

Writing Workshop 4

Reflective Essay

Materials:

- 3 different colored highlighters and/or colored pencils for marking the text

Focus:

This sequence of activities is designed to provide direct writing instruction. Students will create three separate reflective essays through this process: one that is co-constructed as a class with direct guidance from the teacher, one that is peer constructed, and one that is written independently.

Connection to Embedded Assessments:

This workshop provides additional scaffolding for Unit 4, Embedded Assessment 2, Writing a Metacognitive Reflection.

Steps:

1 Be prepared to model, through **guided writing**, a reflective essay of your own. Be sure the narrative will be accessible to students and will offer the opportunity to include the elements of a reflective essay (incident, response, and reflection).

Activity 1: Reading and Analyzing a Personal Narrative

2 **Activate prior knowledge** by asking students to **think-pair-share** on the topic of a good personal narrative.

3 **Brainstorm** with students a list of elements that personal narratives have in common. Explain to students that a reflective essay is a kind of personal narrative. Then streamline the list, creating a **writer's checklist** of the elements of an effective reflective essay that can be copied and posted. Be sure to include the elements of a reflective essay listed in the Goal.

Writing Workshop 4

Reflective Essay

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Think-Pair-Share, Brainstorming, Marking the Text, Generating Questions, Graphic Organizer, Drafting, Rereading, Adding, Substituting, Self-Editing/Peer Editing, Sharing and Responding, Marking the Draft

Focus:

A reflective essay is a type of personal narrative in which writers share insights and observations about life. This type of writing draws upon personal experiences and imaginative thinking. It provides rich opportunities for recollection of past, present, or imagined experiences and thoughtful reflection on these experiences.

Goal:

To write reflective essays that:

- Describe a significant incident and your response to it.
- Reflect on the significance of the incident and its importance to you.

To achieve this goal, you will engage in a series of activities in which you work with your teacher and with your classmates to construct two model personal narratives. You will then use these models to construct your own personal narrative.

Activity 1: Reading and Analyzing a Personal Narrative

1. You have probably read and written personal narratives. What are some common elements of good personal narratives?

Answers might include:

An incident is described with interesting and vivid details.

The reader can relate to how the narrator feels because the feelings are described in a powerful way.

The writer communicates the significance of the incident effectively.

The writer's use of language is engaging.

2. A reflective essay is a kind of personal narrative in which the writer reflects on the significance of an incident. As you read the sample reflective essay, look for elements of a good narrative and mark the text when you find them.

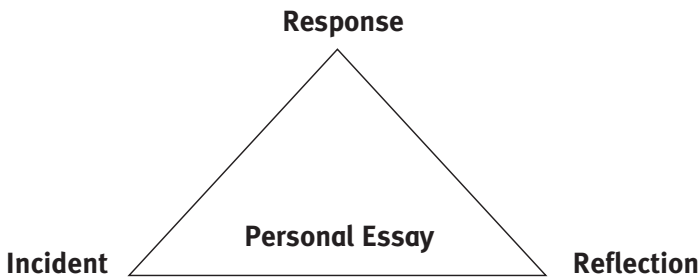
3. Most reflective essays are structured to include three parts:

- Incident: a description of an incident or situation.
- Response: the writer's initial or immediate thoughts and feelings in response to the incident.
- Reflection: the writer's reflection on the incident, after some time has passed and the writer is able to thoughtfully consider the importance of the incident or situation to his or her life.

Sample Text

Read the text "Why Couldn't I Have Been Named Ashley?" on pages 10-11 of your SpringBoard book.

4. Mark the word *Incident* on the graphic organizer below with a highlighter or colored pencil. Now use a different color to mark the word *Response*. You will use these colors as you reread and mark the text. Reread the first two paragraphs of "Why Couldn't I Have Been Named Ashley?" and mark the text to show what happened (incident) when the writer was in fourth grade and how she felt in response.



5. Notice that the writer opens her reflective essay with dialogue and action, saving exposition, or background information, for the third paragraph. Why do you think she made this choice?

6. In the fourth paragraph, the writer begins describing the first time her name became significant to her. Reread paragraphs 4 – 7 and color-code the incident and the writer's response to it.

Steps:

4 Lead a **shared reading** of "Why Couldn't I Have Been Named Ashley?" asking students to note the elements of an effective narrative by **marking the text** with a checkmark in the margin when they notice an element of good narrative writing. Go through the writer's checklist together and ask students to share out where they found these elements in the sample student essay.

5 Introduce the structural elements of a reflective essay: incident, response, and reflection. Model the process of color-coding the description of incident and response in the first two paragraphs.

6 Ask students to consider the effect of opening the essay with dialogue and action rather than explanation.

7 For paragraphs 4–7, have students work in pairs. Check for understanding and make sure that all students can identify these elements.

Steps:

8 Have students color-code the reflection as you reread the last two paragraphs aloud. Ask students to infer how the writer feels about her name. Keep in mind that many writers are more direct in their reflection; this writer has chosen to let the reader infer the significance of the incidents. You probably will want to be more direct in your guided writing sample.

