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**English 12 - The Narrative Essay**

1. What is a Narrative essay?

* Narrative writing tells a story. In essays, the narrative writing could also be considered a reflection, or an exploration of the author's values and insight told as a story. The author may remember his or her past, or a memorable person or event from that past, or even observe the present.
* When to narrate vs explain (Expository essay):
  + The prompt reminds you of an experience or set of circumstances of your own (experiential)
  + The prompt reminds you of an important aspect of your past, an autobiographical incident that has special meaning (reflective)

1. **Your prompt for this essay is:**
   * ***Sometimes conflict can lead to positive change***
   * ***Or,\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ is my home.***
   * ***Or, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ showed me who I am.***
2. Basic qualities of a narrative essay:

* A narrative essay is a piece of writing that recreates an experience through time. It follows a logical sequence, so consider the best order to tell it.
  + *An African Storm*: Begins with a walk in town with the locals; reflects on a storm, language, people and customs; next, a man in a car offers a ride to escape the rain; reflects on her choice to get in the car.
  + *Libraries: Cathedrals of our Souls*: recreates through memory the experiences she had as a childhood and teen at her local library and with the books in it; has the least amount of narrative sequence; mostly reflection.
  + *The Opposite of Loneliness*: Begins with lots of personal reflection about school life at college, both the highs and the lows, but ends with an anecdote about walking in a winter snowfall to the administrative building where she has an insight about her life at Yale.
  + *A Poet’s Boyhood at the Burning Crossroads*: Begins with him watching the news about the death of an African-American man. He brings in emotive, figurative language immediately.
  + *Stability in Motion*: She personifies her car and its “birth” to hook the reader. She introduces her grandmother as a key figure to “connect” with the reader.
* In addition to telling a story, a narrative essay also communicates an insight into life, **a lesson learned or a connection between your experience and the larger world.** Your beginning (or intro) may allude to it, but by the time you end your essay, your conclusion should contain this realization of what has been learned. Your thesis/purpose/insight can be implied or explicit.
  + *An African Storm* – thesis statement: Conventional attitudes can reinforce apathy toward issues in our society, such as racism; Allison Howard’s essay, *An African Storm*, suggests **that change in society is not necessarily achieved through large political gestures or by those who hold power, but by small ‘infinitesimal’ changes that individuals can do every day in their lives**. Through her story of an emerging storm on the horizon, she uses the everyday detail of her walking in the rain with ‘the people’ to demonstrate this belief.
  + *Libraries:* *Cathedrals of our Souls* – thesis statement: There are many truths and perceptions about life that exist in our world. Increasingly, however, **one version of reality, one agenda, is taking precedent over all others. It is one that gives more value to the economic imperative, or ‘that which can be measured.’** Caitlin Moran’s essay *Libraries: Cathedrals of our Souls* explores how the public space and the role of the individual as citizen are being de-valued. She achieves this through her simple narrative of her relationship as a child with her local library.
  + *The Opposite of Loneliness* – thesis statement: Life is full of stress, but also full of wonderful moments; we create spaces for ourselves where we feel safe, but sometimes we have to leave those spaces and create new realities. **The key, however, is not to let fear of the future defeat you; embrace it with the knowledge that you don’t have to proceed with a perfect plan in place. Just always keep the passion alive!**
  + *A Poet’s Boyhood at the Burning Crossroads-* thesis statement: Living in the edges of town, the margins of a community can be stressful and scary. **One must realize and express their identity with pride and not let the fear overwhelm. Sometimes writing (such as poetry or narrative or journaling) may help one overcome the fears and express identity.**
  + *Stability in Motion-* **thesis statement:**

**What insight or message will your narrative reveal for me? – the reader. What thesis statement might I write for your essay in the deconstructive (marking) process???**

* Narrative essays often begin with a single incident, revelation or style that sparks some reflection, similar to a hook in speeches.
* Narrative essays contain elements of story structure, such as characters, setting, ***conflict*** etc.
  + Consider the **narrative complications** of the essays
    - African Storm: person vs. self – she is conflicted over her dilemma - give in to convention, which supports racist attitudes, and get in the car, or not?
    - Libraries: person vs. society – the tangible vs. the intangible; the consumer vs. the citizen; the library vs. the mall
    - Opposite: person vs. self – Keegan has conflicted emotions over leaving her place of comfort: fearful, nostalgic, excited, hopeful.
    - Burning Crossroads- Character vs self - he has to get over his own fears about the dangers of being gay and black and Character vs society- he recognizes the racism and homophobia in his country and the threat of death based on his marginal identities.
    - Stability in Motion- character vs self- the trials and tribulations of being who she is.
* Narratives essays have a voice. This should be your voice. It is achieved through diction (word choice), syntax (manipulation of sentence structure for effect), and rhetorical and figurative devices. (see the handouts on rhetoric and the examples discussed in the essays)
* Narrative essays appeal to the senses through descriptive language. Show, don’t tell. It’s not interesting to read about the garage sale. But it is fascinating to see, feel and experience one. Don’t be greedy on details – use sensory words (words using your 5 senses), and vivid words (“the author ‘stood timidly,’ or “my grandmother looked at me with great concern as if I were the only person in the world that mattered.”) to recreate an experience for your reader.
* Narratives have strong verbs – show events in action; also, your narrative will be stronger if you **write in the present tense**
* Unlike other, more formal essays*, you may write in the first person* (I, me, we) because it is a story about YOU!

**Your assignment!**

1. **Some steps to consider to get you started writing the narrative essay:**

* Identify the experience or event that you want to write about – how will it address the prompt?
* What will be your opener/ narrative hook/ attention grabber?
* What is the narrative complication (conflict)?
* Think about why the experience is significant – insights and reflection?
* Spend a good deal of time drafting your recollections about the ***details*** of the experience. This is how you will make your writing lively and interesting in order to engage the reader’s interest. Add significant details and personal observations. Sharing personal thoughts and feelings will invite the reader into the writer’s world and make them care about the writer’s experiences.
* How will you establish voice and tone?
* How will you establish sequence? Create an outline of the basic parts or events.
* Where will you state your thesis? (it does not have to be at the beginning) Will it be implicit or explicit?

1. **Criteria:**
   * You must have a minimum of four examples where you manipulate your language for rhetorical effect (parallelism, rule of three, anecdote, figurative language, sentence manipulation etc. – see the resources). ***You must copy and paste the sentences, which contain your examples, to a separate piece of paper, and label them.***
   * You must create sensory detail through descriptive language
   * Your essay must be a min of 1000 to a 1250 typed words (regular margins, font and spacing). Roughly two pages.
   * Your essay must have an interesting title that reflects your idea/s
   * Your essay will be marked on a 4-point rubric and is worth 30 marks
   * A printed good copy is due: **Thursday, September 19th at the end of class.**

Happy Writing!