Personal Narratives

Learning from Lessons Life Teaches Us

“All the world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players”

Shakespeare
Content Standards

This unit supports the following standards:

National Common Core Standards (ELA)
Reading: Literature (Grade 7)

Key Ideas and Details
1. Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
2. Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text; provide an objective summary of the text.

National Common Core Standards (ELA)
Speaking & Listening (Grade 7)

Comprehension and Collaboration
1. Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 7 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly.
2. Analyze the main ideas and supporting details presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how the ideas clarify a topic, text, or issue under study.
3. Delineate a speaker’s argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
4. Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with pertinent descriptions, facts, details, and examples; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
National Common Core Standards (ELA)
Language (Grade 7)

Conventions of Standard English
1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
2. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Knowledge of Language
3. Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening. Choose language that expresses ideas precisely and concisely, recognizing and eliminating wordiness and redundancy.

Vocabulary Acquisition and Use
4. Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grade 7 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
5. Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
6. Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

National Common Core Standards (ELA)
Writing (Grade 7)

Text Types and Purposes
3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Production and Distribution of Writing
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
## Learning Window

### Knowledge
- I will know the distinguishing attributes and structure of a personal narrative.
- I will know examples and non-examples of personal narratives.
- I will know narrative elements.
- I will know that personal experiences, when shared with others through writing, can be both helpful and entertaining.

### Habits of Mind
- Thinking and communicating with clarity and precision
- Listening with understanding and empathy
- Creating, imagining, and innovation
- Responding with wonderment and awe
- Finding humor

### Understanding
- I will understand personal narrative as a form of autobiographical storytelling that gives shape to life experiences.
- As a reader, I will understand the importance of perspective and point of view when reading personal narratives.

### Skills
- Write a narrative in which I:
  - Engage and orient my readers by establishing a context and point of view, and organize a sequence of events or experiences.
  - Develop narrative elements (e.g., setting, event sequence, characters) using relevant sensory details.
  - Provide a satisfying conclusion that follows from the events, experiences, or ideas.

### Key Vocabulary:
- personal narrative, perspective, courage
- fear, autobiography, genre
- first person, life experience, milestone
- point of view, context, sequence

### Essential Questions:
- What are personal narratives?
- Why read personal narratives?
- What life lessons have I learned that are worth sharing with others?
### Unit Blueprint

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Personal Goal Setting: Backwards Learning

Examine the samples of proficient work provided for you from students in previous classes who wrote proficient personal narratives. After examining the samples decide what you must know about personal narratives and quality writing. Determine what you must be able to do to communicate with clarity and precision and achieve the goal.

Final Goal

At the end of this lesson or unit, I will be asked to...
Write a narrative in which I:
• Engage and orient my readers by establishing a context and point of view, and organize a sequence of events or experiences.
• Develop narrative elements (e.g., setting, event sequence, characters) using relevant sensory details.
Provide a satisfying conclusion that follows from the events, experiences, or ideas.

Here’s what I need to know and understand to achieve the goal:

Here’s what I need to be able to do to achieve the goal:
**Hook:** Think about this quote, “Courage is not the absence of fear, but rather the judgment that something is more important than the fear.”

**Kindling Question:** Do you agree with this statement? Why? Why not? What is something that you judged to be more important than a fear you might have had to face? What feelings do you have to overcome to face your fears?

**Bridge:** We all face fears every day. Today we are going to read a story about stage fright called “First Appearance.” As you listen and read the story think about the author’s perspective and how he dealt with his fear of being on stage.

Watch for sensory words the author uses to help you understand how he was feeling, the emotions he had to deal with, and comparisons he may have made that helped you as a reader. See if you can find a conclusion that Twain made after this experience and what he learns from it and what he hopes to teach you.
On October 5, 1906, Mr. Clemens, following a musical recital by his daughter in Norfolk, Conn., addressed her audience on the subject of stage-fright. He thanked the people for making things as easy as possible for his daughter’s American debut as a contralto, and then told of his first experience before the public.

