

English Composition II: Narrative Stage

Exercises for the Narrative Essay

By

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Composition Curriculum

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Progymnasmata: Stage Two

Narrative

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Introduction

Narration fits classical Christian education. At the heart of classical education is the belief expressed by Aristotle that we learn best by imitation. Written narration like oral narration is an imitation of the matter under study. When we narrate orally we “tell” back the information verbally. That information may be a chapter in a book being read, a parable, a fable, an essay, or even a single verse in the Bible. In the same way when we do a written narration of a passage we “tell” back the information in writing. In both cases we imitate the original author’s thoughts with possible amplification or reduction.

Narration imitates the ideas in the passage—words, phrases, sentences, or paragraphs. The student must comprehend the meaning of a particular piece of writing, identify the key words or phrases, outline the ideas and then demonstrate his comprehension by rewriting these ideas using his own words in his own composition. Those ideas include not only the terms and thoughts but also the structure and style of the argument or story. Identifying key words and phrases and being able to outline the ideas in the piece are tools to, first, thoroughly understand the meaning of the author, and then, to assist in rewriting the piece in one’s own words and phrases. The student learns to reason and gains one of the “tools of learning,” which is effective written communication through narration.

Narration insures that the student’s writing is driven by ideas rather than vocabulary or style. Focusing on ideas is the foundation for good writing. We use narration to insure our students become good writers and to give them the opportunity to become excellent writers. Good writing is the clear and logical expression of ideas through language. Excellent writing is the clear and logical expression of ideas through brilliant and powerful images. If writing is not clear and logical it cannot be excellent. In fact, writing which is not clear and logical is poor writing. Good writing need not be composed of profound vocabulary or elegant style—those brilliant and powerful images just mentioned. The adroit use of vocabulary and style may mean the difference between a good piece of writing and an excellent piece but without clear, logical thought no amount of cleverness will transform poor writing into good writing. And so we imitate excellent writing through narration, which allows the great authors to become our composition instructors.

This process of imitation through narration differs profoundly from other curricula. The divergence is not a modern phenomenon. Dorothy Sayers identified the absence of imitation as a serious lack fifty years ago. John Milton in his essay “On Education” written in the seventeenth century vigorously complains of the “original” compositions which many schools required grammar students to write. To paraphrase gently Milton called them premature. At bottom the issue is a theological one and has to do with the nature of man. Sinful man seeks autonomy—from God, from neighbor, from the past. Autonomous man believes he is superior to the primitive, ancient cultures, which came before his time. Of course, his time, no matter what century, is always considered progressive, innovative and modern. The whole idea of imitation is abhorrent to autonomous man. He desires to be independent from the past not dependent and connected to it. Consequently, as this worldview enters into the educational arena, independent or autonomous thinking is encouraged by asking students to express their opinions and feelings as if these personal expressions are the basis for learning, reasoning

and truth. However, true reasoning and learning are based not on expressing one's own opinion and thoughts but on the ability to understand the opinions and thoughts of others and to discern whatever truth exists in those other thoughts and opinions. In a more profound way our ability to "discover" any truth is simply the ability to understanding God's opinions and thoughts expressed through Scripture or his Creation. When we read Scripture, our opinions, our independent and autonomous thoughts, are not what matters. Truth does not reside in our opinions but rather in Scripture itself. Our task is to understand and uncover Truth not create it. We must be able to understand the meaning of the author, ultimately God Himself, and to reason how that Truth applies in our lives. Narration, then, teaches through imitation both how to uncover and how to communicate Truth. Our faith truly informs our composition curriculum.

Our educational model is imitative. We should chose imitation over autonomy in our composition instruction, true to the classical spirit of education. Our task is not to innovate or create something new or innovative. We may certainly build upon and improve as we gain confidence and understanding but our initial and primary task is one of restoration. We seek a reformation of composition through imitation. Narration with its imitative nature fits our classical Christian educational model.

Definition of terms

Action—corresponds to the question “what?”

Agent—corresponds to the question “who?”

Cause—corresponds to the question “why?”

Comparative—a statement of comparison.

Copia--a full body or plethora of language which has been internalized and is, as a result, available to the writer.

