



SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Think-Pair-Share, Brainstorming, Marking the Text, Webbing, Graphic Organizer, Generating Questions, Drafting, Mapping, Rereading, Skimming/Scanning, Adding, Substituting, Self-Editing/Peer Editing, Sharing and Responding, Marking the Draft

Focus:

Writers use the personal narrative form of writing to share their own experiences with their readers. An interesting personal narrative makes the reader feel as if he or she is experiencing the events with the writer. This type of writing draws upon personal experiences and imaginative thinking to portray events in vivid detail. It provides rich opportunities for recollection of past, present, or imagined experiences and thoughtful reflection on these experiences.

Goal:

To write personal narratives that:

- Include a clearly defined focus.
- Communicate the importance of or reasons for actions or consequences.

To achieve this goal, you will engage in a series of activities in which you work with your teacher and with your classmates to construct two model personal narratives. You will then use these models to construct your own personal narrative.

Activity 1: Reading and Analyzing a Personal Narrative

1. Think about a great story that you remember because it was interesting, or perhaps you've heard it several times. It might be a family story that gets repeated at get-togethers, or it might be the story of something that happened that you and your friends will never forget. Who tells this story the best? What makes his or her version of the story better than anyone else's?
2. What elements are common to good stories?

3. As you read the sample narrative that starts on the next page, look for elements of a good narrative. Mark the text by putting a checkmark in the margin when you find the element, and write the name of the element beside the checkmark.

Sample Text

Let's Go to the Videotape

by Dan Gutman

I wasn't the skinniest boy in Newark, New Jersey.

Okay, well maybe I *was* the skinniest boy in Newark, New Jersey.

I have no proof either way. But kids at school used to say to me, "You're so skinny that when you go to the movies, you can't hold the seat down." Kids used to say, "Did you hear that Gutman disappeared? Yeah, he turned *sideways*."

Very funny.

Nowadays of course, everybody knows that it's *good* to be skinny, for health reasons. And now that I'm pushing fifty, I'm kind of glad that I've always been thin.

But back in 1965, I was ashamed and humiliated that I could just about put my hand around my own ribs. My legs were like matchsticks. Clothes never fit me right. The waistband of my pants, for some reason, seemed to naturally fall just below my armpits. I wouldn't wear a watch because even the smallest wristband would slide up and down my arm. I was short, too.

I was a mutant freak!

I tried to gain weight, I really did. I heard that drinking milk shakes and eating bananas would make you bulk up. So I tried it. I didn't gain a pound. What can I say? I never had a big appetite. To this day, I eat a couple of bites of food and feel full.

Finally, in fourth or fifth grade, I decided to do something about it. I decided to try weights.

Not lifting them, mind you. That would have been too much work. I'm talking about putting weights in my *shoes*.

You see, my father had a printing business that he ran out of our basement. He had all these thin pieces of lead that he used to separate the lines of type.

One day each year at school, each class would be marched down to the nurse's office for the annual ritual of being weighed, measured, and (in my case) humiliated. It was no fun being the skinniest and shortest boy in the class.

So I hit on a great idea: I would borrow some of my dad's lead weights and slip them in my shoes to make myself heavier and taller. Nobody would know the difference.

No, they didn't. The lead added maybe one pound to my weight and a half an inch to my height. The kids still laughed at me. And it was hard to walk with all that lead in my shoes.

The worst part of school for me, naturally, was gym class. I was never good at sports. I didn't have the arm strength to climb the ropes in gym. I didn't have the endurance to run the mile. Baseball was always my favorite sport, but I couldn't hit the ball. I was always afraid the ball was going to hit *me*. (It never did, but once I ran into a tree while chasing a Frisbee.)

The gym teacher at Mt. Vernon School was Mr. Feely (yes, that was his real name). He made us play basketball a lot. When things got rough, I was always the one on the floor, getting trampled by the other players.

The worst possible words out of Mr. Feely—to me, anyway—were, “Okay boys, shirts and skins.” The skins team, of course, had to take their shirts off. At least with a shirt on, I didn’t look *too* much like a walking skeleton.

