Use a Storyboard to Draft a Memoir

1. Focus

Explain Using a Storyboard

Say: When I draft a memoir, there are two things I want to focus on. First, I want to describe the events so the reader can almost see them happening. Second, I want to show my emotions about the stories I’m telling. Today I’ll share with you a technique that helps me do both of these things. It’s called storyboarding. Before starting to write my draft, I draw pictures of the important scenes in my memoir. Storyboarding is a term often used in the movies, where a director or animator will draw a picture of each scene before filming. Drawing pictures prior to writing my draft helps me choose words to express my thoughts and feelings. Today I’ll show you how a storyboard can help you draft your memoir.

Model Using a Storyboard

Say: I can refer to my organizing chart to help me remember the events in my memoir. The first event in my memoir is when I arrived at my new dorm at college. I was with my mom and dad and there was no one in the room when I arrived. I remember that it was very stark and bare. I will draw a sketch of this event. Then my new roommate arrived. She had traveled all the way from New York, so her parents didn’t bring her. She came by herself. She was different from anyone I knew in my hometown. (Model drawing the two scenes on a storyboard.) Looking at my sketches makes me think about how I want to describe the scenes. I can think of words to describe my dorm room when I first saw it: lonely, stark, empty, bare, plain. Then I can think of words to describe it when I moved my things in: vibrant posters on the walls, yellow desk lamp, striped yellow and blue throw on the bed, dark blue rug, warm and inviting. And I can describe my roommate: lively and bubbly, strange accent, glasses, trendy clothes. Using a storyboard to sketch out the events prompts me to think about descriptive language I can use in my draft.
2. Rehearse

Practice Using a Storyboard

Invite students to draw a scene from their memoir. Then ask partners to share their sketches and use descriptive language to tell about the scene. Ask them to record the words under their sketch.

Share and Discuss Using a Storyboard

With the whole class, invite volunteers to show their storyboards and read aloud the words they wrote underneath. Invite the rest of the class to think of additional descriptive words that could describe the scene. Use the examples to remind students that there are many possible words to choose for each scene you describe.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned how storyboarding before drafting can help us visualize the events and emotions of a scene we’re going to describe in a memoir. Then we practiced choosing words that describe the event and show the reader our thoughts and emotions. As you get ready to draft your memoir, try storyboarding to help you choose words that will make the reader see and feel your memories.

During independent writing time, encourage students to use a storyboard to plan how their memoir will unfold and how they will describe each scene. Reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies during conferences, using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to share their storyboards. Ask students to discuss how using a storyboard helped them.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to use any language they have to describe the thoughts and emotions that go with their storyboard picture. Write their descriptive words on self-stick notes and place them on the drawings. Help students create oral sentences using the words.

Intermediate

Provide simple sentence frames to help ELs talk about their storyboards:

Words that describe this scene are ______.
I felt ______.
I thought ______.

Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers to complete the practice activity.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: description/la descripción; emotions/las emociones; scene/la escena; memoirs/las memorias.