



Reflective Essay

Writing Workshop 4

SUGGESTED LEARNING STRATEGIES: Think-Pair-Share, Brainstorming, Marking the Text, Graphic Organizer, Drafting, Rereading, Adding, Substituting, Generating Questions, 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.

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 Reflective Essay

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

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.

Sample Text

NEW YORK CITY

by Khan Shoieb

1 We are accelerating past 60 on the bridge, headed from the depths of Queens into Manhattan. The dusty meter is switched off, windows rolled down, wind raging through my hair. I am sitting in the front seat of a battered and archaic Ford Crown Victoria. The car is bright yellow. My father is driving, and I see fatigue in his eyes, but I am only eleven and thrilled finally to be tagging along. The cab smells of manufactured lilies from an aerosol can, always overdone and stuffy, and the engine drones on while I fiddle with the cold metal of the ashtray. Nestled in the grey leather of my father's taxi, I coyly peer out across the river at an ethereal city that has stolen my heart. Tonight, when Manhattan is doused in a steamy fog, the metropolis seems more and more distant as we drive closer. I fail to make out any of the skyscrapers through the impenetrable mist; instead, every few seconds, like the revolving beacon of a lighthouse, a few white flashes emerge from the soupy haze of the night, daring me to come forward.

2 My father is not a simple man, but a man who keeps it simple. Work hard, he says. Grab the opportunities that come to you. As I get older and we grow further apart, however, this seemingly clichéd counsel of his gradually contorts itself into an agonizing burden.

3 I learned his story in fragments from my mother. Refusing to heed the warnings back home, he immigrated to New York City at the age of twenty-three, leaving behind his widowed mother and a promising career as a journalist to try and give his children a better life. He settled in the city, but far from the "city" as I would come to know it, for Manhattan is not the origin of dreams, but only their destination. Instead he found a small tenement in Queens between the Spanish and the Greeks, and temporarily took up driving a taxi twelve hours a day while he raised his family and tried to reboot his career.

4 What was once "temporary" has become permanent and what was once an American Dream has become an Immigrant Reality.

5 I can recall very little from my early childhood with any clarity aside from a few moments with my father. I remember he used to work a double shift on Sundays and took Monday off to rest, so that every once in a while, if I was lucky enough and had behaved myself, he might reluctantly take me atop the Empire State Building. We would arrive just as the sun was setting. I was too young to have been able to see anything, so he would hoist me up high and let me clutch dearly to the diagonally crossed wiring before us. Far above the concrete streets, where ordinary hopes and dreams suddenly seemed trivial, I asked my father everything about New York. It was there, grasping that fence on the 86th floor, that I truly learned of my city, more from the sound of my father's voice than the actual words he spoke. And if I was patient enough, he would whisper to me in native tongue of his one reporting assignment in Casablanca and the day he started to dream of a world beyond his homeland, and in particular New York. The city, it seems has a way of simultaneously promising everything and nothing.

6 My father has never voiced a complaint about what has become of his fate in New York. But in stark contrast to our days atop the city—a time when more possibilities lay ahead for him—today I can sense the slightest tinge of regret in his voice. He has grown quieter as he has aged, perhaps from the strain of unforgiving work, but also perhaps because he has begun to think in hypotheticals. Whether he regrets his decision to come to New York, I will never know for sure, but one fact alone stands. My father never went back.

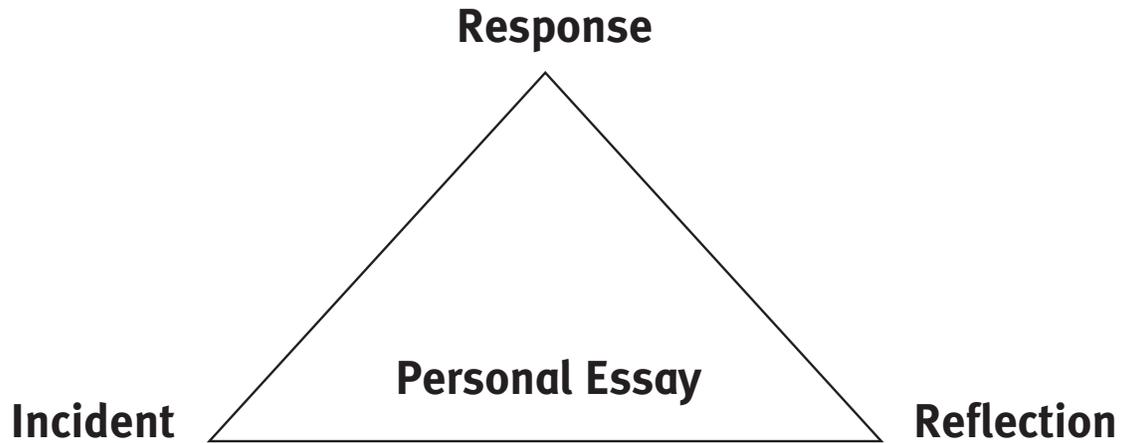
7 The words “work hard” warrant a different meaning when they come from someone who has sacrificed that much for you. The guilt continues to drive me apart from my father, probably because I am not the man he is. I can tell that he silently hopes to live out his American Dream vicariously through his children. I am scared to shoulder that kind of responsibility, to try and live out a glorious American Dream for my father, but too ashamed not perpetually to want to do it for him as well. His sacrifice, however burdening, will always serve as a powerful source of inspiration for me.

