EXPLORING INFORMATION NARRATIVES—A SAMPLE UNIT

The following unit is an example of one approach to teaching some aspects of information narratives. It arose from the impending commemoration of ANZAC Day. Most of the unit can be adapted for older or younger students because of the choice of texts. It is assumed that teachers would contextualise the study of information narratives.

**Resources**

**Novel:** French, J. 2009, *The Donkey who Carried the Wounded*, Angus and Robertson, Pymble. A chapter book for experienced readers; also available as an ebook.


**Picture story book:** Greenwood, M. 2008, *Simpson and his Donkey*, Walker Books, Newtown. A simple text for younger readers that provides opportunities to gain information from the written and visual text.


**SEQUENCE 1: PURPOSE OF INFORMATION NARRATIVES**

» Prior to the commencement of this unit ensure that the students have read either the novel—ebook or paper back version (older readers) or the picture story book (younger students). This could have been through read aloud sessions, shared reading or independent reading.

» Review the content of the book and ask students to identify the key events. Plot these along a rough timeline. Visit each event and ask students to list what they found out about it from reading the book. Model how to do the first few. Divide students into small groups and allocate each with specific events to complete and share with the class. Talk about which information might be fact and which might be a result of the author ‘filling in gaps’ with fictional material. Review or introduce the term ‘information narrative’ and seek and build on the students’ knowledge of this text type.

» Refer to Simpson and ask them to write what they learnt about him from the text. They can colour code what they think is fact and what could be fictional.

» Talk about the structure and features of the book they read. Discuss the purposes of each aspect and review these to check and add extra information to the text from the previous activity. For example, the novel has a prologue, story divided into chapters, author’s notes, maps and acknowledgements; the PSB has large illustrations, a small amount of text and end pages with boxes of information and a map.

**SEQUENCE 2: REPRESENTATION IN TEXTS**

» During shared reading context, older students read the web biography of Simpson. A simpler version can be found for younger students.

» Revisit the Simpson profile from the previous session and add or alter information until students are satisfied that only facts are listed. Talk about the difference between a factual text and an information narrative.
» If desired, students can revisit the event timeline and conduct mini research for their specific event and write a short profile.

» During shared reading with older students, read and discuss Smith-White’s poem ‘Simpson and his Donkey’. Talk about the ways different authors represent or respond to the same event. Identify facts in the poem and add these to the profile and event line. Compare and contrast purpose, audience, content, text structure and language features of three texts (novel, biography and poem). Focus the students’ attention on and talk about point of view, perspectives, voice and other decisions writers make during the writing process. Younger or less experienced readers, or other students for whom the poem is unsuitable, can be assisted to focus on point of view by asking them to write as if they were Simpson when he was working with the donkey and then about how they would feel if they had been Simpson or the donkey.

» Ask students to reflect on what they have learnt about writers, writing and writing processes from the last sessions. Students might like to write a personal response to and reflection on any aspect.

SEQUENCE 3: WRITING PROCESS

» Talk about what the authors of the previous texts needed to know and do before writing. Talk about selecting and narrowing the topic, research, planning the narrative and so on.

» Plan for the joint writing of an information narrative based on a significant person, place or event. If appropriate, link to subjects such as Science [e.g. an aspect from biological, physical, earth and space, and chemical sciences; History [e.g. people, places or events in history] or Geography [e.g. peoples, places, events, environments, sustainability].

» If possible read a short factual text about the subject of the intended narrative and list factual information that could be included in it. Model how to take notes.

» Identify further information needs and compile questions to guide students’ research.

» The students can conduct guided research and record their information on a class data chart (see p. 138 for details of this procedure).

SEQUENCE 4: WRITING PROCESS

» Jointly construct a story/event map to show the sequence of events to be included in the narrative. Try to match facts to the appropriate events.

» Jointly create a profile that contains facts about the person or people in the text.

» The students can continue to create character and setting descriptions to include factual information and descriptive devices.

SEQUENCE 5: WRITING PROCESS

» Jointly draft the orientation (or more if time permits) of the information narrative. Focus on the importance of writing a good lead. Encourage the students to think about effective introductions they have read and about what made them so.

» During this and subsequent sessions, the students use the jointly constructed introduction [orientation] and complete the information narrative in small groups over a series of writing sessions. Their finished drafts can be shared with other groups. They can provide guided feedback to their peers and review and edit their texts before publishing in their chosen format.

ICT: Use digital notes for students to record their responses, connections or questions as they read.

ICT: Consider the use of digital graphic organisers during the planning process.