

Introducing Personal Narrative

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Background

In Kentucky, students are required to write personal narratives as part of the fourth-grade writing curriculum. Sheryl uses professional and student examples to help her fourth-graders build on their knowledge of the characteristics of personal narratives before they begin to write their own.

Instruction and Activities

Sheryl introduces some of the characteristics of personal writing and reads a personal narrative from *Highlights for Children* magazine (April 1989), "Gift from the Storm" by Kathy Millhoff. As she reads, Sheryl asks the students to think about what makes this a personal story.

After reading the story, Sheryl asks the students to share their ideas about the distinctive characteristics of personal narratives. She records these characteristics on a large piece of chart paper.

To share another example of a personal narrative, Sheryl invites an older student to their classroom to read a personal narrative written the previous year when she was in fourth grade. After the piece is read, Sheryl asks the author to reflect on the experience of writing this personal narrative.

When the student leaves, Sheryl distributes copies of the personal narrative. She asks the class to identify any additional characteristics of personal narratives they have observed in the older student's piece. Sheryl adds these characteristics to the list on the chart paper.

Sheryl shares a list of characteristics of personal narratives from the Kentucky writing curriculum, and she and the students compare their list to the state's in order to create a master list of the characteristics of personal narratives.

Finally, the students begin brainstorming and/or looking through their writer's notebooks to find ideas for their own personal narratives. Sheryl provides many additional examples of published personal narratives for them to read and consult as they write.

Sheryl's Follow-up Lesson

When the genre study is almost over and students are ready to publish their pieces, Sheryl introduces a reflection piece. She uses a graphic organizer to help her students think and write about the experience of creating a personal narrative.

Reflecting on My Writing

Think about the top three writing criteria:

Purpose/Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• why I wrote the piece• the most important part or focus
Idea Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ideas I used to develop my piece• ideas answering HOW? WHY? and WHAT? to help reader visualize• ideas that show action so reader can create a movie in his or her mind
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the order in which I told my story• the way I grouped my ideas into paragraphs

What have you learned as a writer from developing a personal narrative? Give examples.