“**Nothing but the driven raps written in my notebook**

**Inspired by the cap and the gown, that's on the coat hook**

…

Associate with those who are consumed with beats

Produce fire, until they melt the room with heat

You know my ink lay all over the sheets, let us/letters gather around

And form words, every time they meet” GZA “Alphabets”

**Literacy Narrative Assignment[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**Purpose:** To use personal experience as evidence to make a claim. More specifically, to use events, people, and experiences as evidence to build a broader, significant argument about what shaped your feelings and ideas about reading and writing

**Audience:** Myself, your instructor, and your classmates. This audience requires that you think about the backgrounds, beliefs, values, and characteristics of those to whom you are writing in order to determine the tone, word choice, direction, and depth of explanation offered in your essay.

**Pre-Writing: Finding Your Focus**

“Your life is dependent on your relationship with words,” young adult author Jason Reynolds speaking to Trevor Noah of *The Daily Show.*

Try to recall a moment in your life when literacy (speaking, reading, writing) had a significant impact on your life. Answer the following questions to get you thinking:

* What is your earliest memory of reading and writing?
* How did you learn to read and write? Did you ever teach anyone else to read or write?
* Who encouraged you to read and write?
* What events interrupted and/or slowed down your ability and/or desire to read and write?
* Did you apply literacy skills to other content areas: sports, music, video games, etc.?
* What kinds of reading have you done in your past and what kinds of reading to you do now?
* What teachers had a particular impact on your reading and writing?
* What assignments had a particular impact on your reading and writing?
* Have different schools or other institutions had an impact on your reading and writing?
* How do you currently feel about reading and writing?
* What rewards have come from reading and writing?
* Did a special or important event from your past make you the reader and/or writer you are today?
* Was there a moment or moments that were especially empowering?
* Did you ever read a book or poem or song that made sense to you beyond the words on the page?

**Moving from Prewriting to Exploratory Drafting**

Once you have generated material write about, it’s time to start thinking about how to organize it and begin writing an exploratory draft of your literacy narrative.

Rather than telling readers everything about your literacy history, **sort through your prewriting material and find the events and people that feel most significant to you** as you seek to explain the origins and development of your current feelings about reading and writing, and focus your draft on them.

As you consider what all these memories and experiences suggest, you should be looking for an overall “so what?” – a main theme, a central “finding,” an overall conclusion that your consideration leads you to draw.

It might be an insight about why you read and write as you do today based on past experience. It might be an argument about what works and what doesn’t work in literacy education, on the basis of your experience.

It might be a resolution to do things differently or to *keep* doing something that has been working.

It might be a description of an ongoing tension or conflict you experience when you read and write—or the story of how you resolved such a conflict earlier in your literacy history.

You could:

* Tell the story of your development from your earliest memories to later ones with the goal of explaining where your current attitudes about reading and writing came from. Along the way, highlight the most significant turning points of your history.
* Choose materials from your pre-writing that reveal the role that a person or type of person played in your literacy development.

Now’s the time to explore your literacy history to figure out what it means to you. So experiment and see what you can say about your experiences; don’t worry too much about getting it clean and polished.

**Requirements:**

* 3-5 pages.
* MLA formatted (unless we agreed on another style during our conference).
* Pay careful attention to voice, style, detail, and description, matching these choices to your intended rhetorical effect.
* Use your best “read like a writer” (Bunn) techniques from previously assigned reading.
* Tell your story very carefully, selecting the right details, pacing, and wording.
* Be sure to connect your story to a larger argument you wish to make about people, circumstances, society, education, language, etc.
* Work towards writing something new, interesting, and relevant.
* Go beyond a re-telling of the story into a construction of an important argument/truth.

**Literacy Narrative Scoring Criteria**

* Narrative contains moments of compelling argumentation (through explicit reflection or implied through story events) regarding listening, reading, writing, speaking and/or another aspect of language.
* Narrative is sophisticated in thought and communicates unique ideas.
* Narrative contains strategic moments of rich detail and in-scene writing that contribute to the argument and rhetorical effect.
* Key moments of the narrative are evenly and sufficiently developed throughout.
* Narrative is appropriate for an audience of first year writing students.
* Narrative is well-organized with strategic transitions between ideas.
* If outside sources are incorporated, they are done so smoothly to enhance the argument and adhere to MLA guidelines for citation (see me if MLA style does not match the style of your writing).
* Narrative answers the “so what?” question.
* Literacy Narrative includes a reflective cover letter explaining how the author made decisions about the writing, and an evaluation of the Literacy Narrative genre—was this a meaningful writing experience for you? Is this similar or different from other kinds of academic writing you have done in the past, and to what effect? Has this writing experience affected your understanding of the connection between language and identity?

Important Dates

* \_\_\_\_\_\_: Prewriting Assignment, 1 page in length, double-spaced
* \_\_\_\_\_\_: Rough draft due
* \_\_\_\_\_\_: Peer review in class
* \_\_\_\_\_\_: Typed peer review letters due for each person in your group
* \_\_\_\_\_\_: Final literacy narrative essay due (including drafts, peer review letters from peers, and your reflective cover letter)

1. Some assignment ideas and language taken from “College Reading and Writing @ UNE: Literacy Narrative Assignment” and “Macmillan English Community Forum: Literacy Narrative Assignment Sheet” websites [↑](#footnote-ref-1)