

Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives

A collaborative project with
ESL Writing and Rhetoric I at

Columbia 

COLLEGE CHICAGO

Compose
Contribute
Collaborate



Literacy Narrative Assignment

As you know from your research in the DALN, a literacy narrative is a personal story about *reading* or *composing* in any form or context. For the final two assignments of the semester, you will be working with your own literacy narrative, in print and then digital form.

Your print digital literacy narrative will focus on a personal story or experience with literacy, told in a compelling, detailed way so that your audience both connects to the story and to the meaning you convey about your understanding of the role of literacy in your life. This essay will be 4-6 double-spaced, typed pages and include at least one reference to an outside academic source and at least one reference to the literacy interview you conducted or the DALN narratives analyzed for your first essay.

Step 1: -- Generating Ideas (Invention)

Literacy narratives can be about your experiences as a small child, a teenager, an adult, a senior.

Literacy narratives can be about reading stories books, cereal boxes, music, or video game cheats—anything at all that you read or any story reading, writing, or composing (digital or print).

Literacy narratives can be about composing letters, Facebook pages, song lyrics, zines, blogs, maps, essays in school—anything at all that you compose, or any story about teaching writing.

Literacy narratives can be sad or happy, poignant or funny, informative or incidental.

Literacy narrative often focus on powerful memories about events, people, situations, places—times when you tried and succeeded or tried and failed; someone who gave you a chance or took one away; situations when someone taught you how to do something or when you taught someone else; churches and schools, contests and performances, plays and public presentations.

Here are a few ideas to get started:

- What has your experience becoming “literate” in a new language been like for you? Can you tell us a story about that process – when something really “clicked” or when something just wasn’t working at all? What was helpful? What was not? Does being

literate in another language feel any different from your native language? How? Why?

- Have you ever felt illiterate? Can you tell us a story about a time you were punished for reading (or not reading)? For writing or not writing? A time when you were rewarded for writing insightfully?
- Have you learned to compose in digital spaces? Can you tell us a story about your process of composing in other modes or media? How does digital literacy influence your print literacy?
- Have you ever written a “goodbye” letter? A love letter? A Poem? A novel? An email message that made you blush?
- Did you ever win (or lose) a crucial public debate? Did you ever forget your lines in a play? Learn American Sign Language? Did you bond with Dick and Jane or the Hardy Boys?
- Did you learn to read by studying the back of a cereal box? Do you remember the first time you thought of yourself as a writer? When you got (or lost) your first library card? The bedtime stories your parents used to read to you? Your favorite book?
- Do you have a story about a person who/an event which discouraged you from reading and writing? A person who/an event which encouraged you?
- Can you tell us a story about the first time you used a computer? The first e-mail message you composed? Your first Facebook page? The first video you made and uploaded to YouTube?
- Do you have memories about playing “teacher” with your friends? Creating a family newspaper or a ‘zine? Reciting scripture to the congregation of your church or at your Bat Mitzvah? Reading the Koran?
- What other questions from your literacy interview might you ask yourself?

Step 2: Pick a story -- Work with a partner as share at least three possible literacy stories that you might want to focus on. As you share, consider these questions:

- Why were/are the event(s) you recounted meaningful/significant to you, *personally*? Why do you like this story? What makes it worth telling?
- How do you understand/interpret the import of the event(s) *in terms of what you know about literacy*? What can it tell you about teaching? Learning? Reading? Composing?
- How does your story position you vis a vis others? Parents? Family members? Peers? Teachers? What significance does this positioning have for your literacy.

Pick one of these stories and be prepared to tell it to the class on Wednesday, October 4.

Step 3: Draft Your Compelling Literacy Narrative

Desire gets confused on South Vermont. There were times when I wanted so much to be other than what I was, to walk through the magical gate of a television cottage. But strange blessing, we can never really free ourselves from the mood of early neighborhoods, from our first stories, from the original tales of hope and despair. There are basic truths about the vulnerability and power of coming to know, about the way the world invites and denies language. This is what lies at the base of education—to be tapped or sealed over or distorted, by others, by us.

— Mike Rose, *Lives on the Boundary* (240)

To successfully writing a compelling literacy narrative, a form of personal essay/memoir, you must tell a story. As you create your narrative, you need to be conscious of dramatic and emotional modulation, of purposeful description, and of making sense of your experience through analysis. In other words, your story must be evocative, detailed, develop characters AND have a purpose, a “so what,” an argumentative intent.

You have a story and you have a purpose:

relate a personal story or experience with literacy, told in a compelling, detailed way so that your audience both connects to the story and to the meaning you convey about your understanding of the role of literacy in your life.

So now it's time to write. Use what you have noticed and what we have discussed in class about what works or does not work in sample literacy narratives to guide your writing.

- Open your narrative in an interesting and provocative way
- Structure your story with an arc (is there a struggle or conflict? A moment of change or realization?) and provide appropriate details.
- Provide enough detail and character development (you are the character) to help us, your readers, connect to your story.
- Connect your story and literacy experience in some way to other DALN entries we have reviewed or discussed or to wider, theoretical discussions of literacy
- Make sure you are heading towards a “so what” and meaningful commentary/insight on the role of literacy in your life.

For Monday, November 9, write your literacy narrative with 3 different versions of your introduction/opening. Bring complete narrative and 3 opening paragraphs to class for review.

Revised Calendar

Nov 2	<p>Writing your own Literacy Narrative - invention – generating stories to tell</p> <p>Homework: share a story for review</p>
Nov 4	<p>Writing Your Own Literacy Narrative - focusing your story, elements of a personal narrative essay</p> <p>Homework – draft your essay; bring draft with 3 versions of the introduction to class on Monday; assigned reading</p>
Nov 9	<p>Workshop Literacy Narratives – making your story compelling and focused</p> <p>Homework – keep writing; assigned reading; Draft 1 of Literacy Narrative due Nov 11</p>
Nov 11	<p>Draft 1 of Literacy Narrative due</p> <p>Putting your Literacy Narrative in conversation with on research about literacy and the DALN–annotated bibliography exercise</p> <p>Homework – annotated bibliography</p>
Nov 16	<p>Connecting your story to other stories -</p> <p>Homework: revise Literacy Narrative</p>
Nov 18	<p>Multimodal options for Literacy Narratives</p> <p>What would you say if you could tell this story beyond print?</p> <p>Homework – collect or develop images, artifacts, audio, video related to your literacy narrative; keep working on literacy narrative</p>
Nov 23	<p>Print Literacy Narrative Due by 5 pm – email to Suzanne and put a copy in OASIS drop box</p> <p>Homework – collect or develop images, artifacts, audio, video related to your literacy narrative</p>
Nov 25	<p>How does shifting modes shift your story? Multimodal composing workshop</p> <p>Homework – storyboard your multimodal literacy narrative; assigned reading</p>

Nov 30	Multimodal composing – workshop Homework – work on your multimodal literacy narrative
Dec 2	Multimodal composing – workshop Homework – multimodal literacy narrative
Dec 7	Multimodal composing – workshop Homework – multimodal literacy narrative
Dec 9	Share your work in progress - Multimodal Literacy Narrative draft due for review
Dec 14	Multimodal Literacy Narrative Due Presentation of multimodal Literacy Narratives
Dec 16	Presentation of multimodal Literacy Narratives / final reflections