

LESSON 15
FIRECRACKERS
Writing an Anecdote

ABOUT THE LESSON

The objective of this lesson is to have your students write about their personal experiences. It won't appear to be onerous to them if presented in a relaxed and cheerful manner. Although the didactic part of the lesson might seem to be the usual routine of listing the essentials of a form of writing, we don't mean this to be a ho-hum lesson. The idea is simply for your students to recall an incident and then make it into an interesting written anecdote. The example of the boy getting burned by a firecracker should be sufficient to show the nature of this kind of anecdote.

EVALUATING STUDENT RESPONSES

The basic dicta for writing an acceptable personal anecdote are set forth in the lesson, namely:

1. Give the anecdote an interesting and appropriate title.
2. Limit the anecdote to one incident or episode.
3. Start with an introduction that sets the scene and produces a mood for the anecdote.
4. Put the events in chronological order.
5. Use language that paints a clear picture of the people, setting, and action. Make sure your verbs are strong by omitting auxiliaries (for example, "sobbed" instead of "was sobbing").
6. Use first person pronouns ("I," "me," and "my").

In addition, you should give credit for:

- suitable language (language appropriate for the intended audience, natural cadence, not too much slang)
- humor
- sufficient detail in describing persons, scenes, and actions
- pathos
- a surprise ending
- an interesting title

Targeted Learner Outcomes: The student will

- learn the nature of a personal anecdote, and
- write about a personal experience.

Personal Anecdote

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We have countless experiences every day. Most of them are routine, and they don't have much significance, but there are many that we do remember for months and years afterward. Some of these are happy, and some are not. Many people tend to remember best the unpleasant memories, and this becomes troublesome for them. It is best to remember our good experiences.

What we'd like you to do is reconstruct in writing an especially memorable experience. For example, it might be the first time you tried to swim or to ride a bike or when you got a pet. The experience should still be vivid in your memory, whether it was humorous, painful, gratifying, poignant, enlightening, heart-warming, uplifting, or embarrassing.

You can make one of your experiences come to life for others by following these suggestions when writing about it.

1. Limit the anecdote to one incident or episode.
2. Start with an introduction that sets the scene and produces a mood for the anecdote.
3. Put the events in chronological order.
4. Use language that paints a clear picture of the people, setting, and action. Make sure your verbs are strong by omitting auxiliaries (for example, "sobbed" instead of "was sobbing").
6. Use first person pronouns ("I," "me," and "my").

The following is the recollection of an elderly man of an incident in his childhood:

My cousin and I were excited because we had some firecrackers to shoot off. In those days our town didn't restrict the shooting of fireworks to a public display conducted by the American Legion at the high school. We could buy our strings of firecrackers, cherry bombs, Roman candles, punk, and sparklers at any of several stands in town during the last week of June and right up to the Fourth of July. It was an appropriately dark night with a heavy cloud cover, and just a little spooky in our neighborhood of modest one-story homes.

Most of our fireworks were pretty tame, especially by today's standards. The most spectacular were the cherry bombs, strings of firecrackers, and Roman candles. The sparklers were kind of pretty when we waved them in the air, but they were mostly for girls, and we were boys of ten and twelve who thought of ourselves as somewhat daring, in a masculine way. I was dark-haired and stocky, and my younger cousin was blond and slim.

My uncle prudently oversaw our little pyrotechnical doings. Tall with thinning brown hair and kind eyes, he was the sort of man who took an interest in all children. In fact, I don't think there was a child—or a dog—my uncle ever encountered that he didn't like. He kept an eye on us from a distance, but I don't suppose he anticipated what was to come.

Personal Anecdote

As I lit a final string of firecrackers, my hand must have been too close to one of them, which went off with a bang and a sizzle. The sizzle was the flesh on my right hand. I let out a yell, and my cousin, followed closely by his father, came running up to me. I didn't cry, but my face must have betrayed the acute pain I was feeling. With characteristically heartfelt words, my uncle tried to console me. But he didn't attempt to treat my hand with a cool bandage or a salve because off I went, striding rapidly up the sidewalk. I was determined not to release any tears and intent on walking off the pain in my hand, which I waved in agony.

They watched and sympathized as I walked doggedly around the block, swearing silently to myself that I wouldn't be that stupid with firecrackers again. I was not only hurt but I was embarrassed at being so inept with the darned things.

After you have recalled a memorable incident in your life, jot down the important parts of the experience in the space below. Arrange them in chronological order, and then write a first draft of your anecdote.

Brief description of incident: _____

Actions:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____
