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Survival Guide: Writing a Personal Narrative [7th grade]

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Education Department

Understanding by Design Curriculum Units

Trinity University

Year 2005

Survival Guide: Writing a Personal
Narrative

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Trinity University,

UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

Unit Cover Page

Unit Title: Survival Guide: Writing a Personal Narrative

Grade Level: 7th

Subject/Topic Area(s): English

Designed By: Nilima Patel

Time Frame: 3 Weeks on Block Scheduling

School District (One Designer): Alief ISD

School: Holub Middle School

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Brief Summary of Unit (Including curricular context and unit goals)

The goals of this unit are threefold: first, instilling in students a sense of purpose for writing. Too often, students do not understand why it is important to write, and more acutely, they do not understand why it is important for *them* to write. Secondly, this unit aims to teach students specific strategies to implement when writing that will serve to engage the audience. There are three strategies that develop students' writing in very concrete, understandable ways. Lastly, students will recognize the benefit of collaborating with peers when writing. While writing is primarily an individual exercise, this unit will challenge the misconception that writing is *entirely* an individual exercise.

Students will write an advice narrative for incoming students, telling of their own experiences in surviving the first few weeks of middle school. The class will discuss what makes good advice good and what experiences they have been through will be helpful to the incoming students. Students will then learn specific strategies to develop this type of writing in a way that engages their audience. As students take their narratives through the writing process, their peers will provide helpful and constructive feedback. Finally, after deciding the criteria for a good narrative, the students will decide which narratives meet those criteria. These narratives will be compiled into a survival guide book.

STAGE 1—DESIRED RESULTS

Content Standard(s)

- 7.15 A. Write to express/discover/record/develop/reflect
- 7.15 E. Use voice and style for audience and purpose
- 7.16 & 7.17 Apply capitalization, punctuation, and spelling and use standard grammar and to communicate effectively.
- 7.19 A. Apply criteria to evaluate writing
- 7.19 B. Respond constructively to others' writing
- 7.19 C. Evaluate own writing for achieving purpose

Students will understand that...

- writers write to provide insight about human experience and life
- writers use a variety of stylistic techniques and strategies to engage readers' attention and sustain it
- writing can be a collaborative process in which peer review is not only helpful but needed

Overarching Questions

- What is the purpose of writing? For whom do writers write?

Topical Questions

- Why do writers share personal experiences?
- How do effective writers hook and hold their readers' attention?
- How do writers properly and effectively express their thoughts and feelings?
- How does interaction with other writers change one's writing?

Students will know...

The steps in the writing process
 Narrative structure
 6 Traits of effective writing

Students will be able to:

Apply ideas, word choice, voice and conventions to develop their writing effectively through Show, Don't Tell; Explode the Moment; and Binocular Strategies
 Create leads that hook the reader

Ongoing skills:

Conventions
 Work effectively in a group to improve writing

STAGE 2—ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Task

Your mission is to create a survival guide entry for the incoming seventh graders, advising them how to make it through their first few weeks of middle school with grace, dignity, and self-respect. Choose an experience that you have gone through during your first few weeks of middle school. That experience can be harrowing (traumatic), striking, noteworthy, embarrassing, adventurous, difficult, etc. You will think about that experience, what you went through, how you overcame that experience, and what you learned about middle school and about yourself as a result of that experience.

You will take this survival guide entry from the prewriting stage through drafting and revision, and finally to the editing and publishing stages. During each stage, your work will be peer-reviewed, which will give you good, constructive feedback. Then, based on criteria that you have determined to be good writing, you and your peers will decide which guides to compile into a book that will be studied by next year’s students.

Your survival guide entry must be school-appropriate, must reflect your most thoughtful deliberation, must be about a *personal* experience that *you* have encountered in middle school, and must exhibit the writing techniques that we will learn about in class for good development. Your survival guide entry must be at least 550 words.

