

Grade: English 9

Unit: Narrative Writing (Launching the Writer's Notebook)

Summative Assessment:

After reading stories of childhood that explore what children learn, write a narrative that relates what you learned to do or be as you grew up. Stories may not be literally true in every detail but will be located in the time and space of your childhood. Use stylistic devices (e.g. imagery, tone, humor, suspense) to develop a narrative.

This prompt is from the MAISA English 9 Launching Unit: Narrative Writing.

Big Brother

My eyes flicker up to observe the group, but quickly return to the exposed pages of my journal. I don't want to have to see all the eyes that are set on me. Just because I shared my thoughts, doesn't change anything. I have still been here for three days. I am not leaving today. So why should they stare at me like I'm some kind of alien? It makes me feel uncomfortable. There is nothing I can do about it. "Talking is part of group. If you don't participate, you don't get better."

"Who else here fights with their parents often?" Daniel asks the group. I glance up to see most of the girls' hands in the room go up. Even a few of the boys raise theirs. I give a slight sigh and shake my head.

Daniel speaks up again. I zone him out, knowing that he is making my story into some big life lesson to benefit everybody. I don't need to hear it. Every time I talk to my mother, she looks back at what has gotten me in here or one of the other fights we have had. She then asks if I know what I did wrong, and then expects me to tell her what I will do different next time.

I pick up the pen that sits in the spine of my journal. Before I can write anything down, the door opens with the screeching of tired metal. I look up. Usually people aren't allowed to

Comment [1]: Note: The names of the people in this narrative have been changed out of respect for their identities.

Comment [2]: This is the first of several times in the narrative that the writer will show how she interacts with her world by looking and observing. It is subtle, but she frequently references how she glances up, looks down, or stares directly at someone.

Comment [3]: The writer begins the narrative in the middle of the action. She does not give the audience a typical "attention getter." Instead, she creates interest by making the reading wonder about where the writer is and why she is there.

Comment [4]: The writer uses the thought shot technique (to develop the internal story) to let the reader know what she is thinking when the group leader speaks, and she connects it to similar lectures she has heard from her mother.

Comment [5]: Nice use of figurative language here, so the reader can hear the door opening.

come into group late. That is one of the rules. If you miss the group's start, you lose your participation points for today.

Instead of somebody who has been here for a few days, a new guy comes in. He couldn't have been any older than 16. Even though I could tell he was older, he was pretty short for a guy; 5' 5, maybe 5' 6. He gave one glance to the table where group was held. He didn't join us like most people would. No. He walked over to the other side of the room and sat in one of the plastic armchairs.

Daniel turns around and looks at the boy. I can tell by his face that he knows the boy, or at least that the boy is familiar to him. "Noah, what brought you back here?" Daniel asks. I allow myself a quick glance at the boy. He seems angry. Wouldn't surprise me if he was. If he is anything like me, he didn't plan to end up at Kingwood Psychiatric Hospital. Then again, nobody wants to end up here.

The boy, Noah, looks at Daniel but quickly returns to his staring contest with the wall. "Court ordered," are his only words.

I hear voices in the hallway. They get louder each passing second. Soon, everybody has at least glanced out the window. Outside is a group of kids. *Group's over.* I look at Daniel just as he begins to speak. "Well, it looks like our hour is up. I hope you will share more with us tomorrow, Noah." Daniel stands up. "I will see you all then."

Before anybody else can stand up, Noah gets up and walks out the door, turning the corner before it can slam shut.

"What are you writing?" somebody behind me wonders. I turn around, surprised when I see Noah. I turn around and look at my journal pages again. "Everything," I say. Noah sits down

Comment [6]: The writer directly characterizes the "new guy," as she sees him for the first time. She could paint a more vivid picture of him by giving the reader more of his physical description.

She shifts the verb tense in this paragraph, which should be kept in the present.

Comment [7]: The writer reveals her location, six paragraphs into the narrative. This is a good move to create intrigue; prior to this, she alludes to the setting, but does not name it.

Comment [8]: Great use of figurative language. The reader better understands the boy's attitude by saying he is having a "staring contest with the wall."

Comment [9]: The writer's use of dialogue to develop the external story is spot on in this narrative. She paints a picture of a group leader who does all the talking and of the attendees who give short answers to his questions. The writer does a good job of teetering between what is happening externally in the room and what she is thinking in her head.

