

*WRITING a PERSONAL NARRATIVE
based on an anecdote from your childhood*



... using techniques of MAGIC REALISM

Magical Realism Personal Narrative Assignment Guidelines

Read the following definitions carefully:

Magical realism (also called magic realism) is a genre of narrative fiction that expresses a primarily realistic view of the real world while also adding or revealing magical elements. It is characterized by the matter-of-fact inclusion of fantastic or mythical elements into seemingly realistic fiction.

Personal narrative is a prose narrative that relates personal experience. It is usually told in the first person, and its content is sometimes nontraditional (meaning that it does not fit the typical criteria of a narrative). A personal narrative can take many forms, but it often focuses on one central event, incident, or experience from the writer's life.

Anecdote is a brief, revealing account of an individual personal or an incident. Often humorous, anecdotes differ from jokes because their primary purpose is not simply to provoke laughter, but to reveal a general truth illustrated by the brief tale. An anecdote might be called "a story with a point." Anecdotes may be real or fictional.

For this writing assignment, you are going to combine these three techniques into a single piece of writing. Here is an overall description of the assignment:

Write a PERSONAL NARRATIVE in which you choose an ANECDOTE from your childhood and recreate it using the techniques of MAGICAL REALISM. Your narrative can be written as a short story or as a piece of creative non-fiction.

Here are a few suggestions you might want to follow:

1. Select a meaningful subject for your narrative. The anecdote you select doesn't have to be completely true—in fact, it can be completely "made up." However, your writing is more likely to be vivid if it is based on authentic memories or firsthand experience.
2. If you can't think of what to write about, try looking through family photograph albums and using pictures for stimulus. You might also wish to ask your parents or family members for suggestions and details.

3. Narrow your focus. Don't try to tell about an entire summer—instead, focus on a single day that summer, or even a single incident.
4. Frame your story effectively, making careful decisions about where to begin and end.
5. Write in the first person. Use a tone appropriate to your subject matter and to the age at which you are telling the story.
6. You might want to use the device of flashback for all or part of the piece (i.e., tell the story in hindsight). You can use a “framing device” if you wish. We will discuss this in class.
7. Include vivid descriptions of the surroundings in order to create an appropriate atmosphere for your narrative. Select details that are consistent with the subject matter you are writing about, and that will enhance the tone of your narrative.
8. Don't remain in “narrative mode” throughout the piece, or your reader will be bored. Attempt to combine narration, description, and dialogue.
9. Keep your narrative lively and tender.
10. The technique of *magical realism* is characterized by a deliberate blurring of the lines between what is real and what is unreal, surreal, or magical. Don't do this by using meaningless or ridiculous exaggeration. Instead, attempt to find metaphorical or symbolic ways of transforming or exaggerating events. For example, you might give a pet the ability to talk, or give your bicycle the ability to see. A doctor or nurse might become take on qualities of a monster or angel.
11. Use any other techniques you can think of to bring your narrative to life. Above all, ENJOY writing it. If you do so, your enjoyment will naturally overflow and mesmerize your reader.



The 2006 film *Pan's Labyrinth* incorporates techniques of *magical realism*.

Personal Narrative Peer Review

Use this sheet to provide meaningful feedback to the author. Remember to be constructive in your remarks. Provide concrete examples wherever possible.

CONTENT, FOCUS, VISION

Is the story the product of strong personal vision? Has the author made a meaningful choice of subject and focus, and does s/he explore this subject meaningfully? Is the story original and fresh? Does the story move readers emotionally while at the same time engaging them intellectually?

Comments:

STRUCTURE

Is the story well structured, with a clear beginning, middle and end? Do the events of the story unfold at an even pace?

Comments:

STYLE

Is the point of view well chosen and consistent? Is the story colorfully written? Has the writer enhanced the story with vivid imagery? Does the story effectively balance dialogue, narration, and description? Is the writer successful at incorporating techniques of “magical realism?”

Comments:

USE OF LANGUAGE

Are the word choices lively, colorful and effective? Is the dialogue properly formatted and punctuated? Are spelling, grammar, and sentence structure correct (making allowances for vernacular or other appropriate departures from convention)? Has the writer made effective use of metaphor, simile, and other kinds of figurative language?

Comments:

Personal Narrative Assessment Rubric

CONTENT: 25 points

A meaningful and original focus has been chosen for the story	10
The narrative is engaging and holds the reader's interest	5
The narrative is genuine and personally expressive	10

STYLE: 40 points

The narrative uses a consistent tone that is appropriate to its subject	10
Characters and events "spring to life"	10
The narrative uses techniques of "magic realism"	10
A balance of narration, description, and dialogue is achieved	10

STRUCTURE AND DEVELOPMENT: 20 points

The events of the story unfold at an even pace	5
Themes and ideas are well developed and fully expanded	5
The narrative is the appropriate length to fully explore its subject matter	5
The narrative is well framed (begins and ends well)	5

MECHANICS: 15 points

Word choices are sophisticated and colorful	5
The narrative is error-free in terms of spelling	5
The narrative contains no grammar or punctuation mistakes	5

Comments:
