The Narrative Unit Lessons

Rationale
The juniors start their curriculum by reading different kinds of narratives, exploration, historical, captivity, and slave narrative. I have to create the link between the literature we read and the narrative style we will write. Hillocks believes (2007), “Knowing how to write narratives can become a base for other kinds of writing and for studying literature.” Once the have a base, the skills will transfer from one genre to another, including state mandated writing tests.

I choose to start with narrative, because the time line of American literature starts with narratives, but also, narrative writing makes it personal, “it allows students to contribute to the body of literature they will study, understand more fully how the works of professional writers are constructed, and learn techniques that will be useful in other kinds of writing” (Hillocks, 2007, pg. 1). And Kirby agrees (2007), “We see CM and the techniques that writer of CM employ as being the foundation of many texts and the bases of writing effectively in multiple genres, including those on mandated tests.” Also students can make the connections from ‘professional’ writers to their own writing. “Successful and artful CMs illustrate ways that narrative permits writers to create meaningful moments that connect to a reader’s life experience” (Kirby, 2010).

Objectives
The students will
- Analyze and respond to literary elements; narrative
- Read, comprehend, analyze, and critique nonfiction
- Develop Vocabulary
- Understand and apply written and oral language conventions
- Develop writing proficiency

Writing objectives: The students will
- Write an autobiographical narrative
- Use writing strategies to generate ideas and to organize, evaluate, and revise the composition
- Apply grammar skills

What happens if I teach [narrative] memoir (Kirby, 2010):
- students grapple with issues of Truth and truth
- students learn and experiment with postmodern conventions
- students explore and expand the scope of the essay
- students work with their lived experiences
- students experience and necessarily practice the value of reflection
- students explore literary tools
Literature Lessons

We will read excerpts from the narratives of
John Smith  Historical Narrative (exploration and captivity)
William Bradford  Historical Narrative
Mary Rowlandson  Captivity Narrative
Olaudah Equiano  Slave Narrative
Frederick Douglass  Slave Narrative

The Writing Unit and the Literature need to be happening simultaneously. During literature we will be studying the narratives for literary devices. Once we can identify them we can begin to apply them to their own writing. Narrative often includes literary devices like, figurative language, metaphor, symbol, dialogue, scene-setting, interior monologue, imagery, and character development.

Other elements common to Narratives (Kirby, 2010):

- often episodic
- *collection of small stories and meaningful moments*
- depart from convention
- leave the reader to do some of the heavy lifting
- reflective and partially fictionalized that reveal truths and mysteries of lives we would never know if the author didn’t take us there

Writing Lessons

Hillocks outlines the steps to take with students. “First, effective narrative depends on concrete detail…Second, effective narrative depends on thoughtfully selecting what to include and what to exclude…Third…sound instruction in writing narrative should help students be more aware of writing for an audience…Finally, the work on writing narrative should contribute to students’ reading of literature” (Hillocks, 2007). I have chosen to follow Hillock’s process. The goal is to motivate low achieving students to write an entire piece.

The Assignment: **Write a story about an event that is important to you for some reason. Write about it in as much detail as you can so that someone reading it will be able to see what you saw and feel what you felt.**

Pretests:

Students will have the block to write and develop. I collect them at the end of class and look over them for the next class period. The information here will tell me who is a ‘skilled’ writer and who needs more help and care.

The next writing block give students colored pens and ask them to re-read their own stories. They should be making all of their changes here on the same page with the pens. I will collect these at the end of the time period (30-or so minutes). The information here will allow me to see who understands revision.

From these pretests I will be able to set up peer groups, as described above.

Brainstorm (about two days):

It is important to participate with the students. In preparation for the narrative lesson, I brought my list of narrative ideas from my graduate school class about writing. Each is
a story appropriate to share with high school students. Hillocks bribed his students with an opportunity to hear one of his narratives and I have no problem doing the same. Hopefully hearing my brainstorm list will loosen the ideas in their head.

I will lead a brief discussion about their ideas. I will have students call some ideas out. The students now list, on paper, as many ideas as they can. On the board could be a list of prompts to help them out. Also I will circulate to help those who are still struggling:

a. What experiences have made you feel really sad?
b. What experiences have been very alarming or really frightening?
c. What experiences have made you feel really proud of yourself?
d. What have been the most difficult tasks you have had to undertake?
e. What contests or games have you tried hard to win?
f. What experiences have made you feel ashamed of yourself?
g. What experiences have made you realize that you truly care about someone?
h. What experiences have made you laugh a lot?