8 The days of me tagging along while my father drives his taxi and the two of us going atop the Empire State Building together are long gone, but whenever I think about what lies ahead, the memories are suddenly resuscitated. I cannot help but hope that one day for me, unlike my father, New York City stands as a symbol of all that I could do and not all that I couldn't.

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.

4. Mark the word *Incident* on the graphic organizer on the next page with a highlighter or colored pencil. Now use a different color to mark the word *Response*. Reread the first three paragraphs of the sample text. Using the colors you chose, mark the text to show the description of the incident and the author's response.



5. Notice that the author opens his reflective essay in the middle of the action, saving exposition, or background information, for the third paragraph. He states that the story comes from his mother. Why do you think the author made this choice? What is the effect?

6. The fourth paragraph is a single sentence. Why do you think the author made this choice? Explain whether the statement is ironic.

7. Continue color-coding to indicate incident and response in paragraph 5.
8. Analyze the reflection in the last three paragraphs. 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. What is the author's tone? How can you tell?

9. What symbol does the author use? How does he use this image?

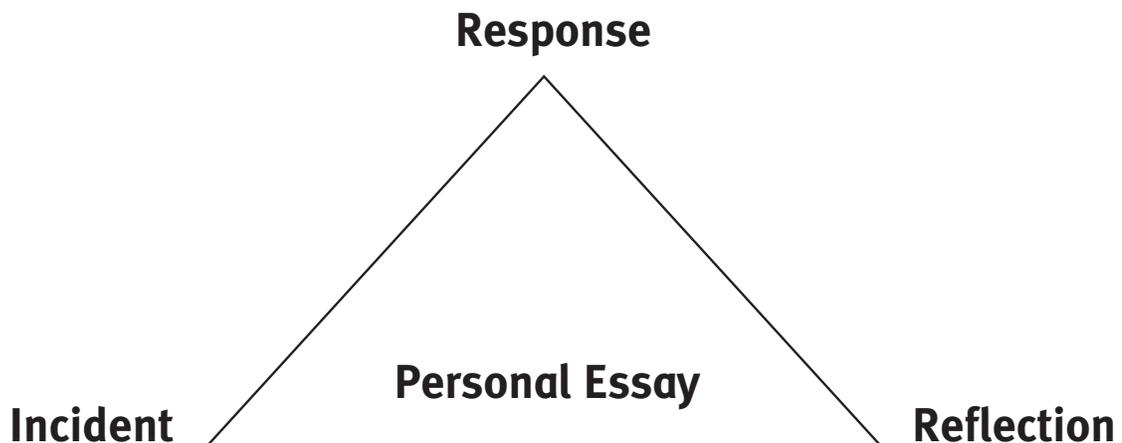
Activity 2: Writing a Class-Constructed Reflective Essay

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 and your teacher has retold the story, 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. Brainstorm your questions here.

2. Take notes on the incident, response, and reflection as your teacher leads guided notetaking. As you listen and take notes, think about the tone of the unfolding narrative. Is it humorous, or thoughtful, or regretful, or nostalgic? Jot some ideas about the tone and a central image you could incorporate as a symbol of the experience. Place this thinking in the center of the graphic.



3. Scan Shoieb’s essay and note the precise descriptive details, compelling verbs, and figurative language he uses.
4. Once the draft of the class-constructed essay is complete, reread it together and add or substitute verbs, figurative language, and precise descriptive language that convey the tone and enhance the effect of your reflective essay. Look especially for opportunities to improve these elements:
 - Coherence with transitional words and phrases.
 - Diction and syntax to set the tone.
 - Direct and indirect quotations to characterize voice.

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 these three parts.
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 a symbol that you could use for effect.
5. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your plan.

Drafting and Refining an Incident and Response

6. Use Shoieb’s sample and your class-constructed model to help you draft an opening that leads to a narration of an incident and your initial response to it.
7. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your description of an incident and your response to it. Examine the figurative language and the verbs you have used so far in your essay. Think about using dialogue or indirect quotations. Think about the tone you want to communicate. Discuss with your partner how you might revise by adding or substituting figurative language, description, or move vivid verbs.

Drafting and Refining a Reflective Conclusion

8. Draft a conclusion that reveals the significance of the incident and that comes to a satisfying conclusion. Give your essay an effective title.

9. Participate in sharing and responding to refine your reflection and your title.

Reflecting and Publishing

10. 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.
11. 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.

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 experience with careful attention to using a variety of narrative techniques (e.g., multiple plot lines, symbolism, and repetition) that effectively develop the incident and response incorporates insightful reflective commentary that reveals the importance of the experience. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> recreates an incident with relevant details and a reflective point of view so that the importance of the incident is forceful and clear uses narrative techniques to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. 	<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 a purposeful and engaging organizational structure that develops the incident, elaborates on the response to the incident, and insightfully reflects on the meaning of the experience uses transitions and a variety of techniques to guide the reader through the incident and build toward a particular tone and outcome. 	<p>The composition</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> follows an effective organization with a beginning that situates and develops the incident 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 diction, sentence variety, sensory detail, and figurative language creatively and purposefully to create an effect demonstrates 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	The composition reflects skillful revision and editing to produce a draft ready for publication.	The composition reflects revision and editing to produce a draft ready for publication.	The composition reflects minimal revision and editing and is not ready for publication.