Comment [10]: The images like the one created by this sentence make all the difference in narratives. The writer shows the reader what happens at the end of the group session, rather than simply telling the reader that Noah left the room. Even seemingly simple descriptions, like the door slamming shut, add to the tone and characterization.

to my right. I'm glad that he decides to sit on that side. This way my arm covers up most of the paper.

"Ok, what is everything?" he asks. I look up at him and I find myself wondering why he came over to me. I don't do much. All I do all day is sit and write in my journal. Even during group. I only talk a little bit. Since he came in yesterday, I haven't said anything.

"I'm writing about my thoughts. I write about anything that comes to mind. But I write it in letters and I address them to Nobody," I explain the concept that I have told so many people already.

At first he seemed confused, but soon started to speak again. "So is that all that you write? Letters?"

I nodded, keeping my eyes on him. To be honest, I was very surprised that he hadn't gotten up and left yet. Most people don't sit with me for a minute, much less a conversation.

"That's cool. So what's your name?" he asked.

"I'm Brooke." That's all I say. I already know his name.

"Okay, Brooke. Why are you here? You seem like a good girl."

"I am here because I am depressed and I wanted to commit suicide. The rest of my story is long and I really don't feel like sharing right now," I say. "You?"

"Like I said before, the court wanted me to come back here. They thought that it was a good idea for me to have a little bit of time away from the outside world. But, I don't really have a choice. It's part of my probation," he says like he rehearsed it. Maybe he has. They ask why you are here about fifty different times on your first day here.

"You're on probation?" I ask, my voice sharing how much I am wondering.

Comment [11]: The writer uses the shrinking time technique, so she can skip to a time in the near future. She adds extra spaces to show that time has passed, but she could have made her transition more obvious by telling the reader how much time had passed (by using a phrase like, "Later that day," for example). Still, her decision works.

Comment [12]: Now she reveals how much time has lapsed to provide a time frame.

Comment [13]: This blunt statement shocks most readers, but that seems like the writer's intent.

Comment [14]: The reader can infer that the writer's own answer to the same question may also be rehearsed and delivered without emotion.

Comment [15]: The writer adds tone by tagging her dialogue.

He nods. “Yeah. I got into some trouble. I was in a gang and I left. From there it just went downhill.” I give a small nod, knowing how it feels when it all goes downhill.

“Time to come in!” somebody shouts from inside the gym. I take one last look around me, not knowing when the next time I come outside will be. Then I take a sigh and close my journal, making sure to grab my pen.

“I will see you later,” Noah says as he heads inside. I give him a smile before he turns around and heads inside.

Comment [16]: This is a nice blend of dialogue and the writer's thought shots.

“So why do you seem so stressed?” I am asked. I recognize the voice as Noah's. He said he would see me in gym during group today.

Comment [17]: Again, the writer shrinks time by skipping lines. She does not imply how much time as passed.

“What do you mean? I'm not stressed,” I say.

It's clearly a lie, but he decides to play along. “If you're not stressed, then why do you keep scratching your arms?”

He got me. I look down at my arms. They are covered, not only by my sweatshirt, but by a thin layer of bandages. “It's a relief. I feel like I deserve it. I do nothing but destroy everything around me, so why should I get a break,” I say it quietly. If he wasn't sitting next to me, he wouldn't have been able to hear me.

“It's not worth it,” he says.

“How would you know?” I ask, my voice getting a little bit louder.

“I used to cut,” he begins. “I stopped because somebody that I loved and trusted told me how they felt. After that, I stopped.”

Comment [18]: The rest of the narrative is dialogue that conveys the heart of the writer's story. It is emotionally honest and technically well executed.

When he stopped talking, he looked at me. He probably knew what I was thinking. More than that, he expected me to respond. I don't respond though. I keep thinking of what he said. He stopped because somebody told him how they felt. Then, I realize his point.

"What you're saying is that if somebody is being truthful to me about what they think, I should stop?" I say it like a question.

Comment [19]: The writer adds tone to her dialogue with tags like this.

Either way, he answers me. "Maybe. I mean, does your self harm hurt those around you?"

