

# Identifying Personal Narrative Elements Using Mentor Texts

Personal Narrative Elements	Tights and Camo By Brock Clarke
<p>Central idea: Skiing helps the author maintain peace in his relationship with family member.</p>	<p>I grew up in a small mill town just south of the Adirondack Mountains, and although I live in Maine now, for many years I lived in places where it didn't really snow, and I would look forward to my trip home for the holidays, when I would go cross-country skiing with my dad. "Look forward" is a bit misleading; "pay obsessive attention to the snow report while ignoring everything else" might be more accurate.</p>
	<p>The main reason for my snow obsession had something to do with the end of the world; never mind about that. The other reason is that I missed my father, and when you miss your parents, the more you try to express it, the more likely you are to get into an argument with them — but it's nearly impossible to get into an argument with your father while you're both cross-country skiing.</p>
	<p>I didn't go skiing with my dad last year — he was sick (he's better now, thank you) — and so my wife agreed to go with me in his place, mostly because I begged her. This was Christmas Eve. We were in the deep woods, in deep snow; it was beautiful, and perfectly quiet and empty — until, that is, we heard the baying of dogs and gunshots. A few seconds later, we saw a guy walking toward us. He was wearing camo and holding a gun.</p>
	<p>When I see a guy walking toward me holding a gun, I want to turn and run, or turn and ski. But in this case my masculine pride prevented me from doing so, although my masculine pride had not prevented me from wearing ski tights and a hat with a fuzzy ball on top. Anyway, the guy got to within a few feet of us, and before he or I could say anything, my wife blurted out, "You get any deer?"</p>
	<p>My wife grew up in New Jersey and doesn't exactly keep tabs on the length of the deer-hunting season in upstate New York, so she had no idea that she'd inadvertently accused this stranger with a gun of being a poacher, which he might well have been. Which was why I then said, loudly and idiotically, "Ha, ha, of course he's not hunting deer!" And then, rather than ask him what he was hunting (if it wasn't deer, it had to be rabbits, unless it was humans), I said, "Cold, isn't it?" — again, idiotically, because it wasn't all that cold and because his camo pants were certainly insulated and for that matter so were my tights.</p> <p>"Naw," the guy said. "It was 10 below in Speculator last week." Then he eyed</p>

me, over his beard (his beard was red and covered every bit of his lower face until just an inch under the eyes), and asked, "You know where Speculator is?"

I did know where Speculator was — an hour north of where we were standing. I'd been there many a time. And so I said, "I know exactly where Speculator is!" This must have sounded as suspect to him as it sounds to me now, because he said, "Well, you ever been to Bungtown?"

I had not been to Bungtown. I had never even heard of a place in upstate New York with that name. But I was too busy establishing that even though he had a gun and I was wearing tights, I had been to just as many really cold places as he had. So I said, "Yeah, yeah, I've been to Bungtown."

"It's cold there, isn't it?" the guy said, grinning now.

"Sure is," I said. "Really cold."

He and I had a good laugh over how cold it is in Bungtown, and then he said his goodbyes and strode away. I watched him go, feeling pretty good about the whole exchange, watched him until he turned into the woods and disappeared. I imagined him finding his dogs, who had found the animal he shot before running into my wife and me. I imagined him putting his dogs and the dead animal into his truck and then driving home. And then I imagined him telling his family about getting this guy in the woods to say he'd been to a place that doesn't exist called Bungtown. I imagined my wife telling the same thing to my family when we got home, and all of them having a big laugh at my expense, and me having a good sense of humor about it and then not and getting ticked off and eventually getting into an argument about something else, anything else.

Strong conclusion:  
The conclusion leaves readers with a lasting impression of the significance of the experience: Skiing helps the author maintain peace in his relationship with family member.

I turned to face my wife, to begin the inevitable process. But she was already 100 yards away, skis kicking, poles poling. "That's exactly what my dad would have done, too," I thought, and then set off after her, putting as much distance as I could between us and whatever we might have argued about had we not been skiing.

REFERENCE: Reprinted with permission from *The New York Times*, 2011.