

7th Grade: Unit 1 Topic 2: Memoir Writing

Essential Questions:

- How do others understand who we are?
- How does language support our identity?

Suggested Pacing: 10-15 days

Background: In fifth grade students explore autobiography in several ways. First, they explore what it means to write a small moment narrative. They also write biographies of historical figures involved in exploration and North American colonization and memoirs about themselves from the perspective of other key people in their lives. In every grade K-6, students write reflections about who they are as learners and where they want to go in their learning.

Task: Students will write a letter to their younger self about a moment or important event that has happened to them.

Materials:

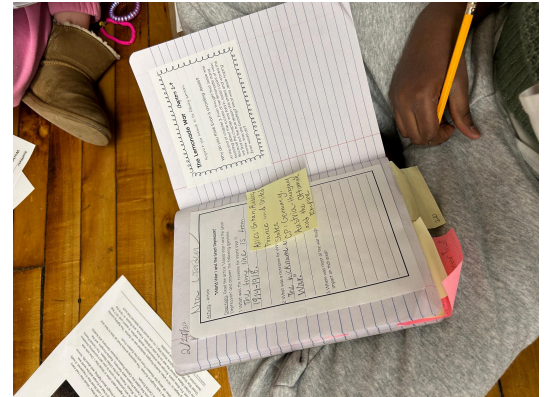
- Chart paper
- Sticky notes
- Student notebooks
- Markers
- Index cards or blank paper (depending on presentation method chosen).
- Colored pencils or crayons
- Tape
- [Memoir Folder](#)

Purpose: The purpose of this task is for students to apply the writing techniques and strategies they critiqued in their book club memoir to their own piece of writing. Students will identify a key moment in their lives, make purposeful decisions about how to structure their writing, and use specific language choices to convey meaning. They will also practice self-reflection and empathy as they reflect on their own lives and on the work of their classmates.

Making Meaning:

In their notebooks, have students make a list of important events that have happened to them. Have they moved or changed schools? Experienced the death of a relative or loved one? Traveled somewhere for the first time? This brainstormed list is just exploratory and encourage students to write down anything that comes to mind about their life.

Once they have this list, ask them to look it over and consider what information they would have wanted to know when they were younger. Go back to David Robinson's ["Letter to My Younger Self"](#) and read it with students, this time to understand why he wrote it and why that information would have been important for his younger self to know. Students may come up with ideas like:



- He would know his perseverance would pay off
- He would know that he would eventually achieve his dream

In looking at their own lives, what would you want your younger self to know? What do they now know as seventh graders that would have made something easier or more understandable?

Investigation:

Using a graphic organizer or notebooks, have students plan out their letter. They can use a chapter format that they used for their critique.

- What event do they want to write about?
- How did it impact them back when it happened?
- How does it impact them now?
- What do they wish they had known back then?

Students can use the above bullets to guide them as they write - this is an organizational strategy so that whenever they shift away from what they are currently writing about, they know what they should be writing about next.

At this point, students are making a plan. They are not writing their letters yet. What details do they want to make sure they include? What about the event is special or important that they want to talk about?

Part 2

Potential Writing Mini Lessons for Whole or Small Group: See Jennifer Serravallo's Writing Strategies book

