



Teaching Listening and Speaking: Using Pictures to Promote Agency

by [*Neda Sahranavard*](#)

Using students' backgrounds and identities to acknowledge and promote their agency helps teachers create a community of learners in their classes where the process of teaching and learning is personalized. It also creates strong bonds among students as they feel accountable, which boosts student motivation, participation in the activities, and retention.

The following lesson plan is a narrative journal assignment for students with advanced English proficiency, but it can be adapted for different teaching contexts, skill area classes, and proficiency levels. I use this in my academic English oral communication courses to train international teaching assistants in becoming effective public speakers. It starts with writing narrative journals and moves to creating and presenting effective presentations.

The main focus of the lesson plan is telling factual stories by using students' personal pictures to promote their agency. This lesson plan involves students' backgrounds and identities to create a professional learning community of multilingual, multicultural, and multidisciplinary international teaching assistants and acknowledge the agency of the learners/scholars.

Journal Writing: Describe Your Picture(s) Creatively

Duration: 3 sessions, each 80 Minutes

Language Skills: Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking

Materials and Technology: Laptop (or cellphone), internet, learning management system (LMS), students' selected pictures, projector

Objectives

- Writing a personal story creatively based on a picture
- Describing a familiar event in writing using descriptive language
- Reading creative nonfiction stories
- Analyzing stories and pictures while thinking critically
- Working collaboratively with a partner/class
- Describing and presenting a story in front of an audience
- Listening to stories and getting to know peers

Outcomes

Students will be able to

- write personal stories using descriptive language.
- read and listen effectively for key elements and supporting details.
- organize ideas to create and present effective presentations.
- present and describe a factual story.
- use communicative resources and strategies.
- use intelligible academic English.
- listen to stories to learn about their classmates' personal and cultural backgrounds.

Procedure

Session One

Warm-Up

- Bring some pictures (from any resource; see Figure 1 for examples) and ask students to create stories for those pictures.
- Ask students to share their stories orally in groups.

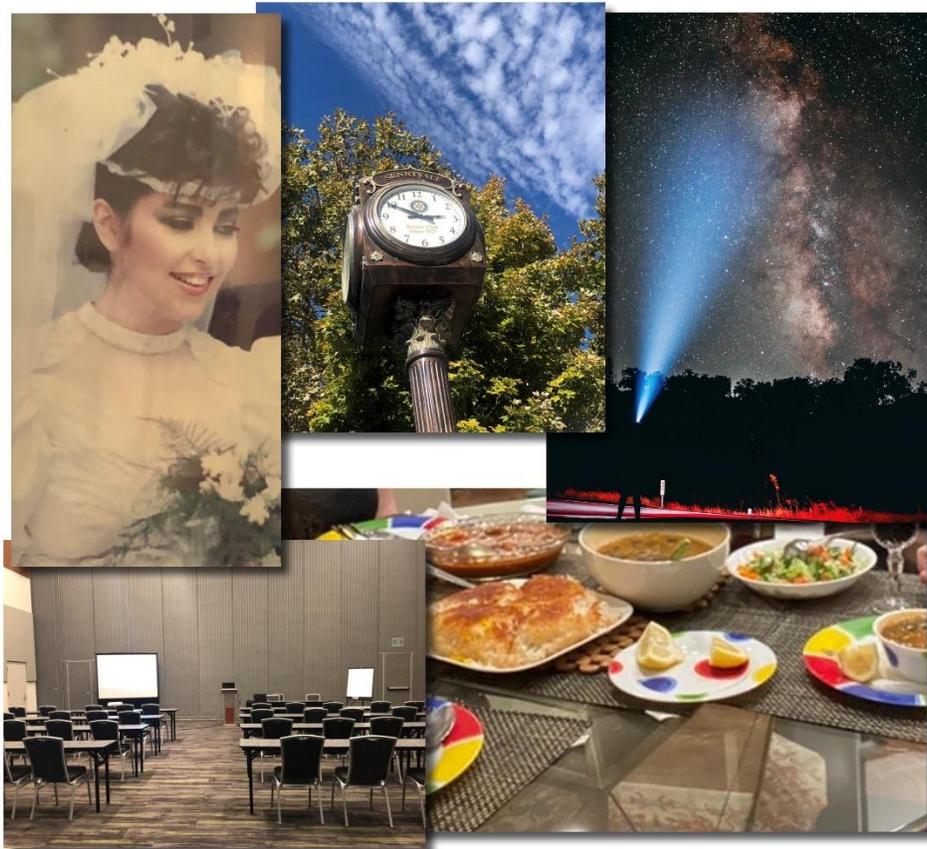


Figure 1. Example photos for students to create stories.

Instruction

- Teach journal writing. For some great tips on journal writing, see “[Journal Writing Tips: The Benefits of Freewriting](#)”
- Teach descriptive language and use some examples. For guidance, see “[Descriptive Writing – Strategies for Teaching](#)”
- Ask students to select a picture from their social media account or from a childhood album.

Assignment

- Assign students to write a journal entry and tell the story reflected/implied in the pictures by reimagining the time they took that picture. (Because this is a journal-writing assignment, the length of the journals depends on the students’ stories.)
- Ask students to use descriptive language describing the unique features of the picture that reveal an aspect of their identity.
- Assign students to post their pictures and stories to the discussion board on your LMS.
- Ask each student to select a story from their peers’ responses. Each student should post a message on the LMS mentioning their selected story so other students do not select that particular story.
- Ask students to review the Reading the Story handout (Appendix A) before they read their selected stories, and then complete the handout as they read.
- Ask students to post the handout to the LMS.

Session Two

Warm-Up

- Brainstorm some verbal and nonverbal public-speaking strategies, resources, and techniques, such as facial expression, body language, pauses, pitch, volume, and intonation.

Instruction

- Discuss techniques and resources that students can use to speak effectively in front of an audience.
- Share a video of an effective speaker and ask students to take notes about the strength of the speaker’s speaking skills. [TED Talks](#) offer great videos for examples, and you can easily find something suitable on YouTube; [this video](#) of then President Obama giving a commencement address is excellent, as it models the use of gestures, facial expressions, pauses, and humor to retain audience attention. Show students several minutes of a video and have them watch the rest at home.
- Ask students to use their notes and discuss the strength of the talk and the speaker in groups.
- Ask groups to share their ideas with the class.

Assignment

- Ask students to use their completed Reading the Story handout and prepare a 2-minute presentation sharing the story of their classmate with the class.

- For homework, have students create a Presentation Notecard (Appendix B) to practice for their presentation.
- For homework, have students create an electronic poster using the Poster Presentation Template (Appendix C) and post it to the LMS to use on the day of presentation.
- Share and go over the rubric you will use to grade students' presentation (Appendix D).

Session Three

Warm-Up

- Remind students that they will be graded based on the rubric (Appendix D).
- Ask a volunteer to keep the time for presenters.

Instruction

- Remind students that they have 2 minutes to present their poster and introduce their classmates.

Assignment/Assessment

- Ask students to present their posters (based on the Poster Presentation Template, Appendix C) in front of the class.
- Project each presenter's poster as they present.
- Grade students' presentation.

Student Examples

Following are a few examples of student work from my class.



What makes us happy? Some people might say it comes from a relationship with friends or family. I would like to say it also comes from what you are really excited about.

Odaiba is an artificial island in Tokyo Bay, Japan. This district is made for pleasure cruising, shopping, and seaside activities. It holds shopping halls, technology museums, and an iconic bridge called the rainbow bridge. No one

has attempted to hold music festivals here, whereas several food festivals are annually held such as Oktoberfest, a beer festival originating from Germany.

Seashore needs music. Jazz was appropriate since it originates from the New Orleans, located along the Mississippi River in the united states. We organized the largest student jazz festival here since we wanted to bring the flavor of jazz to the seashore. I helped a project since I was interested in how we could change the atmosphere of the artificial island.

In addition to the work for the festival, I belonged to a jazz band for playing here. I wanted to be a part of the group delivering a sound to the bay area. My decisions brought me to the busiest time in my life; yes, of course, that has made all the difference.

About 80 student jazz bands played jazz with different playing styles and passions like different colors on a canvas palette. Although my memory is getting blurry as time goes by, my satisfaction still remains clear with smiles looking like every kind of flowers in front of a flower shop.



This photo was taken 4 years ago when I had my first-time experience of riding in a hot air balloon. I was doing my master in New York City back then and had a quite amount of leisure time during the weekend. Every year around October, my friends and I tried to come up with some places to go to see the foliage (red leaves). In that year, we decided to go on a hot air balloon tour and see the red leaves from a different perspective. So, we searched

online and found a place with a reasonable price and beautiful view.

