EXPLORING NARRATIVES—A SAMPLE UNIT

Texts: See details in unit and resources list

It is assumed that the students have read, responded to and discussed aspects of fictional narratives in shared, guided and independent contexts. They will also have talked about and experimented with the various text structures and language features of narratives and through enjoyable experiences developed an understanding of contexts, purposes, audiences and the work of writers. This unit focuses on ways of teaching some aspects of narrative writing and is based on the work of Gleeson (2014).

SEQUENCE 1: DESCRIPTION—CHARACTERS

» Read with the students a range of narratives of any type. After each reading draw on the students’ knowledge of the purpose, type, audience, structure and language features. They discuss and justify what they liked and disliked about each narrative.

» Draw the students’ attention to the main characters and discuss what the author tells about the character (the words to describe the character) and what the author shows about the character (through the character’s actions). Talk about how the author built the description through both approaches. Use the terms ‘characteristics’, ‘physical appearance’, ‘personality’, ‘attitudes’, ‘behaviour’, ‘habits’, ‘mannerisms’, ‘actions’ (saying, doing, making) and so on.

» Share extracts from texts (picture story books—PSBs—and novels) that demonstrate descriptions of characters, and identify and discuss how characters were described. For example:
  – *Matilda* by Roald Dahl—description of Miss Trunchbull, Chapter 8.
  – *Hating Alison Ashley* by Robin Klein—description of Miss Belmont, Chapter 1.

SEQUENCE 2: DESCRIPTION—CHARACTERS

» Review the learning from the previous session/s. Revisit one of the model texts and focus on how the writer built description. Depending on the students’ prior knowledge focus on sentence and word level grammar, vocabulary and any literary devices.

» Model or jointly construct with the students, the planning and writing of a description of a known character (animated or human) from a still or moving image. Focus on physical description and then actions. Seek and build on the students’ understanding of ways to build description.

» Students can select another known character or person and create a short description. They share and discuss these with their peers noting how the writer made the description come alive for the reader.

SEQUENCE 3: DESCRIPTION—PLACES AND THINGS

» Provide a model of a place description; for example, the description of the barn in E.B. White’s *Charlotte’s Web*, Chapter 1. Discuss how the author built this description and how it differs from other descriptions of places they may have read. Talk about the use and type of sentences and ways of making the text cohesive. Talk about the use of literary devices to create description. See pages 271 and 276.
Take the students outdoors and encourage them to select a place (without telling others) that they want to describe. Discuss the role of the senses in creating description. Ask them to think about what they see, hear, smell and so on and write a rich description of their selected place. They share these and note what the writer did to create a rich description.

SEQUENCE 4: LANGUAGE FEATURES

» Select relevant focuses, each of which is to be addressed during separate sessions. Select examples of the specific focuses from model texts. Draw the students’ attention to the specific focus; seek and build on their prior knowledge through discussion, inquiry and so on; and then ask the students to find examples in other texts (published or their own texts). For example, focus on:
  - dialogue
  - voice
  - verb tense and types
  - point of view
  - sentences—types, function, beginnings, structure
  - literary language.

SEQUENCE 5: THE WRITING PROCESS

» Model the writing of a short narrative. This may take a few sessions.
» Show students how to plan plot, characters and setting using a graphic organiser or by brainstorming.
» Model the writing of the lead and the orientation. During the process, you may decide that students can join in to jointly construct the remainder of the narrative.
» Complete the modelled writing sessions ensuring each has a specific focus.
» The students can work with a partner or individually to write a narrative of their own choice from planning to publishing. This will take several sessions. Provide explicit teaching or demonstrations during the process.