

Name: _____

Historical Narratives

Does a picture speak a thousand words? If so, what does it say? This semester, that is for you to decide!

Over the course of the semester you will have the opportunity to write numerous short historical narratives (500-1,000 words) that correspond to historical photographs related to the time period we are studying in class. Historical narratives form a part of a larger project, **In 1,000 Words**, in which we will analyze historical photographs and films, as well as create history by taking and developing photographs of the present that reflect our current experiences and perspectives. As the project progresses, you will be introduced to the details of the other components. Below is a general list of a few of the main components:

1. Analysis of Photographs & Films (seeing through the lens of others)
 - a. Photographs accompanied by written narratives. At the end of the semester, our most well written narratives will be improved and combined into a chapbook.
 - b. Films will require a written review.
2. Analysis of Historical Fiction (examining how history is portrayed by authors).
 - a. Book Clubs & Written Review
3. Production, development (through chemical processes), and analysis of a series of photographs that examine a variety of contemporary themes (documenting history through your own lens). We will begin by examining themes through the AJA project, and later delve into other themes of interest. We will exhibit some of our photographs and narratives near the end of the semester.
 - a. Development of a series of photographs.
 - b. Creation of an artist portfolio of photographs.
 - c. A 1,000 word essay regarding final photograph assignment (written and audio recorded).

What is a historical narrative?

According to UCLA's National Center for History in the Schools, "one of the defining features of historical narratives is their believable recounting of human events. Beyond that, historical narratives also have the power to disclose the intentions of the people involved, the difficulties they encountered, and the complex world in which such historical figures actually lived."

WriteExperience characterizes a narrative as "a piece of writing that recreates an experience through time" whether it be your own past or present experience, or that of someone else.

Beyond sharing a story, a narrative typically "communicates a main idea or a lesson learned."

In order to write a historical narrative, you will need to step into the shoes of people from the past in order to see through the eyes (lens) of others. You will need to empathize with the individuals involved, and not judge or make assumptions based on the norms and values of contemporary society. This requires creativity and imagination. At the same time, you still need to make sure that the narrative is well written, that it captures the audience's attention, and that is historically relevant.

Planning

In order to write your own narrative you will first want to think about major themes:

1. What is the experience you are going to write about?
 - a. Who are the characters? What are their characteristics, strengths, and weaknesses?
 - b. Where does it take place?
 - c. When does the event take place?
 - d. What happened before this event took place? How might this be relevant?
 - e. Outline the series of events that takes place before and during the event (be as detailed as possible).
2. Why is this experience important?
3. From what perspective will the story be told? How is this relevant?

Once you have your outline written, try and go into detail about each part of your narrative. Use vivid details and descriptions that allow you to recreate the experience for your audience. Even details that seem irrelevant are not necessarily known to your readers, given that this may be the only knowledge they have of the event.

Writing

Title - You historical narrative needs to have a title; it should be catchy and relevant – something that catches the reader’s eye.

Structure – Chronological approach (linear) or flashback (a.k.a. non-linear).

Introduction – There are a couple of ways to go about writing your introduction. In part, it depends what structure you choose for your narrative. You could start off by introducing the significance of the narrative to your audience, hooking them and allowing them to see this significance repeat itself again and again throughout the narrative. The second option is to just start off by “hooking” your audience, drawing them in with an interesting dialogue or particular event and then unravel the significance of the narrative slowly over the course of the story.

A few important points -

- Narratives are often written in the first person, but can also be written from the third person. For example, Langston Hughes’ narrative was written in the first person, while Virginia Woolf’s is told from the third person.
- You don’t have to tell your reader directly what your message is, rather let them experience it (see next bullet about how to do this).
- Narratives are written using vivid, sensory (seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting, touching) details, which collectively leave a strong impression. The reader should “experience” the event, not just read about it. You don’t want to give so many details that it leaves no room for imagination, but your narrative should be detailed and descriptive.
- Like other stories, narratives should have a plot, include information about the setting and the characters, have a climax, and an ending.

