

Personal Stories, Part 1: Telling Your Story

(2 hours)

Lesson at a Glance

SUMMARY

Everyone has a compelling story to tell. However, many people lack the tools to put their tale into writing. This lesson introduces a female steelworker who discovered that her life was a rich source of story material. It shows students ways to turn the raw material from their lives into rough drafts and, eventually, edited narratives. It offers opportunities for reading personal stories written by others.

GOALS

- To understand the process of writing a personal story or essay
- To produce a rough draft of a personal story or essay

LEARNER OUTCOMES

Students will...

- Learn about the writing strategies of a female steelworker who became a writer.
- Read one of her stories and discuss its meaning.
- Reflect on their lives and on emotional moments that are the raw material of personal essays.
- Write about or list three experiences—their own or a classmate's.
- Free-write a rough draft to be edited in subsequent classes.

MATERIALS

VIDEO:

Milestones: Kathi Wellington Dukes
Episode 28: Length: 6:19, Start Time: 1:42

PRINT:

An excerpt from "The Card" by Kathi Wellington Dukes
Issue 28, p. 8

Meet Kathi Wellington Dukes: *Writing Out the Rage*
Issue 28, p. 9

ACTIVITIES

- View and discuss one **TV411** video segment.
- Read two *In Print* articles related to the video.
- Review seven vocabulary words or terms.
- Discuss strategies for writing rough drafts and revising them.
- Free-write a rough draft for a personal story.

**"I write
everything
twice."**

WRITING

Personal Stories, Part 1: Telling Your Story

Step by Step

1. INTRODUCING THE CONTENT

Pre-Viewing Activities

Discuss

How many students have had experiences in their lives that they would like to write about?

What would their stories be about? Work? Raising children? Family history? A troubled time in their lives? People who helped them somehow, like a teacher or a good friend?

Teacher Talk

Keeping a journal is a good way to write about our private feelings and to get a fresh perspective on our lives during good times and bad times. Once everything's down on paper, uncensored, the journal writer can work on turning the raw material into a polished story.

We're now going to meet a steelworker who did just that and found out that people were interested in what she had to say about herself.

VOCABULARY REVIEW

- circumference
- molten lava
- I-beams
- pig iron
- camaraderie
- censor
- bliss

2. MODELING THE STRATEGY

View Video

Milestones: Kathi Wellington Dukes
Episode 28: Length: 6:19
Start Time: 1:42

Strong, resilient Kathi Wellington Dukes was the first woman in her family to work in a steel mill. In this segment, she talks honestly about the challenges in her life and about strategies that helped her "write out the rage" and create a powerful story on paper.



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Step by Step (cont.)

3. MINING THE STRATEGY

Post-Viewing Activities

Discuss

What are learners' impressions of Ms. Dukes? What kind of person is she?

Possible responses:

- survivor
- strong woman
- hard worker
- good writer
- angry woman

What are her feelings about her job?

Possible responses:

- She both loved and hated the work.
- She was proud to be a steelworker.
- She liked the camaraderie with fellow workers.
- She thought the work was dangerous and dirty.
- She thought the steel-making process was beautiful.

What was her motivation for writing?

Possible responses:

- She had strong feelings about her job that she wanted to express.
- She wanted to "write out her rage."
- She wanted other people to know what a steelworker's life is really like.
- She wanted other people to know there's "dignity in the dirt."

What were Ms. Dukes' strategies for writing?

Possible responses:

- She wrote whatever was on her mind, uncensored.
- Afterwards, she revised and cut what she had written.
- She made sure her final story reflected the strong feelings that had motivated her to write in the first place.

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Step by Step (cont.)

What's the purpose of revising and cutting your own words?

Possible responses:

- When you write without editing, sometimes you repeat things unnecessarily, or sometimes your ideas aren't clear.
- You can rearrange your story to make it easier to follow, telling what happened in a different order.
- You can add details or characters that make the story stronger, or take away the parts that confuse the reader.
- You can replace ordinary words with more vivid words or words that capture exactly what you're trying to say.

4. EXTENDING AND PRACTICING STRATEGY

Workbook Activities

Distribute copies of the excerpt from "The Card" (*In Print* Issue 28, p. 8). In small groups, students can read the excerpt from Kathi Wellington Dukes' personal story and discuss answers to the questions below.

- Who was the Duke?
[Kathi's grandfather.]
- Why did the Duke and his brother stop speaking?
[Because the Duke was a union worker and his brother worked on the management side of the mill.]
- What is the significance of "The Card"?
[It signified membership in the union, a group of workers who banded together to increase their power in negotiations with their employer over salaries, benefits, and work rules.]
- What are the students' impressions of the author's "tone of voice"? Does she sound strong and convincing? Does she sound angry? Does she write the way she talks? What does it mean to have a "voice" in writing?

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Step by Step (cont.)

Focused Freewrite

Remind learners of Kathi's tips about writing: to put down whatever is on your mind, uncensored, without worrying about spelling, grammar, etc., and then to revise and cut as necessary to make the story more powerful.

Ask students to write for 5–10 minutes about a personal experience, a family member, or another person who's had an impact on their lives.

Possible prompts:

- When I had my first baby...
- My first day on the new job...
- I joined (or didn't join) a union at work because...
- The day I arrived in the United States...

Note: Learners may be most concerned about their spelling and grammar. Assure them that these elements can be worked on in the final edit. For the first draft, encourage students to focus instead on finding ways to tell the story in the best possible way, with vivid language and details.

If students are reluctant to write, consider pairing them up and asking them to interview each other. You may need to ask students to write a list of interview questions first: for example, "What did you love/hate about going to school?" "What was your favorite/least favorite job and why?" "What is the best thing about your family?"

After taking clear and careful notes, the interviewer can write a brief "profile" of the classmate.

5. PORTFOLIO

Students save their rough first drafts in their portfolio. Next time, they can add sentences or paragraphs or start editing their stories.

WRITING

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Step by Step (cont.)

6. HOMEWORK

Distribute copies of the profile of Kathi Wellington Dukes (*In Print* Issue 28, p. 9) for students to read on their own. (As an additional assignment, students can write a few sentences on what they learned about Ms. Dukes from the article.)

7. WEB CONNECTION

For a Web lesson on this topic, go to www.tv411.org, click on **Writing** and then on **How to Write Your Autobiography**.

RELATED VIDEO AND PRINT MATERIALS

Check out our online index at www.tv411.org for other **TV411** lessons on this topic and much, much more. Also, see the companion lesson, *Journal Writing*, on pages 55–60 of the *TV411 Teacher's Guide*.