

Narrative Class

Learning Objectives

“[Mr. Johnson] advised me to keep a journal of my life, fair and undisguised. He said it would be a very good exercise, and would yield me infinite satisfaction when the ideas were faded from my remembrance...”

—James Boswell, written in his London Journal, July 16, 1763

General Course Description

The Personal Narrative course uses literature as a means of getting students to think about some of the most important aspects of writing, including narrative voice, structure and development, word choice, and theme. The course begins with reading and writing journals, a study that encourages students to discover their voice and to write spontaneously and naturally. From the journal, the study naturally progresses into the personal narrative, fictional narrative, the autobiography and lastly, the biography. The course will close with a study of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, a play based on Plutarch’s biography of the Roman soldier-emperor. The reading will include narrative poetry, personal essays, fictional works and excerpts of works based on autobiography and biography. The textbook anthology will include works by Plutarch, Lewis and Clark, Frances Burney, James Thurber, George Whitefield, J.J. Porchat, George Muller, Samuel Pepys, James Boswell, John Wesley, William Bradford, George Fox, Davy Crockett, Hudson Taylor, Helen Keller, Thomas Jefferson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Booker T. Washington, Charles Dickens and others. At the end of the year, student will give a speech inspired by one of the authors or works read. *Student will also be required to read several novels independently.*

Journals

- Student will read and study historical and literary journals and learn about the authors of these important works.
- The study guide will exercise the students’ reading and writing skills and will include the following:
 - * A list of vocabulary words to be memorized, including vocabulary exercises (antonyms and synonyms, analogies, and sentence completion) The battery of vocabulary exercises was designed to mirror the standardized tests such as the PSAT and SAT.
 - * Reading comprehension exercises. The reading comprehension section practices the student's skill in scanning text for details, making inferences, and discovering the meaning of a word in its context.
 - * Journal-writing instruction and assignments.
 - * Various themes or issues brought up in the journals.
 - * Instruction in writing, such as proper use of detail, sensory words, figures of speech, dialog, active verbs, and specific and concrete (rather than general and abstract) words; student will also have exercises in omitting needless words in his compositions.
- The study guides will give specific, focused instruction and assignments for writing journal entries, as well as helpful suggestions on composition. The guides will contain useful

references to other journals that can serve as additional writing models for students in writing their own journals.

- The students will be required to keep a journal, which is intended help them find their “voice” so that they can write with speed, confidence, maturity and skill. Journal writing will serve as a repository of experiences, conversations, and reflections from which the students may draw later for writing narratives, etc.
 - * Students will study journals as models for their own writing. The assigned journal exercises will be given with the following goals in mind:
 - * The entries will encourage the student to think about topics brought up in the journals read.
 - * Student will use the journal as a reservoir of memories and reflections to draw from in later writing.
 - * Student will learn to include pertinent details of daily events and comments showing thought and keen observation. Student will attempt to put in critical comments and observations that put the details of the day’s events in bass-relief and give the account depth and substance.
 - * Students will learn the multiple purposes in keeping a journal—as a record of past events, thoughts, memories, conversations, feelings, current events, one’s reading, and personal religious devotion.
 - * Student will learn that the best writers can find interest in most “uninteresting” events, remembering the importance of keeping his “inner eye” open to interpret his experience.
 - * The journal writing exercise will give the student the necessary preparation to write personal narratives and biographical essays.
- Reading selections include journal entries of pioneers and explorers, such as Merriwether Lewis; Quaker narratives by George Fox and John Woolman

Autobiography and Personal Narratives

Student will study the autobiography as a medium in which the author makes sense of his life experience and will explore the ways in which the author gathers and uses detail to construct a meaningful story. The student will learn to examine the author’s “protagonist” as a revelation of himself.

- Student will learn important aspects of the autobiography, such as plot, conflict, climax and resolution.
- Student will answer study guide questions on the material to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary.
- Student will look at the autobiography's details and examine what they reveals about the author’s occupation, personality, convictions, etc.
- Student will choose an independent reading book (autobiography) and write a report.
- Student will write a personal narrative.
- Students will read works by the following authors: Davy Crockett, James Thurber, Henry Thoreau, Paul B. Du Chaillu, William Henry Hudson, Richard Jefferies, Hudson Taylor, Helen Keller, Booker T. Washington, Charles Dickens, Frederick Douglass, Harriet Jacobs, and others.

Biography

- Students will read and study classic biographies or excerpts from those biographies, including those by the following authors: Samuel Johnson, Cotton Mather, Robert Southey, Plutarch, Thomas Jefferson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Thomas Babington Macaulay, and Washington Irving.
- Student will answer study questions on the material to improve reading comprehension and vocabulary.
- Student will choose an independent reading book (biography) and write a report.
- Students will write a biography of an older person still living, perhaps a relative or a friend of the family. Students will do library research and interviews with the person about whom they are writing. Students will learn about proper documentation and bibliographies.

Drama

As part of his study of biography, student will read Shakespeare's Julius Caesar. Goals of the instruction will include

- learn vocabulary from the play.
- practice reading the play aloud.
- practice interpreting difficult passages through exercises devised to increase student's reading comprehension.
- study the sources for the play, including Plutarch's biography of Julius Caesar.
- read a critical work on the play.
- compare the dramatic work with Shakespeare's sources.
- study the terms applied to the poetic techniques and figures of speech used in the play.
- understand the major themes and how they are dramatically presented in the play.
- write a critical paper on one of the themes.
- watch a film production of the work.
- memorize at least five passages from the play.

Fictional Narratives

Students will read and study the following short story/fictional narratives:

- Anton Chekhov, "Gooseberries"
- Vsevolod M. M. Garshin, "The Signal"
- Guy de Maupassant, "The Cripple"
- Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Maypole of Merrymount" and "The Minister's Black Veil"
- Charles Dickens, "I am Born" from *David Copperfield*
- Daniel Defoe, excerpt from *Robinson Crusoe*
- Juhani Aho, "When Father Brought Home the Lamp"
- O. Henry, "A Retrieved Reformation"
- P. G. Wodehouse, "The Man Who Disliked Cats"
- Guðmundur Friðjónsson, "The Old Hay"

- Pierre Loti, “An African Pet”

Grammar

- Student will do a complete study of grammar that will include parsing and diagramming. Student will learn all parts of speech; tense, voice, and principal parts of verbs; all functions of nouns; verbals; phrases (verbal and prepositional); and all types of clauses.

Poetry

- Students will study the various techniques in poetry, including scansion, meter, alliteration, rhyme, imagery and figures of speech.
- Students will study the poetry and lives of various notable poets.
- Student will memorize six poems and recite them in front of the class and in front of a larger audience at the end of the year. Poems include those by Emily Dickinson, Walter Scott, John Keats, John Donne, Christina Rossetti and William Wordsworth.
- Students will read poetry written during the American abolitionist period to accompany the slave narratives, such as
 - * John Greenleaf Whittier, “To William Lloyd Garrison”
 - * Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Slave Sining at Midnight” and “The Warning”
- Students will read narrative poetry, such as the following:
 - * William Wordsworth, “The Idiot Boy”
 - * Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, “The Courtship of Miles Standish,” “The Wreck of the Hesperus,” and “Elizabeth”
 - * Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Ballad of the Oysterman”
 - * John Greenleaf Whittier, “The Slave Ships”

Speech

- Students will write a speech to be presented in front of an audience at the end of the year.
- Students will learn the importance of poise, gestures, and the regulation of the voice’s pitch and volume in delivering a speech.