

Model Lesson:

Prewriting Graphic Organizers for Personal Narratives

Brainstorming Ideas for Personal Narratives

Today we will begin writing a personal narrative. A personal narrative is a true story that really happened to the writer. It is about events and experiences in the writer's life that really matter and are important to him or her.

To help you think of some possible personal narrative topics, let's brainstorm ideas using the Brainstorming Chart for Personal Narratives.

Distribute copies of the chart. Display one on the overhead or data projector.

The categories on the chart can help us recall experiences from our past. First, I will read each category on the chart. Then, I can start adding my ideas related to some of the categories.

Read the categories.

I have an idea for a personal narrative about family traditions. Every holiday season, my family and our neighbors would go look at holiday lights. Everyone would squeeze into the van for our annual drive. I'll add this idea, "look at holiday lights," under the "Family Traditions" category.

Have one or two students share ideas about their own family traditions. Tell them they can add the ideas to their charts.

I also have an idea about a class trip to the museum. I think I'll add this idea under the category, "Special Places, Trips, or Vacations." I'll write "class trip to museum" on my chart.

Does anyone else have an idea for this category?

Ask one or two students to share their ideas. Continue to model and think aloud to brainstorm a few more ideas, and then add them to your chart.

Now it is time for you to brainstorm and come up with some ideas for your chart. Write as many ideas as you can, but you don't have to include an idea for every category.

After approximately 5 minutes, have students share with a partner one or two of the ideas on their charts.

Narrowing the Focus of an Idea

Now you have some great ideas or topics for personal narratives. Let's take a closer look at the elements of a well-written personal narrative. Personal narratives should have a narrow focus or topic, rather than a large one. When you write a personal narrative, it is important to narrow your topic or focus before you begin writing.

To make sure that your topic isn't too large or broad, you need to think about the experience and exactly what happened. Let's use the Narrowing the Focus of an Idea graphic organizer to help us

narrow the focus of one of our ideas.

Distribute copies of the graphic organizer. Display one on the overhead or data projector.

I am going to model first how this graphic organizer can help me find a narrower focus for one of the brainstorming ideas on my chart. I will select one brainstorming idea that is really important and that matters to me. I am going to write “class trip to museum” on my chart.

Now I will list specific things that I remember about this experience.

Model narrowing the topic using the graphic organizer. Narrow the topic by listing “long bus ride to city,” “lots of exhibits,” “picnic lunch at the park,” “IMAX movie,” and “the snake on the bus.”

Now I have some single events that happened on our class trip to the museum. I need to select which narrowed focus topic I will write about. I think I’ll write about the snake on the bus. I will place a check mark in the little box in front of “the snake on the bus.”

Now it’s your turn to select one of your ideas that you want to write about. Look over the ideas on your chart. Select one that really matters to you and is important.

Allow 5 minutes.

Tell your neighbor which idea you choose to write about.

Write the idea you choose on your graphic organizer. Now you are ready to narrow your focus. List specific things that you remember about your experience. When you are finished, select the one that you want to write about. Place a check mark in the little box in front of it.

Allow time for students to complete their graphic organizer. Have several students share their narrow focus/topic.

Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative

Narrowing the focus is important, but before you start writing, you also need to develop the central idea of your personal narrative. Let’s use the Developing the Central Idea of a Personal Narrative graphic organizer to help us determine the central idea.

Distribute copies of the graphic organizer. Display one on the overhead or data projector.

First, I will copy my narrowed focus/topic on the chart: the snake on the bus. To develop a central idea, I need to visualize or picture in my mind exactly what happened. I will list these important details on the chart as I remember them.

List on the chart: First-year teacher; Out-of-town class field trip to the museum; Halfway home with an hour more to go; Several girls start screaming; Snake is somewhere on the bus; Eric had caught a grass snake at the picnic in the park; Snake had escaped from his backpack; Everyone had to get off the bus; Searched for 45 minutes; Found it “hiding” inside a paper bag under my seat.

Now I need to consider the significance or importance of this event/experience and think about its effect on me then and now. Well, I will never forget this experience because it was both scary

and funny. It also taught me a valuable lesson. I learned that, as a teacher, I should never assume anything and should always be prepared for the unexpected. I should always clarify expectations, including what qualifies as a souvenir!

Using this information, I know precisely what my personal narrative is going to be about. I will write the central idea on my chart.

Write: "Be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations on out-of-town field trips."

Let me check. Does my central idea include the singular, significant event I chose to write about? Yes, I am writing about finding a snake on the bus (the unexpected) coming home from an out-of-town field trip. Does my central idea include why it's important or meaningful to me? Yes, it states that I learned to be prepared for the unexpected and clarify expectations.

Now it's your turn to develop the central idea for your personal narrative. First, copy your narrowed focus/topic on the chart.

Pause and monitor as students copy their narrowed focus/topic on the chart.

Now try to visualize what happened that day. List on the chart several important details that you remember.

Monitor and provide support as students list details about what happened. Allow 5 minutes.

Before you write your central idea, think about the following questions listed on your chart: What is the significance (importance) of this event/experience, or what was its effect on you then and/or now? Then, discuss these questions with your partner/neighbor.

Allow 2 minutes.

Now, on your chart, write the significance or importance of this event/experience or its effect on you then or now.

Monitor and provide support.

You are ready to develop the central idea of your personal narrative. On your chart, write the central idea. Try to include the singular, significant event that you will be writing about and why it's important or meaningful to you.

Monitor and provide support. Have several students read their central ideas.