

## Lesson 2 Writer's Journal

### Aim:

How and why should we keep writing journals?

### Do Now:

Prewriting: (in the new journals)

Write the following phrase on your page.

When I say “Go,” you will write for three minutes without stopping. Do not pick up your pen from the page; if your mind goes blank just write “My mind is blank” or whatever words you wish over and over until your mind and senses reopen. The phrase — “On a day when nothing happens, I...”

1. Students respond to the Do-Now, writing for three to five minutes.
2. Have a few students share their responses. You can take notes on their responses on the board, detailing use of description or observation.
3. Explain to students that they have just learned one technique for keeping a writer's journal; this technique can be used when they are stuck or just as an exercise. Then explain that a writer's journal is not a diary; it shouldn't be a list of what the writer did that day. Nor need it include his/her innermost feelings. Rather, it is a place to record observations, practice describing things and people and places, work out thoughts on events or articulate and develop ideas. It can also be the start of a personal essay or memoir.
4. Offer a model of journal writing. You can read an excerpt of your own writing — a personal essay or journal entry that you are willing to share with students. This could be something you have written before or something you write for this exercise; just make sure it is not fictitious. You can also bring in an excerpt from a memoir/personal essay or published journal of a more well-known writer as your model. Emphasize, however, that the model is just one model; they should not feel obligated to copy anyone's style.
5. Use journals for today's writing workshop. Students should write for twenty minutes or so about “A Day” that stands out in their memories or that holds special significance for them. They might continue what they started in the Do-Now or start something new. The day could have been a life-changing event, a day when their eyes were opened to something that had a profound impact on them, or simply be the observations of a day in which nothing in particular “happened.” Stress that all good writing, even non-fiction, is creative, not destructive. Discourage character assassination, in writing and in sharing work.

On the other side, make sure that students feel free to write about the darker side of their lives as well; they may wish to write about someone who hurt them deeply, or about an something of which they are deeply ashamed. Each student should feel free to pick any event as a subject, even if he/she doesn't want to share their writing aloud.

6. Ask students to share what they wrote. You will probably have many students who wish to share, but do not force anyone to share. The idea is to get them comfortable with writing, so you shouldn't make anyone uncomfortable today. Some students may be willing to share if someone else reads their entries. Discuss how students some of the writing techniques students used and asked them to comment on how they used the journal exercises in these first drafts.

### Extensions

- Journal writing is a critical part of the writing process! Encourage your students to write everyday; if possible, provide a few minutes at the beginning of class for journal writing. You can also bring journals on field trips in and outside of school so that students can “take notes” on life.
- Students continue working on their pieces, completing a rough draft, offering it for peer review and then completing a final draft. Celebrate final pieces with a reading and/or student publication.
- Students can study published memoirs as a genre; or select memoirs of authors/ poets/playwrights you've been studying in class. You might ask them to look at similarities and differences in terms of style, content, etc., between journals and more formal writing or between memoirs and fiction/poetry/drama by the same author.