

A large white cloud with a dark grey shadow to its right. The word "NARRATIVE" is written in bold, black, uppercase letters inside the cloud. A grey ladder with rungs leans against the left side of the cloud. Below the large cloud is a smaller, similar white cloud with a dark grey shadow to its right.

NARRATIVE

A Note About Narrative Writing

Narratives are stories, whether fiction or nonfiction. This broad category includes personal narratives, memoir, historical narratives, historical fiction, fantasy fiction, short stories, myths, parables, and narrative nonfiction of the kind found in many magazines.

Narratives can be used for many purposes. They can be used to make an argument (parables, fables, cautionary tales); they can be used for explaining information (biography, scientific processes, current events). Storytelling in the real world can be a way to present an argument or present information.

However, in our current reality, narratives are often treated as a separate genre in high-stakes testing situations. For this reason, we decided to create a separate section on narratives. We hope this eases some pressure on teachers who must prepare students for such a test. We would like to note, however, that trying to isolate narrative from argument and information is about as silly as separating creative writing from academic writing.

In our opening lesson, student writer Elizabeth Stewart offers a splendid memory of her grandfather. Her piece models both the structure of a narrative and a wonderful starter set of *types of details*. If you only use one craft lesson from the whole book, let it be this one.

1

Color It Up



What Writers Do — Writers describe what they see, think, do, and say to tell a story. They describe what other characters do and say, too.

What This Writer Does — Elizabeth skillfully blends all four kinds of description in this piece, leaving readers with a perfectly clear picture of the whole memory.

Activity for your class:

1. Pass out copies and read the piece together with your class.
2. Have students highlight the following:
 - yellow—everything the narrator thought
 - blue—everything the narrator saw
 - pink—everything that anyone said
 - green—everything anyone did (not counting thinking or talking)

(This highlighting can be done by groups, partners, or individuals.)

3. Share and compare what you notice.
4. Create a class chart so that your class can remember the colors.

Challenge for students:

Highlight a story you've written, using the same color codes, just to see your own patterns. You may want to use the Memory Reflection text structure, below, to write a new personal narrative.

Memory Reflection

Where you
were

What
happened first

What
happened next

What
happened last

What you
thought

I looked up with amazement as the sun's light made its way through the trees along Holly Lake. I could've watched it all day, but I had a bet to win.

"10 dollars for who catches the most fish!" exclaimed my Grandpa. Still a little shaky on thought I nodded my head making sure my Grandpa knew the bet was on. I spun around toward my red, sparkly pole and started to set up.

It seemed it took ages to set up, but I knew it barely took 5 minutes. I studied the water while waiting for my Grandpa to be ready. Before I could realize it, I saw my Grandpa's bobber in the water. Was he cheating, he was supposed to wait for me? I didn't care I had to get my hook out in open water for a fair game. Even though anyone could win, I had a doubt that I will, my Grandpa's a wonderful fisherman.

I looked back over at my Grandpa, he had already caught 2 fish, and I didn't even have one. At that moment I knew I had to step up my game. I quickly power walked over to the fish food and threw three hand fulls over by my hook. I glanced back at my Grandpa, he had only caught 1 more fish. I slowly sighed with relief, but my bobber was dunked under the surface. Once the fish was out of the water, I was stunned. It was marvelous, with red and blue scales that gleamed in the morning light. I don't know but it somehow gave me hope. I then quickly sent the fish back into the lake. I caught one more fish. It wasn't quite like the other one, but it still gave me hope. My Grandpa now had 4 and I still had 2, until the amazing hour I had been hoping for appeared. I caught 8 fish and my Grandpa caught 4, making the score 10 to 8.

More and more tugs came along, some were mine and some were my Grandpa's. Questions were dancing in my head, "Did I win? Was it a tie?" I looked over at my Grandpa and started walking toward him. The wooden dock seemed to squeak a

tune beneath me. I didn't know who won but I had a feeling I was about to find out.

"I won?" I yelled in delight, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. "Yep, the score was 17 to 14," explained my Grandpa. As we walked through the forest I thought to myself "I can't believe I won and I can't believe how much hope you can find in the smallest thing. I can't wait to come back here to once again challenge my Grandpa!" ☆

Combining Rhetorical Devices: Cataloguing and Repetition

What Writers Do — Writers sometimes use combinations of rhetorical devices to increase reader interest.

