Use Photographs and Objects to Brainstorm Ideas

Objectives

In this mini-lesson students will:

• Use photographs and objects to brainstorm ideas for a personal narrative.
• Tell a partner about their photos and objects using focus questions and sentence frames if needed.
• Contribute to a class list of ideas for personal narratives.

Preparation

Materials Needed

• Teacher photographs and objects to model brainstorming
• Student photos or objects for practicing brainstorming with classmates
• Chart paper and markers
• Writer’s notebooks
• Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

A day or two before the mini-lesson, ask students to bring photographs or objects (mementos, souvenirs, collections, etc.) to inspire brainstorming. If students forget or cannot bring their own, show the sample photos using the interactive whiteboard resources. You should also bring photographs or objects to share as you model for students. If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.

1. Focus

Explain Using Photographs and Objects to Brainstorm Ideas

Say: Brainstorming is letting ideas come into our heads and then writing them down quickly before we forget them. When we need ideas for writing a personal narrative, sometimes our brainstorming needs a little “push.” Looking at photos or favorite things, such as an old toy or a souvenir from a place we’ve been, brings back an event from our past. Often objects can help us grab a memory and pull it forward, so we can write about it. Here’s how I do that when I brainstorm.

Model Using Photographs and Objects to Brainstorm Ideas

Display an object or photograph from an event in your life. Think aloud to show how it helps you remember something from your past. Use the sample think-aloud below to help you construct your own ideas to share with students. Demonstrate how to record ideas on chart paper as you brainstorm.

Sample think-aloud. Say: This is a rock that I brought back from my first camping trip. I’d never slept in a tent or cooked on a campfire before. I remember that first night. It was so cold and the ground felt so hard under my sleeping bag. I also remember hiking through the woods around our campsite. It was beautiful! And, oh, the smells! Everything was so fresh and sweet! There was a little creek there, too. It had the clearest water. I can still hear it rushing over the big, mossy rocks. I slipped on one when I was crossing. I fell right into the water and everyone laughed, even me! I was wet up to my chest! When I took off my jeans that night, this little rock was inside one of the pockets. It became my souvenir of that camping trip. It always helps me remember. I’m going to write my camping trip as an idea for a personal narrative. Continue to brainstorm ideas and record them on the brainstorming list.

Memories for a Personal Narrative

- my first camping trip
- the day I broke my arm
- winning the contest at the mall
- when my best friend moved away

Sample Brainstorming List
2. Rehearse

Practice Using Photographs and Objects to Brainstorm Ideas

Encourage students to work with a partner and share their photographs and/or objects to brainstorm about the past events they bring to mind. Remind students to record their ideas in their writer’s notebooks. Students should share the following information about their objects or photographs:

- **When and where were your photos taken?**
- **When and where did you get your objects?**
- **What ideas or memories come into your mind as you look at the objects?**
- **What sights, sounds, smells, or feelings do they make you remember?**

If your class includes English learners or other students who need more support, use “Strategies to Support ELs.”

Share Ideas

Bring the class back together and invite individuals to share personal narrative ideas inspired by their photos or objects. As students contribute ideas, record them on a class chart of personal narrative ideas. Read the chart together and point out the variety of ideas from the class. Remind students that writers get ideas from everywhere, including from each other.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned that photos and objects from our pasts can help us brainstorm ideas for personal narratives. There are lots of things around us that we can use to spark a memory. Look around. What can you use to inspire a memory that can become a great piece of writing?

Encourage students to apply this brainstorming strategy during independent writing time. During student conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring students together. Invite two or three students who brainstormed personal narrative ideas to share their ideas with the class.

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### Strategies to Support ELs

**Beginning**

Invite beginning ELs to tell you about memories associated with their photos or objects. Use self-stick notes to label the actual objects or the objects appearing in their photos. Encourage students to draw pictures of the memories the objects inspire. Label key words on their drawings. Provide a simple sentence frame to help students talk about their memories: *I remember ______.*

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers. Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their ideas for writing a personal narrative. For example:

- **This helps me remember ______.**
- **I was ______.**
- **I thought ______.**
- **I felt ______.**

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: *memory/la memoria; object/el objeto; photograph/la fotografía.*