

Narrative Example Essays

Grades 9-10

Essay scores are produced for the following grade ranges: 3-4, 5-6, 7-8, 9-10, and 11-12. Thus a ninth grade essay is compared to models for both ninth and tenth grades.

Prompt for Essays 1-3: *Write a narrative essay about an important memory. This can be either a very recent one or one that happened in the past. Use effective literary techniques to make your audience feel as if they are witnessing the events themselves.*

Narrative Essay 1: The Injury

It was my brother's 10th birthday, and I was just seven years old. I was so excited because we were going to have a SpongeBob Squarepants birthday party at a pizza place. I was bouncing up and down on my parents' bed and watching TV. Up and down and up and down and up and down. It was a BIG mistake. I got so excited that I started doing flips in the air. I was doing well so I decided to let go of my feet. I flipped over and over with my hands waving crazily in the air. Then, CRACK! It sounded like a twig snapping, but there was no twig. That loud crack was my neck.

My Mom walk in to tell me to get ready. When she saw me, she screamed and ran to my Dad. Then my brother ran in. My dad dialed 911 and I was on my way to the hospital.

I was dreaming about SpongeBob when I heard a noise and slowly opened my eyes. Where was I? I looked around the room to see a room full of worried family and a couple of strangers. I couldn't move my head - it was strapped to a board. I felt dizzy, and sick.

My mom said, "Don't move, Sweetie. You'll be fine."

Big tears rolled down my mother's cheeks, matching mine. I was so scared. There were busy people all around me, asking all sorts of questions and pushing and prodding me. Soon most of them left, and a nurse came up and smiled at me.

"You're all finished. We'll take this brace off and you can go. You are one lucky little girl."

My mom started to cry again and asked, "You're sure? She's fine? No damage?"

The nurse just smiled again and nodded.

"Mommy I'm hungry!" I said. "Where are Dylan and Daddy?"

"They went on to the restaurant to be there when the birthday guests arrive. We'll go meet them."

She got me something to eat and then we went to the pizza place. My brother ran up to me and said, "I'll never be mean to you ever again!" I just laughed. I thought about what happened that day and what lesson I learned: Not to flip on the bed, and how much I loved my family, and especially how lucky I was. I looked to my Dad who had a great big grin on his face and glistening eyes. And I looked to my brother and whispered "Happy Birthday!"

Annotation: The writer of this narrative has an engaging style and tells her story as a young girl might. The use of dialogue makes the story flow. More development of the events is needed, however. There is good detail in the introduction, but less as the story unfolds. The abruptness of the resolution leaves the reader unsatisfied.

Narrative Essay 2: The Injury

Bong! Bong! Bong! The big bedsprings were almost as loud as my screams of glee as I watched SpongeBob Squarepants on the old 12" TV set while practicing what I thought of as my gymnastics. I was seven, and dreamed of being a gymnastics star. Trying out tricks on my oversized bed was one of my favorite things to do. I swirled and swooped in circles in my little blue room. What drove my excitement even more than usual was the fact that it was my brother's 10th birthday, and we were going to have a SpongeBob Squarepants birthday party at a local pizza place. Dylan and I both loved Sponge Bob Squarepants, and I couldn't wait for the party.

Up and down and up and down and up and down and flip . . . that was the pattern. Unfortunately, I got so excited that I started doing flips in the air, a big mistake! I was vigorously jumping and twirling over and over again, feeling invincible. I imagined I was in a gymnasium and there was a giant net underneath, and many people there to be sure I was safe.

But that was not true. There was no enormous net waiting to catch me if I happened to fall, and there certainly were no people nearby to keep me from harm - just my bed. I was doing so well with my flipping that I decided to let go of my feet, which I was grasping tightly, which made me look like a tiny little ball. Of course, letting go was not a wise act, nor was even flipping in the first place. But at the age of seven I was totally confident in my power over gravity. So I lifted my hands off of my feet, and raised them high in them in the air. I was squealing with excitement, but I wouldn't have been if I had known that I would soon be screaming in pain.