Declarative—a statement of fact.

Interogative—a question.

Manner—corresponds to the question “how?”

Paraphrase--retelling the fable or narrative in a student’s own words while amplifying through figures of description, rearranging the sequence of events, or changing characters, place, or time.

Place—corresponds to the question “where?”

Progymnasmata*-- pro-gym-nas'-ma-ta from Gk. pro "before" and gymnasmata "exercises". A set of rudimentary exercises intended to prepare students of rhetoric for the creation and performance of complete practice orations (gymnasmata or declamations). A crucial component of classical and renaissance rhetorical pedagogy. Many progymnasmata exercises correlate directly with the parts of a classical oration. These 14 Progymnasmata from Aphthonius are listed below. Similar progymnasmata are grouped together. The exercises are in general sequential.

Fable

Narrative

Chreia

Proverb

Refutation

Confirmation

Commonplace

Encomium

Vituperation

Comparison

Impersonation

Description

Thesis or Theme
Defend / Attack a Law

*(from "Silva Rhetoricae" (<http://humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>))

Time—corresponds to the question “when?”

Figures of Description

Anemographia: Creating an illusion of reality through description of the wind.

Astrothesia: A vivid description of stars.

Chorographia: The description of a particular nation.

Chronographia: Vivid representation of a certain historical or recurring time (such as a season) to create an illusion of reality.

Fourteen more Figures of Description

Teaching Procedure:

1. Teacher reads story to class.
2. Point out an example(s) of Recognition for each story. Ask the students to give examples from the story as well. Be sure they are aware of being drawn into the story through these points of delight. You may have them describe their own experience with these images.
3. Point out any examples of Reversal in the narrative.
4. Have the students narrate the story orally in class. This narration could be done as a group exercise, by calling on individual students, or in small groups.
5. Students identify the six components (Agent, Action, Time, Place, Manner, and Cause) of a narrative and outline the story, making note of Recognition and Reversal.

Eleven More Procedural steps

Grading Sheet

Grade _____

Narrative Title:

Points

Handwriting

_____/5

Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, grammar)

_____/15

Content (story line, sentence and paragraph structure, style)

_____/40

Vocabulary/Diction (word choice)

_____/20

Other requirements:
(Figures of description, dialogue, etc.)

_____/20

Comments:

Lesson 1: Nathan and David (2 Sam 12:1-7 NIV) Ten days

Goal: To equip each student with all the skills necessary to effectively communicate through written composition and to prepare them for Rhetoric.

Purpose: To master the second stage of the Progymnasmata, Narrative, by learning the attributes of brevity, clarity and credibility (D'Angelo, Frank J., *Composition in the Classical Tradition*, page 30). These attributes are learned through the identifying and utilizing the six constituent elements, through paraphrasing by condensing, expanding, altering the sequence of events, and changing the viewpoint, and through utilizing direct and indirect declarative, and interrogative and comparative modes.

To review the skills mastered in Fable.

Objectives:

- Students will listen and read along as the teacher reads the narrative.
- Students will circle or underline key words and phrases as the teacher reads the narrative. The teacher will go over vocabulary with students.
- The teacher will call on individual students to retell the story in their own words or students will pair up and retell the story to one another.
- Students will correctly identify the Agent(s), Action, Time, Place, Manner and Cause on the Worksheet.
- Students will correctly outline the story. They will identify the key events and place them in their proper sequence.
- Students will correctly paraphrase the story by condensing.
- Students will correctly paraphrase the story by expanding including the use of the figures of description **anemographia** and **astrothesia** using their outline and above identifications.
- Students will correctly paraphrase the story by changing the viewpoint with the use of **chorographia** and **chronographia**.
- Students will correctly paraphrase the story by inverting the sequence of events with the use of **dendographia** and **dialogismus**.
- Students will vary phrases or sentences from either the narrative or their own compositions, first in word then in idea. For word variations students will list the word to be varied then the variations. After varying the key words students will go on to vary the idea or ideas of the phrase or sentence.

The Narrative: 2 Sam 12:1-7 (NIV)

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Exercise 1 (110 minutes): Read the story to the class. Point out key words and phrases in the story. Go over vocabulary with students. Have the students narrate the fable orally in class. This can be done as an individual, several individuals, or a group exercise. Alternatively, you may have the students will pair up and retell the story to one another.

