Use Perspective to Narrate Events

1. Focus

Explain Using Perspective to Describe Events in the Moment and Many Years Later

Say: When I write a memoir, I describe an important moment or event in my life. In the memoir, I can describe the event as it happens, to give my readers the feeling of being there with me. However, since the event has already happened, I am also looking back on it as I write. It is possible to convey to my reader both of those time periods at once: the sense of being right there in the present, as the event unfolds, and the sense of looking back on that same event from a distance, perhaps with some new perspective or insights I’ve gained since the event took place. Today we’re going to look at an example of a memoir in which a writer describes an event while it is happening and also looks back on that event from the vantage point of many years later. We’ll also discuss how you can use this narrative strategy in your own memoir.

Model How Writers Use Perspective on Events in the Moment and Many Years Later

Display the modeling text on chart paper or using the interactive whiteboard resources.

I took a bus down to Herald Square in Manhattan. A crowd of people from different backgrounds carried picket signs that said “Jobs Now!” and “Full Employment!” We marched and sang protest songs like “We Shall Not Be Moved.” The tune plays in my head as I write down the lyrics now, and I feel some of the energy and vitality that moved me to action fifty years ago.

Modeling Text

Say: In this excerpt, the writer carries me forward through the event as it occurs. The event is the day in the 1950s when she attends a civil rights protest at the age of 13. She takes a bus and finds herself surrounded by a diverse crowd of people. She tells us the words on the signs they carried and that “we marched and sang protest songs like ‘We Shall Not Be Moved.’” Her descriptions are so full of detail that I can put myself right there, alongside her, in the crowd. After this, though, the author gives us a new perspective in the final sentence: it is now fifty years later, and she can hear the same music in her head that she heard on the day she is describing. “The tune plays in my head as I write down the lyrics now,” she writes. She both remembers the event and feels its effects.
in her life decades later when she says that hearing the same tune in her head makes her feel “some of the energy and vitality that moved me to action fifty years ago.” At age thirteen, she couldn’t have known the importance this event would have on her life; but fifty years later, she knows. In this paragraph, the writer tells the event both as it happened and with the perspective gained from looking back on it from the vantage point of years later. This is a useful strategy for using your voice in memoir writing.

### 2. Rehearse

**Practice Narrating an Event in the Moment and After the Fact**

Ask students to write three sentences about the first day of sixth grade. In the first two sentences, students should describe the day as it occurred, as though they were reliving that day in the moment. In the third sentence, students should look back on that day from the vantage point of having spent some time as a sixth grader. Students should write down their sentences and be prepared to read them to the class. They should be ready to explain how they used voice to narrate the events from different points in time.

**Share Practice Sentences**

Bring students together and invite them to read aloud their sentences and explain how they narrated the events as they happened and then from the vantage point later in time. Record sample student sentences and post these as models for students to use as they write their own memoirs.

### 3. Independent Writing and Conferring

**Say:** We just learned that a writer can look at events as they occur and also from the vantage point of some time later. As you write your memoir, remember to use this strategy to bring your readers close to an event from your past and give readers your thoughts about what that experience means to you.

Ask students to identify a section of their memoir that they can improve by presenting events from different perspectives in time. 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 different perspectives in time.

### 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 about past events using the sentence frames below:

- I liked ______.
- I used to ______.

Write your sentences on chart paper. Invite students to read them with you. Then ask students to generate additional sentences of their own using the same sentence frames to talk about past events in their lives.

**Intermediate and Advanced**

Pair ELs with fluent English speakers during the partner practice. Supply the following sentence frames to help them add reflections about the practice sentence:

- Looking back, ______.
- Later, I learned ______.
- Now I know ______.

**All Levels**

If you have students whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: describe/describir; memory/la memoria; perspective/la perspectiva.