What This Writer Does — Ashlea combines *cataloguing* (listing) and *repetition* (repeated words, phrases, or sentences) in her spectacular narrative about a camping trip.

Activity for your class:

1. Read the piece with students after passing out copies.
2. Ask them to look at the sentence in the first paragraph beginning “I couldn’t roast...”
3. Next, ask a student to read that sentence aloud. As it’s read, have the class listen for the list (*gooey, chewy marshmallows, go fishing in the bay, hike to the top of the fifteenth highest mountain in the U.S.A., or rock climb up “Ten Teeth Peak”*). Demonstrate by holding up fingers as it is read to count the items on the list.
4. Explain to students that the name for this device is *cataloguing*: making a good, long list of specific items.
5. Then ask students to find where the catalogued sentence is repeated toward the end. What is the effect of this repetition? (*It almost creates an inside joke between the reader and the writer.*)

Challenge for students:

Look through your journal or writer’s notebook for a phrase like “lots of things” or “different kinds of...” Try replacing the phrase with a sentence using cataloguing and see what you think of the results. Experiment with repeating it.

Memory Reflection

Where you
were

What
happened first

What
happened next

What
happened last

What you
thought

Cruel Camping in Colorado

The lightning flashed, the thunder roared and a big fat drop of mucky water landed in my newly highlighted hair. “Gaa.” I mumbled. This was not a good start to my tenth birthday. My dad even promised me this would be my “Birthday spectacular.” Birthday spectacular? How about birthday stinker! I couldn’t roast gooey, chewy marshmallows, go fishing in the bay, hike to the top of the fifteenth highest mountain in the U.S.A., or rock climb up “Ten Teeth Peak.” Instead of all that great, fun stuff, I was cramped in a leaking tent with my hopeful parents. My brother even got to sleep in his own tent. Then, all of the sudden there was a snuffling of leaves in the distance. Since I had been camping many times before, I knew that was not the typical forest floor creature. “Dad! Dad! Wake up!” my dad woke with a congested snore. “Aghh! Can’t you remember to use that mouthwash I brought for you? Wo-we!” I snorted. My dad ignoring that replied, “You’re fine Big girl. Go on back to bed.” Once again, the lightning flashed while the thunder roared on. I pressed my face against the bug-pruff window to get some fresh air and a view, but what I got was some lousy brownish-greenish sky, and a smell of mud and dead bugs. That was definitely cruel camping in Colorado.

There it was again! That-that shuffling noise! It was coming closer, closer, closer, and closer... “Aghhh!” I screeched as loud as my voice box would go. “What was that?” My mom had woke. “Owwwww!” my dad groaned annoyed. “You just hit my head!” he added. “Well, you hit my arm and you’ve been snoring all night long!” my mom grunted between her teeth. I chuckled to myself, listening to their childish argument. After a moment or two I told them what I had heard. “Stomping, and crashing, and tearing down anything and everything in its way. Clawing down trees and probably jumping over Ten Teeth Peak this very moment. It’s got to be Ten Teeth’s legendary 350 pound bear!” I explained, exsagerating just a tad. “That sounds like some old campfire story,” assured my dad. “Besides, that bear is just some myth,” my mom added. “You’re right,” I replied. Though I had no idea what was in store for me in just five minutes...

“But, I guess if you’re so unsure of this, I bet we could go check out whatever’s out there,” my mother exclaimed suspiciously. “Ooookay?” I replied hesitantly. Once we got on our boots, we headed out. “This is kind of freaky!” I whispered softly to myself. The owls hooting, green mysterious eyes watching our every move, kind of gave me the willies. “Da-na, da-na, na-na, na-na!” went a little voice in my head just like in the movie, “Jaws.” The next thing I knew, my mom yelped, “BEAR!” (BEAR!) “Ahhhhg!” I blurted as I jumped in the air, screaming for dear life, but knowing I would never make it out of here alive. Just as I made two full 360 degree turns without touching the ground, I landed in a ginormus puddle of goop and mud. I rolled over with mud slathered on my body, head to toe to say goodbye to my beloved parents one last time before my life ended... But they were laughing uncontrollably “Whaa?” I questioned. I looked to my right and noticed that my brother, Luke, who was supposed to be sleeping in his tent, was dressed in a bear costume! “Happy birthday!” they all laughed. I threw gooey mud at all of them. “That’s what you get!” I taunted, laughing a little myself. “That wasn’t very nice!” I complained. “Well, I guess we wanted to give you an extra special birthday present this year,” Luke grinned. I smiled back.