Key Criteria:

- Good advice that helps the incoming students
- Lead that attracts and engages the reader
- Thoughtful development of writing based on class lessons
- Providing constructive, thoughtful criticism for your peer’s work
- Proper conventions

Rubric for Personal Narrative:

| Quality of Advice | Lead | Development | Conventions |
|---|--|--|---|
| Advice is highly relevant and helpful to next year’s students. Advice would definitely help next year’s students. | Lead hooks the reader. It is full of detail and imagery. It is unique and engaging. | Essay is developed as a whole. Good word choice creates meaning, and voice conveys enthusiasm for topic. | Virtually error-free, especially in subject-verb agreement (SVA). |
| Advice is somewhat relevant to next year’s students. Advice might help students. | Lead somewhat hooks the reader. Detail and imagery are present but don’t really engage the reader. | Essay is mostly developed although there are a few gaps in the important details. Word choice is inconsistent in creating meaning. Voice sometimes conveys enthusiasm for topic. | Errors are noticeable but do not detract from meaning or slow reader down, especially in SVA. |
| Advice is not really relevant to middle school. | Lead is cliché and fails to engage the reader. | Essay’s development is spotty to nonexistent. Evidence of purposeful word choice is lacking. Voice is flat. | Errors detract from meaning and slow reader down, especially in SVA. |

Rubric for Group Collaboration: Rate 1-5 (5 being the best or most)

| Name of Member | Positive Attitude—Willing to work, ready to work, on task | Constructive Criticism—offered criticism that helps writer | Willingness to work with this person again | My work has improved as a result of this partner’s input |
|----------------|---|--|--|--|
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Yourself | | | n/a | n/a |

Other Evidence

- Open-Ended Response Debate: Which lead makes you want to read the rest of the essay? Analyze each lead and justify why one is more “hooking” than the other based on your own criteria.
- Spicing Up Boring Leads: Modify leads of well-known narratives (especially songs and children’s books) to make them interesting and “hooking.”
- Show, Don’t Tell Exercise (development): Change be-verb statements to developed paragraphs through acting and role-playing. Read aloud.
- Explode the Moment Exercise (development): Pick a specific, significant and important moment in the revision, and revise for sensory details. Read aloud.
- Binocular Exercise (development): Choose dull/blurry details from passages and make them more specific and alive through illustration and other art forms. Read aloud.
- Evaluate Paragraphs for Trait Strength: Read aloud and individually various pieces that show different types of ideas, voice, and word choice. In groups, define the criteria of what makes good ideas, voice, and word choice and then evaluate each piece based on those criteria.
- Application of traits studied (ideas, voice, word choice, conventions) in discrete, isolated paragraphs
- Ratiocination on conventions learned in class
- Writing Portfolio: Place each draft in a portfolio to track progress.

STAGE 3—LEARNING PLAN

Day 1 (Block Scheduling—90 minutes)

1. Discuss as a class why we read books and what types of books we read. This will eventually lead to the purpose for advice books. Why do these authors write these books? Why do they share their personal experiences? For what purpose do these books serve their readers? Discuss what makes good advice, who would read this advice, etc.
2. Discuss the first few weeks of school. What were some of the trials and tribulations that the students faced in middle school that they did not experience in elementary school?
3. Introduce the performance task and questions. Come back to discussion on advice and discuss specifically the kind of advice that would be helpful for next year's students.
4. Brainstorm the various events that the students have gone through that they wish someone older would have warned them about in groups.
5. Blueprint activity—students will receive an enlarged map of the school. On the map, students will write quick words or phrases of memories that they have in the various areas of the school. On the back, they will choose 3-5 memories and elaborate into paragraphs.

