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Personal Narrative Genre Study [4th grade]

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UNDERSTANDING BY DESIGN

Unit Cover Page

Unit Title: Personal Narrative Genre Study

Grade Level: 4

Subject/Topic Area(s): Reading, Writing, English/Language Arts

Designed By: Emily Delgado

Time Frame: 8 Days

School District: Comal Independent School District

School: Indian Springs Elementary

School Address and Phone: 25751 Wilderness Oak, San Antonio, TX 78261

Brief Summary of Unit

This unit is intended to be a beginning of year introduction to the genre of personal narrative, with the purpose of equipping students with a solid understanding and strong examples of personal narrative writing in preparation for writing their own. Students will begin by identifying the purpose for writing a personal narrative and then uncover the components of a quality personal narrative through discussion and dissection of six mentor texts. After determining the elements of a personal narrative, students will then use those elements as guidelines for identifying and improving upon the personal narratives of others. This unit culminates with a performance task requiring students to peer examine two “peer work samples”, both identifying strengths in the writing and areas where improvements could be made. Ideally, this unit would be immediately followed with a unit on personal narrative writing.

Unit: Personal Narrative Genre Study
Grade: 4th

Stage 1: Desired Results

Understandings

Students will understand that...

Learning about the experiences of others through reading can help us better understand other people and the world around us.

Reading the personal narratives of others can help us improve our own writing.

Essential Questions

1. What can we learn from the stories of others?
2. How can reading someone else’s story help you to write your own?

Knowledge

Students will know...

- Personal narratives are an opportunity to tell a personal story.
- Personal narratives focus on a single, important event.
- Personal narratives can focus on a specific moral or contain a universal theme.
- Even though personal narratives are one person’s story, they appeal to a wider audience.
- Personal narratives show the author’s feelings.
- Personal narratives should not only tell *what* the author did, but *why* he or she did it and *how* she or he felt.

Skills

Students will be able to...

- Analyze, make inferences, and draw conclusions about the author’s purpose in cultural, historical, and contemporary contexts (TEKS ELAR 4.10)
- Establish purposes for reading selected texts (TEKS ELAR 4.Fig19A)
- Ask literal, interpretive, and evaluative questions of text (TEKS ELAR 4.Fig19B)
- Summarize and explain the lesson or message as theme (TEKS ELAR 4.3A)
- Compare and contrast characters (TEKS ELAR 4.3B)

Stage 2: Assessment Evidence

Performance Task:

You are a peer editor. You will read two writing samples and use the class checklist to write suggestions to each peer, telling them what you learned from their writing, identifying their strengths, and telling them what changes they can make to make their writing even better.

Finally, you will complete a self-reflection explaining how editing the two writing samples can help you in your own writing.

Other evidence:

- Pre/Post Assessments
- Class discussion
- VennDiagram/Double-Bubble Activity
- Exit Ticket
- Graffiti Wall
- Personal Narrative Hunt
- Peer editing scenario

Stage 3: Learning Activities

(Steps taken to get students to answer Stage 1 questions and complete performance task)

Required Resources:

Ralph Fletcher “Driving at Night” from Mentor Author, Mentor Texts

Patricia Pollaco My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother

Jon Scieszka “Chapter 33: Car Trip” from Knucklehead: Tall Tales and Mostly True Stories about Growing Up Scieszka

Tomie DePaola Chapter 2 & Chapter 4 of 26 Fairmount Avenue

Roald Dahl “The Great Mouse Plot” from Boy

Day 1:

Students will complete a brief pre-assessment, which will consist of the following questions:

- What is a personal narrative?
- What are the qualities of a good personal narrative?

Students will then share their answers with other students using elbow buddies, walk & talk, or similar. After some sharing time, the teacher and students will work together to create a working definition of the term “personal narrative”. Teacher will then introduce the first essential question for the unit: **What can we learn from the stories of others?**

Teacher and students will read the part about the blueberry competition from My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother by Patricia Polacco. After reading, pose this questions:

1. What did you learn about Patricia from this story?
2. Can you relate to Patricia?

Begin anchor chart* “Elements of a Personal Narrative”. Add bullet number:

- **Personal narratives are an opportunity to tell a personal story.**

*Teacher and students will work together over the course of this unit to create the anchor chart. Students should create their own copy of this anchor charts in their notes as the unit goes along.

Day 2:

Revisit the 1st essential question: **What can we learn from the stories of others?** Introduce the day’s mentor texts: “Driving at Night” by Ralph Fletcher and “Car Trip” by Jon Scieszka. These two stories are about a similar topic, but you will find they are very different. Teacher and students will read the mentor texts.

Teacher and students will create a large double bubble or Venn diagram to compare the two stories. (This can be done on the white board, while simultaneously created in journals OR created on a large sheet of anchor chart or butcher paper with writing done by both teacher and students.) Teachers are encouraged to ask guiding questions, including “What did you learn about Jon and Ralph?”

