

Writing the *Analysis through Narrative Essay*

This two – three page essay assignment encourages students to move into the realm of higher-order thinking by challenging them to draw conclusions about the value of a personal experience.

Most of us can easily recall the facts surrounding a memory of a summer vacation or the first day of work at an after school job. In turn, most of us can communicate those facts in writing in the order in which they happened; however, it is far more difficult to examine and explain what impact key experiences in our lives have had on us. How have they shaped us and influenced our behavior or perspective today?

This form of thinking, often referred to as critical reflection, has long been a valuable tool for analyzing experience and questioning its usefulness as it contributes to one’s personal growth. Centuries ago, Socrates noted, “the unexamined life is not worth living.” And, centuries later, American essayist, Henry David Thoreau, retreated to the tranquil surroundings of Walden Pond where he, in his words, wished “to front only the essential facts of life . . . and see if I could not learn what it had to teach.” Yet, we have moved into an age in which distractions—social media, television, video games---often prevent us from mentally processing our experiences so that we might benefit from the learning opportunities they provide.

One Student’s Experience with the Analysis through Narrative Essay

In her essay below, **Faith Scheidemantle**, considers how her love of running has not only shaped her perspective of the world, but how others perceive her.

I Am Well-Loved Shoes

A cool breeze blows lazily through the early morning air as hundreds of runners nervously wait for the deafening blow of the official’s starter pistol. This year brings forth a new group of runners; nevertheless, many familiar faces can still be spotted within the sea of multicolored uniforms. I stand on the golf course surrounded by screaming fans and I think, “Welcome to state cross country.” All four years of my high school career, my dad and I have gone to the MSHSAA State Cross Country meet. When I first joined my high school cross country team, I never would have imagined that it would become such a big part of my life. As I continued to participate in cross country, I started to identify myself through the sport. In our modern American culture, people are encouraged to pursue their individual identity through their passion for something bigger than themselves. My involvement in cross country has helped shape my identity in American society.

It is common for high school to be viewed as a time for people to discover their true identity. It is a time to mature and change into a young adult that will meet society’s high standards. Students are expected to leave high school with IQs as high as Albert Einstein’s and ambitions as farfetched as ruling the world. While reaching our full potential, we are also expected to find our place in the small society within high school. My freshman year, I found a

place where I could fit in among the hundreds of teenagers in the school. I had discovered a new passion that would teach me countless things about myself throughout my high school career.

Pushing through the gym doors, I remember the butterflies exploding inside my stomach. It was my first day of practice, and we were meeting in the gym to stretch before running. The returning athletes viewed me with cautious suspicion as I joined their stretches. I felt like a gazelle being watched by a pride of hungry lions; I was the fresh meat. It was not until we actually started running that I realized that I really belonged with this group of people. With a thin layer of sweat forming on my skin, I started to keep pace with one of the older girls. She seemed like the friendliest and fastest of my predators, so I thought running with her would be the best plan. After that first day of practice, it was clear that I would love to become a part of the team. At the time, I did not realize that joining the team would become a defining part of my future.

My high school cross country career passed by in a blur of laughter, sweat, tears, and medals. Teenage girls, many clad in tiny shorts and sleeveless tops, gathered nervously behind the white line that had been poorly painted onto the grassy surface. This arrangement quickly became a familiar occurrence in my life. The spectators were beginning to gather along the sides of the course, waiting for people to run past, so they could scream out their random nonsense. Part of me knew that this was the last race of my high school career, but another part of me refused to accept it. I had come a long way since the day I pushed through the gym doors to meet my new teammates. I had developed from a scared gazelle into a fierce lioness. With each new practice and race, I discovered that I was very passionate about running. After my final race, salty tears streamed down my forlorn face. I thought back to all of the times that cross country had taught me something new about myself. It taught me that I am a fighter who never surrenders and a leader who carries her team with her through challenges; however, most importantly, it taught me that I am a runner. The overwhelming amount of sadness I felt after realizing my cross country career was over made it obvious that cross country had made a huge impact on my life.

Somewhere in Camdenton, an old man opened his newspaper and his crinkly face creased into a smile when he saw the young girl running across the page. "Scheidemantle Makes History at District Meet" exclaimed the headline. This random man has no idea who I am, but he was happy for me because of my accomplishments. There are some people who only know the media perception of me; I am that girl from the newspaper who runs track or something. As I look at my own face printed on the black and white pages of a local newspaper, I realize one important factor: this is who I am. I am the strong, dedicated runner that peers back at every individual who opens the newspaper. Without even realizing it, I had created an identity for myself through my passion for running. People who do not really know me still know that I am a successful cross country runner. Cross country has become a permanent part of how people perceive my identity in society.

It makes sense that people would perceive me in this way. All four years of my high school career, my dad and I have attended the state cross country meet. Shirtless teenage boys

run around with their chests painted in their school colors. A million different personalities are mixed together on one golf course. We are all there for the same purpose: to support cross country. The sport has become a defining part of our lives, and we choose to let it remain that way. Every year, we lace up our own running shoes and drive to Jefferson City. We want to witness the greatest runners in our state competing against each other. Cross country is our passion; every runner at the meet can identify themselves through their love for the sport.

In our modern American society, it is very common for people to be identified through their passions. Many people can easily identify themselves through their love for a sport. Old, torn up running shoes with mud stains and frayed laces are something that I can always associate with distance running. Miles and miles of open road on a rainy Saturday morning is an image that describes the thrill of running perfectly. So whether people think of old tennis shoes or rainy mornings when they think of me, I like to imagine that all aspects of cross country tie into my identity. I am a runner; all of the amazing experiences I have while running make me the individual that I am today. I can relate to waking up at the crack of dawn to chase the sunset because that is a part of my identity. I have become so passionate about running that I have started to identify myself through all of the aspects of the sport. I am no longer just another high school girl; I am a cross country runner.

As I lace up my shoes to go for an early morning run, I do not worry about what people will think of me while I am running down the street. Who is that girl in the bright yellow shirt with the ponytail bobbing behind her? To society, I am just another tiny speck on the face of this earth, but I have found a place where I belong. My favorite part about identifying myself with running is that most of my identity is locked away in my own head and heart. Watching the sun rise above the trees in the early morning hours or witnessing the heat rise off the pavement in the late afternoon are parts of my life that are kept entirely for me. The world gets a glimpse of who I am; they see the expensive running shoes and the newspaper headlines, but they do not see the best parts. Society misses out on the music playing in my head and the bizarre thoughts in my mind. I am free like a bird soaring through the sky. Society gives everybody an identity; we become the activities that we love. Although, if I am early mornings, well-loved shoes, GPS watches, and back roads, then I am proud of who society seems to think I am. I am a runner, so that is how society should choose to label me.

When students submit the final copy of this two – three page essay, their instructors expect to find the following:

- a thesis that makes a judgment about the value of the experience
- a detailed paragraph or two that describes the experience
- paragraphs that explore and explain the learning or insight gained from the experience
- a conclusion that confirms the judgment identified in the thesis
- If sources are used, compliance with the MLA or APA format for documentation.