



#9939

# NARRATIVE WRITING 1: STRUCTURES--WHAT IS A NARRATIVE?

CLASSROOM VIDEO, 2002  
Grade Level: 8-13+  
24 mins.

## DESCRIPTION

A classical narrative uses the three-act structure. Defines basic terminology and introduces the elements of the "first act": setting, characters and their traits, the problem or theme, and perspective. The "second act" relates what happens next and is the most active, longest section. It presents the character arc, complications, and causality. The "third act," or climax, tells the conclusion and answers questions. Uses dramatic excerpts to clarify each ingredient of successful narrative fiction.

## ACADEMIC STANDARDS

### Subject Area: Language Arts–Writing

- Standard: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process
  - ◆ Benchmark: Writes fictional, biographical, autobiographical, and observational narrative compositions (e.g., narrates a sequence of events; evaluates the significance of the incident; provides a specific setting for scenes and incidents; provides supporting descriptive detail [specific names for people, objects, and places; visual details of scenes, objects, and places; descriptions of sounds, smells, specific actions, movements, and gestures; the interior monologue or feelings of the characters]; paces the actions to accommodate time or mood changes; creates a unifying theme or tone; uses literary devices to enhance style and tone) (See INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS 1-7.)

## INSTRUCTIONAL GOALS

1. To define a narrative and explain its structure in three parts: beginning, middle, and end.
2. To examine good character development.
3. To show the importance of time and place.
4. To point out thematic concerns.
5. To illustrate the use of first and third person perspective in narratives.
6. To examine the use of complications and causality in plot development.
7. To explain the importance of the climax in a narrative.

## VOCABULARY

1. act (part)
2. anachronism
3. attributes
4. causality
5. character
6. climax
7. complications
8. context (setting)
9. conventions (rules)
10. describe
11. genre
12. narrative
13. omniscient
14. person (grammar voice)
15. perspective
16. psychological
17. structure
18. theme
19. traits

## BEFORE SHOWING

1. Explore the parts of stories and what makes a good story.
  - a. Everyone writes a short story about one-half to two-thirds of a page long.
  - b. Cut the stories into three parts: the beginning, the middle, and the end.
  - c. Pass the beginning part to the student on your right and the ending to the student on your left.
  - d. Put the beginning you received above your middle part and the ending you received at the bottom.
  - e. Make a list of ten reasons why the story is not a good story. Discuss the reasons.
  - f. Return the elements of the stories back to their authors for activity 3.
2. In small groups, discuss and make notes about the difference between a story and a list. Each group reports. Make a list of the ideas on the blackboard or overhead transparency.
3. Experiment with story telling.
  - a. Put the three pieces of the original written stories in the following order: middle, beginning, and end.
  - b. Experiment with other arrangements.
  - c. Rewrite the story so it makes sense, but in a new order. In other words, rework the material in any order except the order in which it was originally written.
  - d. Share the stories. Consider sharing both the original and modified versions together.

## DURING SHOWING

1. View the video more than once, with one showing uninterrupted.
2. Pause each time a part of the heavenly baseball joke is on screen to allow viewers time to read the joke in addition to the captions.

## AFTER SHOWING

### Discussion Items and Questions

1. Define *narrative*.
2. What can all good narratives be split into?

## C a p t i o n e d M e d i a P r o g r a m

3. What is *characterization*? How do writers and filmmakers perform the task of characterization? Which strategies of characterization work best?
4. What different jobs does a storyteller do at the beginning, middle and end of his/her story?
5. Explain the importance of time and place in a narrative. Define *anachronism*.
6. What are *thematic concerns*?
7. What is a *narrative complication*? How are complications arising out of the main character's nature different than those arising out of the antagonist's nature?
8. Explain causality in narratives.
9. What are the advantages and disadvantages of telling a story in first person?
10. What is a *narrative development*?

### Applications and Activities

1. Do some "imaginative recreation." Having read a book or seen a film or play, etc., write a short story in a scene that takes place before the beginning of that text or after its end.
2. Write a short story featuring a writer as one of the main characters and in which the craft of narrative writing plays a significant role in the story. Remember that not all writers are novelists.
3. Write a critical essay on the craft of narrative writing. Possible essay topics might be:
  - a. Stories are not just entertaining, they can also be educational. Do you agree?
  - b. The nature of a society is reflected in the stories it tells. Do you agree?
  - c. To write an effective story it is necessary to follow the unwritten rules of storytelling. Do you agree?
4. Write a narrative poem or "ballad."
5. Research the story of your nation. Is there more than one story that can be told about your nation?
6. Is it true that different sorts of stories tend to be told by male and female storytellers? If so, how can these differences be discovered? How can they be described?
7. Research stories from other cultures, peoples, times and languages. Is it true that classical narrative structure applies to these stories?

### SUMMARY

*Narrative Structures* is designed to help students grasp some of the "unwritten rules" or "conventions" governing the way stories are typically constructed, with an emphasis on classical narratives. It includes suggestions on how to go about planning and writing a story based on the classical narrative structure and seeks to provide an introduction to certain aspects of the craft of storytelling.

### CMP RELATED RESOURCES

- [esSay What? #9910](#)
- [The Perfect Paragraph #9345](#)
- [What is a Genre?– Introduction to Genres #9938](#)

## World Wide Web



The following Web sites complement the contents of this guide; they were selected by professionals who have experience in teaching deaf and hard of hearing students. Every effort was made to select accurate, educationally relevant, and “kid safe” sites. However, teachers should preview them before use. The U.S. Department of Education, the National Association of the Deaf, and the Captioned Media Program do not endorse the sites and are not responsible for their content.

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- **LEO NARRATIVE ESSAYS**

<http://leo.stcloudstate.edu/acadwrite/narrative.html>

This Web site from Literacy Education Online highlights the “Principles of Writing Narrative Essays” and the “Conventions of Narrative Essays.” For tips on richer writing, click on the hot-link “sensory details” or the “Write Place Catalogue” at the end.

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- **NARRATIVE ESSAY PROMPTS**

<http://members.accessus.net/~bradley/narrativeprompts2.html>

Here is a list of ten prompts specifically written for high school students and identified by content such as “Being Unprepared,” “Light Bulb Moments,” or “Changing Places.”

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- **WRITING TO PHOTOGRAPHY / PHOTOGRAPHY TO WRITING**

<http://www.kodak.com/global/en/consumer/education/lessonPlans/lessonPlan040.shtml>

This Web site is a lesson plan written by Steven Youra for students in his Introduction to Language and Literature course. In it he uses photographs as a narrative writing tool and prompt. To quote findings: “Students’ comments and actions reflected increased insight as they began to see photography as rhetoric, as language, and to see the analogies between photographic and verbal expression.”

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- **ARMAGEDDONMUD–INTRO–WRITING A DESCRIPTION**

<http://www.armageddon.org/intro/desc.html>

A science fiction Web page that depicts the rules for writing effective character description, with examples of good and bad narratives and reasons why. Click on the “Sample Descriptions” link for more narratives.