

***In Common: Effective Writing for All Students***  
**Collection of All Student Work Samples, K-12**

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By The Vermont Writing Collaborative, with Student Achievement Partners and CCSSO

**Eighth Grade**  
**Range of Writing - Narrative Writing**  
**Writing Samples**

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**File Name: N8R Black and White Photo****Narrative****Grade 8****Range of Writing****Black and White Photo**

I walked past the playground. The pigeons swarmed around the crumbs of food dropped by children, and made a cloud filled with feathers, dust, and leaves. Admiring the day with every step, I continued to walk through Central Park. I strode out of the park and onto the sidewalk. As I walked a few blocks, I picked out the tourists from the crowds. Most of them were stopping by every table to buy either and “I love NY” shirt or a postcard.

Finally, I saw the fountains and the big stone columns that protected the Metropolitan Museum. I ran up the endless steps, dodging the people and cameras. I entered the cavernous halls, donated my dollar, and was directed through stairways, exhibits, and halls. After I walked through the Greek pottery section, I entered the exhibit of Richard Avedon. It was my first time seeing his photographs, and I was fascinated.

I saw portraits of Marian Anderson, former presidents, and Andy Warhol. The crowds moved slowly, as if to try to suck up the emotions of the photographs for life. Several people blocked doorways, selfishly. With a little but meaningful push, I moved on. Each room was watched by a security guard, I thought of how lucky they were to be able to see these photos every day and have the time to think about each person being photographed. Most of the people were very important to society and history. Some photos were being blocked off, from the amount of people crowding around them, while other photos were lonely. I felt badly for those photos and made sure I stopped to look at them. Each photograph was in black and white but was able to capture the persons emotions and personality.

About three quarters of the way through the exhibit, I came across a lonely photo. I immediately walked over to it, and then when I was two feet away, I realized that the man in the photo must

**Engages and orients the reader by establishing context for narrative to follow.** The reflection / narrative will be from the **point of view** of the writer, with a focus on the insight drawn from the experience

**Descriptive details develop the experience** of being in the museum.

**Descriptive details develop the character's experience** of the photographs.

**Uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events:** The writer uses sensory language and descriptive details to describe the photograph and the narrator's reaction to it

**Uses full-sentence transition to signal shift from one setting to another** as the writer arrives at the key photograph.

**Precise sensory details develop** both the image of the photograph and the writer's reaction to the photograph.

have been upset and lost. The man's face was round but hollow. His eyes were sunken in a he had dark bags surrounding them. He was beginning to go bald and his hair was worn and messy. He looked as if he hadn't bothered to shave for a week and little black prickles were starting to grow in where his beard should be. He appeared crushed and broken. Small tears gathered at the bottom of each eye, the type of tears that hadn't fallen yet but made the world around you look blurry. His mind seemed chained to a memory that he couldn't escape. I felt awful, sorry, and shocked.

Blinking my eyes, I woke myself from my daze. I looked at the bottom left hand corner of the portrait. His name was Colonel Paul Tibbets. I had never heard his name before. Then I noticed the words under his name. He was titled as the pilot of the B-29 Enola Gay. He was titled as the man who dropped the atomic bomb on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945. As my lips repeated these words to myself, I felt even more sorry and even more shocked. I sensed from the photograph that when he dropped the bomb, he didn't know what he was doing. The photo told me he regretted it, and I sensed that he felt guilty and responsible for the 200,000 lives lost that day.

He was a man who made a huge impact on World War II. He is a man who models for us what war really is. He opened our eyes by dropping a monster who could not be tamed. Things like this happen during wars. People are killed. Not just the phony actors who spill their fake blood and fire their fake guns with fake smoke. Real people are killed. Nearly every person sees movies on wars. People are taught through commercialism that those movies are what was really is.

**Uses narrative technique of reflection, pondering on experience of seeing the photograph, coming to a new understanding (insight) of the significance of war.**

Before seeing this photograph, I was like other people who thought war was a bunch of GI Joe's, dressed in camouflage, being brave. But after seeing this photo, I realized that war was just pain and misery. It made me wake up to the real world and learn that everyone is affected by war, both those who are killed and injured and those who kill and injure them. Both sides of people are innocent. By looking into Colonel Paul Tibbets' watered eyes, I was awakened to what happened and what can happen in war. He helped define the word "victim." In war, those who are bombed, hurt and killed are victims, but those who are instructed to perform terrible acts in war are victims too. War affects everyone. Everyone is innocent. Everyone is a victim.

**Uses transitional clause to signal shift from one time frame to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events**

I wish that people could see this photograph before making opinions on war today. I wish that Colonel Paul Tibbets' lonely picture was surrounded by crowds at the Met. I wish that he had the opportunity to teach more people from his huge mistake rather than us learning by another being made.

**Conclusion follows from events of the experience.**  
Writer **reflects further** on what this photograph has meant to her.

For this reflective narrative from an eighth-grade language arts class, the student was asked to write an essay on a moment in her life when she realized something new. This essay is not a story in the fictional sense, but it does use narrative techniques. The writer chose to write about seeing a photograph at a museum and the understanding of the world gleaned from that experience.

In the reflection, the writer uses a structure in which she first describes the experience of seeing the photograph and then reflects on the meaning of the photograph in an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. She uses precise words and phrases and sensory language to tell about the experience itself and reflective details to develop the response to the photograph.

