**Brainstorm Ideas Using a Time Line**

**Objectives**

In this mini-lesson, students will:
- Use a time line to brainstorm ideas for a memoir.
- Work with partners to develop a time line of important memories.
- Contribute to a class list of memoir 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” onto chart paper.

**1. Focus**

**Explain the Brainstorming Process**

**Say:** In a memoir, we tell about an important time in our lives. A good way to get ideas for a memoir is to think back to times in our lives when we’ve experienced major changes. We can focus on these transitional points in our lives and record these on a time line. When we record these times of change on a time line, we can see the experiences that have made us who we are stretched out across a page. These are the ideas we can choose from to write a good memoir. Let me show you how a time line helps me brainstorm.

**Model Brainstorming Using a Time Line**

Use the sample think-aloud to help you develop your own brainstorming models to share with students. Demonstrate how to record ideas on a time line as you model brainstorming.

**Sample think-aloud. Say:** I can remember several experiences that had a big impact on my life and changed the way I looked at things in my life. When I was just beginning middle school, my grandfather passed away. I relied on him for a lot of things. I could always count on him no matter what, and it took me a long time to accept that he wasn’t around anymore. This helped me realize the importance of letting those you love know how much you care. I’m going to put that on my time line. I can also remember a girl in my high school. Her name was Jen Lu. For some reason, a lot of the kids picked on her. Even though I had several chances to speak up for her, I was too afraid. But one day when I needed help, she was there for me. Jen taught me that being a good person and being a popular person aren’t always the same thing. That was an important lesson that had an effect on how I looked at my relationship with others. Another memory is my first job. It was so hard and it paid so little! I was in high school then and that job is what made me decide to go to college. I knew I had to learn how to do something I enjoyed. Yes. That job changed my whole life! These are things I’ll put on my time line, too.

**Event:**

- grandfather died
- met Jen Lu
- my first job

**Age:**

- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16

**Sample Brainstorming Time Line**
2. Rehearse

Practice Brainstorming for Writing a Memoir

Invite students to work with partners to develop a timeline of experiences in their writer’s notebooks. Remind students to focus on memories of experiences that are most important in their lives. Partners should tell each other why the memory is about something that made a difference or created a change in their life.

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 invite individuals to share memories from their timeline that are good ideas for a memoir. As students share, add their ideas to the list of memoir ideas you began earlier. Reread them together and talk about the diversity of experiences in the classroom. Remind students that writers are often each other’s best resources. Another writer’s ideas can often spark one of our own.

Strategies to Support ELs

Beginning

Invite beginning ELs to tell about or draw an important experience from their lives. Provide them with labels of key words they share and help them use the words to form simple sentences about their memories.

Intermediate and Advanced

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

- I remember _____.
- This event was important because ______.
- It helped me ______.
- It changed ______.

All Levels

If you have ELs whose first language is Spanish, share these English/Spanish cognates: experience/la experiencia; memoirs/las memorias; memory/la memoria.

3. Independent Writing and Conferring

Say: We’ve just learned that using a timeline is one way to brainstorm ideas for a memoir. As you brainstorm on your own, you can use a timeline to think about how you or your life has changed over time and what events sparked these changes. A timeline can become a map of the things that have made you who you are. It can be a treasure chest of ideas for writing a memoir.

Encourage students to use a timeline as they brainstorm ideas for a memoir 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 important events in their lives and explain why these events were important.