

In Section 1 you saw how the writer of the Student Model reflected on his topic. In this section you will analyze the final draft of his narrative essay. You will learn how to structure your ideas for your own essay.

A Student Model

Read the writing prompt again and answer the questions.

WRITING PROMPT: Choose a significant event in your life that resulted in a change in your view of the world or taught you a lesson.

- 1 What is the prompt asking the writer to do?
- 2 What are some problems a student might have going to school in a new country that he or she did not have at home?

Read the essay twice. The first time, think about your answers to the questions above. The second time, answer the questions in the Analyze Writing Skills boxes. This will help you notice key features of narrative essays.

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How I Became a Mexican American

1 When I was 13 years old, my family – my grandparents, my little sister, and I – moved to the United States from Mexico. I still remember worrying about leaving my lifelong friends behind and having to make new ones in a completely foreign land. My grandparents had made this decision to move, and there was no changing their minds. “Ale, we are moving to make a better life for you and your sister, and you will thank us one day,” they explained. I did not believe them. All I could think was that my grandparents, whom I loved and trusted, were doing something that would be the end of happiness as I knew it. I was sure that I would never forgive them. In my teen years, I lacked perspective,¹ above all, the perspective that comes from looking beyond yourself.

2 As it turned out, I had not even come close to fully **anticipating** how difficult my new life in America would be or how lonely and excluded I would feel. Although I tried to present the **image** of being just another student at my new school, I always felt hopelessly different, especially as there were few Spanish-speaking students in my school and I was ashamed of my difficulties learning English. Oddly, what I found to be most **stressful** was when my grandparents would pick my sister and me up after school. They would be so happy to see us and would greet us very loudly in Spanish. I dreaded that

¹perspective: the ability to consider things accurately and fairly

1 Analyze Writing Skills

What does the writer do in the first paragraph? Circle your answer.

- a gives the situation for the story
- b gives only details about where the story takes place

2 Analyze Writing Skills

In the first paragraph, is the thesis directly stated? Circle your answer.

- a yes
- b no

3 Analyze Writing Skills

Underline all the adjectives in paragraph 2 that the writer uses to help his reader understand his feelings about his situation. Are they positive or negative feelings?

moment at the end of the school day, worried about what my American peers,² who all went home alone, would think. I wanted to ask my grandparents, "Why did you bring us here if you are going to act and speak like we are still in Mexico?" If I had to **adjust** to my new surroundings, why didn't they? After all, they were the ones who had wanted to come here!

3 Although I managed to keep my mouth shut, these questions bothered me until one day when I came home unexpectedly. My grandmother was looking at old pictures from Mexico. For the first and only time in my life, I saw her sobbing. My grandfather's arms were around her and he patted her hair. I stayed out of sight but overheard her telling my grandfather, "I miss them all so much – Diego, Isa, Hector, all the rest of our family. I miss the whole town; I miss Luz, Mercedes, and all my old friends, the house that you built and that we lived in so many years, my garden ..." My grandfather was trying to comfort her. "My love," he told her, "Always remember that we did this so that our grandchildren can have the **security** of a bright future." An overwhelming sense of shame washed over me. "How could I have been so selfish as to be ashamed of them at school and even at home?" I wondered. I had only thought of how the move to the United States had affected me. **In the case of** my grandparents, who had spent such long lives in Mexico, it had been much harder.

4 Suddenly, I gained a new perspective on my situation. I began to understand the **complexity** of my grandparents' lives and the sacrifices they had made and were making for me and my sister and we never knew. Through all their difficulties, they always smiled, made us laugh, and gave us hope about the future. My sister and I had been given a gift from our grandparents. That was it. I decided right then and there to make the most of it. My worries over struggling to speak English like my peers were replaced with an **ambition** to work my hardest to repay my grandparents for what they had done. This hard work paid off more quickly than I had imagined possible in my learning English fluently and feeling more comfortable in my new homeland.

²peers: people of the same age, social position, or abilities

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4 Analyze Writing Skill

- a In which paragraph does the character gain a new understanding?
3 4
- b Which paragraph describes the event that helps the character gain this understanding?
3 4

5 Analyze Writing Skill

Good writers vary the length and structure of their sentences to make their writing interesting. Underline the subject of each of the first three sentences of paragraph 4. Do all the sentences begin with the subject?
Yes No

5 Recently, my grandparents had their fortieth anniversary, and I planned a special surprise party for them. The party was a complete success, and I made sure that our family and our American friends ate the traditional Mexican food and listened to the traditional Mexican music that my grandparents still loved so much. In this and many other ways, I have tried to repay my grandparents **over the course of** the last several years. Sometimes it is only later that we understand we are being given a gift and can see that the gift is much bigger than even the giver could have realized.



6 Analyze Writing
 What lesson or message does the writer want to convey from this story? Circle your answer.
 a Understanding and appreciating other people's situations help us see our own situation in a better, more positive way.
 b If you adjust to a new culture and get to know people from that culture, you can be a better, happier person.

ACTIVITY 3.1 Check Your Understanding

Answer the questions.

- 1 How did the writer change? What caused the change, and what positive consequences did it have for the writer?
- 2 What is the significance of the party scene in the last paragraph?
- 3 What are some other problems people might have to overcome when they move to a new culture or go to school in a new culture?

ACTIVITY 3.2 Outline the Writer's Ideas

Complete the outline for "How I Became a Mexican American" using the phrases in the box.

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| grandparents' greeting at school | new opportunities and new perspective |
| lacked perspective | sacrifices for grandchildren |
| looking at old pictures and crying | new perspective |