Day 2

6. Reporter's Formula—the students will trade maps with a partner in their groups. The students will read their partners' memories and create who, what, where, when, why, and how questions that they want to ask their partner about a particular memory. Students will then ask their partners the questions and record responses on index cards. Then, students determine which story is the most relevant or interesting and generate questions specific to that story. They will ask their partner the questions and record the responses.
7. Students will outline the memory. To ensure focus of topic, the first Roman numeral will focus on what happened 1-2 minutes before the event. The second Roman numeral will focus on the event itself. The third Roman numeral will focus on what happened just after the event. The fourth Roman numeral will focus on what they learned from the experience. For elaboration (the A, B, C), the students will write the first details that come to their minds. Students will read their group members' outlines and discuss relevancy of the experience. Based on what we learned about good advice in earlier discussions, is this experience something that would be helpful for incoming students to know about? If not, provide time to outline another memory. Introduce the ideas trait and discuss need for topic to be narrow.

Day 3

8. After reading leads from multiple children's books and determining what makes them good (discussed in groups), discuss as a class how good leads not only hook the reader but also reflect the author's voice. Introduce and discuss voice trait.
9. Students will receive leads of well-known narratives (books and songs). They will modify each lead to make it more engaging.
10. Students will apply what they know about good leads to their leads in their narratives. They will trade papers with their groups and critique each other's leads, keeping in mind what constructive criticism means.

Day 4

11. Compare paragraphs using the Show, Don't Tell development strategy and paragraphs that do not. The students will determine what elements are included in the strategy.
12. Students will change be-verb statements into developed paragraphs using the Show, Don't Tell strategy through acting and role-playing. Read aloud and determine paragraphs that are developed really well. Students will discuss when it is appropriate to use the Show, Don't Tell strategy and when it is appropriate to use be-verb statements.

13. Students will apply what they learned with the Show, Don't Tell strategy in their narratives. They will trade papers in their groups and determine the strength of each paragraph and areas that need improvement. Students will make any necessary changes and read aloud to class. Discuss how this strategy helps develop voice in a narrative.

Day 5

14. Students will trade papers in their groups. After reading their partner's paper, students will highlight the most important events, statements, moments, etc. in the narrative that have not already been developed in through the first strategy. Narratives will be given back to owners. The students will list everything that they heard, saw, touched, smelled, tasted, thought, and felt in that moment. The class will discuss when it is appropriate to use each sense and discuss the strategy in general. They will then turn that into a developed paragraph. Students will read their paragraphs aloud within their group and determine if any changes need to be made based on what they learned during class the discussion (when is it appropriate to use each sense, should they describe one sense more, etc). Discuss how this strategy helps develop voice in a narrative.
15. Students will look at detailed pictures from magazines, photos, drawings, etc. as a class. After a discussion of what are the important details, the class will list the important details in the pictures. Using a thesaurus and dictionary, students will use the Binocular strategy to develop the details. Class will discuss if there are details that are confusing or incorrectly used based on meaning of words. Discuss the importance of deliberate word choice. Introduce word choice trait.
16. In groups, students will read a story and discuss the important details. They will then develop those details using the Binocular strategy.
17. Students will decide what details are dull or blurry in their narratives and make them come alive using the Binocular strategy. They will trade papers in their groups for revision. Students will look for added details that might confuse the reader.

Day 6

18. As a class, students will discuss what reflects good voice, word choice, and ideas. In groups, students will discuss the voice, word choice, and ideas in each other's papers. Students will determine which papers are good examples of each trait. Read those examples aloud in class. Class will discuss why those examples reflect the trait well.
19. Lecture on subject-verb agreement (SVA). Students will highlight subject-verb pairs and make sure that they agree. They will trade papers and peer edit for SVA.

Day 7

20. Ratiocination on conventions (grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation) in groups and partners.

Day 8

21. As a class, students will revisit the discussion of what makes good advice. After listing the criteria for good advice for next year's students, students will read another class's narratives (anonymous). They will decide if the narratives they read would qualify as good advice under those criteria in their groups.
22. Then, class will revisit discussions on good leads, development, ideas, voice, and word choice. Groups will decide which narratives are good examples of each.
23. Class will decide which narratives are good candidates for the final Survival Guide book.