(Hillocks, 2007, pg. 39)

I collect the papers at the end of the time.

The next class I give the class about 15 minutes to continue their ideas list. Then I offer my bribe story; I read it aloud. I can now lead a discussion about what kind of questions can be asked about a piece: questions about setting, characters, action, character attempts, results, responses, and dialogue. Put their ideas on the board or overhead.

In their already chosen peer groups each student chooses two of their ideas they are willing to share with the group and reads them. Group members ask questions they have about the story ideas. Which one do you want to know more about? How can ‘we’ make this story a good one? What needs to be added?

Students will write their story using their peer group questions to guide their writing. I will wander from student to student to help when they appear stuck. I have found that stationing myself for students to come to does not help them. They are too shy to ask for help, but if I am walking by they can easily ask me a question and move on.

**If necessary through monitoring and spot checking, the following lessons are good for targeted mini lessons.

Figurative Language and Detail

Hillocks uses a shell game to teach figurative language. I could very easily use photographs, a tray of random toys and gadget or jewelry. Ruth Cullum offers an activity for students to describe new jobs for household or classroom items. The idea with these games is to describe something with accurate language, so that someone could read your description and pick out your object.

Hillocks also uses two different versions of the activity. Due to the skill level of my students I will play the game as a group activity to support their learning.

The first step is to model the game. Choose one shell (or household item, etc) that is truly unique. Ask students to offer descriptive words for the item. Give lots and lots of wait time. Walk around with it so they get a good look. Encourage similes.
Each group receives two shells (or items depending on the game chosen). They choose together which one they will write about. They must work together choosing the language they will use to write about their chosen item. Collect finished papers. Redistribute the papers and their two shells to another group. Can they pick out the item described? Underline the line(s) that helped the most. Collect the papers with comments. Review to plan mini lessons for tomorrow. (Usually introduction sentences, punctuation, etc.) The next time groups plan and re-write. If time allows share out loud with class.

The final day each student, individually, receives one shell (or item) to write about. After all are collected, redistribute the papers to other students. All shells (or items) are on the front table. Without removing the shell, can they identify their shell from the description?

Writing dialogue; in my experience most students know how to do this. This could be a review lesson or skipped. The first step is to model a practice dialogue with student help. Choose two TV/video game/literature characters. What would they talk about? What is unique about that character that might show up in speech? (For example, Darth Vader has loud breathing)

On the overhead or board write the dialogue like a drama. In their groups they choose two characters. What would they talk about? What would they say? Read them aloud in class. Discuss how to change the drama format to quotation marks.

When writing about people, I have students fill out a character sketch sheet. On the sheet they need to create a picture in the reader’s mind about this character. The character sketch worksheet (Certo, 2010) asks for gestures the character makes, physical traits, personality traits, a symbol that is associated with this character and quotes that they might say or respect. I look for elements of these traits in their story.

Revising

After spending a number of days writing, adding, and updating our narrative stories, its time to read them with our groups.

The peer revision rules are:

1. Students sit facing each other with copies of his or her paper
2. Student reads his or her piece of writing without apology or introduction to influence the piece.
3. Responses start at the writer’s right and continue in a circle.
4. Responses are positive or neutral.
5. Second responses are more pointed to offer suggestion.
6. Throughout the process the writer makes no comments or noises. (Graham 2007, pg. 36).

What needs to be changed, removed, and/or added?
Once they move through each paper, they can make changes.

Editing will have to be done a little different. In editing we are looking for spelling and punctuation. I have created a peer editing check list. Student desks are in rows. Students place their narrative and check sheet on the desk. They move one chair backward, those in the back move to the front of the next row. They must read and comment on the check
list (or on the narrative itself). They must read at least two and offer helpful suggestions. They must sign their checklist so I can verify. Final drafts are typed.

Grading
Hillock’s rubrics cover all the areas of the 6+1 Traits of Writing. Our district has adopted the 6 Traits rubric. I will introduce the Hillock’s rubrics for all the pre-writing. The final draft will be graded on a 6 Traits rubric.