I would pray, *Please put me on the shirt team. Please put me on the shirt team.*

“Gutman!” Mr. Feely would always bellow. “You’re a skin.”

But usually, the game we played in gym was kickball. I liked kickball, mostly because nobody had to take off his shirt to play it.

There were about a dozen boys on each team, and the fielders would scatter across the big gym. Little guys like me would try to hit dribblers past the infield and scoot to first base before the ball got there. Big guys could bang the ball as far as they could and bounce it off the far wall.

There was one game I will never forget as long as I live. My team was “at bat.” We sat in a line on the side waiting our turn to kick. Edmund Fortuna was sitting next to me. He turned to me and said, “Hey, Gutman, do you realize you’re the only guy on the team who isn’t wearing Cons?”

“Cons” were Converse All-Stars, those canvas sneakers that were state-of-the-art in the sixties (this was before Nike and Adidas came along).

I looked down the line, and Edmund was right. Every single kid except for me was wearing Cons. I had cheap, no-name sneakers. Suddenly, I felt ashamed. Ashamed of my stupid sneakers.

It was my turn to kick and I was mad. I decided that instead of trying for my usual cheap single, I would just whack the ball with everything I had. That’s what I did.

The ball took off and sailed across the gym, straight as an arrow. I headed for first, keeping my eye on the ball to see where it would land. It looked like it had a chance to read the far wall, or at least the basketball backboard that was attached to the wall. If it bounced off the backboard, that would make it doubly hard to catch.

The ball was on a downward trajectory when I reached first. Kids had positioned themselves under the backboard in case the ball didn’t reach it.

And that’s when it happened.

The ball went through the hoop!

Swish. Nothing but net. I had kicked a basket all the way across the gym!

Everybody stopped. It was like the Day the Earth Stood Still. Nobody had *ever* kicked a basket before. We didn’t know what to do.

“Home run!” Mr. Feely announced. “That’s a thousand runs!”

I circled the bases triumphantly. Then I sat back down next to Edmund Fortuna.

“Let’s see you and your Cons do *that*,” I said.

When we got back to class, everybody was talking about what happened in gym class. “Gutman kicked a basket! Gutman kicked a basket!” As the girls heard the news, they were looking at me with new respect. I was working hard to act like it was no big deal.

This incident happened nearly forty years ago, but I remember it like it was five minutes ago. I'm sure that none of the other guys who were there that day remember it at all. It was only important to *me*.

It would be nice to say that this was the beginning of my incredible athletic career, the turning point where I went from being a skinny little geek who couldn't play sports into a real jock. Stories are supposed to have happy endings, right?

Well, forget it. I'm still a skinny little geek who can't play sports.

But sometimes, when I'm lying in bed at night before I fall asleep, I roll this mental videotape I have of the time I kicked a basket in gym class. In my mind, I watch myself kick that basket over and over again.

I'll bet every kid has at least one of those moments in his life when he did something really, really great, something really unexpected.

Close your eyes and think of that moment from time to time. Remember it just the way it happened. Never let that video fade away. Someday, forty years from now, when you're lying in bed at night, you might want to replay it.

4. What is the main focus of this narrative?

Activity 2: Writing a Class-Constructed Narrative

Prompt: Write a personal narrative that meets the requirements listed in the goal statement.

1. Use a graphic organizer to help you brainstorm additional ideas for topics that are inspired by this narrative.
2. With your class, you will now create notes for the following elements that will prepare you to write a personal narrative:
 - Brainstorm a list of questions based on your teacher's brief telling of a story. Use the reporter's questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how) to fill in details of the story.

- Highlight examples of figurative language in Gutman’s narrative. Look for images, metaphors, and similes that make the story easy to visualize and interesting to read. Then brainstorm figurative language you might use to enhance the narrative the class is creating.
- With your partner, review the ways readers learn about characters. Skim Gutman’s narrative again to determine which methods he uses.

What the Character Says	What Others Say
What the Character Does	Descriptions of the Character
What the Character Thinks	Other Techniques

- With your class, you will now use your notes and your reading of the sample text to finish writing a narrative with an effective beginning, middle, and ending.