After the compare and contrast activity, students and teacher will return to the anchor chart “Elements of a Personal Narrative”. Pose these questions:

1. How have you related to the personal narratives by Patricia, Jon, and Ralph? Do you have anything in common with them?
2. Does the length of a personal narrative determine whether or not you can enjoy or learn from it? Why or why not?

Use the above questions to help get students to the next two bullet points:

- **Even though personal narratives are one person’s story, they appeal to a wider audience.**
- **Personal narratives focus on a single, important event.**

End the lesson with an Exit Ticket: Write down your favorite detail from one of today’s texts. Explain why this detail spoke to you.

Day 3:

Revisit the 1st essential question: **What can we learn from the stories of others?**

Begin today’s lesson by reading back several of yesterday’s Exit Tickets. Introduce the day’s mentor text: “The Great Mouse Plot” by Roald Dahl. Encourage students to underline or highlight details that speak to them. Teacher and students will read the mentor text.

Create a Detail Graffiti Wall*. Each student should contribute at least one piece of “graffiti”, a detail from the text that spoke to him or her. To increase rigor, require the students to code their detail by which of the five senses it appealed to (red=sight, orange=hearing, green=touch, blue=taste, purple=touch). Students should cite the page number where the detail was found.

*This can be created by laying out a large sheet of butcher paper on a table, leaving smaller papers at each table of students to later be assembled, or on a dry-erase board. Students can write directly onto the papers/board or on individual sticky notes they can stick to the paper or board.

After the graffiti wall activity, students and teacher will return to the anchor chart “Elements of a Personal Narrative”. Pose this question:

1. Why did Roald, Patricia, Jon, and Ralph include details in their personal narratives?

Use this question to help get students to the next two bullet points:

- Personal narratives show the author’s feelings.
- Personal narratives should not only tell *what* the author did, but *why* he or she did it and *how* she or he felt.

Day 4:

Revisit the 1st essential question: **What can we learn from the stories of others?**

Introduce the day’s mentor text: Chapter 2 from 26 Fairmount Avenue by Tomie DePaola.

Preface the text by informing students that this is a chapter from a larger memoir—a collection of personal narratives. Encourage students to look for the “small moment” or shorter personal narrative hidden within this chapter. Teacher and students will read the mentor text. After reading, have students share with a partner what they believe the “small moment” from this chapter to be (the story about Nana Upstairs). After the discussion, have students share their thoughts, then pose these questions:

- What did Tomie learn?
- Have you ever had to learn a lesson “the hard way”?

Return to the anchor chart “Elements of a Personal Narrative”. Pose these questions:

1. Why did Tomie write this personal narrative? What was his purpose as an author?
2. What lesson can you learn from Patricia, Roald, Jon, and Ralph’s narratives?

Use the above questions to help get students to the last bullet point:

- Personal narratives can focus on a specific moral or contain a universal theme.

If it has not been touched, on the idea of theme will need to be more explicitly explained. In this scenario, use the previous mentor texts as examples of theme. For example, all of them (with exception of “The Great Mouse Plot” deal with the theme of family).

Day 5:

Revisit the 1st essential question: **What can we learn from the stories of others?**

Review the “Elements of a Personal Narrative” anchor chart. Students will use their lists to perform a hunt for personal narratives.

Personal Narrative Hunt: Provide each student/student group with a stack of books from your classroom or school library (you will need to ensure beforehand that there are at least a few personal narratives included amongst the other texts). Have them use their personal copies of the class “Elements of a Personal Narrative” anchor chart as a checklist to determine which books are personal narratives.

After the hunt, introduce the second essential question: **How can reading someone else’s story help you to write your own?** In particular, how can the mentor texts we’ve read help us to create our own personal narrative?

Use the “Elements of a Personal Narrative” anchor chart to create a class checklist for writing a personal narrative.

Day 6:

Revisit the 2 essential questions: **What can we learn from the stories of others? AND How can reading someone else’s story help you to write your own?**

Introduce the mentor text, Chapter 4 of Tomie DePaolo’s 26 Fairmount Avenue*. Let students know that this is another chapter from Tomie DePaolo’s memoir and that it, too, contains more than one story. As we read, we will look for these individual stories. Teacher and students will share this reading. As they read, teacher should mark the beginning and end of each “small moment” or short narrative contained in the chapter.

(*Though recommended for every mentor text, it is imperative that students have their own photocopies of this chapter to mark on for today’s lesson.)

Introduce the scenario: Imagine we are peer editors for Tomie DePaolo and we want to help him to create one personal narrative from the small moments included in this chapter. Of the three small moments we identified—Easter, building the road, and drawing on the walls—we need to choose which one is closest to being a complete personal narrative. We will use the checklist we created to help us.

Teacher and students will go through each small moment to determine which small moment would make the most complete personal narrative according to our class checklist. Students will

then work independently to write a short paragraph with text evidence telling what they learned about Tommie DePaola from this narrative. They will then generate 3 questions they will have about the text. Discuss those questions with elbow buddies as well as how the story would be better if they were answered.

Days 7&8:

Students will complete the performance task. Once the performance task is complete, students will complete the post-test questions (identical to pre-test questions).