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Convention: Grammar and Punctuation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Punctuating (and Paragraphing) Speech" - 9.11, p. 334 ○ "Say It With Feeling!" 9.15, p. 338 ○ "Group Words for Comprehension: Commas" - 9.14, p. 337 ○ "Voice Comma" - 9.13, p. 336 ○ "Creating Complex Sentences" - 9.24, p. 347 ○ "Creating Compound Sentences" - 9.25, p. 348 ○ "Revising Run-on Sentences" - 9.23, p. 346 ● Choosing an idea <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Moments with Strong Feelings" - 3.2, p. 95 ○ "Important People" - 3.1, p. 94 ○ "Scrapbook Your Life (to Write About It Later)" - 3.10, p. 103 ○ "These Are a Few of My Favorite Things" - 3.12, p. 105 ○ "Tour Your Home" 3.18, p. 111 ○ "Always Times, One Time" 3.19, p. 112 ○ "Defining Moments" 3.37, p. 130 ● Developing an idea | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Word Choice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Watch Your Tone" - 7.19, p. 280 ○ "Precise Nouns" - 7.3, p. 264 ○ "Surprising Verbs" - 7.27, p. 289 ○ "Vary Words to Eliminate Repetition" - 7.18, p. 279 ● Using transition words and phrases <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Not 'So' 'Very' 'Nice'" - 7.23, p. 284 ● Writing an ending <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "End in The Moment" - 5.11, p. 178 ○ "End With Last Words from the Character" - 5.12, p. 179 ● Revision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "Using Partners to Make Writing More Readable" 10.2, p. 365 ○ "Tell Me: Does It Make Sense?" - 10.7, p. 370 ○ "PQP (Praise, Question, Polish)" - 10.10, p. 373 ● Publishing |
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “The So What? Rule” - 4.19, p. 154 ○ “Focus on An Issue” - 4.21, p. 156 ○ “Ask Questions to Focus” - 4.7, p. 142 ○ “Find Your Passion to Focus” - 4.8, p. 143 ○ “Imagine Your Audience and Consider Your Purpose” - 4.9, p. 144 ○ “Experimental Draft to Find Focus” 4.23, p. 158 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Organizing events/Sequence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Start With A Plan In Mind” - 5.18, p. 185 ○ “Write the Bones” - 5.39, p. 206 ○ “Support Your Facts” - 6.22, p. 233 ● Elaboration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ “Show, Don’t Tell” - 6.13 - 6.14, p. 224 - 225 ○ “Use Empathy to Figure Out What to Add” - 6.31, p. 242 ○ “Weave in Symbolism” 6.44, p. 255 ○ “How Does Your CHaracter Talk?” 6.33, p. 244 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Add a cover/illustration ○ Round tables ○ Powerful Lines - authors write the theme from their letter to self on a sentence strip to hang up in the room. Students will then use post it to write connections they have to the other themes.
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Create and Produce:

This section of the task is reserved for writing workshop, where students will write their memoir letters, consider a cover/illustration for their letter, and confer with the teacher and peers. Students should have access to graphic organizers and small group instruction to move them forward in their writing.

As students are planning their writing, offer them access to graphic organizers that they can choose to use. Some students will not need a graphic organizer, and other students may create their own in their notebooks.

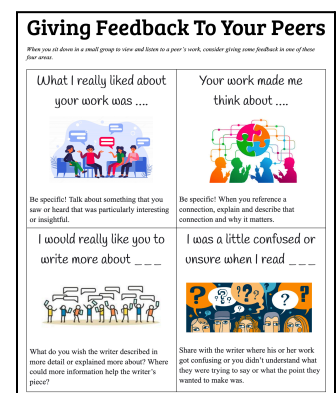
An effective technique is to write with and in front of your students. For example, use David Robinson’s [“Letter to My Younger Self”](#) as a mentor text to writing this memoir letter. Every student has read the text, and you can write with students to create their first part of their letter. This is a great opportunity for the teacher to write with their students and share their letter to the younger self as well. This will help them to see you as a writer, too, and observe how you craft an idea and write sentences that stay on the topic that we said our first bullet would be about.

Students can also borrow the “chapters” organizing strategy that they used in their critique if that is helpful to them as writers during this task.

Step 2

Meet with every student in a writing conference. Read their work ahead of time and be purposeful about what you want the student to leave the writing conference knowing or understanding about their writing. Students can also meet with peers for review of their work and feedback.

They can use this guide to [Peer Feedback and Peer Review](#). Students should look to highlight what is positive about their partner’s work and then ask questions and make suggestions on how their work could be improved. Students may need peers’ assistance in how to eliminate words and focus their ideas. Peers could underline words that helped them to gain



a deeper understanding or better picture of how the partner communicated a central message or theme to their younger self.

Once they have consulted with a peer, students can meet with the teacher again in a separate conference, exploring word choice and techniques for honing their ideas about their memoir letter, which should include praise and criticism. Students should go through an iterative process, consulting with peers each time they make a revision or change.

Communicate and Present:

Students will bring paper copies of their final drafts of their Memoir Letter to present in groups of two or three. During the presentation, the presenter will hand out copies of their Memoir to the other students in the group. All students will have Post-It Notes and a writing utensil to use while the presenter reads their final draft aloud. They will write feedback and their reactions on their Post-Its while the presenter is reading their letter. They will use their Post-Its in the next section to use in their own reflection.

Reflect:

Students will place the post-its they wrote about others' work in their notebooks in order to reflect on the connections that resonate with them as well as the essential question, "How do we learn about others?"

Students can respond to the following questions in their notebook?

- How did reading other memoirs help you learn about your classmates?
- How did your perception of yourself as a writer change throughout this unit?