I look down. "I've never really thought about it before. I only know that I hurt people a lot. I need to stop it, but the problem is that I don't know how."

"Well, how about this," Noah says. "I care. You are really nice and I don't want you to get hurt. Promise me, that whenever you get angry or you want to hurt yourself, start writing down everything that you think. Another thing that you should do instead of hurting yourself, is talk. Maybe not to your mother, but to a friend."

"I don't—"

Before I can say anything his response, he stops me. "No, promise."

I look down and a slight smile forms on my lips. "I promise that I will try my hardest," I say.

Noah shrugs one shoulder. "It's a start," he says.

Comment [20]: The writer uses this conclusion to show what she has learned from her experience. It is not the typical reflection that comes at the end of a student-written narrative; instead, it gives the reader the impression that the writer is still learning, reflecting, and growing from the experience about which she wrote. Her time at this place is over, but her journey is not.

Teacher's Final Summative Comments:

High school students write about a wide variety of topics for the personal narrative; I make it clear at the beginning of the unit that if they choose to write about experiences that even *hint* that they were or are in danger in any way, it is my professional obligation to share their writing with a counselor and their parents. Please know that this particular student's parents, themselves, made her teachers, counselor, and the administration aware of her past experiences and her present struggles. This writer chose to write about this sensitive topic—a personal experience about which some may be ashamed to write—after I made it clear she would need to share it with her peer writing group and, of course, me.

The strength of this narrative lies in the writer's ability to tell a story. It does not feel forced or formulaic, even though there are clear requirements in the rubric calling for the use of narrative techniques/moves.

Narrative Rubric	<i>High (5)</i>	<i>Medium (3)</i>	<i>Low (1)</i>
Personal Narrative Focus (x3)	Narrative focuses on one event or experience that is significant in the writer's life and reveals the writer's feelings or thoughts about the experience. Story is told in first person.	Narrative focuses on one event or experience that is significant in the writer's life. The writer's feelings or thoughts about the experience are briefly or unclearly mentioned. Point of view might not be consistent.	Narrative may focus on too many events or experiences, or the events do not seem significant in the writer's life. The writer's feelings or thoughts about the experience are missing. Story might not be told in first person.
Developing the Character's Internal Story (x3)	Character thoughts clearly reveal what's going on inside the character's head. It is easy to see how the main character's thoughts impact the action.	Character thoughts adequately reveal what's going on inside the character's head for the reader to understand.	Story lacks a clear internal story. The reader is unsure about what the main character is thinking.
Development of the Character's External Story Through Description and	Character description reveals physical characteristics, behaviors/mannerisms, and dialogue to paint a	Character description reveals physical characteristics, behaviors/mannerisms, and dialogue to help the	Story lacks a clear external story. Story contains insufficient dialogue and description to

Dialogue (x3)	clear picture of the characters in the reader's head. The reader is able to "hear" the characters speak and understand what kind of people they are. The characters come to life for the reader.	reader understand the characters, but the characters do not come to life for the reader.	help the reader visualize the characters. The reader is unable to "hear" the characters or know what kinds of people they are.
Figurative Language (x3)	At least two examples of figurative language are well-used. Extra points may be awarded for thoughtful use of sensory imagery.	One example of figurative language is used or two examples are used but may be incorrectly used/identified.	No attempt to use figurative language or no correct examples of figurative language used.
MLA Formatting and Mechanics (x2)	Dialogue is properly formatted so that the reader can easily distinguish between speakers. <u>Story is in MLA format.</u> Few or no errors in mechanics. Story is easy to read.	Dialogue formatting may have some errors that make it difficult to tell who is speaking in some places. There is an attempt of MLA formatting. Some errors in mechanics may make reading difficult in places.	Dialogue formatting has many errors, making it very difficult to follow who is speaking. Story is not in MLA format. Many errors in mechanics make the reading confusing and hard to follow.
Trait Identification (x2)	Each requirement is highlighted and labeled correctly; be certain to include a color key. *Internal story *External story *Characterization *Meaning *Figurative Language	Some requirements are highlighted and labeled. *Internal story *External story *Characterization *Meaning *Figurative Language	Few requirements are highlighted and labeled or are labeled incorrectly. *Internal story *External story *Characterization *Meaning *Figurative Language