9 Students will find the dominant image of the embossed pencil in paragraph 6. Ask students to find where the writer repeats that image and to **think-pair-share** how the writer uses this repeated image.

Activity 2: Writing a Class-Constructed Reflective Essay

10 At this point, move into a guided writing of a reflective essay. Model brainstorming a topic by creating a web of incidents in your own life that are significant to you. The student sample connects three related incidents; your model may be more useful for students if it addresses only one incident. Identify an object that you could use as a dominant and repeated image for each potential topic. Include them on your web along with the potential topics.

11 Briefly tell aloud the incidents that you have brainstormed, saving some interesting bits to keep the students engaged during the guided writing. Then ask the class to choose one of these incidents to help you develop into a written reflective essay.

12 Based on the brief version they have heard, ask students to work with partners to **generate questions** to ask you using the reporter's questions strategy.

- 7. In the seventh paragraph, the writer describes a third incident with her name. Mark the text to identify the incident and her response to it.
- 8. In the last two paragraphs, the writer reflects on her name. What is her tone? How can you tell? Use a third color to code the reflection; remember to highlight or underline the word *Reflection* on the graphic organizer with the color that you are using as your color-coding key.

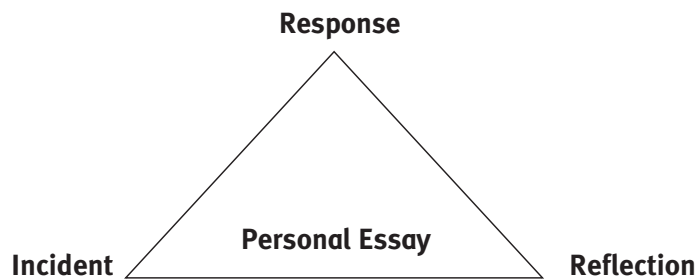
9. What image does the writer repeat? How does she use this image?

Activity 2: Writing a Class-Constructed Reflective Essay

Prompt: Write a reflective essay that meets the requirements listed in the goal statement.

As your teacher models the process of creating a reflective essay, you will be expected to take notes and participate in the class writing of the essay.

- 1. After your class has decided upon a topic for the reflective essay, use the strategy of the reporter's questions (who, what, when, where, why, and how) to ask questions that will help create a more detailed retelling of the incident, response, and reflection.
- 2. Take notes on the incident, response, and reflection as your teacher leads guided notetaking.



13 While students are generating these questions, display a triangle **graphic organizer** to take notes on the structural elements of a reflective essay. Then, as students ask you their reporter's questions, answer and populate the graphic organizer appropriately. Model how you would flesh out your notes about the incident, response, and reflection.

3. As you scan the essay again, mark the text for precise descriptive details and active, vivid verbs. Think about how you can make vivid, effective language choices in the class essay as you construct an opening paragraph together.
4. Finally, work with your class to refine language choices to help convey tone.
5. After you have constructed an effective conclusion, brainstorm some possible titles by posing questions that relate to the content.

Activity 3: Writing a Reflective Essay with a Partner

Prompt: Write a reflective essay that meets the requirements listed in the goal statement.

Generating Content

1. Brainstorm topics that you might write about. Briefly, tell your partner the story; work together to choose a story for each of you to write.
2. Plan the structure of your reflective essay, identifying the incident, response, and reflection. Use the reporter's questions to help you and your partner fill in details of the incident, response, and reflection.
3. You should try to remember the incident as clearly as you can, but you might find that there are gaps in your memory. List others who were there and might be able to fill in gaps, and make a plan to ask them for information.
4. Identify an object that you could use as a dominant image that you repeat for effect.
5. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your plan.

Drafting and Refining an Incident and Response

4. Use Achilike's sample and your class-constructed model to help you draft an opening that leads to a description of an incident and your initial response to it.
5. Examine the descriptive language and the verbs you have used so far in your essay. Add or substitute more descriptive language and active, vivid verbs where you can. Think about using dialogue or indirect quotations. Also consider the formality of tone you want to communicate.
5. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your description of an incident and your response to it.

Steps:

- 14 Have students scan Achilike's essay and note the precise descriptive details and vivid verbs that the writer uses. Discuss the effect of these in preparation for effective student language choices.
- 15 At this point begin **drafting** your essay by modeling your opening on the sample. Work in the image that you will repeat in the conclusion. Ask students to help you include precise descriptive details, but include a limited amount of response at this time.
- 16 Read your draft aloud, asking students to identify where your response to the incident appears. You might color-code your draft, just as you did with the student author's sample. Compare the amount of description of your response to the amount in the sample text. Ask students to identify the places where they wonder how you felt. Revise your description by **adding** details to your initial response, addressing the class's questions. You might weave some details into the existing paragraphs, model writing a paragraph describing your initial response, or both.
- 17 Revisit the graphic organizer and add to your notes about the significance of the incident. Then co-construct a reflective conclusion for your essay. Create a memorable ending that brings the essay to a satisfying conclusion. Try to repeat the dominant image to tie the essay together, as the student sample does.
- 18 Allow the class to guide you as you **substitute** some of your verbs with more compelling choices.
- 19 Though Achilike uses standard language primarily, she sometimes uses nonstandard words and phrases. Be sure students see the connection between diction and tone. Ask students to help you revise the diction in your essay to use standard and/or nonstandard language to set the tone.