MY heart goes out in sympathy to anyone who is making his first appearance before an audience of human beings. By a direct process of memory I go back forty years, less one month—for I'm older than I look. I recall the occasion of my first appearance. San Francisco knew me then only as a reporter, and I was to make my bow to San Francisco as a lecturer. I knew that nothing short of compulsion would get me to the theatre. So I bound myself by a hard-and-fast contract so that I could not escape. I got to the theatre forty-five minutes before the hour set for the lecture. My knees were shaking so that I didn't know whether I could stand up. If there is an awful, horrible malady in the world, it is stage-fright—and seasickness. They are a pair. I had stage-fright then for the first and last time. It was on a little ship on which there were two hundred other passengers. I was sick. I was so sick that there wasn't any left for those other two hundred passengers. It was dark and lonely behind the scenes in that theatre, and I peeked through the little peek-holes they have in theatre curtains and looked into the big auditorium. That was dark and empty, too. By-and-by it lighted up, and the audience began to arrive. I had got a number of friends of mine, stalwart men, to sprinkle themselves through the audience armed with big clubs. Every time I said anything they could possibly guess I intended to be funny they were to pound those clubs on the floor. Then there was a kind lady in a box up there, also a good friend of mine, the wife of the Governor. She was to watch me intently, and whenever I glanced toward her she was going to deliver a gubernatorial laugh that would lead the whole audience into applause. At last I began. I had the manuscript tucked under a United States flag in front of me where I could get at it in case of need. But I managed to get started without it. I walked up and down—I was young in those days and needed the exercise—and talked and talked. Right in the middle of the speech I had placed a gem. I had put in a moving, pathetic part which was to get at the hearts and souls of my hearers. When I delivered it they did just what I hoped and expected. They sat silent and awed. I had touched them. Then I happened to glance up at the box where the Governor's wife was—you know what happened. Well, after the first agonizing five minutes, my stage-fright left me, never to return. I know if I was going to be hanged I could get up and make a good showing, and I intend to. But I shall never forget my feelings before the agony left me, and I got up here to thank you for her for helping my daughter, by your kindness, to live through her first appearance. And I want to thank you for your appreciation of her singing, which is, by-the-way, hereditary.

MORALS AND MEMORY.
Listen to the story and follow along in the text. Stop and make notes along the way.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facts/Details</th>
<th>Sensory Words/Feelings</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Your Personal Connections</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Ideas</th>
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<td></td>
<td>What does the author mean when he says stage fright is a “horrible malady?”</td>
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</table>
Most Valuable Point

Work with a partner and compare the notes you both made. Discuss your questions together. Summarize your notes and then identify the most valuable important point you learned. Be ready to share your summary with the class and be prepared to explain your thinking.

Summary of My Notes:

Most Valuable Point:
**Comprehension Menu**

Work with your Literature Circle. Read through each of the questions on the menu. As a group, discuss the questions and reach consensus. Scan and skim Mark Twain’s “First Appearance” to find evidence to support your thinking. Be prepared to share your thinking when we have our large group discussion.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mastery</th>
<th>Interpersonal</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What does Mark Twain do to ensure he will get a laugh or two from the audience? Was this successful?</td>
<td>How might the sharing of Twain’s personal experience have helped his daughter or others?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are some lines from the story that helped the reader know what it felt like to have stage fright?</td>
<td>What personal lesson is Twain trying to share with the reader?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What event happened that inspired Twain to tell this story?</td>
<td>How did Twain show he sympathized with his daughter?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Can you identify or relate to this story? What connections did you make?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Self-Expressive</th>
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<tr>
<td>How does author’s perspective affect the telling of the experience?</td>
<td>When can a little fear be helpful? How?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How does humor help the story?</td>
<td>How might the story change if it were told from Twain’s daughter’s perspective?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What reasons might Twain have in sharing this experience with others?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do these reasons impact author’s purpose?</td>
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</table>
Think of a Time: Overcoming Fears

We all have personal fears we have to face in our lives. Think of a time when you had to face a fear and it turned out to be a good thing. Use the slide organizer to help you organize your thoughts. Afterwards, share your experience with a partner. How can sharing life lessons help others?

What happened?

Describe your feelings before the event or experience.

Describe your feelings afterwards.
**Teacher’s Note:** It is important to assess and refine understanding of the Personal Narrative at this time in the classroom. Use the Vocabulary Concept Map tool (Silver, Strong & Perini, 2001) to reinforce and review the attributes of personal narratives.

**Present the map in this order:**

- **Category**
- **Essential Vocabulary**

*Ask students to brainstorm what they know about the attributes of a personal narrative and record them. Elaborate as needed.*

After reviewing the attributes, ask students to reflect on other stories they have read and determine if each is a “yes” example (a personal narrative) or a “no” example (comparatives). Comparatives may have some similar attributes as personal narratives but they belong to a larger category.