Even though it took about 10-12 hours' drive for the round-trip and we had to get up at 3am to be able to see the sunrise, I'd say it's totally worth it. The view is breathtaking. There were about 10 people on the balloon viewing and sharing the beautiful scene. Before the balloon took off, I thought I would be scared by the height. But surprisingly, I was addicted to the views in front of my eyes and totally forgot about being scared.

After I moved to California, I spent most of my weekends at studying and rarely had any chances to go outside and enjoy the beauty of the nature. I am getting used to the current lifestyle and doing research makes me happy from a different dimension. But still, when I am looking at the photos that took several years ago when I traveled around the States, I miss my time.



A photo that was taken two years ago and posted on Instagram and VK, I name "Russian Grand Canyon". Not everyone can immediately figure out a trick behind this photo, and someone can't believe that it is in Russia, but it actually is. Before I spill the beans about the secret of the photo, I'll give you some information about the background and preceding events.

Several years ago, I started to work in a company as an electrical engineer. Most of the coworkers in my team were the same age as me, and we soon got along pretty well. We spend a lot of time together not only in the office but outside, as well. One of our customs was to go camping on the beach, which locates a one-hour drive from Saint-Petersburg, several times every summer. It was unforgettable, we encountered together good and bad weather conditions, happy and sad moments, new experiences and difficulties of camping, and so on.

Once my friend and I were coming back to the camp from the volleyball court, which was on the nearby part of the beach. To get to the camp we had to cross a narrow stream, that comes out of the forest and flows into the bay, dividing the long beach into two parts. When we reached the stream and leaped over it, I stopped and realized that I had just seen something amazing. I came back to see it again and focused on the shore of the stream. Choosing an appropriate point of view, I found it astonishing and immediately took a photo to share with everyone.

On this photo, you can see one-foot-height sand shore of the narrow stream, which looks gorgeous on the macro photo. This shot reveals my trait of paying attention to details and find interesting things that might be camouflaged or hidden in plain sight. I hope some of you find it attractive.

Conclusion

This lesson plan gave my students an opportunity to feel comfortable in class and about their personal and cultural backgrounds and express their ideas and feelings. After the presentations, I realized that my students found it less challenging to take a stand and express their ideas. My class turned into collaborative communities that facilitated participation, group work, and growth.

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Reading the Story

Directions

Please select one story from your classmates' stories posted on the LMS discussion board and read it. Answer the following questions based on your knowledge about your classmate as you read the story.

The story belongs to (classmate's name): _____

Your classmate's major of study: _____

Copy and paste their picture here:

Insert Your Classmates' Picture

Before Reading the Story

- Look at the picture and guess what the story will be about. Why do you think so? What do you infer about your classmate?

- What would you like to know about your classmate? Why?

As You Read the Story

List the important/major elements of the story you are reading:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

After Reading the Story

What did you learn about your classmate? List your responses here:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Presentation Notecard

Directions

Please list the most important elements of your classmate's story:

Major Elements

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

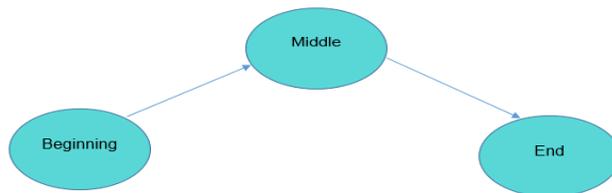
Supporting Details

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

How does the picture of your classmate help you know them better? List your responses:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Create a diagram for the story you read based on the following diagram:



Poster Presentation Template

Your Classmate's Name

Your Classmate's Country of Origin

Language(s) Your Classmate Speaks

Your Classmate's Major of Study

Any Other Interesting Information About Your Classmate

Insert Your Classmate's Picture

List the Major Elements of Your Classmate's Story

Your Name and Date

Rubric

Presenter's Name: _____

Adherence to the Assignment	Points
Had a journal and a picture posted to the LMS	_____/10
Had a poster and posted it to the LMS	_____/10
Stayed within the time limit	_____/10
Content and Organization of the Presentation	Points
Introduction: Introduced the classmate	_____/10
Body: Presented the classmate's story	_____/10
Conclusion: Shared what the presenter learned about their classmate's personality, culture, and discipline	_____/10
Verbal Delivery	Points
Used academic English correctly	_____/10
Spoke intelligibly: comprehensible, fluent, appropriate tone, volume, diction, intonation, pitch, pauses, avoided fillers	_____/10
Nonverbal Communication	Points
Facial expressions, posture, confidence	_____/10
Used resources such notecards, the board, and the poster	_____/10
Total	_____/100

Comments:

Strengths	One Area That Needs Improvement