

Grade 5

Unit 1: *Personal Narratives*



Use the Interactive Read-Aloud lesson and text on the following page to kick off this unit with your students.

Unit-level Essential Question

What makes an excellent personal narrative?

Lessons 1-5

Guiding Question: What makes a personal narrative different from a fiction narrative?

Writing Prompt: How is a personal narrative different from other forms of writing you have read? What elements do they have in common?

Lessons 6-10

Guiding Question: How can different points of view affect the way a story is told?

Writing Prompt: Pair up with a partner and brainstorm an event that happened in class this year. Once you have chosen an event, write a paragraph describing that event, taking turns to read your paragraph to each other when you are done. How does the story change when different people tell it?

Lessons 11-15

Guiding Question: What can readers learn from someone else's personal narrative?

Writing Prompt: When have you taken a bad experience and turned it into something great? Write a personal narrative about a time you did so, remembering to use elements such as personification, dialogue, and strong (specific and descriptive) verbs and adjectives.

Unit 1 Culminating Activity

Choose one element of writing—such as showing, not telling; dialogue; tone; etc.—that you think is most important to good narrative writing. With that element in mind and with the resources you have received so far in this unit, create a presentation to convince your class about this element's importance.

GRADE 5 UNIT 1

Read-Aloud

Use the following Read-Aloud to introduce **Grade 5 Unit 1**.

Tell students that throughout this unit, they will think about the following **Essential Question**: What makes an excellent personal narrative?

Explain that over the next few weeks students will study a special kind of writing called a personal narrative. To start that study, they will hear a personal narrative. As they listen to this story, they should pay attention to the different elements they hear, thinking about which ones might be special characteristics of a personal narrative.

Read the Read-Aloud, pausing after each section to discuss the text-based questions.

“When I Was Famous”

by Colin Rafferty

The first time I was famous, it was because I hadn't watched television for a year, and had won \$500 from my father for doing so. The *Star*, the local paper, wrote an article about me, and ran a photo of Dad handing me the cash. I wore a Batman t-shirt. When I got to high school two years later, a lot of the students from other schools told me their teachers had shown them that article and dared them not to watch TV for even a week. It didn't do much to help my social standing.

It was pretty easy to be famous in Kansas City, because there just wasn't much competition. We had major league football and baseball teams, but we even got excited over seeing one of the forwards from the indoor soccer team (the Comets) at the shopping mall. Once, I saw the mayor of Kansas City at Sears, buying a suit—the town had *that* level of celebrity sighting. When I became famous for the second time, during my junior year of high school, I had a pretty good idea of how the town would react. A few curious callers, an article in the paper, and then it would be over. No fuss. Very Midwestern.

Literal. Who is telling the story, and who is it about?

» The author, Colin Rafferty, is telling the story about himself.

Literal. According to the author, was it easy or hard to be famous in his town?

» It was easy.

Inferential. Rafferty opens his narrative by talking about “the first time” he was famous. What does this imply about how many times he has been famous?

» The first time suggests there was a second time, so we can infer that Rafferty has been famous more than once.

Evaluative. Rafferty says that being famous the first time did not help his “social standing.” Why might this be?

» Other kids did not like their parents comparing them to the author. They didn't want to be like him, so they didn't become friends with him.

In February, I'd appeared on the *Jeopardy!* Teen Tournament, and although I'd lost my match, I'd still put up a fight, scoring \$9000 (I'd like to point out that this was still the era when the most valuable clue was worth just \$1000). In the interim between filming in January and the episode's airing, I'd gotten over losing, mostly, and had for the most part enjoyed watching myself on the local station, which had, in a flash of synergistic brilliance, sent a reporter and crew over to interview me during the immediately-following five o'clock news. There were articles in both the *Star* and the *Johnson County Sun*, a suburban newspaper that consisted mostly of high school sports news and water utility updates.

I even got recognized, twice. The first time, I was in the same Baskin-Robbins as the Paul Newman incident when a young boy asked me if I was "the *Jeopardy!* guy." The second time happened while I was on a double date with my girlfriend and another couple; our waiter recognized me. My girlfriend was disappointed that he didn't comp us the meal; it was the night of the Sadie Hawkins dance, and she was picking up the tab.

I loved this kind of fame. The first time, the no-TV-for-a-year thing, felt like being famous for doing something weird, like walking on fire or eating glass. Being famous for *Jeopardy!* felt like I was finally recognized for the one thing in life I was really good at—trivia. People noticed—sometimes! People cared—kinda! I did what a hometown celebrity's supposed to do; I made them feel proud about the town they were from, made them able to say, *Hey, look who else is from Kansas City*, even if only for a short time.

All of this happened within about a week or two of the episode's airing. As I understood it, my fame was about to run out.