As I flipped over, arms waving crazily in the air . . . Crack! It sounded like a twig snapping, but there was no twig. Unbelievably, it came from my neck. Suddenly, I couldn't hold my head up. I had no strength in my neck! I gasped with fear, but the throbbing pain was so intense I couldn't breathe. I dropped to the floor. My eyes rolled back. The blood drained from my face, and I felt a curious sensation of floating.

I didn't hear my Mom walk in to tell me to get ready. I did hear scream, though, when she saw me. When she saw me, though, she screamed. I could feel her stooping over me, calling my name over and over.

"Cara, Cara! James! James, call 911!" She called. My brother came running but jerked to a stop when he saw me. He just stood there, speechless with shock. My dad followed with his phone in his hand. He, too, stood a moment in shock, and then punched in the numbers on his phone. I heard him say raggedly, "My daughter . . . she's hurry!"

His voice faded in and out, and then I heard my mom say, "James, she doesn't have a pulse!" Then I was out. I no longer heard my family. I was floating in the ocean. Not only was I in the ocean, but I was in Bikini Bottom, home of SpongeBob Squarepants and his friends! It was a gorgeous day Bikini Bottom, and SpongeBob and I were laughing. Then Patrick, SpongeBob's pink starfish friend, skipped to meet up with SpongeBob and me.

"Hey you're Patrick!" I yelled happily.

"How do you know my name?!?" He bellowed in his deep, goofy voice. I told him how much I loved the show. SpongeBob and Patrick loved hearing this, and immediately wanted to know which episodes I liked best. As we talked, they gave me a tour. I saw the pineapple where SpongeBob lives, the Krusty Krab, where he works, and even met his pet snail, Gary. Yes, and I even heard Gary meow! However, I really hoped we didn't run into Squidward. I've never liked him. The tour was not even finished when I suddenly felt as if I were running. I left SpongeBob and Patrick in the distance, as I seemed to sprint faster and faster yet. What's going on? I don't want to leave, I thought!

“Well, Goodbye!” I heard SpongeBob say faintly. I turned to wave, and then, my whole world went dark.

“Hey-hey! She’s waking up!”

“Oh, thank heavens!”

I sluggishly opened my eyes. *Where was SpongeBob? And Patrick? Where was I now? Was I really in the ocean with them?* I realized I was in a high bed in a bright room. *Oh, I’m still in my room. What happened? This is not my bed.*

There were blurry people standing around, but I didn’t recognize any of them. I tried to move my head to see more, but I couldn’t move my head. Later, I found out that it was strapped to a board. One of the blurs moved and became my mom. She bent over me, taking my hand.

“How do you feel, Sweetie?”

“My heart hurts, and I’m cold.” I could see the sheet that covered me completely up to my neck. Another blur, which became a guy in a white uniform, stepped up and gently laid a blanket over me. As I slowly regained awareness, I felt dizzy and sick.

“You’ll be fine,” said my mom, but she had tears in her eyes.

“Just lie still,” said one of the guys I didn’t recognize. He was taking my blood pressure. I did not argue. And without another word, he and his partner began pushing me through the house. I drifted off to sleep again and the sirens were the last thing that I heard for quite a while.

I opened my eyes later to see my Mom hovering over me, along with two young women in light blue pants and tops. My vision was a little better, but I still felt dizzy and sick. I tried to turn my neck, but now there was a large, tight neck brace around me, preventing any movement of my head.

“Mommy, what’s going on? What’s around my neck?”

“It’s a brace to keep you from moving your neck. We are afraid it might be broken.”

“We’re just going to take some X-rays and check everything out. Just lie still now,” said one woman, who I thought might be a nurse.

“Okay.” I said with a whimper and began to cry. Big tears rolled down my mother’s cheeks, matching mine. I closed my eyes again, trying to stay relaxed, but all I could think of were the stories I’d read of people who’d broken their necks, paralyzing them for the rest of their lives.

