

Launching the Narrative Writing Unit—4th Grade

1. Define narrative as a genre

Purpose: to tell a story (real or make believe) of an event or experience

Activity: Using a circle map, students will jot down notes about the elements of a narrative:

a story	problem, solution	beginning, middle, end
characters	setting	uses your imagination
dialogue	includes sensory details	opening sentence

2. Review narrative elements from circle map

- Introduce Narrative prompt: story glove, anchor chart
- Deconstruct “The Shoemaker and the Elves” with graphic organizer
- Emphasize sequence of events, problem, and solution

3. Introduce/review Sensory Details

- Using same story (Shoemaker & Elves), students will extract sensory detail examples from the story by highlighting and will write them onto sentence strips
- Show examples & non-examples of “show not tell” (T-Chart) Showing | Telling

4. Teach how to narrow the focus/topic

- Using the “Watermelon” analogy, narrow the focus:

Watermelon is the broad topic, a slice is the smaller focus, the seeds are a moment

Example:

Watermelon—One day I went to the park.

Slice—I went to the park to play with my friend.

Seed—I met my friend at the park and played on the play structure.

- Practice narrowing the focus with the students and have them write them in their notebook.
 - Practice “watermelon” topics such as:
 - I took a trip to Disneyland.
 - Last weekend, I celebrated my birthday.

3. I played with my brother.

5. Teach how to write an opening sentence/paragraph

- a. Embed with introductory paragraph—the paragraph introduces in more detail the characters and setting
- b. Opening sentences can “hook” or “grab” the audience so they want to read more.
- c. Use Picasso examples from familiar stories. Pick out the character descriptions, settings, and “hook” (see list below)
- d. Create an anchor chart/living chart with examples
- e. Students will write definitions/examples

Picasso Examples from Anthology:

Treasures, Unit 1, pg. 13 (My Diary, From Here to There)

Treasures, Unit 1, pg. 108 (Because of Winn-Dixie)

Treasures, Unit 2, pg. 140 (My Brother, Martin)

Treasures, Unit 2, pg. 165 (Mighty Jackie, The Strikeout Queen)

Treasures, Unit 2, pg. 220 (The Tale of Pecos Bill)

6. Model a Narrative using This Prompt:

PROMPT: Imagine that you're walking through the hallway at school when all of a sudden you hear a strange sound coming from inside of your class. Upon entering the classroom you see a strange animal sitting at your desk. Write a story using sensory details about what happens next.

Step 1: Analyze the prompt: Topic, audience, key words

Step 2: Brainstorm on a circle map: whole class about character, setting, sequence of events with rising action, problem/solution.

Step 3: Fill in graphic organizer (Narrative Map)

Step 4: Begin drafting introductory paragraph with emphasis on hook/grabber

Step 5: Read introductory paragraph out loud, begin drafting 2nd paragraph (beginning), and maybe 3rd paragraph (middle)

Step 6: Read paragraphs worked on previously out loud, finish drafting final paragraphs (including resolution and concluding paragraph). Add any transition words to make the story flow.

Step 7: Revise only introductory paragraph for “show not tell” (demonstrate “show, not tell”). If time, revise 2nd paragraph.

Step 8: Reread narrative draft. Review “Show not tell”. Review revisions from previous step on introductory paragraph. Revise remaining paragraphs.

Step 9: Teach concluding paragraph using Picasso’s (similar to how you introduced introductory paragraphs).

Step 10: Finish revising for “show not tell”.

Step 11: Edit for conventions.

Step 12: Publish? Illustrate? If not, begin a new prompt with more guided practice.

LIST 81. STORY STARTERS

Writer's block happens to even the best writers. Use these to ignite students' imaginations and get them started. You can also use these as starters for a group writing project. Post a story starter on newsprint or on the computer at the writing station. During the course of a day (or week) each student reads the story so far and adds another sentence or paragraph. At the end of the period, the story is read aloud and printed. Each student, then, writes a suitable ending for the story as an at home or independent writing assignment. When using these for individual writing experiences, remind students to use the Descriptive Words list for ideas for adding color and detail to their stories.