Well, the day after the incident, the bad weather had cleared out, so it dried up all the rain. Then I did roast gooey, chewy marshmallows, go fishing in the bay, hike to the top of the fifteenth highest mountain in the U.S.A., and rock climbed up to the tipy-top of “Ten Teeth Peak.”

Some people say they found a puppy and got to keep it. Others say they found a doll they’ve been searching for, then finally found it. Though my story is about how I found a closer relationship with my family. I think that’s the best thing you could ever find. I’m very proud of my parents and Luke for always trying to make our holidays and vacations fun. I am very blessed to have a family that cares so much about me. Luke better watch out though, because he’s having a sleep-over this Friday night, and I might just borrow my friend Megan’s clown wig. Mom had joked once about his fear of clowns. His sleep-over might just turn into a 3 ring circus... ☆

Using Onomatopoeia as an Organizational Device

What Writers Do — Writers use the poetic device onomatopoeia for many reasons: to describe sounds, to create emphasis and rhythm within a piece, and to enliven the text with words that jump and pop off the page.

What This Writer Does — Flor uses onomatopoeia not only to add sound details but also to punctuate—and call attention to—the three different parts of her narrative. The three words *Bang, Pow, Zoom!* structure her piece.

Activity for your class:

1. Pass out copies of the piece and read it aloud.
2. Ask students to look at the three words in the title (*Bang, Pow, Zoom!*) and then find and highlight these words where they appear in the body of the piece.
3. Have students write a summary sentence for each of the three sections that begin with these words.
4. Discuss the effect of using onomatopoeia as an organizational strategy.

Challenge for students:

Look at something you have written, or think about a memory you could turn into a personal narrative. See if you can come up with three (or more) onomatopoeic words that you could use to organize your piece.

OR

As a class, use the text structure below to create a new narrative that matches the structure of Flor's piece. Use onomatopoeia in the three middle sections of your piece, as shown in the model.

Memory Reflection With Onomatopoeia

	(Bang)	(Pow)	(Zoom)	
Where you were	What happened first	What happened next	What happened last	What you thought

Bang, Pow, Zoom

Bang! There was an echo that sounded like someone had just hit their foot on a piece of metal.

“Oww!” screamed Jemma. “That hurts, I don’t think I can run in the race, you’ll have to put in someone else to run for me, Coach,” she stated as a bruise formed on her foot. It was about five minutes before the race started and we needed to find a substitute quickly.

“OK, Celeste come here, we need you to fill in for Jemma, she hurt her foot and can’t race today,” the Coach explained quickly before the race started.

“I’ll fill in for her and do my very best, Coach,” I exclaimed.

As I lined up with the other people who were competing, I was ready to beat everyone. I looked down at the black, hot, rubber tar track and thought to myself, Speed I am Speed. There was a little breeze that came with the beautiful weather we had today. It wasn’t as bad as after school practice when it was burning hot.

Pow! The noise of the gun was loud and the competitors started running as quickly as they could. Luckily for me I was ready to run and as soon as I heard the gun shot I ran as fast as I could go.

When everyone was running, I was in fifth place going at a steady pace. I had a plan figured out to win this race, it had been planned for weeks and I saved it for today. I would run at a steady pace and slowly speed up as I got closer to the finish line.

It had gotten hot when the sun came out and made it difficult to run on the hot track with your feet feeling like they’re on fire. I started getting tired when I began my third lap, but pushed myself to finish. It was challenging because my body was telling me to stop, but I kept going.

I was on my fourth lap, almost done with my heart beating quickly, and I knew I could do this, so I kicked it up a notch. I sped up so I could get in front of everybody else. It was between me and someone from another town in this black and monster green colored track suit. We were both so close to the finish line and...ZOOM! I ran right past her, she looked to the side and saw this black and gold and yellowish suit fly by as if she was on the ground and a car going 100mph zoomed right by her.

“Yea!” the Coach and everyone in the crowd yelled. They were excited I got first place and started crowding around me. My parents were getting emotional. They hugged me and looked at the medal I got. It was gold with a running shoe with wings and a number one trophy planted on the medal.

I embraced the fact that I got first place even though it was challenging, and I couldn’t believe it, but I worked for it. This may not be the last race I’m going to be in, so watch your back, competitors. ☆