The two women were joined by a couple of other people, who all busied themselves with me, asking all sorts of questions and pushing and prodding me. Soon most of them left, and a nurse came up and smiled at me.

“You’re all finished. We’ll take this brace off and you can go. You are one lucky little girl.”

My mom started to cry again and asked, “You’re sure? She’s fine? No damage?”

The nurse just smiled again and nodded. “She’ll probably have a headache for a day or so, and may be a little sore, but she’s fine.”

My mother reached for me and held me tight. Knowing I was going to be fine, I suddenly felt great!

“Mommy I’m hungry!” I said. “Where are Dylan and Daddy?”

“They went on to the restaurant to be there when the birthday guests arrive. We’ll go meet them right now. They will be so excited and relieved.”

I think my mom would have bought me anything I asked for right then, but all I wanted was food. She took me to a vending machine and I punched in 7-9 on the pad. Plop! My cookies fell down, and my Mom handed them to me along with coke. Then we walked hand-in hand out the doors of the hospital. I seemed to be especially tuned in to sounds, smells, and the beautiful, beautiful day. I stared out the window of the taxi as we sped toward the restaurant to meet my dad and brother. Everything looked new and clean. I was alive and I could move!

When we walked into the restaurant, my brother and his friends raced over to me, shrieking and saying, “Did it hurt, did it hurt?” and, “I’ll never be mean to you ever again!” I hugged my brother and my dad and thought about what happened that day. I thought about what it felt like to ride in an ambulance, to wear a neck brace, and to have narrowly missed being seriously hurt. Mostly, I thought about the lessons I had learned. Of course, I had learned not to do flips on the bed, but I’d also learned how much I love my family, how much they love me, and especially, how very fortunate I was. I looked at my Dad, who was beaming with happiness and whose eyes were glistening with unshed tears. Then I looked at my big brother, and thought about how both of us were celebrating milestones today. I reached over and hugged him, whispering, “Happy Birthday!”

Annotation: This essay is much more fully developed and thus is much more interesting. The development is even, so that the sense of abruptness is lessened. The conclusion is also an improvement over the last essay.

Narrative Essay 3: The True Treasure

The day my house burned was warm for December. My mom and brother had gone out of town for the day to visit a college he was interested in. I was fourteen, and I wanted to sleep in. Around ten o’clock, I woke up and stretched, and then I thought about the day I had all to myself. I took a long shower, dressed, and then went downstairs to the kitchen, where I decided to treat myself to fry baby donuts. These were breakfast treats my mom would make when I had friends over, and I loved them. They were easy to make out of canned biscuits, so I set the frying pan on the stove and added about two inches of oil. My dog Tyler padded in and looked up hopefully to see if I wanted to give him something to eat.

“No, Tyler. No donuts for you, Boy!” He just wagged his tail and went over to look in his food bowl, in case something had magically appeared. When it was clear there was no food to be had, he decided he needed to go outside. I opened the basement door and let him through so he could go out the doggie door downstairs. When I went back to the kitchen, the oil was almost hot enough. I pulled the biscuit dough out and separated the biscuits, then poked a hole in the middle of each.

Just then I heard my cell, so I ran upstairs to grab it. My best friend, Mary Katherine, was on the phone, and wanted to know if I wanted to go to the mall. If so, her mom would pick me up in just a few minutes, since she was already going out. Well, yes! I threw down the phone, quickly brushed my hair, and checked my face. I remembered that Tyler was outside, so he was fine. I grabbed my purse and my key and ran downstairs just as Mrs. McNair was pulling up in front of the house. I waved to Mary Katherine and opened the car door.

“Hi, Erin! How are you?” she asked.

“Oh, good, thanks. Thanks for taking me to the mall.”

"I'm glad you could go. Mary Katherine has wanted to spend some of her birthday money. I need to do some errands, so I'll be back for you around 12:30. Then we can go get some lunch, if you like." Mary Katherine and I immediately started plotting which stores we would hit first. She wanted to look at jewelry and CDs.