20 Examine the student sample for the writer's use of direct and indirect quotations, paying attention to the punctuation used. Discuss with students where you might use direct and/or indirect quotations and revise accordingly.

21 Have students analyze Achilike's title and help select a title their essay.

Steps:

22 Revisit the **writer's checklist** for an effective reflective essay and, using suggestions from the class, revise your piece of writing as needed.

23 Self-edit your draft for punctuating dialogue and any remaining issues, and publish a copy for each pair of students.

Activity 3: Writing a Reflective Essay with a Partner

24 Students will now move into working with a partner to write a reflective essay. The instructions on the student page reflect the same process students went through on the class-constructed model. You will want to monitor and provide support to students as they go through each of the stages of generating content, drafting and refining, reflecting and publishing detailed in the student pages.

25 Be sure students retell their stories orally and **generate questions** to encourage additional detail in the storytelling.

26 Partners should use the triangle **graphic organizer** to jot down notes about the incident, their response to it at the time, and their reflection on it now that time has passed. This prewriting may include ideas for a dominant image that would be repeated in the conclusion.

27 After writing an opening, partners should read their first few paragraphs to each other and **mark the draft** to take notes on questions and comments brought up by their partners. A mini-lesson on integrating dialogue may be useful here.

28 Require that partners share and respond to their conclusions and titles, providing feedback and asking questions to guide the writer's revision.

Drafting and Refining a Reflective Conclusion

- 10.** Draft a conclusion that reveals the significance of the incident and that comes to a satisfying conclusion. How are you using the dominant image to tie your reflection together? Give your essay a title that uses a relevant question effectively.
- 11.** Participate in sharing and responding to refine your reflection and your title.

Reflecting and Publishing

- 12.** Use the writer's checklist and feedback from your partner to make sure that you have included the essential elements of a reflective essay, and revise as needed.
- 13.** Use available resources as you edit your narrative and prepare it for publication.

Activity 4: Independent Writing

Prompt: Write a reflective essay on an incident of your choice that meets the requirements listed in the goal statement.

29 Have each student self-assess in terms of the **writer's checklist**; then have partners assess each other. Students should use this information to revise their essays. You may want to select appropriate mini-lessons to facilitate editing for publication.

Activity 4: Independent Writing

30 Assign the third writing prompt as independent work, monitoring and providing support as needed.

Writing Workshop 4 Reflective Essay

SCORING GUIDE

Scoring Criteria	Exemplary	Proficient	Emerging
Development of Ideas	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recreates an incident with well-chosen details and a reflective point of view • uses a variety of narrative techniques such as dialogue to effectively develop experiences, events, and characters • includes insightful reflective commentary on the significance of the incident. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recreates an incident with relevant details and a reflective point of view • uses narrative techniques to develop experiences, events, and/or characters • reflects on the importance of the incident. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recreates an incident using irrelevant, minimal, and/or repetitive details and an unclear point of view • contains little or no use of narrative techniques • contains limited reflection on the importance of the incident.
Organizational Structure	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides an engaging and/or creative beginning that introduces the narrator's problem or situation • uses transitions and a variety of techniques (e.g., a dominant image) to skillfully guide the reader • concludes with an ending that naturally follows from and insightfully reflects on what is experienced and resolved over the course of the narrative. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides a beginning that introduces the problem or situation and a narrator and/or characters • uses transitions and techniques to create a smooth progression of events • concludes with an ending that follows from and reflects on what is experienced. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contains a beginning that is unclear and/or does not directly relate to the story • presents disconnected ideas and limited use of transitions and techniques • contains an ending that is disconnected, unfocused, and/or non-reflective.
Use of Language	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses precise diction, varied syntax, sensory detail, and figurative language to create a distinctive effect • demonstrates technical command of conventions of standard English. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses diction, syntax, sensory detail, and figurative language purposefully • demonstrates general command of conventions; minor errors in punctuation, grammar, capitalization, or spelling do not interfere with meaning. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • uses diction, sensory detail, and figurative language ineffectively or not at all • contains an unclear or inconsistent tone • demonstrates limited command of conventions; errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, and/or spelling interfere with meaning.
Writing Process	<p>The essay reflects skillful revision and editing to produce a draft ready for publication.</p>	<p>The essay reflects revision and editing to produce a draft ready for publication.</p>	<p>The essay demonstrates minimal revision and editing and is not ready for publication.</p>