Literal. What did the author do to become famous the second time?

» He was on Teen *Jeopardy!*.

Inferential. How did the author feel about losing?

» He was upset, but he says that he mostly "got over it."

Inferential. The author says he was recognized as "the *Jeopardy!* guy." Does this make it sound like he was very famous or just a little famous, and how can you tell?

» a little famous, because they did not know his name

One night, I got a phone call from a local radio station asking me to participate in something they were doing the next morning, a trivia contest between, they hoped, me and Herb Stempel.

If you're not well-versed in game show history, Herb Stempel is the contestant who blew the whistle on the 21 scandal, in which contestants were given the answers to questions ahead of time, told how long to wait before answering and when to lose it all. Herb Stempel is the reason game shows became actual contests and not soap operas with a lot of questions, a cerebral pro wrestling.

And Herb Stempel is smart—really smart. The movie *Quiz Show*, a dramatization of the scandal, had just come out, and while watching it, I was amazed at the trivia that Herb (played by John Turturro) knew, vast lists of arcane information that made my “What is Father’s Day?” or “Who is James Watt?” feel like remembering how to tie my shoes in comparison.

I agreed to the station’s request—how I could I not, really?—and so, the next morning, I woke up before dawn and waited for the phone to ring. When it did, the show’s producer told me to wait just a moment, that I’d be on soon. I could hear the show in the background, the sad patter of the morning show DJs as they ran down wacky news from around the world.

Then, they announced Herb Stempel, and a voice best described as “1950s Bronx Storekeeper” filled my phone’s earpiece. They chatted with him for a while, and, without warning, brought me in, referring to me as “Kansas City’s own *Jeopardy!* contestant.”

Literal. What kind of invitation does Raffery get because of his fame?

» He is invited to be on a local radio show.

Inferential. The author writes that Herb “blew the whistle” on a “scandal.” Based on what you know about these words, does this mean he did something right or something wrong?

» Blowing the whistle means exposing something, and a scandal is something bad. Therefore Herb told the truth about wrongdoing, which means he did something right.

Inferential. The author uses a simile to compare what he knows with what Herb knows, saying that compared to Herb, the trivia he knew felt “like remembering how to tie my shoes.” What does this show about how the author felt next to Herb?

» He felt like he did not know as much as Herb, as if he only knew basic trivia.

The first DJ explained the contest; he would ask us each three questions, and whoever got the most right would be declared the winner. Herb took the first question—the capital of Albania—and quickly answered it. I also knew the answer to my first question—the capital of Kenya—but just before I started to answer, the other DJ spoke, *sotto voce*, into his microphone.

“The answer is Nairobi.”

I swallowed my eager answer, paused, then quietly said, “Nairobi.”

This was a setup. This, I realized, was a stupid morning disk jockey joke designed to make fun of the whole *Quiz Show* scandal and not anything like a real contest.

I had wanted it to be so much more than that. I’d wanted it to be a meeting of two trivia geniuses, of two generations of men who were good at one thing, something defined by its uselessness, and had found a way to get noticed, even famous, for it. I’d wanted it to

be a chance for me to show Herb Stempel, *the* Herb Stempel, how much I knew, not to beat him, but to perform for him. I'd wanted it to be confirmation for me, legitimacy for me, exposure for me, celebrity for me.

And it wasn't. Herb and I were, I realized, not famous. We were footnotes, written in small type at the bottom of the page. Herb, at least, had managed to secure a place in history thanks to the scandal; I wasn't even going to survive the first revisions. I'd be forgotten by that afternoon. No more public recognition. No more newspaper articles. I would go back to being a high school student.

I ended up beating Herb that day, despite the fact that we both got one question wrong—the DJs just added one point to my score so their joke could have the punchline they wanted. We talked a little more on the air, me about *Jeopardy!* and Herb about *Quiz Show*, and then we were thanked for our time, and done.

I hung up the phone. The sun was starting to come through the clouds to the east. It was quiet in my room. I could have turned on the radio, but didn't. I waited for someone to tell me what the next question was.

Literal. How is the radio call different than what Rafferty expected?

» It was a set-up. He did not really get to answer the questions on his own.

Inferential. What did Rafferty learn from this experience?

» He discovered he was not really famous.

Evaluative. Rafferty writes that after the contest, he “would go back to being a high school student.” How do you think he felt about this?

» It was not what he had wanted, so he probably felt disappointed.

Use the following prompts to extend student understanding of the Read-Aloud.

Guiding Question: Think about the story Rafferty tells about his life. Based on it, what do you think might be important traits or characteristics of a personal narrative?

Writing Prompt: Think about a time when something did not go the way you hoped or expected. Write a true story about that time, making sure to use detail and description to show what happened and how you felt.