Use the Voice of a Storyteller

1. Focus

**Explain Using a First Person Storyteller’s Voice in a Memoir**

**Say:** When I write a memoir, I describe what I remember about an important time or an important experience in my life. My memoir is a narrative that requires storytelling. I hope to bring to life people, places, and events that are important to the experience I describe. I often use the first person voice of a storyteller to put myself back into the event that I’m telling about. To connect with my audience, I use story elements such as setting, characters, dialogue, plot development, and conflict. Today we’re going to look at the use of a first person storyteller’s voice in a memoir.

**Model Using a First Person Storyteller’s Voice in a Memoir**

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources. Ask students to listen for elements of storytelling in the writer’s voice as you read the passage aloud.

"Yes, lots of things can happen when you jump out of an airplane. . . . They are all playing in my mind that August day in 1968. I’m in Jump School at Fort Benning, Georgia, 15,000 feet in the air. I go to the door of a Flying Boxcar, a C-119 twin reciprocating-engine airplane from World War II. I’m ready to make my first jump. I look out the front of the aircraft. All I can see is fire coming out of the front engine, smoke out of the back. The jump officer is yelling, “Go! Go! Go!” I must be crazy, I think. How did I get here?"

**Modeling Text**

**Say:** I like the way the writer uses storytelling techniques in this passage to bring me close to his conflict. In the book, this passage comes near the start, after a list of things that can go wrong with a parachute jump. The writer sums up that list with a conversational line: “Yes, lots of things can happen when you jump out of an airplane.” We are still in suspense about why he’s telling us this. Then he uses the dots of an ellipsis to suggest that he is transporting us back in time. From that point, he describes the experiences as though he is experiencing them again—in the first person, present tense. I understand the full weight of his fears when he mentions the setting: “Jump School at Fort Benning, Georgia, 15,000 feet in the air.” The writer narrates his actions: he goes to the door, looks out front, and sees fire and smoke. He introduces dialogue, with the jump officer yelling “Go, go, go!” Then the passage ends with the narrator’s thoughts bringing the conflict into tight, clear focus: “I must be crazy, I think. How did I get here?” The writer ends this passage at the point of highest tension: the plane is on fire and someone is shouting at him to jump. What will he do, I wonder? Thanks to the writer’s storytelling, the opening of this memoir reads like an
action thriller. I can see how the use of a first person storyteller’s voice puts readers right into the memoir events.

2. Rehearse

Practice Using a Storyteller’s Voice in a Memoir

Display the practice text on chart paper or use the interactive whiteboard resources.

It was the start of another day of school.

Practice Text

Ask students to imagine they are writing the first few sentences of a memoir about the first day they attended elementary school. Ask students to add sentences to the practice text that use a first person storyteller to describe an eventful day. Explain that they can base this on a real day or one that they invent.Remind them to consider story elements such as setting, dialogue, character, and plot development. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be able to explain how they used a first person storyteller and storytelling elements to establish voice.

Share Practice Sentences

Bring students together and ask them to read aloud their sentences. Invite them to explain the use of a first person storyteller and the storytelling elements in their sentences. Use the following questions to encourage discussion:
• How did you the use of a first person storyteller help your story?
• Which storytelling elements do you plan to use in your memoir? Why?

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We just learned that writers can use the voice of a first person storyteller to put readers into the action in a memoir. Writers use classic storytelling elements such as dialogue, characters, plot development, and settings when they write memoirs. These storytelling elements also help readers enter into the experiences the writer describes. As you write your own memoir, remember to include storytelling elements to bring your narrative alive in the minds of your readers.

Ask students to identify a section of their memoirs that they can improve by adding detail with the first person voice of a storyteller. During conferences, reinforce students’ use of this and other strategies using the prompts on your conferring flip chart.

4. Share

Bring the class together. Invite volunteers to read aloud a section of their memoirs in which they used the first person voice effectively to tell their story.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

While other students work with partners or during independent writing time, work one on one with beginning ELs. Model generating oral sentences that use the first person to tell about events. Provide the following sentence frames for students to create their own oral sentences to tell about a simple experience such as coming to school:

I saw ______. I heard ______. I felt ______.

Intermediate and Advanced

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during partner practice.

All Levels

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: experiences/las experiencias; narrate/narrar.