

Personal Narrative Writing Assignment (Teacher's Model)

Sample Notecard One: Generating Ideas:

1. Sister's Birth (Sarah's Start)
2. Random Roommates, Blueberries, & Breaking the Ice
3. Fish & Chips & Rowing on the English Channel
4. Scecina & Sister Fougerousse
5. To the Guy on a Star (Senior Year Car Crash)
6. The Day Berry Twist Died (Death of a Small Town, U.S.A.)
7. Coen's Seizure (The Traumatic Edge of Beginnings & Ends)
8. The Worst Hike of My Life: The Grand Canyon After Prom Night
9. The Awkwardness of a First Date
10. The Closest I Got to Water
11. Falling Down with Flute in Hand
12. The Night of the Skinwalker Visit
13. Middle School Memories | Trailers & M's Strung Out Parents
14. My First Bicycle Ride
15. Stations Suspended: The Last Time I Prayed to Get Out of Stations

Sample Notecard Two: Narrowing Focus:

1. Fish & Chips & Rowing on the English Channel

Working Thesis Statement: It is only after rowing on the English Channel that I can fully articulate the intensity of first time endeavors and immense situations of can't-breathe moments of complete and utter humiliation.

2. Coen's Seizure: The Traumatic Edge of Beginnings & Potential Ends

Working Thesis Statement: This story exemplifies the traumatic edge between life and death and those perceived beginnings and potential ends.

*Remember: A "working" thesis statement is just a practice run. You should develop the thesis as you write.

Sample Notecard Three: Focusing:

1. **Rhetorical Question:** How many unnoticed breathes do you take a minute?
2. **Analogy:** *The Grinch* & the seizure (theme of loss) OR puzzle pieces and early memories
3. **Anecdote:** Elaborate on the magic of Christmas & the Grinch who stole Christmas OR my past
4. **Statistic or Fact:** 2 to 5 percent of children experience a febrile seizure in their first five years of life (Remember: This is brainstorming. You can change this up when you start drafting.)

Sample Notecard Four: Detailing:

1. **Exposition:** Neighbor's House; Southern Indiana; Living Room in front of the TV; Coen is 18 months old and running a fever; he is wrapped up in a blanket sitting on my lap watching *The Grinch*; it's December 3rd
2. **Rising Action:** It's the climax of the film; the Grinch steals all the gifts; the town starts singing; Coen sits up; he had fallen asleep; he opens his eyes, but all I can see are the whites of his eyes; then he starts shaking; I don't know what to do at first; I lay him flat on the couch; my mother just brought over dinner; she begins CPR
3. **Climax:** I call 911; he stops breathing, turns purple, and becomes unresponsive; the ambulance is on the wrong street- I can see their lights on the street over
4. **Falling Action:** Mom brings Coen back to life. I go into shock. The EMTs arrive. Everyone leaves. I stay with the other two kids who are still asleep. It fully hits me- I process everything at once.
5. **Resolution:** Scariest moment of my life; made me realize how fragile life truly is

Sample Notecard Five: Early Drafting (Just Writing to Get My Thoughts on Paper):

It's a modern living room- distressed wood floors, accent furniture, leather furniture, a big screen television. It's an All-American kind of scene- small starter house in Midwest suburbia. All of the main lights are off, because I just put the three boys to bed. The room is radiating with that Christmas time vibe. There were multiple rounds of prayers, singing bedtime songs, and at least two bedtime stories when I put the boys to bed tonight. I expect the occasional *I need to use the bathroom* or *I need a cup of water*; but, for the most part, they are down for the night. I sit on the couch and enjoy the soft glow from the multi-color Christmas lights on the Christmas tree in the corner of the room. I switch through the channels until I see that *The Grinch* is on (not the cartoon- but the Jim Carrey rendition). Their parents are in Louisville at the hospital bringing their fourth child into the world. I hear little footsteps coming from the hallway. They stop at the edge of the hallway and the living room. I wait for a voice. Silence. I sigh, throw off the blanket, and look toward the hallway, "What's up bud?" Coen comes forward. He is eighteen months old and struggling with a cold. He drags his blanket in one hand and clutches his sippy cup in the other hand. He is crying. I wrap the blanket around him and sit down on the couch. I sing a song and he's out. For a moment, everything is okay. The glow from the Christmas tree competing with the light from television sets the tone. Coen looks so peaceful. Everything is okay. The boys are sleeping in the next room over. The dog snuggles up beside Coen and I digging the blanket like it's a nest. Everything is okay until it isn't. But, that's the way of it, isn't it? Everything is okay until it isn't.

