

Lesson Plan: Gypsy Fortune-Telling (Practice in Narrative Writing)

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Lesson: Practice in Narrative Writing

Timeframe: 60 minutes

Target Audience: Students preparing to write a narrative essay

Materials needed: markers, whiteboards, a deck of playing cards

Objectives: After this lesson, students will be able to

- use specific details to develop a point of view.
- develop an abstract theme from a concrete plot.
- model in one paragraph the four key elements of narration.

Introduction to Lesson [5 minutes]:

To prepare for the narrative essay, review the four key elements of narration—setting, character, plot, and theme—using the gypsy fortune-telling method. Traditionally this method does not consider symbols or patterns; instead, it looks for images to form pictures that can be placed in a coherent order to tell a story. The purpose of the exercise is to use the cards to tell a story, not to tell fortunes.

Procedures [50 minutes]:

Step One: Reviewing elements of narration [5 minutes]

Review the four key elements of narration:

- setting (when and where the story takes place),
- plot (the main action that is some sort of crisis),
- character (the people involved with the plot who cope with the crisis),
- theme (the point of the story, usually a moral, a universal truth, or some humorous advice).

Offer students the following model. “The King of Diamonds is conked on the head by the King of Clubs who steals his diamonds, so the King of Hearts with his long sword of justice slays the thief, and the King of Spades buries him. This brief narrative has character (kings), plot (theft), and theme (justice). Though no setting is indicated by the specific cards, crowns on the cards suggest castles.”

Step Two: Organizing groups of students to write collaboratively [5 minutes]

Write on the board: “In one short paragraph develop a narrative with setting, character, plot, and theme incorporating some element in each of the cards you are dealt.”

Divide the class into even groups of no more than five. Each group will be responsible for a collaborative paragraph written on the board. Once the groups are formed, deal out a card face up to each student. Let students use their imaginations, but a specific image for each card should be referenced in the story. If students need help, offer the following suggestions.

- Hearts = flowers and fruit or sweethearts and children, suggesting a theme of love
- Clubs = staffs and sticks or forests and orchards, suggesting a theme of ambition or competition
- Diamonds = gems or glass (like a window or a broken mirror), suggesting a theme of wealth
- Spades = swords and shovels or towns and mountains, suggesting a theme of death

Step Three: Drafting a short narrative paragraph collaboratively [20 minutes]

Allow each group time to brainstorm and develop a story that includes the card references while the teacher circulates among the groups to answer questions and encourage student efforts. When each group is done, students should write a draft on the board for easy instruction, correction, and discussion.

Step Four: Editing and proofreading [10 minutes]

The teacher and students will briefly edit and proofread the paragraphs on the board. Here the teacher helps students find grammatical errors and also checks to be sure all four elements of the narrative are included, paying close attention to the last sentence for an indication of theme.

Step Four: Reviewing the Paragraphs [10 minutes]

Review the separate paragraphs as a class and try to guess where the cards are referenced in the narratives. Have a member from each group read its work. Ask for feedback from the rest of the class to guess what cards are referenced in the narratives.

Closure/Evaluation [5 minutes]:

This group exercise prepares students to write individual narratives, so remind them to establish the setting and introduce characters at the beginning, to develop the plot with specific, descriptive details, and to emphasize the theme at the end.

Lesson Analysis:

The great strength of this exercise is that it is fun because any narrative is satisfactory as long as the four elements are used. It can be a morale booster, especially early in the semester. The one constant weakness in this lesson plan is time management. This exercise requires supervision, yet not micro-management. The best way to keep students on task is to keep asking where the cards are referenced in the story. The cards may have produced the ideas, but somehow the images that suggested the ideas may get left out of the draft. Stress that the images are important as concrete details that make the stories vivid and clear.