- **Examples of personal narratives**
- **Comparative genre examples which are NOT personal narratives**
Sample Vocabulary Concept Map for Personal Narratives

- “The Market Square Dog” by James Herriot
- “The Case of the Monkeys That Fell from the Trees” by Susan
- “Stray” by Cynthia Rylant
- “First Appearance” by Mark Twain
- “The Drive-In Movies” by Gary Soto
- “Conquering My Fear” by an unknown student

Personal Narrative

Genres

- follows a structure
- focuses on one experience
- shows the purpose clearly in that the importance of the event is clear to the reader
- expresses the writer’s thoughts and feelings throughout
- is written in first person (“I”)
- has manly relevant sensory details (things for the reader to see, hear, feel, smell, taste)
- must have dialogue in order for the reader to feel like he or she was there
- must have why it is important and/or how it affected the writer
Teacher’s Note: Provide students with the partially completed Vocabulary Concept Map on the next page. Select books from the library which are both examples and non-examples of personal narratives.

On the back table you will find many different types of books. You and your partner are to read excerpts from the texts you select and determine if each is an example of a personal narrative or if it is a non-example.

Use the Vocabulary Concept Map to organize the stories under the correct groupings.
Vocabulary Concept Map Organizer

Genres

Personal Narratives

- follows a structure
- focuses on one experience
- shows the purpose clearly in that the importance of the event is clear to the reader
- expresses the writer's thoughts and feelings throughout
- is written in first person ("I")
- has many relevant sensory details (things for the reader to see, hear, feel, smell, taste)
- must have dialogue in order for the reader to feel like he or she was there
- must have why it is important and/or how it affected the writer
Peer Reading

1. Select a partner to work with.
2. Decide who will be Reader A and who will be Reader B.
3. Reader A reads “Conquering My Fear.” Reader B reads “Facing My Fear.” As you read, complete the organizer provided for you.
4. After completing the Description Organizer, work with your partner to retell the story and help them complete the organizer.
5. After discussing the two pieces, compare the two narratives (Use the Top Hat Organizer.)
6. Decide if they are more alike or more different.
7. Respond to the Conclusion Questions and draw a conclusion about overcoming personal fears.
Reading A: “Conquering My Fear”

For as long as I could remember I have had a chronic fear of crashes at high speeds and that my best friend Joseph has never feared anything. He would jump off the Eiffel Tower if he got the chance. On the day that I would finally conquer my fear I was in the back seat of Joseph’s uncle’s Ford Expedition with the whole seat to myself. If I were to turn my head around I would see the large speeder boat the car was pulling behind it. We were on our way to the Delta Marina. Our plan was to go tubing in the water. The only way we would end our turn on the tube was by flipping over and crashing into the water.

The road began to get rocky and the smell of wet wood was in the air. We finally reached the loading point for cars with boats. It was not until I was sitting in the boat with my life vest on and I could feel the swaying of the marina water that I realized how scared I was. I was shaking slightly, my palms were soaked with sweat and suddenly I felt as if I had to throw up and the engine had not even been turned on yet.

I sat in the very back of the boat facing the front. When I saw Joseph’s uncle put the key in the ignition I almost instinctively grabbed the closest thing to my hand. To my surprise I had grabbed Joseph’s arm who had sat adjacent to me. I recoiled with great embarrassment. Joseph said joshingly, “Oh Adam I didn’t know you felt that way.” Then he laughed, but I was too caught up in my mistake to laugh or even notice the engine had turned on. The sudden acceleration surprised me so much I almost fell off right away.

It took a few seconds, but I got used to the speed and even began to find a peace in the wind and the sound it made as it rushed by my ears. I sat in a very scholarly position with my hands folded and my back straight up. I looked over at Joseph and saw him in a reclining position with one hand holding a soda and the other hanging out the side of the boat feeling the water that the boat pushed up in large cascades as it cut through the once calm currents. I tried to relax as Joseph did, but I felt as if all my muscles and joints had made up their minds to stay put until it was my turn to test my courage. Within a few minutes the engine was turned off and the boat came to a halt. My peace was lost.

