

Lesson 2 – Finding Significance

➤ **FORUM:**

Author Lucy Calkins writes in her book *The Art of Teaching Writing*, “I write to hold what I find in my hands and declare it a treasure” (7). What does this statement mean to you? Do you feel you have something of significance to write about? Explain your answer.

Respond to these questions on the **Forum**. Post a reply to at least two other posts.

➤ **LEARN:**

In our last lesson, we discussed some of the mechanics that govern the process of writing. Today we’ll look at the more subjective part of writing: its core, the text. I’m sure most of you have, at some point, complained, “But I don’t have anything to write about.” That is not true! You may feel you don’t have anything of significance to write about, but the truth is that any event from your life is significant because you are unique and therefore the experience was unique. After all, no one experienced it in just the same way as you.

To illustrate, let’s imagine you and a friend go to the beach. Let’s imagine that your friend is not a good swimmer, but you are. How will each of you experience the beach? You will probably be frolicking in the waves: significant, unique experience for you. Your friend may be standing off to the side just enjoying watching you: significant, unique experience for your friend. You may approach the ocean with boldness and adventure; your friend may tiptoe up to the waves with fear and trepidation. Your experiences are unique. No one can experience the ocean in exactly the same way as you.

All of this to say that you DO indeed have things to write about that will be of interest to your audience. A reader loves to hear about new adventures. Additionally, a reader loves to hear about familiar adventures through different eyes. You have something of significance to offer through your writing. Really, you do! As further encouragement, Lucy Calkins quotes writer Vicki Vinton who says, “It is an illusion that writers live more significant lives than non-writers; the truth is, writers are just more in the habit of *finding* the significance that is there in their lives” (p. 7). Let’s all become better at finding the significance in our lives!

Our first unit will focus on the significance in your life as we will be reading and writing a personal narrative. Simply put, **narrative writing** is telling a story about something that has happened to you or to someone else. By this definition, we can ascertain that a **personal narrative** is written in first person about an experience the author personally had. A personal narrative includes descriptions of the event as well as the author’s feelings about the experience. In today’s techno world of blogs, we see a lot of personal narratives. And doesn’t the popularity of blogs go to show that as human beings, we are interested—truly interested—in the happenings in others’ lives?

➤ **ACTIVITY**

1. Write down the definitions of **narrative** and **personal narrative** in the *Vocabulary* section of your Language Arts Notebook.
2. (*Optional*): Start your own blog. Some popular blog hosts are www.blogger.com and www.homeschoolblogger.com. If you don’t want to get that technical about it, why not pick up a pen and a journal and record your daily happenings the “old fashioned” way?!

Lesson 6 – Personal Narrative Brainstorm

➤ **MATERIALS:** one or more pictures which evoke memories (the memories do not necessarily have to be good ones!)

➤ **LEARN:**

Do you remember our quote from Lucy Calkins: “I write to hold what I find in my life and declare it a treasure”? Look at the picture(s) in front of you. What memories does each picture evoke? Do you treasure your memories? You should! Your memories are special.

We will be writing our own personal narratives in this unit, so our first step is brainstorming. Considering your pictures, choose your favorite one. While contemplating your favorite picture, we are going to complete a Brainstorm Cluster, which will help you generate a topic for your personal narrative. Before we get started, however, let me more clearly outline the procedure you will follow:

Look carefully at your picture. When you first chose this picture, you probably had one specific memory in mind. But think beyond that one memory. Think of any other memories the photo may conjure up. For example, let’s say your picture is of you at your 4th birthday party. Maybe a birthday party picture also reminds you of your 5th birthday, the one where you received your first bike. Maybe this memory of your first bike reminds you of the first time you rode a two-wheeler. Maybe this reminds you of the trip you had to take to the hospital when you fell off your bike and broke your arm. Do you see how one memory can spark another? Once you have jotted down the main memories the photo evokes, begin adding details. OK, now it’s time to get started...