SAMPLE PERSONAL NARRATIVE

(USE FOR CHECKLIST ACTIVITY)

The Rough Draft (Remember: It's okay to have mistakes in this one!)

[Introductory Paragraph] I have vague memories from my early childhood. They are more like flashes of small details that are muddled and confusing. If you took a five-hundred-piece puzzle kit, threw all the pieces up in the air, and then collected twenty of those pieces, you might understand how my early childhood memories exist in my memory. They are just bits of details, brief snippets of feelings, and small compendiums of vague notions. In 1893, psychologist Caroline Miles referred to this phenomenon as “childhood amnesia,” or the inability of adults to retrieve memories from their childhood years. How many memories are lost in the first five years of our lives? Just erased, forgotten, eliminated? It seems that when that five-hundred-piece puzzle is thrown up in the air, everyone in our lives at that time collects some of the pieces. From these people, we can begin to piece back together the bigger picture. I don't remember dying as a child. I guess I did. That's what they tell me, technically speaking anyway. Technically speaking: I started vomiting blood. I stopped breathing. I went limp. I was brought back to life. I don't remember seeing any lights at the end of tunnels. In my life story, I don't really remember the early tragedies and the traumas. They are erased, forgotten, and eliminated. One day, when Coen is old enough to start piecing together his life story, he'll ask me about the night he stopped breathing. He'll ask me about that third of December. I'll be on the other side in the future. I'll be holding all the pieces of his bigger picture. He'll ask me for these puzzle pieces of his earliest memories and they will be written here to remind him that no matter what happens, he is here for a reason and that a million things could have slightly changed the entire course of his life history, but they didn't.

[Body Paragraph One] I grew up in a small town, U.S.A. We lived in an older neighborhood filled with starter homes for young families and bungalow-style homes for retired folks. It was very Midwest suburbia. I was a sophomore in high school when my mom asked me to help the neighbors by watching their young children on the street over. They had two young boys. Tee was returning to school to become a RN. Colin worked until seven during the weekdays. I worked at an ice cream shop that was only open six months out of the year. So, my mom signed me up to watch the boys in the evening when ice cream season had come and gone. I ardently tried to explain that I wasn't the person for this job. I explained, “Mom, I'm not good with kids. I don't know how to talk to them. Please ask Sarah or someone else. Please. She is much better with this kind of thing.” However, my mom is the type of person who makes up her mind and that is that. She replied in that *mom* tone, “Kaylie, *you are* doing this.” So, I started watching these kids in the off-seasons. I decided that an unconventional approach was best. I treated the children like miniature adults for most of the time. In the following high school years, two more children came along. That's the first hundred puzzle pieces. This is where his story begins.

[Body Paragraph Two] It was a modern living room- distressed wood floors, accent furniture, leather furniture, a big screen television. It was an All-American kind of scene- small starter house in Midwest suburbia. All of the main lights were off, because I had just put the three boys to bed. The living room was radiating with that Christmas time vibe. There were multiple rounds of prayers, singing of bedtime songs, and at least two bedtime stories when I put the boys to bed tonight. I expected the occasional *I need to use the bathroom* or *I need a cup of water*; but, for the most part, they were down for the night. I sat on the couch and enjoyed the soft glow from the multi-color Christmas lights on the Christmas tree in the corner of the room. I switched through the channels until I saw that *The Grinch* was on (not the cartoon- but the Jim Carrey rendition). I pulled my AP Psych textbook and notes out of my backpack. I needed to study for the upcoming final exam. Tee and Colin were in Louisville at the hospital bringing their fourth child into the world. I heard little footsteps coming from the hallway. They stopped at the edge of the hallway and the living room. I waited for a voice. Silence. I sighed, tossed off the blanket, moved the textbook to the side, and looked toward the hallway. "What's up bud?" I asked. Coen came forward. He was eighteen-months old and was struggling with a cold and teething. He drug his blanket across the living room floor in one hand and clutched his sippy cup in the other hand. He was crying. It wasn't a serious cry. By that point, I knew all the levels of crying. It was a sleepy-cutting-teeth-struggling-with-a-cold cry. I wrapped the blanket around him and sat down on the couch. I softly sang a song and he quickly fell asleep. For a moment, everything was okay. The glow from the Christmas tree competing with the light from television set the tone. Coen looked so peaceful. Everything was okay. The boys were sleeping in the next room over. The dog snuggled up beside Coen and I digging the blanket like it's a nest. Everything was okay until it wasn't. But, that's the way of it, isn't it? Everything is okay until it isn't.