Activity 3: Writing a Narrative with a Partner’s Input

Prompt: Write a personal narrative that meets the requirements listed in the goal statement.

Generating Content

1. Revisit your brainstorming about topics you might write about and add any new ideas for topics. Briefly, tell your partner the story; work together to choose a story for each of you to write. Use the reporter’s questions to ask your partner about the story to help you remember the important details.
2. On separate paper, jot down a brief description of the characters involved. Brainstorm figurative language to make the setting seem vivid to your readers.

3. Plan the structure of your narrative, identifying the beginning, middle, and end of the sequence of events. You should try to remember the incident as clearly as you can, but you might find that there are gaps in your memory. List others who were there and might be able to fill in gaps, and make a plan to ask them for information.

Drafting and Refining an Opening

4. Use Gutman’s sample and your class-constructed model to help you draft an opening that tells when and where the incident takes place. Remember to use figurative language to enhance your description.
5. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your opening.

Drafting and Refining the Sequence of Events

6. Use your prewriting to help you draft the narrative, telling the events in chronological order, from the beginning, to the middle, to the end. Remember to describe how you felt at key moments.
7. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your telling of the incident.

Revising by Adding Characterization

8. Determine what additional methods of characterization would be useful to help your reader get to know the characters in your narrative. Consider using direct and/or indirect quotations. Use the characterization graphic organizer to think about what you have used and what more you might include.

What the Character Says	What Others Say
What the Character Does	Descriptions of the Character
What the Character Thinks	Other Techniques

Drafting and Refining a Conclusion

9. Reread your narrative and consider how you can express:
 - The reasons for actions.
 - The importance or consequences of actions.
10. Draft a conclusion that comes to a satisfying closing. Note that a satisfying closing does not necessarily mean a happy ending.
11. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your conclusion.

Reflecting and Publishing

12. Use the writer's checklist and feedback from your partner to make sure that you have included the essential elements of a narrative, and revise as needed.
13. Use available resources as you edit your narrative and prepare it for publication.

Activity 4: Independent Writing

Prompt: Write a personal narrative on an incident of your choice that has a clear focus and that communicates the reasons for actions and the importance of consequences.

Writing Workshop 4 Personal Narrative

SCORING GUIDE

Scoring Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Emerging
Development of Ideas	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tells a focused story with a clear point of view uses narrative techniques such as dialogue (direct and indirect), pacing, and description to effectively tell a focused story provides reflection that thoughtfully communicates the importance of or reasons for actions and/or consequences. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tells a generally focused story with a clear point of view uses narrative techniques to tell the story reflects on the consequences or importance of the experience. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> tells an unfocused story with an unclear point of view contains little or no use of narrative techniques contains limited reflection on the importance of the experience.
Organizational Structure	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides a creative opening that introduces the setting and narrator and hooks the reader uses a variety of effective transitions to connect events and signal shifts in setting or time provides a reflective ending that naturally follows from the narrated experience. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides a beginning that introduces the setting and narrator and/or characters uses transitions to connect events and signal shifts in setting or time provides a reflective ending that brings closure to the narrative. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> contains a beginning that is unclear and/or does not directly relate to the story presents disconnected ideas and limited use of transitions contains an ending with little or no reflective commentary.
Use of Language	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses sensory and figurative language to capture the action and make the story vivid uses a variety of sentence structures to enhance the story uses precise words and phrases to enhance the story shows control of punctuation, grammar, capitalization, and spelling. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses sensory and figurative language to capture the action and make the story clear uses a variety of sentence structures generally uses precise words and phrases contains minor errors in punctuation, grammar, capitalization, or spelling, but they do not interfere with meaning. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses sensory and/or figurative language ineffectively or not at all shows little or no variety in sentence structure contains words and phrases that are repetitive and/or unclear contains errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling that interfere with meaning.
Writing Process	<p>The composition reflects thoughtful planning, revision, and editing to produce a draft ready for publication.</p>	<p>The composition reflects evidence of planning, revision, and editing to produce a draft ready for publication.</p>	<p>The composition reflects minimal evidence of planning, revision, and editing and is not ready for publication.</p>