

# LESSON PLAN

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## Personal Narrative Essay

*In this lesson, T&W teaching artist [Olivia Birdsall](#) invites students to select a topic for a Cause-Effect/Before-After essay, and instructs them to describe the changes they observed in themselves via specific, vivid description (SHOWING) instead of general summary (TELLING).*

**Grade(s) Taught:** 11th–12th

**Genre(s) Taught:** Personal narrative essay

**Common Core State Standards:**

(Refer to the [English Language Arts Standards > Writing > Grade 11–12](#))

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

**Guiding Questions:**

What is a cause? What is a catalyst? What is an effect?

What is a “positive change”? What changes have you experienced in your life?

How have you changed in the last three years? What was the catalyst for those changes?

What is the difference between showing and telling?

How can/do our actions reveal our character?

What actions have you taken to SHOW that you have changed?

## LESSON

**Introduction/warm-up activity:**

- Ask students to write out three examples of how they are different now than they were on their first day of high school. NOTE: You may want to distribute the Personal Narrative Essay worksheet to help students generate ideas, or hold that for later in the lesson.
- Invite students to share some of their self-observations with the class. As they share their observations, encourage them to give examples of behavior, or actions that demonstrate the changes they have identified. See if they can also articulate how they used to think/ behave/act before the changes took place.

- Discuss WHY these changes occurred. Define CATALYST, CAUSE, EFFECT. Discuss the standard structure of the before and after essay; i.e., describe how you were before the change, describe the catalyst/cause for your change, describe yourself after the change.

### **Main activity:**

- Distribute and read aloud (or ask a student to read aloud) [“A Home Destroyed,”](#) a personal narrative essay by Nina, a student applying to Johns Hopkins University.
- Discuss how Nina SHOWS her changes rather, than just telling about them.
- Briefly address the senior assistant director of admissions’ comment and how Nina was able to write about something very personal that had a larger universal theme.
- Ask students to select an important change in their lives/character as a topic.
- Students brainstorm ideas for their cause-effect/before-after essays using the [Personal Narrative Essay worksheet](#).
- Have students write a descriptive paragraph for the BEFORE or CATALYST/CHANGE section of their essay.

### **Closing:**

- 2–3 students share and receive commentary on their descriptive paragraphs.

### **Materials:**

- Sample essay: [“A Home Destroyed”](#)
- [Personal Narrative Essay worksheet](#)

### **Vocabulary:**

Catalyst, cause, effect, showing, telling, description