

Appendix A

Reading Real to Write True

11 Tips for Teachers to Use Narrative Nonfiction in English Class

- 1. Use mentor texts.**
Design nonfiction writing lessons around high-quality memoir, literary journalism, and essays.
- 2. Not all memoirs are created equal.**
There's a difference between a ghostwritten celebrity tell-all and a thoughtful, researched personal account. Choose wisely and encourage students to do the same.
- 3. Read like a skeptic.**
James Frey, Brian Williams, Stephen Glass, and Margaret B. Jones (among others) prove that it pays to read "truth" skeptically. Ask students to consider author credibility, narrator likeability, and trustworthiness of the account along with how these questions intersect.
- 4. Use narrative writing to assess reading skills.**
What's better for evaluating student comprehension of literary elements like plot and character: a test/quiz, or actually having students apply these elements to an original narrative?
- 5. Don't censor student writing, unless you have to.**
Empower students to tell their best stories (which aren't always pretty). If you have to censor, be up front and clear about why and under what circumstances.
- 6. Consider timing.**
Traditionally, teachers have assigned a beginning of the year personal narrative as a "get-to-know-you" assignment, but students will likely be more honest and revealing after they've had time to build a trusting rapport with you and their classmates.
- 7. Help them build the skills.**
What skills do you want students to master? Writing in active scenes? Using action and dialogue? Incorporating reflection? Embedding information and argument in story? Before you assign a personal essay, lead students through a series of mini-lessons to help them develop the skills you'd most like to see (remember to reference the mentor texts!).
- 8. Give them (guided) time.**
Good ideas don't always come overnight (or at other predictable intervals). Give students time (along with guided brainstorming tasks and well-advertised deadlines) to find the right one.
- 9. Do it with them.**
If you want students to write with openness and emotional vulnerability, demonstrate that you're willing to be honest and vulnerable by writing with them and sharing your work.
- 10. Be mindful of sharing.**
Always give students an out when it comes to sharing personal writing. There's therapeutic value in personal writing, even if it remains private. Don't force students to peer-review or make their personal writing public without consent.
- 11. All (good) writing is nonfiction.**
Whether it's a poem, short story or novel, memoir, editorial, research paper, or instruction manual, all compelling writing has its roots in truth and lived experience.

10 Tips for Students to Write Engaging Narrative Nonfiction

1. Capture your ideas over time.

Ideas don't come on demand. When you get a good one, be sure to have a collection method. Use a writer's notebook or an app like Evernote. Mine your social media accounts for stories that have meaning beyond that particular moment in time.

2. Remember the advice of your mentor (texts).

Remember the narrative nonfiction book and other pieces you read? What did those authors do well? What do you want to try to incorporate in your own work?

3. Tell the truth.

It's impossible to capture the whole (or ultimate) truth, so tell your relative truth and be faithful to your perspective.

4. Do your research.

Look back at photos, interview others involved in your story, double-check verifiable details, and consider news and pop-culture from your featured setting. Getting the objective details right helps to build trust with readers when they get to your subjective experience.

5. Write in scenes.

Good scenes have a start, an end, and a sequence from one to the next (like a movie).

6. Write actively.

Including action and dialogue helps to put the reader in your shoes. Using active (rather than passive) voice helps to show rather than tell. Circle or highlight all of the linking/helping verbs in an early draft. Are there places which would work better with active verbs?

7. Be honest and vulnerable.

Don't write for revenge or to settle scores, and don't write a story if you're not ready to tell it yet. That being said, honest accounts require thoughtful vulnerability. What do you have to admit (about yourself or others) to make this story work?

8. Make an impression and leave an impression.

Invite readers in through intriguing first lines. Consider what story openings have drawn you in as a reader. Also, consider your closing lines. Can readers sense a shift? Have you arrived at the unspoken/unwritten ending line: "and nothing was the same after that?"

9. Share your work with a friend.

Sharing work with peers allows you to consider how you're coming across and whether you're telling your intended story before you release it to the judgment of the world. Going public (especially with personal writing) is always nerve-racking, so it's important to do it in increments.

10. Write for more than a grade.

Consider writing for publication or for a contest like Scholastic. Doing so will help you reach the full potential of the piece. Often, graded drafts are good starts which could be even better with a little more work.