

MARY JO'S TEACHING POINT

Reflecting on Memories

PREPARATION: The day before this lesson, ask students to bring in some photographs or objects related to an event, person, or location that is special to them. Students can draw their event, person, or place instead of using a photograph. Provide examples, such as a picture of the neighbor's pet duck, a rock you picked up on a hike, or a drawing of your first fish tank.

TEACHING THE LESSON

1. Read "David Talks to Students: Finding Ideas" (page 20) to students. Ask them to consider a memory they might want to write about.
2. Tell students to describe the memory in phrases or important words (posing some suggestions, such as the following, to help "jog" memories):
 - pet duck—ducks as pets, what ducks eat, the quacking sound, the duck's feathers
 - rock—red with layers of yellow, very hard surface, hills near the hiking path
 - my first fish—buying the tank, feeding, cleaning, refilling the water
3. Have students turn to a partner and talk to each other about their memory. Ask them to jot down other ideas that come up while they share their memories. Encourage partners to help each other list topics they could write about (for instance, information about ducks as pets, kinds of rocks, saltwater vs. freshwater fish tanks).
4. Call on volunteers to share the topic they might write about after sharing their memories.

ASSESSMENT: Which students might need more "talk" time to help them come up with ideas for good writing topics? Who needs to converse with others to expand their details? These students may benefit from small-group meetings to draft their ideas.

ONE 30-MINUTE LESSON



OBJECTIVE: Students will use personal memories to propose writing and research topics.



Ali's memory

Finding Ideas

Hi kids!

Do you ever wonder where authors find their ideas? Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) used to tease that when he ran out of ideas, he went to a certain store and bought a bag full of them. My favorite way to find ideas is to look around and carefully observe what is going on. I live on a lake, so I never run out of things to watch and wonder about. Recently I spotted a neighborhood cat doing her best to sneak up on a dove that came down from a tree to drink from a pool of water.

The cat tried to hide behind a brick column but her twitching tail stuck out behind her and tipped off the wary bird. They stared at each other for a while before the cat, in frustration, took a step forward. The bird took off for a safe limb. Here's what I was thinking as I watched the scene.

“Good morning, dear Miss Dove,” said the cat.

“Drop dead,” cooed the dove.

“Oh, my!” the cat murmured. “That’s no way for a sweet, plump, tender, mouth-watering dove to talk. I come in peace.”

“Right. For a ‘peace’ of me. Get out of here.”

Is there enough drama in that little scene to kick off a story? Maybe, maybe not. I haven't thought about it enough to know. Maybe a poem instead? Probably. The main point is I did the exercise of observing an action and imagining what the participants might be thinking. When we do this often enough to develop a habit, it's amazing how many ideas dance around us, waving their hands in the air, shouting, “Me! Me! Choose me!”

Once on a trip, I looked out my hotel window and watched a pair of cardinal birds. She perched on a limb. He strutted along the top of a wrought-iron fence. He flew to the ground, retrieved a twig in his beak, and flew into a tree to demonstrate how helpful he would be around the nest. She flew closer but still kept a safe distance. I won't spoil the ending, except to say that it inspired a love poem.

And that's my story. He who looks, finds. Writers learn to keep their eyes open. Ideas are all around us. They are inside of us too! Memories can be a rich source for ideas. Thinking about something we've done or experienced is another way of observing. We're observing ourselves!