Historical Relevance - given that your narrative is historical and refers to a period of time that we are examining, you need to assure that your narrative is historically relevant. What does that mean? It means that your narrative needs to include information that situates the narrative in the time, place, and with characters that make the narrative believable for the historical time period you are writing about.

Revising your Narrative

It is important to revise your own narrative. Does it communicate the details and the overall message you hope to communicate to your readers? Where can you add details and descriptions? Is your narrative well organized? Is there anything you can remove that is superfluous?

Each unit, you will write a number of different narratives. The process of photo analysis and investigation will be worth 15 points and the final narrative will be worth 35 points. The final will be assessed on the following rubric:

	7	6	5	4 – 1
Composition	The final narrative is structured coherently. The narrative flows very well from beginning to end.	The final narrative is coherent, but is choppy in places and / or could be improved by reordering some of the components.	The final narrative shows that attention has been made to the composition, but the ordering and / or flow of the narrative is hard to follow in more than a few places.	The narrative has some to no structure, making it is challenging to following and / or jumps from one thing to another with little to no transition.
Theme/ Message	The author's theme / message is clear. The message is either stated in the beginning or unraveled by the end to leave the reader with a clear understanding of the author's perspective and intended message.	The author's theme is evident, but either could be improved by leaving more room for imagination or by putting greater emphasis on the message.	The author's theme is stated, however, is either not particularly evident throughout the document or is highly over-emphasized, taking away from the reader's use of imagination.	The author's theme is not clear. Either, the theme is not stated, or there appears to be an incoherent theme.
Use of creative & descriptive language	Creative and descriptive language is used throughout the narrative. The language allows for the reader to "experience" the event, but leaves some room for imagination.	The author uses creative and descriptive language in many places in the narrative. Many of the narratives sections can be "experienced" by the reader, but some areas of improvement are needed.	The author uses some creative and descriptive language, but the narrative would be significantly improved with the use of greater detail and description. Or, the author uses so many details that it interrupts the narrative.	The author uses little to no descriptive language, making it hard for the reader to "experience" the narrative.
Historical Relevance / Accuracy	The narrative is strongly rooted in the historical context. Characters, setting, theme, and dialogue represent the authors understanding of the historical time period.	The narrative incorporates a significant amount of historically relevant information with few areas in need of additional attention or research.	The narrative includes some historically relevant information, but lacks some key relevant information, which takes away from the "believability" of the narrative.	The narrative includes little to no historically relevant information.
Writing Conventions	The final product reflects careful revision and attention to detail. Few to no punctuation, spelling, or grammar mistakes are found which allows the reader to become fully immersed in the dialogue.	The final product is well written. Some revision is evident, but a handful of punctuation, spelling or grammar mistakes distract the reader from engaging fully in the narrative.	The final product shows little to no revision prior to submission, or despite revision continues to include numerous punctuation, spelling and/or grammar mistakes.	The final product has many grammar, punctuation, and spelling mistakes. The final product does not demonstrate it has been thoroughly revised.

For the first narrative, we will be writing about the photographs you analyzed about “Chinese Migration” to the United States. Given this is our first narrative, we will work at a slower pace, segmenting the process so that we can discuss and receive more feedback. The first narrative should not be more than 500 words (2 pages double spaced). Typically, we will analyze photographs on Thursdays, you’ll turn in a rough draft on Monday, and a final draft on Tuesday.

For this first narrative (with some flexibility, given we have testing) we will operate on the following schedule:

1. Answer planning questions & write introduction (2/2-2/3)
2. Have a partial draft by 2nd period of class 2/4 for peer review. We will have some time in class on Friday to write. We’ll all print our drafts in class to have peer reviewed. It can be a work in progress, but must show you have moved forward!
3. Revised and polished draft due on Monday (printed out before class). A good idea would be to finish the draft by at least Saturday, sleep on it, then review it on Sunday.

When we have all of our narratives, you will have the opportunity to go back and improve your best one.