

Process Writing Scheme: *A time in my life I will always remember*

The main objective of this writing scheme for Year 7 (11/12-year-old) students was to enable students to convey experiences in personal narrative writing. The key principle was that students' writing should emerge out of their own experiences and their responses to the topic, *A time in my life I will always remember*. The criteria for peer assessment were constructed collaboratively by students and the teacher. Students worked in mixed ability groups of 4/5 throughout the scheme of work.

Outline of the scheme of work

Students produced an initial draft, a second draft focused on improving content and a third and final draft to improve expression as well as content.

Pre-writing

Students discussed why people talk and write about their own experiences.
Students discussed some of the experiences they would always remember.

Drafting

Each student wrote a personal narrative based on one of their experiences.

Revising Phase 1

Students worked in groups to ask each other questions about their accounts.
Students redrafted their accounts in response to their classmates' questions.

Revising Phase 2

Students worked in groups to peer assess each others' accounts.
Students discussed what makes a piece of writing effective.
Students redrafted again in response to peer assessment and discussion of effectiveness.

Celebrating

Students shared their completed accounts with the whole class.

Students suggested some possible motives for sharing experiences, such as:

- *Catharsis* (To express your feelings; To release something locked up inside you; They might be upset and need to share it)
- *Audience response* (They just want people to know to see what they say; You can make someone else smile)
- *Audience understanding* (To give other people understanding of something)
- *Audience empathy* (To tell them how you experienced it)
- *Inner necessity* (Because they are excited and want to share it with us).

Developing criteria for success

Students suggested answers to the question *What makes a story interesting to listen to?*
Their ideas were collected and displayed on the board:

Makes the reader feel sorry for the author
A funny story – amusing – with emotion
Description – adjectives, imagery, similes
Atmosphere
Don't take it too seriously
Exaggerate
Anticipation – build up
Being enthusiastic

These ideas were used to create criteria for success to cater for the wide range of topics, approaches and writing styles the students were likely to produce.

The first three criteria represented what all students' accounts could be expected to achieve.

The features of atmosphere, enthusiasm and exaggeration were used as criteria for students who needed additional challenges.

A requirement was added to consider endings to encourage students to give their accounts shape.

The final criteria for success were as follows:

A story you want to tell
With good use of details and feelings
And a satisfying ending

You might also:

Build atmosphere
Tell it with enthusiasm
Exaggerate if you want to

Planning for writing

Students were provided with some questions to support their planning:

- What was the setting?
- Who was with you?
- What were the main things you remember?

Student A's planning sheet read as follows:

I was in Malta in the Silent City
I was in a cafe
Nana granddad cousin
I got attacked by a cat
it hurt

Students' first drafts

Students' first drafts were completed in class. Students had access to their planning notes and to the criteria for success.

Student A's first draft was as follows:

Story draft 1

My story starts when I went to Malta with nana granddad and cousin. One of the days we went to a cafe in the Silent City when a cat jumped on my knee and attacked me.

Students' discussions of first drafts

Following completion of their first drafts, students worked in groups to read each other's accounts and to ask each other questions about them. This process was first modelled by one of the more confident students reading her account to the class with students asking her questions about her account.

Preparation for second drafts

Working in groups of 4/5, students reported back on their question-and-answer sessions and discussed how they might change their accounts. Each group nominated one account to share with the class, reading it aloud then telling the class what questions that student had been asked and what answers had been given.

As preparation for writing second drafts, students were also asked to think about how they might integrate their answers into their narratives.

Second drafts

Students wrote second drafts in class.

Student A's second draft was as follows:

Story draft 2

My story starts when I was 11 and I went to Malta with nana granddad and cousin. It was nice there but it was cold. One of the days we went to the Silent City which is an ancient site where you're meant to be silent. We were getting hungry so we went to a cafe to get something to eat. When a ferocious cat jumped on me. It was big and white with giant teeth and claws. Next it started to scratch me and bite me.

Preparation for third drafts

Preparation for third drafts consisted of peer assessment of second drafts and opportunities to discuss what makes a piece of writing effective.

Peer assessment

Students worked in groups to peer assess each other's accounts using the criteria for success agreed earlier.

Making judgements about writing effectiveness

Students considered what makes a piece of writing effective by comparing actual accounts with artificially simplified versions. This example is from Student B:

The Banana Boat – Actual account

On holiday in Majorca we wanted to go on a banana boat. First we had to get on the banana boat so my dad had to lift me and my mum onto it then he pulled himself up. Then the boat started to wobble. It was really slow at first and then it zoomed and we were that far out that we could see another island.

The Banana Boat – Simplified account

On holiday in Majorca we wanted to go on a banana boat. First we had to get on the banana boat. My dad had to lift me and my mum onto it. He pulled himself up. The boat started to wobble. It was really slow at first. It zoomed. We were that far out that we could see another island.

Student B's original text was judged by the class to *make more sense than the other one* because *some of the sentences were meant to be in one*.

The actual account conveys the effect of acceleration resulting in a new perception of distance, whereas the simplified account presents the experience as three separate events, two of movement then one of perception. In the actual account, the conjunctions *and then* and *and* help to create links between clauses, but they also require the reader to supply the 'feeling' of acceleration between *slow* and *zoomed*. Similarly, when the focus shifts from the movement of the craft to the narrator's and her family's perception, the conjunction *and* has a partly explanatory effect which the reader is forced to supply: *it zoomed and [and = so fast that very quickly] we were that far out...* . This suggests that the extract was written as a single perceived experience, not as two separate events plus a perceptual description.

Writing third and final drafts

Students were asked to write third and final drafts of their accounts. The task specification was:

A time in my life I will always remember

Write the final draft of your story in exercise books.

Give your story a title.

Use your peer assessments to make your story more interesting for a reader.

Make any other changes so that your story is more interesting and more effective.

Student A's third draft account was as follows:

The ferocious feline

My story starts when I was 11 and I went to Malta with my nana granddad and cousin. The place was nice and clean but it was cold and windy. One yet another cold windy day we went to an ancient site with big temple like buildings. It was high up like on a gigantic hill which made it even more cold. It was called the Silent City where you where meant to be silent in. We was getting hungry so we went to a cafe.

I sat down then a giant white ferocious feline jumped on my knee. It stuck its huge claws into me and as I went to strangle grab it it bit me. I finally got it off me but it started to hurt.

Celebrating

The final lesson was devoted to students reading their stories aloud to the class.

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