The reflection concludes with the narrator's ideas about what she wishes people could learn from the photograph and the story it tells.

**File Name: N8R Black and White Photo**

**Narrative**

**Grade 8**

**Range of Writing**

### **Black and White Photo**

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About three quarters of the way through the exhibit, I came across a lonely photo. I immediately walked over to it, and then when I was two feet away, I realized that the man in the photo must have been upset and lost. The man's face was round but hollow. His eyes were sunken in as he had dark bags surrounding them. He was beginning to go bald and his hair was worn and messy. He looked as if he hadn't bothered to shave for a week and little black prickles were starting to grow in where his beard should be. He appeared crushed and broken. Small tears

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**File Name: N8R Deadly Ink**

**Narrative**

**Grade 8****Range of Writing****Deadly Ink****Queen Elizabeth I**

One tiny black leg gracefully sweeps forward. Then five more identical legs immediately follow. The distance covered is just slightly over a mere quarter of an inch. Carried on its face is no discernible expression. The same face carried from the first introduction to oxygen. To freedom. To life. The little bug pauses shortly from its purposeful stride.

Yes indeed, there is much happening outside in the country of England. The year is 1587, and the month February. Everyone still wishes me to be married, but I do not think it a wise idea. Should I hand my country over to someone else who will recklessly run England? No. I owe it to my subjects to keep them safe as long as possible, and for as long as I am alive. I also at the moment need to keep my country safe from France and Spain who seem to be plotting against me, planning to take over this country.

However, my attention is focused on the bug. Such a frail, helpless looking character.

The task at hand requires only a signature from me. My name, written identically countless times before. The consequence of signing this paper are far bigger than any paper put forth in my past existence, unfortunately. This time my signature means the death of a fellow human being. My cousin, Mary, the Scottish queen.

The bug continues its deliberate march forward, this time coming closer to the figure standing across from me, the woman reading the paper. It seems to glance upward at my huge figure looming over it. Threatening, but at the moment sitting still.

There is no question about what I must do. Mary has been kept in many different prisons here after being accused of plotting her husband's

**Engages and orients the reader by establishing a context for narrative.** The key conflict / focus in the story, "to freedom, to life" (or not) is introduced, though not yet fully developed

**Engages and orients the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator,** Queen Elizabeth, in the first person.

**Uses a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events,** as attention shifts back to the bug.

**Uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey events:** The writer uses details to develop suspense of the internal conflict the Queen is struggling with, her character, and the events of the story

**Uses narrative techniques of pacing, reflection, and description to develop the character of Queen, the events of the story, and the internal conflict she faces.**

murder and after escaping prison in Scotland to come asking for my help. I had no choice but to keep her here. I have kept her here for over twenty years. I could not leave her helpless.

Now, however, Mary is guilty of high treason. She was found to be communicating with France and Spain. She has been devising plans with them to take over England. To let her live would be wrong. Nevertheless, she is a relative of mine. In addition, she is a queen. How can I put to death royalty? The hand belonging to none other than me has to sign the paper for her death. Is there a special term for me giving approval to Mary to be killed? Regret? Shame? Murder?

A hand seemingly unnoticed by the bug raises into the air.

My signature is the task at hand. My signature is Mary's death. The tip of my quill pen finds its way to the paper. My heart beat finds its rate speeding up.

I look up just in time to see the hand of one of my guards falling, slicing through the air. A foot away from the table. Half a foot. Two inches.

The little bug looks upward at the hand falling above its back. It panics. The frail legs start to move as fast, and almost faster, than the bug knew it could. Not fast enough.

A cold chill runs down my back, causing my hand to shake at the impact of the other hand hitting the table. Of the other hand hitting the bug. I look down at my signature. Elizabeth. In the middle of the "z", there is a tiny fault where my hand slipped. The bump is hardly noticeable to those who would glance at my signature in the future. However, engraved in my mind is my name holding the mistake in the "z", holding the bug's death, and holding Mary's death.

**Shifts perspective back and forth** between the bug and the Queen to help create dramatic tension

**Uses description and reflection to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole and build toward a particular tone and outcome**, focusing the reader on what is about to happen, both to the bug and to Mary

**Provides a conclusion** of the bug's death and Mary's death that **follows from events of the story**. The lack of reflection on Elizabeth's part indicates that the time for reflecting is over and she has taken action.



For this narrative from an eighth-grade social studies class, the student was asked to write a narrative showing a moment of critical importance in the life of a historical character the class had studied. This writer effectively introduces a character, Queen Elizabeth I, and tells the story of her decision to execute her cousin Mary. The writer uses the bug as a narrative device to build the dramatic tension as Elizabeth tries to come to her decision.

The writer develops a structure in which the focus shifts back and forth between Elizabeth's ruminations on her cousin's fate and that of the bug that symbolically represents her cousin, a use of metaphor that is not stated in the Standards at this grade level. The event sequences unfold naturally and logically. The writer uses precise words and phrases and sensory details to tell the story and to develop Elizabeth as a character. She sequences events so that they build inexorably to the outcome of the death of both the bug and Mary, an aspect of narrative writing not stated in the Standards at this grade level.

The narrative concludes almost abruptly, as the bug is killed and Elizabeth arrives at her decision that Mary must be executed. It seems to reflect the firmness with which she finally decides, after having struggled mightily with the decision.

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