➤ **ACTIVITY:** Print out the **Brainstorm Cluster Template** (feel free to add more boxes as needed by simply drawing them in). When you have completed your Brainstorm Cluster, file it in the *Writing* section of your Language Arts Notebook. *My example is on the next page.*

Picture of me with my mom. Mom is wearing a brightly colored, floral dress (clearly from the 70s!) We're out in front of our house

My bunny quilt –
new when we
lived on Natick

the bunny quilt
new after trip to
dentist

snuggling under
waiting for Tooth
Fairy

had to have baby
teeth removed –
had temporary

wanted a
container for mine
like Grandma &

living room picnics
with my kids

cookie picnics

Mom's red and
white checkered
outfit – just as

in Holland on the
way to the US
from Africa

no warm clothes
to wear, cold in
Holland

going to a show
and taking a
trolley to the show

I'm on the trolley,
Mom and Dad
outside

being comforted
by Mom in her
pants suit

The bird barrettes
– earned when
we lived on

swimming lessons
– hated them

the smell of the
chlorine at the
YMCA

gymnastics was
fun, but not
swimming

finally completed
the course and
got the barrettes

Lesson 32 – Commas, Rule 1

➤ **LEARN:**

As we have done in past units, we are going to take a break from our writing assignment to learn about the proper use of commas. In my teaching experience, I've found that the misuse of commas tends to be one of the more common errors in writing, so I want to cover them as soon as possible. This way, we will establish good habits up front.

In past lessons, we discussed complete sentences. We looked at two kinds of sentence errors: fragments and run-ons. As you learned, one of the main tools you can use to “fix” sentence errors are commas. Over the next few days, we will look at the rules that govern commas. Today we'll take a look at Rule #1. Please write these rules down in the *Grammar* section of your Language Arts Notebook.

RULE 1 – Use a comma to separate each item in a series or list of three or more words or phrases. Also, use commas with descriptive words where two or more adjectives modify the same noun.

Example:

I made the beds, swept the floors, vacuumed the carpet, and scrubbed the bathtub to get ready for our guests. Then I went shopping to stock the refrigerator with drinks, vegetables, and fruit.

In this example, four clauses in the opening series are separated by commas, and three words in a list are separated by commas. You should know that it is technically optional to place a comma that is in a list of words or phrases before the word “and.” For example, the commas after “carpet” and “vegetables” in the example above are optional. I prefer to place the commas here, but it is not wrong to omit them; it's up to your personal preference.

Commas are also used with descriptive words. Use a comma in a series of two or more adjectives that modify the same noun.

Example:

The long, narrow, winding road lead to a beautiful, serene lake.

In this example, “long,” “narrow” and “winding” are adjectives that all modify the noun “road.” Thus, they are separated by commas. Likewise, “beautiful” and “serene” modify “lake” and are separated by commas. Note that no comma follows the last adjective in the series; also be careful in determining the function of the last word of the series. You must make sure that all the adjectives equally modify the noun. For example,

Before you watch TV, I want you to clean the dirty, grimy kitchen sink.

In this example, “kitchen sink” acts as a single noun because without “kitchen,” “sink” is not adequately identified. Therefore, “grimy” is the last adjective before the noun in the series and no comma should be placed after it. This may seem confusing, but it's easy to check. Just insert the word “and” in between each adjective. To check the above example:

Incorrect:

Before you watch TV, I want you to clean the dirty *and* grimy *and* kitchen sink.

Correct:

Before you watch TV, I want you to clean the dirty *and* grimy kitchen sink.

Therefore, you should place a comma only in between “dirty” and “grimy.”

Let's look at a final example to make sure you understand:

She looked longingly through the window at the lovely elegant pearl necklace.

First, identify the list of words: "lovely," "elegant," and "pearl" modify "necklace." Now confirm that each adjective equally modifies the noun "necklace." To do this, insert the word "and" in between each adjective:

She looked longingly through the window at the lovely *and* elegant *and* pearl necklace.

Clearly, the sentence does not make sense with the "and" between "elegant" and "pearl." Therefore, you should place the commas appropriately:

She looked longingly through the window at the lovely, elegant pearl necklace.

- **ACTIVITY:** Complete the Practice Exercises for this lesson found in the **Workbook**. When you are done, you may check your answers against the **Key**. If you got a lot wrong, review this lesson and the definitions therein. Then file your papers in the *Grammar* section of your Language Arts Notebook.