

Writing the Essay III

The **BIG** Idea

- Which facts and details of my experience will create the most clear and compelling essay?

AGENDA

- Approx. 45 minutes
- I. Warm Up (5 minutes)
 - II. Fleshing it Out: The Main Facts and Little Details (15 minutes)
 - III. Tell Your Story (15 minutes)
 - IV. Share Your Story (5 minutes)
 - V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

MATERIALS

- STUDENT HANDBOOK PAGES:**
 - Student Handbook page 26, My Story, My Essay Topic
 - Student Handbook page 27, Story Facts
 - Student Handbook page 28, Story Details
 - Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback
- FACILITATOR PAGES:**
 - Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)
 - Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)
- Overhead and LCD projector
- Notebook paper, pens, and pencils

OBJECTIVES

During this lesson, students will:

- Identify important facts and vivid details from an event or experience that highlight their personal strengths.
- Write a description of the event.
- With help from classmates, identify the most effective images and phrases to use in their essays.

OVERVIEW

This is the third week in the essay-writing unit. In this lesson, students will identify the “story” they’ll tell for their college essay — an event or experience in their own lives that reflects specific strengths. They’ll begin by identifying important facts and vivid details from the experience. Then they’ll use this information to write a description of the event. Finally, they’ll share their writing with a partner, who will provide specific, constructive feedback for next week’s draft stage.

PREPARATION

- List the day’s **BIG IDEA** and activities on the board.
- The following handouts need to be made into overhead transparencies or copied onto chart paper:
 - **Student Handbook page 26, My Story, My Essay Topic**
 - **Student Handbook page 27, Story Facts**
 - **Student Handbook page 28, Story Details**
 - **Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback**
 - **Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)**
 - **Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)**

IMPLEMENTATION OPTIONS

Activity II, Fleshing it Out: The Main Facts & Little Details: To permit more time for student writing, you may choose not to review the examples provided in **Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)** and **Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)**.

Activity IV, Share Your Story: If students need more time for writing (**Activity III, Tell Your Story**), you could wait until the beginning of the next class to have them share their writing with a partner. If students are reluctant to share their work with each other, you could ask volunteers to read their essays aloud for class feedback, rather than working in pairs.

ACTIVITY STEPS

I. Warm Up (5 minutes)

1. [As students enter, ask them to complete their **Student Handbook page 26, My Story, My Essay Topic**. As homework in the previous lesson, students were asked to come up with a personal experience that reflects the strengths they identified. In this activity, they will briefly summarize the story, or personal experience, that they will describe in their essay.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** At this point, you have identified your personal story, or the experience you're going to write about in your essay. Now that you know your essay topic, you're going to spend most of this lesson fleshing out the facts and details to write your essays. Towards the end of the lesson, you'll write a more complete description of your story. Then you will share your writing with a partner, and exchange feedback about the most effective images and phrases.

II. Fleshing it Out: Main Facts and Little Details (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Any strong story answers the basic questions: who, what, when, where, how, and why. It's the same for a college essay. Whatever your essay topic, you'll want to provide a complete picture for the reader. You don't want the admissions officer to read your essay and be left wondering, "When did this happen?" "Why was that event significant?"
2. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 27, Story Facts**. On an overhead projector, show the **Facilitator Resource 1, Story Facts (Example)**.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** You're going to use this page to record important facts about your story. Remember the story we discussed last week about the teenager who took the two kids by bus to the city library? This example shows how the writer might identify basic facts of this story. [Briefly walk through this example with students.]
4. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** A good story also includes vivid details that make readers feel as if they're there. One way is to describe the experience through your different senses — the sights, sounds, smells, tastes, even the emotions. Listen to these two descriptions of the teenager's experience taking the kids to the city library:
 - *I was really nervous taking the kids to the library, but I tried not to show it.*
 - *As the bus took off, I felt a wave a panic. My heart was pounding and my palms were sweaty. But I smiled at the boys and pointed out the sight of Lake Erie through the trees.*

5. [Point out how the first description *tells* about the experience, but the second one uses vivid details to *show* the reader what it was like to be there.]
6. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 28, Story Details**. On an overhead projector, show the **Facilitator Resource 2, Story Details (Example)**. As you did before, walk through this example to show students how they could use their senses to identify the most vivid details from the story.]
7. [Give students about 10 minutes to complete these two handbook pages.]

III. Tell Your Story (15 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now I'd like you to use these facts and details to tell your story in your own words. Don't worry about how you structure the writing – we'll focus on that next week. For now, just tell the story as it comes to you. [Provide paper, pens, and pencils to students who need them.]
2. [Give students 15 minutes to write.]