1. Grandpa's attic is full of old clothes and other stuff from long ago. My sisters and I like to go up there and make believe we are . . .
2. Just as she settled into her favorite chair to read her book, Jessica's cell phone rang. "Who would be calling this late at night?"
3. It was just after noon when Andrew hungrily opened his Justice League lunch box. He couldn't have been more surprised. Right next to the apple he found . . .
4. If you think about it, every season has its good points and its bad points. For me, the best thing about winter is . . .
5. Mom told me to look left and look right before I crossed the street. But she never told me to look up! I was about halfway across when BOOM! It fell from the sky and landed right in front of me. Well, finders, keepers . . .
6. Garret and Clayton were excited as they boarded the plane to visit their grandparents' farm in New York. But they were going to miss all the things they usually saw when their father drove them to the farm.
7. The ball crashed through the window. "Oh, no," Alex said aloud. "Who's in trouble now?"
8. The first one had been perfect. Then the second one, well, near perfect. Could I get three in a row and win? I held my breath and tried not to think of the crowd.
9. The perfectly formed footprint was the biggest one David had ever seen out on the trail. What had long thin toes like that? He bent down to look at it closer. He was studying the footprint when he heard the sound and turned to look behind him.
10. "This will show them," Emily thought as she hammered the last nail into place.
11. My brother Philip is fussy. He doesn't like many foods. So we experimented in the kitchen. That's how we discovered the prize-winning recipe for chocolate-covered . . .
12. The directions on the package said to pour the powder into a large bowl and then briskly stir in a cup of water. As I stirred the mix, a sweet smelling smoke came up out of the bowl and swirled over my head. I looked up. Through the haze I saw two bright eyes. "That's quite enough, now. And, thank you for the water. I was very thirsty."
13. Tiptoeing in the dark, Jenn stepped around the desk. She pushed Professor Dracket's chair against the wall so she could open the center drawer. Freeing Benji may turn out easier than she thought it would be. After class, she had seen Dracket drop the key the drawer. All she had to do now was take the key, sneak into the lab, and open the cube.
14. Taking his cloak from the peg on the wall, Steven looked around the room one last time. "I will miss this place," he said to himself. As he left the Hall of Years he heard a faint reply: "We'll miss you, too." Without looking back, Steven stepped across the threshold and into the mist. He knew his first challenge was to cross the Smoking River. As he started walking toward its shore he had an idea . . .

15. Candi brought the mail into the kitchen and sat down at the table. "Lots of junk mail," she thought as she sorted through the stack throwing most of the envelopes in the trash. Then, she saw it. The trademark gold envelope. She was picked for the new Incredible Journeys show! Where would they send her? She held her breath as she opened it. Of all the places in the world, she was going to . . .
16. For a long time, I thought every day was pretty much the same as the next. I got up, went to school, came home, had supper, did homework, watched TV, and went to bed. Then I did it again. That all changed the day I discovered . . .
17. "Wait right there—don't move! I'm coming to get you! I'm coming!" the voice called urgently. Surprised, Hanna looked down the tree and saw . . .
18. Tomorrow is my Great-Granny's birthday. Everyone is so excited. She's going to be 100! I love to visit with her. She tells me stories about when she was young. Would you believe back then they didn't have . . .
19. Saturday was a very rainy day. The sky was a funny gray, almost white. The rain was coming down hard and straight. Well, it might not be a good day for a bike ride, thought Jared, but it was a perfect day for Jacob and me to . . .
20. The directions on the box said, "Washes off with warm water." Jaime had been trying to wash it off for an hour. But it was still there. How could she explain why her face was . . .
21. Yabbo checked the instruments. Everything was ready. In just a few minutes they would leave the shelter of the space station and venture forth on Terra 34. What would they find?
22. Dad's company gave him a promotion. It's a good thing, I guess. It means they think he is doing a great job. The problem is, we have to move again. This time in March. Right in the middle of the season. I wish I didn't have to go because . . .
23. Chris bent down just enough to see whether the liquid came up to the mark on the measuring glass. Nope. She needed to pour just a bit more to make it perfect. Measuring your ingredients is important. She learned that last year in Potions 101. Tom had put just a pinch too much of toads' tail in his kettle and, "poof." The green smoke rose so quickly they had all breathed in it. It wasn't much fun hopping from place to place. Luckily that problem lasted only a day. But, if she were to mix in too much oil of . . .
24. The absent-minded old man left the door to the car open and his keys inside while he carried his groceries into the house. That was all the time the thief needed to steal the car. As he climbed in, he reached around the wheel and turned the key. The engine sprang to life. He put the car in gear and stepped on the gas just as the old man came from the house. "Nadine! Nadine!" he cried. "Who's Nadine?" the car thief wondered. Just as he had that thought . . .
25. The winds were strong. So strong that you had to hold onto your hat with both hands. I felt silly walking down the street like that. Arms up. Elbows out. Leaves and old newspapers blew passed me. All of a sudden, I felt a claw circle my waist and yank me off the ground and into the air. I screamed as I looked over my shoulder and saw the huge . . .