Brainstorm Ideas Using Personal Connections

1. Focus

Explain the Brainstorming Process

Say: Brainstorming lets ideas flood into our minds—ideas that we can jot down quickly so they don’t get away. When we need ideas for writing historical fiction, we can think about real places, people, and events that we know about or that we’ve studied and have some kind of personal connection to. They can even be things that happened long ago to our grandparents or someone else we know. Let me show you how I brainstorm ideas for a historical fiction story.

Model Brainstorming Using Personal Connections

Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. Demonstrate how to record ideas on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources as you model brainstorming.

Sample think-aloud. Say: My friend’s mother grew up in Indonesia. She’s told me what it was like there when she was a little girl back in the 1940s. Her family had very little food because World War II was happening all around them. They actually ate fruit bats to stay alive! I could find out more about what it was like back then and write a story—one that could have actually happened in that place and time. I’ll put that idea on my list. I remember my great-grandmother telling me about coming to America. She was only ten at the time. Her family traveled on a ship from Ireland. This would make an interesting idea for a story. My character could be a young girl who had to leave her grandparents behind in Ireland. I also remember learning about the Native Americans who lived in our state when it was being settled in the 1800s. My story could be about them and what happened when their home was taken over by white settlers. That’s another idea I like, so I’ll list it, too.

Sample Brainstorming List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical Fiction Ideas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>living in Indonesia in the 1940s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Americans living in our state in the 1800s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>immigrating to America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Objectives

In this mini-lesson, students will:

- Use personal connections to discover ideas for writing historical narratives.
- Use focus questions to practice brainstorming with a partner.
- Contribute to a class list of historical fiction ideas.

Preparation

Materials Needed

- Chart paper and markers
- Writer’s notebooks
- Interactive whiteboard resources

Advanced Preparation

If necessary, copy the sentence frames from “Strategies to Support ELs” on chart paper.
**2. Rehearse**

**Practice Brainstorming Using Personal Connections**

Invite students to work with a partner to brainstorm ideas for historical fiction using their personal connections to people, places, and events. Remind them of the importance of recording ideas in their writer's workshop notebooks. To keep students focused, post the following guiding questions:

- What do I know about past events in my state that I could use for a story idea?
- What do I know about events in my family members' lives?
- What real people and events from the past could I use?

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

**Share Ideas**

Bring students back together and ask them to share favorite ideas they brainstormed for writing historical fiction. As ideas are contributed, add them to the brainstorming chart you started earlier. Reread the list together and comment on the variety of ideas that have been suggested. Talk about how important it is to use the other writers in the classroom as resources for story ideas. Point out that often someone else's idea can lead us to an idea of our own.

**3. Independent Writing and Conferring**

Say: We’ve just learned how brainstorming helps us discover ideas for writing historical fiction stories. We can use personal connections to brainstorm our ideas. As you brainstorm on your own, think about places, people, and events from the past that you know about. Using what we know and what we’re interested in always helps us find ideas for writing.

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

**4. Share**

Bring students together. Invite volunteers to share the historical fiction story ideas they came up with by using personal connections to brainstorm.

---

**Strategies to Support ELs**

**Beginning**

Invite beginning ELs to tell you about their ideas for a historical fiction story using whatever words they can. You may also invite them to draw about an idea. Provide them with keywords or labels that come from the ideas they share. Help them use the words to form simple sentences as they brainstorm.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Provide sentence frames to help ELs talk to their partners about their idea for historical fiction. For example:

An interesting event I know about is ______. I learned about it from ______.

**All Levels**

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: historical fiction/la ficción histórica; past/el pasado.