IV. Share Your Story (5 minutes)

1. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Now it's time to share what you've written with a partner and give each other some constructive feedback. Keep in mind this is very early in the writing process. Don't worry if you feel like your writing is not ready to share. There are three main goals for this step:
 - First, to make sure you've provided enough facts to make the story clear;
 - Second, to identify some of the most compelling words and phrases;
 - Third, to make sure your essay reflects the qualities or strengths you want to highlight.
2. [Have students turn to their **Student Handbook page 29, Story Feedback**. Briefly review the feedback they should provide.]
3. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** To share your writing, you might prefer to read your story aloud to your partner rather than have him or her read it. This is your choice. Either way, do not write your feedback on your partner's writing. Instead, use this form to write down your feedback.
4. [Have students find a partner. Give them an opportunity to share their writing, evaluate their partner's work, then read their partner's feedback.]

V. Wrap Up (5 minutes)

1. [Have student volunteers share favorite phrases and images from their partner's story.]
2. **SAY SOMETHING LIKE:** Great job today, everybody. Next week, we'll spend a little time reviewing some tips for writing and organizing your essay. Then you'll spend most of the period writing your drafts.

Story Facts (Example)

WHAT

(What happened?)

I took two neighbors to the Cleveland city library by bus. I had never been there and had only ridden the bus a couple times in my life. It was an amazing experience for all of us!

WHO

(Who are the important people in the story? Was there someone you learned from, someone you affected, or someone who reacted in a different way? What was your relationship with them?)

My two next-door neighbors, in second grade and third grade. They were great athletes, but struggled in school, especially with reading.

WHEN

(When did this take place? Over how much time? How old were you? If it's significant, what was the season? What else was happening then?)

I was 15, a sophomore in high school. I had only ridden the bus once or twice before. It happened one day in July.

WHERE

(Where did it take place? What was important about this setting?)

Three main places: my hometown, about 45 minutes from Cleveland; on the bus to Cleveland; and Cleveland, which was a big city compared to my hometown.

HOW

(How did the experience happen?)

I thought the boys should see the big library in downtown Cleveland. I thought it would be exciting and inspire them to want to read and learn.

WHY

(Why was this experience important to you?)

I was so nervous, but really proud of myself for going through with it. I guess I had more determination than I thought! It also showed me how much I enjoy working with kids. Even if it's really hard, it can be very rewarding.

Story Details (Example)

SIGHTS

Nervous faces before the trip. Seeing Lake Erie through the trees. Bumper to bumper traffic downtown. The library's soaring marble façade.

SOUNDS

The hiss of the bus door closing. The boy's silence on the trip there. The horns of downtown Cleveland, and the quiet of the library. Excited chatter on the way home.

SMELL

Exhaust and roasted nuts on city streets. The smell of books in the reading room.

TASTE

Cinnamon mints I passed around on the ride there.

TOUCH

Sweaty palms, heart pounding on the bus ride. Hot air from the sidewalk. The heavy library door. The cool air of the reading room.

EMOTIONS

I felt panic as the bus pulled out, but I was trying to act calm and excited. The boys seemed pretty nervous, too. They were fascinated by the city and the library. On the way back, we were all really excited.

My Story, My Essay Topic

Main Idea: I am _____
(list the qualities you want to highlight in your essay).

Describe a single event or experience that reflects these qualities. This is your “story” that you’ll share in your essay. It could be something that happened to you one day, over a summer, during a semester, or throughout your life—as long as the story is focused. **(Note: it’s ok to summarize in a couple of sentences here. You’ll be adding details later.)**

If you’re stuck, think about a time or specific way that you were influenced by:

- Your family, ancestors, or heritage
- Your pastimes or favorite activities
- Significant people outside your family
- Travel to different places or exposure to different people
- Your strongest beliefs or values
- A difficult or challenging event
- Criticism or failure
- Your dreams for the future
- A piece of literature or art

Story Facts

Use this form to write down the basic facts about your event or experience.

WHAT

(What happened?)

WHO

(Who are the important people in the story? Was there someone you learned from, someone you affected, or someone who reacted in a different way? What was your relationship with them?)

WHEN

(When did this take place? Over how much time? How old were you? If it's significant, what was the season? What else was happening then?)

WHERE

(Where did it take place? What was important about this setting?)

HOW

(How did the experience happen?)

WHY

(Why was this experience important to you?)

Story Details

Close your eyes for a minute and imagine yourself in the story you will write for your essay. Describe the experience using your different senses.

SIGHTS

SOUNDS

SMELL

TASTE

TOUCH

EMOTIONS

Story Feedback

Listen to or read your partner's story carefully. Write down the words and phrases that are most compelling and descriptive. Which part of the story makes you feel like you're there?

After you've listened to or read the story, write any questions you still have about the experience. What facts or details would help the reader understand this story?

Finally, write a few words to describe the writer, based on the story.