[Body Paragraph Three] My mom brought over some leftovers from dinner. She was in the kitchen placing them in the refrigerator. It was the part in *The Grinch* when the Grinch steals all the presents and the town celebrates with singing anyway. Coen jerked up. I expected slight disorientation and maybe some mild crying. However, I was never prepared for what happened next. It was like a horror film, except not a film, it was real life. He opened his eyes and all I could see were the whites of his eyes. His eyes were rolling. You know those intense moments when time slows down? It doesn't really slow down. It just feels like everything is going in slow motion. Whoville residents on *The Grinch* were singing in the background. The lights were off except for the Christmas-tree lights and the glow of the television screen. I froze for maybe ten seconds just staring into the whites of Coen's eyes trying to process what was happening, but it felt much longer. Then, he started to convulse. So, I tried to lay him flat on the couch and support his head. I yelled into the kitchen. I didn't know what to do. I started panicking. My mom was calm, but stern and told me to call 911.

[Body Paragraph Four] I had never had to call 911 in my life. I dialed the number. Coen stopped convulsing. His face turned white, then purple-ish blue. He started foaming at the mouth. Then, he stopped breathing. I freaked out, "Oh my gosh, oh my gosh, oh my gosh- yes, hi, this is Kaylie Fougrousse. I am at 3234 Vincennes Road. I need an ambulance. Oh my god, he's not breathing. Oh my god, he's going to die." The lady kept telling me to calm down. She kept asking me if I was in Clark or Floyd county. "Floyd. Floyd County," I snapped. "Okay, I'm going to keep you on the line. Do you have someone there with you?" she asked in the world's calmest voice ever. "Yes," I responded curtly. "Okay, good. They are on their way." Time was stopped. It had to be stopped. My mom was doing CPR. The fire trucks

showed up on the wrong street. I could see them through the back window. I was screaming at the lady on the phone telling her that they were on the wrong street. In moments of panic, I remember the strangest things. I remembered a psychology lesson about seizures. The longer oxygen is cut off from the brain, the more brain damage. In that moment, I realized that I couldn't tell Tee. How can you tell a mother that her son is dead as she is brining a life into the world? I panicked even more.

[Body Paragraph Five] The EMTs arrived. Coen started breathing again. The rest was a blur. People were asking me questions: *How long did the seizure last? Was he running a fever? Is he on any special medication? What happened?* Be as detailed as possible. Then, they left. Mom went down to the hospital with Coen and the EMTs. The house was quiet. I sank to the floor of the kitchen and just sat there. My dad burst in through the garage door, panicked, "What's happening?" I explained everything all over again. "I can't tell Tee. I can't tell her. This is my fault. I can't tell her." Then, I became paranoid. I pulled a chair into the boy's room and I stayed up the rest of the night making sure that they were breathing and alive. They had slept through the whole thing. Liam sat up at one point during the night and asked what if everything was okay. "Yeah bud, everything is okay. Go back to sleep," I said. He looked around, "Where's Coen?" he asked. I took everything in me not to breakdown right there. "Go to sleep hon." By some miracle, he did. He went back to sleep. My dad kept checking in. He kept telling me that I needed to get some rest myself. He said he would come over and watch the boys. But, I couldn't leave them, and I definitely couldn't sleep. My mom had called Colin and told him everything. Cora was born that night.

[Body Paragraph Six] Coen lived. No brain damage. However, everything changed. Suddenly, school didn't seem as significant as it had in the weeks before. I spaced out in class a lot. I replayed the situation over and over again in my head. *What could I have done differently? What if my mom hadn't been there just as the seizure started? What if one of the boys had witnessed everything?* The what-ifs were endless. The "stress" of finals was not a major concern for me. Life seemed so much more precious than it had in the past. Tee and Colin kept thanking me for being so brave. Like what, brave? That was the opposite of what I was. I was terrified- probably the most terrified I had ever been in my life- not brave. With time, things went back to normal for the most part, but not entirely. There are still moments when I see the boys playing soccer in the backyard and think about how differently life could have turned out- how different the finished puzzle could have been. But, the fact of the matter is that every piece came together to make a memory that he will forget to remember. Childhood amnesia. However, if he ever wants to re-construct the memory, the puzzle pieces are right here.