All my fear that was carried away with the wind finally caught up with the boat as it stopped. Joseph’s uncle turned around in his rotating captain’s chair and asked us who would go first. My courage was at an all time low. I became lost in a daydream. I did not notice how distorted my outside appearance was. My mouth was hanging down and my jaw tilted to the left revealing my dimples and wrinkling my forehead. When I realized a long pause had passed I noticed Joseph and his uncle were staring at me with disbelief. After another short pause Joseph finally stood triumphantly as if he just won the World Series and was ready for his victory lap. I figured he was going to volunteer to go first. This lifted the unbearable weight that plagued my shoulders for what seemed like an
eternity. “I vote Adam goes first,” said Joseph. I was so stunned by this. I was skeptical to believe he said it. When his words finally registered with my brain Joseph’s uncle had already finished fixing up the rope that would pull me. All that was left was for me to climb on to the tube and hold on. Before I stepped off the boat Joseph gave me a pat on the back and whispered into my ear a phrase that I will never forget, “If you whim out I will make your life miserable.”

I had known Joseph for years and knew that he would never do that, but his words gave me courage. The pat on my back punctured a hole in me that leaked fear and his hand transferred an ocean of courage, his courage. Out of nowhere I felt I could jump off the Empire State building without flinching. I got on to the tube without so much as a stutter. My new burst of confidence shocked Joseph and his uncle as much as it shocked me. Slowly the tube floated away from the boat and it came to me, this is it. There’s no turning back now.

The only thing that compared to this moment between getting on the tube and thrusting forward is at the beginning of “Saving Private Ryan” when the troops are waiting for the boats to open. The whistle that signaled the soldiers to get ready in my case was the thumbs up Joseph would give me when they were ready to go. Like the soldiers that either died right away or made it to the beach, I was either going to hang on or fall off right away. Joseph’s fateful thumb went into the air. I concentrated all my new found courage on gripping the handles and nearly squeezed them in half. I got such an adrenaline rush when I was flung forward for the first time, I could have lifted a truck above my head. I zoomed at what felt like one hundred miles an hour down a long strip of water. The objects passing by reminded me of when Han Solo sent his ship into light speed and the stars passed with a blurred tail. I was in another peaceful state of mind. I had conquered the world. I got too relaxed though. My grip on the handles loosened and suddenly the only thing between me and the water was air. I hit the water so quick I did not have time to be scared.

As I floated in the water I reached what might be referred to as my atonement. I realized what I had accomplished and now what I could accomplish. Joseph has always been there for me when I needed support, and vice versa. This incident seems to stand out the most for me. After that day I was a changed person. Thanks to the boost of confidence from a good friend I have gone about my life in a cool, assured manor. Maybe someday I will tell Joseph of the great impact he has had on my life.
Reading B: “Facing My Fear”

Everybody has a fear of something that can paralyze them on the spot. I have this fear, which causes my legs to shake, sometimes even breaking out into a cold sweat. Thoughts of a certain death race through my mind, and the world appears to be a treasured place, a utopia. I imagine my own funeral, then am whisked quickly back into the horrors my thoughts produce. There is a simple reason for this feeling, I am deathly afraid of heights.

Despite my fear, a few summers ago I somehow found myself climbing to a high place, my body trembling with every inch upward. My cousins had convinced me to go with them to a cliff-diving spot while we were on vacation. The area itself was breathtaking, a grass covered opening ending sharply at a rocky cliff, with deep blue water splashing against the cliff’s base. My cousins had convinced me it was completely safe to jump into the water below.

We sat by the edge on benches constructed to watch divers, eating lunches we had brought. Several divers jumped while I was eating, and they seemed to enjoy themselves, but I wasn’t ready to make the plunge yet. As we finished our lunches, my cousins began to take off their t-shirts, since we dressed in our bathing suits before we arrived. My oldest cousin, Jeff, jokingly asked me if I wanted to jump first, since he knew I was afraid of heights. I weakly commented back but it hadn’t any effect. Jeff understood there was no way I was going to go first so he decided to lead the dive himself. With a running start he jumped off, curling his body together into a ball on the way down.

I watched Jeff jump, and briefly looked over the edge and down to see the splash, I regretted looking for the drop seemed to fall for miles. I heard him calling from the water below that I was to go next, and to my horror my cousins agreed. I undressed into my bathing suit, and walked over to the edge for one last look down before I attempted to convince my body to jump. Little did I know that my cousins had plotted for me to do this, and promptly pushed me, and I lost my balance and fell. My body flailed, and I screamed, but before I knew it I was in the water, already resurfacing. Jeff patted me on the back, laughed and asked me how it was.

