Narrative Voice Free Write

Understanding the character of narration is essential — not just structural narrative properties (rising and falling action, flashbacks and flashforwards, etc.) but also narrative perspective and point of view. This exercise encourages students to reflect on the role that narrators play in mediating the stories they report.

For this exercise, I have students complete a free write in which they creatively narrate their day from the point of view of a specific narrator distinct from themselves. I encourage them to make their narrators as dissimilar from themselves as possible to foreground the generative tensions authors can establish between narrators and characters. I grade these exercises for completion rather than “aesthetic quality” because the goal of the exercise is simply to teach students how and why the character of narration matters. If you feel the need to more rigorously grade the exercise, the 150-word responses are a good place to do it, as they involve more formal argumentation and close reading evidence and analysis.

If there’s time, one great way to preface this narration free write lesson plan is to have students watch the film *Stranger than Fiction* (2006) the night before. While by no means necessary, the film does a wonderful job spotlighting the dynamics of fictional narration, so it’s a great stepping stone for students learning the basics of novel writing and narration specifically.

**Lesson Plan**:

* Give students 15-20 minutes to compose a free write in which they creatively narrate their day from the point of view of a specific narrator distinct from themselves.
* After the initial writing time, break students into groups of 2-3 students (25 minutes total). Ask students to perform their scraps of narration to their groupmates — to bring their narrators to life in the act of performative reading. Ask them to do this **without prefacing** their work.
* After a student has shared their narrative, ask groupmates to use textual evidence to reverse engineer the character of the narration; that is, to discern who exactly is telling the story. It can be as simple as something like "she sounds like she's from the 19th century," "she has a cynical outlook on the life of the character/me," etc. To support their reasoning, ask them to cite textual evidence in a well-reasoned 150-word response to each story.
* Wrap up by discussing how the short narratives were shaped by the specific details they identified, and that different narrative details could drastically alter the reader’s perception of events. If possible, use this exercise to set up the reading for next class; ask students to keep narrative voice in mind as they do the next reading and to look out for specific details that influence their reading of the narrator.