



Language Arts Lesson 8
Speaking Applications (Grades 4-6)

Instruction 8-1
Narrative Presentations

As we said in the Lesson Preview, speaking in front of an audience is tough for anyone. But if you learn to do it well, it will help you in school -- and for the rest of your life. No matter what kind of work you do, there will probably be times when you need to speak up in a meeting. Or when you want to express your views at a community gathering. So we'll try to make public speaking a little easier for you.



There are four main types of oral presentations you may be asked to make, especially in school: Narrative Presentations, Informative Presentations, Oral Responses to Literature (book reports) and Persuasive Presentations.

This Instruction is about Narrative Presentations.

As we learned in Lesson 4, a narrative is a story. People love stories -- so a Narrative Presentation is the easiest to make, since it's what the audience likes best. There are two steps involved in making a Narrative Presentation:

1. Selecting or writing your story
2. Delivering your story



Selecting or Writing Your Story

As we said, a narrative is a story. There are many different kinds of stories. If you're looking for a story to tell, check out your school or public library. Or the internet. Select a story that touches you in some way -- then give your own interpretation of it. And when you tell a story that you didn't write yourself, be sure and tell who did -- unless it's a traditional folktale or fairytale.

If you decide to write your own narrative, you can either make it up (fiction) or tell about something that actually happened (nonfiction or autobiography). In either case, remember that the basic elements of narrative are the same -- plot, character and setting.

Your story should be divided into three parts, as follows:

The Introduction -- where you get your listeners' attention, introduce the characters and describe the setting.

The Middle (or Body) -- where you tell what happened (in chronological order) and build tension as you work toward your conclusion (end).



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The Conclusion (or End) -- where you reveal the final outcome, summarize the action, and drive home the point of your story (what it means).

For a more complete discussion of what goes into the making of a good narrative, review the Instructions in Language Arts Lesson 4 (Grades 4-6).

One thing we want to remind you about here is point of view. Point of view simply means from whose perspective the story is told. You can use different points of view in a Narrative Presentation just as you can in a written narrative. Here are the most common points of view:

First Person -- when the narrator is part of the story and uses the word "I." If you use this point of view, your listeners will get a deep understanding of a character's motivations and identify with him or her. You can also tell what happened as a witness and not as a participant. That point of view is called "first person observer." The disadvantage of any first person point of view is that the audience only gets to know one person (the "I").

Third Person -- when the story is told by someone outside the story. An "omniscient third person" narrator sees everything and reports on all the characters. An "unintrusive third person" narrator presents a series of events without comment, while an "intrusive third person" narrator offers an interpretation of them.

Differing narrators -- when one story is told by several different narrators. This can give alternate accounts of events and can suggest the complexity of life, but it is probably too confusing for an oral presentation.

When you select a story to tell, or pick a topic for a story you are going to write, don't think about yourself. Think about your audience! Select a story or topic that they can relate to and find interesting. Making a Narrative Presentation is not about you and how you look and whether you are having a bad hair day.

It's about your story.



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Rehearsing Your Presentation

Once you have selected or written your story, read it over and over and over and over. Get to know everything about it until the characters and setting become as real to you as your family. Then visualize it. Imagine sights, sounds, scents and colors. Only when you see it vividly yourself can you make your audience see it too.

Learn it as a whole, not in pieces. You don't have to memorize it completely, unless that is easy for you or your teacher insists on it. And don't read it word for word. Just tell it -- it doesn't matter if you miss a few words as long as your meaning is clear. You may be allowed to look at notes or cue cards. And you might want to try and memorize the first and last lines.

Practice telling your story often. Rehearse, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse. Tell it to your mirror, your mother, your cat. Practice projecting your voice so the whole classroom can hear you. The more you rehearse your story, the more comfortable you will feel when it comes time to deliver it.



Delivering Your Story

On presentation day, dress appropriately but comfortably. As we said, a Narrative Presentation is not about how you look, it's about your story. So you don't want to be distracted by uncomfortable shoes or baggy pants that might fall down around your ankles.

When you get up to speak, capture your audience's attention by giving them a reason to listen. Start out with an "attention grabber" -- a startling statistic or interesting quote or something else they can relate to.

Project your voice so that everyone can hear you, but don't be over dramatic. Be yourself. Speak clearly and vividly. Use figurative (colorful) language.

Use humor if it seems appropriate, even if you are dealing with a serious subject.

If you stumble, don't repeat sentences or phrases unless they are absolutely essential to the meaning of your story. And never point out your own mistakes.

If you are speaking to a diverse audience, speak slowly so that everyone can follow you. For many students, English is their second language.



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Use dialogue and different voices if you are good at it. But if you're not, don't.

Sometimes it's better to say less rather than more. More communication does not always equal better communication.

Involve your audience. Look at them. Ask rhetorical questions or refer to some experience that you and the audience share.

Once you finish your story, stop! Don't ramble on. Leave your audience with something to think about. If questions are asked, they should be asked after your conclusion.

Don't feel badly if the audience doesn't applaud. Applause is not a true measure of success. You may have given them something they want to ponder quietly. Few people applauded Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address -- and it is one of the greatest speeches ever given.

The more you speak in public, the easier it will get. After each presentation, evaluate it. Did the audience ask questions? If not, that doesn't mean that you explained everything completely. They may just have been eager to get on to their next class. And nice as it is to get applause, remember that the lack of applause doesn't mean you gave a bad performance. Ask your teacher or friends how you did. But no matter what anyone says, the most important thing is how you yourself feel about your presentation.