

# Mini Genre Unit

## Memoir/ Personal Narrative

### Author: Andrea Bostwick

**Background:** This unit was designed specifically for my 6<sup>th</sup> grade students and their needs, but can be used by anyone. I designed it after having my students write stories and realizing that they weren't getting the beginning middle (with a peak of excitement), end idea down. I thought that if they wrote about something personal they wouldn't be too distracted with all the possibilities in a fictional story and be able to focus better.

**Core Curriculum:** *Standard 8 Objective 6 a*

Produce personal writing (e.g. journals, personal experiences, eyewitness accounts, memoirs, literature responses)

## Day One

**Overview:** Today I will get students to think about their memories and the things that make them who they are in preparation of writing a memoir.

**Materials:** *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge* By Mem Fox (See Resources)

**Procedures:**

1. Explain that we will be starting a unit on writing memoirs, or writing about our memories and we are going to get thinking by reading *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*
2. Read aloud *Wilfrid Gordon Macdonald Partridge*.
3. Discuss the memories mentioned in the book. (e.g. How were the memories warm, funny, etc.)
4. Take out your personal object that holds a memory and explain to the students that today we are going to write about objects that remind us of moments in our lives.
5. Have students take out their objects and tell everyone we are going to write for 5 minutes silently about our object and what it reminds us of.
6. Use the document camera to show you writing while the students write as well for 5 minutes.
7. At the end of the 5 minutes read aloud what you have written. Then open it up to have a few students share as well.
8. Ask students to save their piece from today in their writing folder.

## Day Two

**Overview:** Students will see that experiences in their lives cause them to change over time.

**Materials:**

*When I was Young in the Mountains* By Cynthia Rylant (See Resources)

**Procedures:**

1. Remind students that we are working on writing our memories and today we are going to think about how we have changed over time through our life experiences.
2. Tell students that we are going to read a book called *When I Was Young in The Mountains*. In this book the author tells about how her life was when she was young.
3. Read aloud *When I Was Young in the Mountains*
4. Talk about how the author might be different today (e.g. Do you think she still thinks the same today about everything?)
5. Explain that they are now going to write some sentences using the pattern I used to be... Now I am ....
6. Show a couple examples of your own I used to be... Now I am...
7. Give the students time to write their own list of 5-10 sentences.
8. Go around and ask students to share what made them change (**Informal Assessment**)
9. Ask students to save this piece in their writing folder.

## Day Three

**Overview:** Today's goal is to show students a good example of a personal narrative/memoir and identify key points to writing them.

**Materials:**

Mastering the 5 Paragraph Essay (See Resources)

Student copies of the personal narrative example essay

**Procedures:**

1. Tell students that they have been reflecting on their memories for the last two days and now we are going to start thinking about writing down our own memoir, so today we are going to look at how to write a memoir.
2. Hand out copies of the personal narrative example piece. Put teacher copy under the document camera to show the notes you make.
3. Begin to read it aloud. Stop after the 1<sup>st</sup> paragraph and point to how the author has set up the story with background. Tell the students that the reader does not know anything about the situation and we have to build the readers background knowledge by letting them know how the memory was set up. Have students make note next to paragraph to give background on the memory.
4. Read the Second paragraph aloud and talk about how the author uses dialog to make things more interesting. Show how the author even used quotation marks to explain her own mental dialog. Explain that with memoirs or personal narratives the dialog may not be exactly what it was when it happened, but write it to your best memory because it makes it more interesting. Have students make a note to add dialog.
5. Read the third paragraph aloud. Point out all the details that have been added like the sound word at the beginning of the paragraph. Explain that the author really has to

describe the situation well so the readers feel like they are there. Have students make note to add detail.

6. Read the fourth paragraph aloud. Point out a couple things here. One, how well the author describes the other character (her dad) and second how the author really ties up the story so that the readers feel satisfied. Have students make note to have an end to their memoir and to describe other characters well.

7. Read aloud paragraph 5. Talk about how the author comes out and says the lesson learned or the moral of the story. Explain that their personal narrative/memoir needs to have a point. Have students make note to explain their point of the story.

8. Have students take out their writing pieces from the last couple days and begin to pick what they might want to write about in their memoir. Give students silent time to write.

9. Go around and ask students to share what they might plan on writing. Evaluate that everyone is working on their brainstorming (**Informal Assessment**).

## Day Four

**Overview:** Today students will get an opportunity to work on their memoirs after a review of what they need to include.

**Teacher Prep:** Write an intro to your personal narrative so it is started, you will add to it during the lesson.

### **Procedure:**

1. Pull out the copy of the essay from yesterday and use the document camera to display it with notes.

2. Read it all aloud again while reminding students of the notes:

1. Set up the situation with background knowledge
2. Add dialog
3. Use details and add description
4. Describe other characters
5. Wrap it up
6. Moral

3. These are a lot of notes so simplify by telling students that you will be looking for and grading the following things:

1. Set up
2. Description
3. Conclusion with moral

3. To start them off on the “write” foot display the intro to your personal narrative and read it. Point to the parts you added to really set up the situation for the reader. Then for the students, write the next part (a paragraph or so) add at least two of the items listed above. Ask the students to help you point out the pieces you added.

4. Let the students get started. While they are writing walk around the room and confer with different students seeing that they are comfortable adding the different parts (**Informal Assessment**).

## Day Five

**Overview:** Today the students will confer and brainstorm with one another.

**Teacher Prep:** Finish your own personal narrative and leave out some key things so that you can talk with the students about how to edit it.

**Procedure:**

1. Start by explaining that the students will be conferring with one another today, not for editing, but to see if they can help each other add the elements talked about in previous lessons.
2. Explain that they will start by helping you edit your own writing.
3. Read aloud your personal narrative. Then ask the students to give input on what they find confusing or missing from the Big Three. Push the students to identify missing details, need for more introduction and a nice conclusion. Edit these parts yourself if needed.
2. Explain that the students will need to partner up and follow the steps below:
  1. Exchange papers
  2. Read aloud the other person's paper to them
  3. As you listen to your paper being read think if there is anything you might want to add or that you think is missing stop the other person to stop and add the things as you go.
  4. Now read your own paper aloud to the other person.
  5. As you listen to the author read their paper stop them when parts are confusing or not making sense and give them suggestions to make it better.
  6. Repeat with partner
3. When students finish conferencing allow them to go back and make changes.
4. Tell students that they are to write a second draft and hand it in. They will have two days next week to work on rewriting.

**Assessment:** Read students writing and look for the Big Three using the rubric below:

Personal Narrative/Memoir Writing Assignment	Introduction	Description	Conclusion
1	No introduction present.	No details or description added.	No conclusion present.
2	Introduction present, but it doesn't set up the story enough. It leads to confusion	Some details and description, but it doesn't add to the story.	Conclusion present, but doesn't make the reader feel like the story is all wrapped up.
3	Introduction sets up the story and makes it easier to understand, but may lack a key detail or two.	Description and details present and make the story better. A few points could use more description.	Conclusion is present but lacks a good wrap up or moral.
4	Great introduction. Sets up the story and includes all the key information needed to allow for the reader to understand.	Great description. The reader feels like they are there and can make good mental images of the situation.	Conclusion makes the reader feel fulfilled and gives a lesson or moral.

#### Resources

Fox, M. (1985). *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*. La Jolla, CA: Kane/ Miller

Rylant, C. (1982). *When I Was Young in The Mountains*. New York: E.P. Dutton

Van Zile, S. (2006). *Mastering The Five-Paragraph Essay*. New York: Scholastic