I’m not going to say that facing my fear of heights was easy, because it wasn’t. I admit that I probably wouldn’t have jumped if my cousins didn’t push me over the edge. This little push taught me that sometimes we need to accept help from others to push us through a personal crisis. Now, when I’m faced with a hurdle in life, I’m more willing to reach out for help from my friends and family, because that’s what they’re there for.
There’s nothing better than when you face and defeat something that you have feared as far back as you can remember.

**Description Organizer**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Conquering My Fear”</th>
<th>“Facing My Fear”</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What experience is the author writing about?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What made this event an important milestone in the writer’s life?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What was the author’s purpose in sharing this story?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What does the author reveal about his/her perception of fears?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What did the author learn from fears?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What sensory words does the author use?</td>
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<td>How does the author use comparison to make a point?</td>
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Top Hat (Comparison) Organizer

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<th>Similarities</th>
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<th>“Conquering My Fear”</th>
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Conclusion Questions

1. Are the two pieces of literature more alike or more different? Why do you think this?

2. What might be the causes for the differences?

3. What might be the causes for the similarities?

4. What conclusions can you make about personal narratives?
Task Rotation and Narrative Writing

You have been reading personal narratives and now it is your turn to write your own. Use the following Task Rotation to help you brainstorm and plan for your writing. Your personal narrative should be between two and three typed pages, double spaced, using Arial 12-point type font. Make sure you read your narrative and check for errors before turning it in.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity 1</th>
<th>Activity 2</th>
<th>Activity 3</th>
<th>Activity 4</th>
<th>Activity 5</th>
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<tr>
<td>Think of some events in your life you would consider being milestones. Make a list of these milestones in your life. Choose one milestone and think about the sequence—what happened first, next, last.</td>
<td>Think of how this one important event on your list changed either your perspective, your behavior, your attitude, or shaped your character in some way. How did this one event impact you? Why was it an important milestone?</td>
<td>Think of something you could compare this event or the feelings you had during this event that might help the reader. Explain why these two things might be alike?</td>
<td>Try to put yourself back into that situation. Make a list of words that would best describe your feelings, your emotions, your physical reactions, and what you saw, heard, and felt. Think if there were other people there, what did they say, how did they influence you. Time to Write: Approximately 3 Days Write your own personal narrative about one event in your life that changed you in some way. Be sure your personal narrative meets the criteria from the key vocabulary map and is told in first person voice.</td>
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**Writer’s Club**

Purpose: To develop a support group in which writers share and discuss their work, generate feedback on how to improve their work, and share publications.

**Rules of the Writer’s Club**
1. Everyone reads.
2. Listeners respond to questions chosen by the moderator.
3. Writer listens to responses and does not defend self or the piece.
4. After listening to other’s responses, the writer tells what he/she will do to revise and polish the piece.
5. When moderator reads, someone else moderates.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literal Questions</th>
<th>Personal Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>How can you summarize what the piece is about?</td>
<td>How did the piece affect you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What attributes of a Personal Narrative can you identify in the piece?</td>
<td>What feelings did the piece arouse in you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>What did you learn from the piece?</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interpretive Questions</th>
<th>Creative Questions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is the theme?</td>
<td>How might the writer make this piece stronger?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the most important part of the piece?</td>
<td>If this piece were a kind of music, what would it be? Why?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What is the author’s purpose?</td>
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</table>
Self Assessment: Personal Narrative Writing

After working with your Writer’s Club and making revisions, how do you feel about your final piece.

Circle the face that best describes how your polished piece.

Fantastic                     Good                    Just O.K.               Terrible

☐ My personal narrative clearly focuses on a single characteristic or instance to form a central perspective.

☐ My paper is fully developed sensory details, precise details and vivid imagery.

☐ My paper is well organized and easy to follow.

☐ My paper uses has a central theme or lesson for the reader to take away.

☐ My story is told from the voice of first person.

☐ My writing is free of spelling errors and mistakes in mechanics.

☐ My writing piece uses varied sentence structure and is interesting.

☐ My writing shows the importance of the instance in my life.

☐ My writing draws a reasonable conclusion that follows from the events of the idea, incident or experience.