Students outline the story.

I. Nathan sent by God to tell David a story

A. Two men, rich and poor

1. Rich man had many sheep and cattle
2. Poor man had only one little ewe lamb
 - a. Bought it
 - b. Raised it with his family
 - 1) It shared his food
 - 2) Drank from his cup
 - 3) Slept in his arms
 - c. Like a daughter to him

B. Rich man gives feast for Traveler

1. Rich man will not feed him his own animals
2. Rich man takes the ewe lamb for dinner

II. David reacts in anger

- A. "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die!"
- B. "He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

III. Nathan speaks judgment, "You are the Man!"

Identify:

Agent(s) (who) ___Nathan and David _____

Action (what) _____Nathan tells David a story _____

Time (when) _____David's reign as King of Israel_____

Place (where) _____David's Palace_____

Manner (how) _____ Nathan engages David's attention and self accusation_____

Cause (why) _____to convict David of his sin with Bathsheba_____

From their outlines have the students expand by using the figures of description **anemographia** and **astrothesia**. **Anemographia** could be used to describe the setting of the story itself or the “story within the story.” The same is true for the use of **astrothesia**. Students who do not finish in class should complete their drafts as homework. Have parents instruct at home for spelling and punctuation.

Exercise 2 (110 minutes): Have the students paraphrase the story through changing the viewpoint (either David's or Nathan's perspective would be logical) and with the use of **chorographia** and **chronographia**. Students who do not finish in class should complete their drafts as homework. Have parents instruct at home for spelling and punctuation.

Exercise 3 (110 minutes): Have the students paraphrase the story through condensing in the following manner. From their copy of the story have students highlight the important words, phrases or whole sentences. Have the students consider eliminating adverbs, adjectives, phrases or clauses then check if the meaning is lost by any such elimination. Have them rewrite the story from their highlighted items and exercise one outline. Dialogue should be converted to direct or indirect declarative.

Example:

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Exercise 4 (110 minutes): Have the students paraphrase the story inverting the sequence of events with the use of **dendographia** and **dialogismus**. Students who do not finish in class should complete their drafts as homework. Have parents instruct at home for spelling and punctuation.

Example:

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

David had burned with anger against this rich man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to be hung from the highest limb of the tallest oak tree (**dendographia**)! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity, even if he says, 'The poor man should be happy to win my favor.' (**dialogismus**)"

David burned with anger because Nathan had just told him this story, "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him. This rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except this one little ewe lamb he had bought. He had raised it, and it had grown up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. These two men, one rich and the other poor, lived in the same town."

Nathan had told this story in obedience to the Lord who had sent him to speak to David.

Exercise 5 (110 minutes): Vary the following phrases or sentences first in word then in idea. For word variations list the word to be varied then the variations. After varying the key words go on to vary the ideas by rewriting the sentence or phrase.

- A. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle.
- B. The poor man raised the little ewe lamb.
- C. The rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep.
- D. David burned with anger against the man.

Example: The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle.

A. Words

rich: wealthy, abundant, powerful, prosperous, etc.

man: landowner, rancher, cattleman, herder, etc.

had: owned, possessed, controlled, etc.

very large: many, numerous, abundant, etc.

number: herd, group, collection, possession, etc.

B. Ideas

The wealthy man owned many a number of sheep and cattle.

The powerful landowner possessed a very large collection of sheep and cattle.

The rich man controlled an abundant number of sheep and cattle.

A very large possession of sheep and cattle were controlled by the powerful man.

Etc.

Worksheet

The Narrative: 2 Sam 12:1-7 (NIV)

The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."

David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."

Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man!"

Identify:

Agent (who) _____

Action (what) _____

Time (when) _____

Place (where) _____

Manner (how) _____

Cause (why) _____

Outline

I. _____

A. _____

1. _____

2. _____

a. _____

b. _____

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

c. _____

B. _____

1. _____

2. _____

II. _____

A. _____

B. _____

III. _____

A. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle.

B. The poor man raised the little ewe lamb.

C. The rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep.