



Sample Activity:
Analyzing the Narrative

from the Pre-AP workshop

Pre-AP[®]: Strategies in English –
Writing Tactics Using SOAPSTone

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Pre-AP: Strategies in English – Writing Tactics Using SOAPStone Sample Activity

Analyzing the Narrative

What are some of the typical problems students encounter when writing a narrative?

Intellectual:

Organizational:

Mechanical:

Now that you have compiled this list, let's look at how a professional writer manages a narrative.

The following excerpt is taken from *Dust Tracks on a Road* by Zora Neale Hurston (New York: HarperPerennial, 1996).

But nine months rolled around, and I just would not get on with the walking business. I was strong, crawling well, but showed no inclination to use my feet. I might remark in passing, that I still don't like to walk. Then I was over a year old, but still I would not walk. They made allowances for my weight, but yet, that was no real reason for my not trying.

They tell me that an old sow-hog taught me how to walk. That is, she didn't instruct me in detail, but she convinced me that I really ought to try.

It was like this. My mother was going to have collard greens for dinner, so she took the dishpan and went down to the spring to wash the greens. She left me sitting on the floor, and gave me a hunk of corn bread to keep me quiet. Everything was going along all right, until the sow with her litter of pigs in convoy came abreast of the door. She must have smelled the corn bread I was messing with and scattering crumbs about the floor. So, she came right on in, and began to nuzzle around.

My mother heard my screams and came running. Her heart must have stood still when she saw the sow in there, because hogs have been known to eat human flesh. But I was not taking this thing sitting down. I had been placed by a chair, and when my mother got inside the door, I had pulled myself up by that chair and was getting around it right smart.

As for the sow, poor misunderstood lady, she had no interest in me except my bread. I lost that in scrambling to my feet and she was eating it. She had much less intention of eating Mama's baby, than Mama had of eating hers.

With no more suggestions from the sow or anybody else, it seems that I just took to walking and kept the thing a'going. The strangest thing about it was that once I found the use of my feet, they took to wandering. I always wanted to go. I would wander off in the woods all alone, following some inside urge to go places. This

alarmed my mother a great deal. She used to say that she believed a woman who was an enemy of hers had sprinkled "travel dust" around the doorstep the day I was born. That was the only explanation she could find. I don't know why it never occurred to her to connect my tendency with my father, who didn't have a thing on his mind but this town and the next one. That should have given her a sort of hint. Some children are just bound to take after their fathers in spite of women's prayers.

Answer the following question: How does this selection qualify as a narrative?

In small groups, analyze the text by using the SOAPSTone strategy as presented below:

Who is the Speaker?

(Remember that it is not enough simply to name the speaker. What can you say about the speaker based on references to the text?)

What is the Occasion?

(Be certain to discuss and record both the *larger occasion*, that is, those issues or ideas that must have made the speaker think about this incident, as well as the *immediate occasion*, whatever made her decide to put this incident in her autobiography.)

Who is the Audience?

(To whom is this text directed? It's not enough to say: "Anyone who reads it." You will want to identify a certain audience by describing some of its characteristics.)

What is the Purpose?

(The purpose could be purely a personal one, e.g., to assuage guilt, to boast. But it could also be directed at the audience, in which case you will have to decide what the message is and how the author wants this audience to respond.)

What is the Subject?

(You should be able to state the subject in a few words or a very short phrase.)

What is the Tone?

(Try to choose a description of the tone that fits the piece as a whole. You must also include specific words or phrases from the text and explain how they support your statement.)

Now that you (and your students) have analyzed the narrative by isolating its elements, it's time to apply the same strategy to the creation of a narrative.

First read the prompt.

Tell a story about yourself, using an incident that you know happened but don't actually remember. If you can't remember the incident, how do you know about it?

Working individually, write four or five sentences that summarize your response to this prompt.

Before you begin telling this story, however, complete the following SOAPSTone.

Who is the Speaker?

(Since you are the speaker of the piece, what important details does the audience need to know?)

What is the Occasion?

(Explain why you chose to write about this particular situation. Is there any prior information that will help the audience understand why you chose this topic?)

Who is the Audience?

(Describe the type of people you are writing for. Why did you choose this group?)

What is the Purpose?

(State the point that you are trying to get across to the audience. Why do you bother telling your audience a story about yourself?)

What is the Subject?

(In a few words, state the possible topics that could apply to your narrative.)

What is the Tone?

(Describe the attitude that you are trying to express to your audience. When your audience finishes reading this narrative, what might be some of the important words or phrases you want them to remember?)

Look back at the responses to the questions for **occasion** and **purpose**. Explain how they are related. Now look at the answers to the **subject** question. What might be the title of your narrative?