The mall was crowded with many people Christmas shopping and teenagers just hanging out. There was a long line to see Santa, and it was almost impossible to talk over the sound of squealing kids. We had been to two or three stores and were heading into Kmart when she took my arm. "Erin, did you hear that? Didn't they just call your name?"

"What?"

"On the loudspeaker -Didn't they just call your name?" Yes, there it was, an announcement asking me to report to the mall office. I was puzzled, but along we went. Why in the world would they call me? Mary Katherine and I hurried to the mall office where we found a middle-aged woman sitting behind a counter. As we walked in, she stood up.

"Hi. Can I help you?" she asked.

"Uh, I think you called me? My name is Erin.

She suddenly looked concerned. "Oh, Sweetheart, your neighbor called. I hate to tell you this, but your house caught fire. The firemen are there now."

I thought I was going to collapse. What? My house? On fire? I could not even speak.

The lady continued, gesturing to a man in uniform, coming out of the back, "This is Ed. He's the mall security guard and he'll make sure you get home."

I burst into tears and sobbed all the way to the car. My stomach was in knots. What about Tyler and my cat Buffy? I was sick with worry, but it didn't seem real. *How could my house be on fire*, I thought wretchedly. What had happened? I thought back to the few minutes before I left the house, and then the agonizing realization of what I had done slowly dawned on me. The oil for the donuts - I'd left it heating when I went to answer the phone! I'd never gone back to the kitchen to turn off the stove! My house was on fire because of me! How could I have been so careless? I had been in such a hurry to go to the mall that I set my house on fire! The drive to my house took forever. I had almost stopped crying when we got to my neighborhood. I couldn't see the house as we turned onto my street because of the two enormous fire engines parked in front, but I could see and smell the greasy smoke. When we pulled up, the searing smell of burning assailed me, and the smoke in the air nearly choked me. I will never, ever forget that awful smell. Neighbors were gathered in the street and on the edges of the lawn and firemen were everywhere. As soon as I got out, one of them loped over. I almost didn't recognize him under all his fireman's gear. It was Dennis, a friend of our family's.

"Dennis! What happened?"

"Erin, is there anyone inside? We've called your mom, but where's your brother?" The questions came too fast, overwhelming me.

"No, no. But my dog and cat are in there!" Thinking of Tyler and Buffy, and how, if they died, it would be all my fault, I burst into fresh tears. I told Dennis between sobs that my mom and my brother were three hours away, but that Tyler and Buffy were inside. I was so distraught about the animals that I couldn't even fathom the devastation to our house. I looked over at the hoses still pouring water onto the roof and the porches. The deluge of water created steam that mixed with the still-billowing smoke, so that it was impossible to tell what was steam and what was smoke.

Dennis was telling me that the fire inside was out. “Your kitchen is in bad shape,” he said, “but most of the damage to the rest of the house is from the smoke and the heat. They can do as much damage as a fire, sometimes, and the whole house is involved, with extensive damage, but believe me, I’ve seen worse. You’re lucky.” But I wasn’t feeling lucky. I was devastated that Tyler and Buffy could have been hurt or even killed by my carelessness.

Dennis was still talking. “Don’t worry about your dog. He was running around and he’s fine. Mrs. Cutshaw has him, I think. I’ll go in and get everyone to look for your cat.” My heart leaped in my chest. Tyler was okay? I turned to look for Mrs. Cutshaw when suddenly, Tyler slammed into my legs and started jumping and wiggling. He was alive! He was fine! Now I waited to hear about Buffy, and I continued to cry, hugging Tyler to me, stroking his black and white fur. Our next door neighbor, Mrs. Cutshaw, came over and hugged me and tried to console me, but I was devastated at what I had done. The house was still pouring smoke and three firemen outside had were still spraying the roof with the huge water hose. No one spoke. I knew that the longer we waited, the less likely it was that my cat had survived. But then the front door opened and Dennis, even dirtier and sweaty than before, walked out of the house holding Buffy. Dennis smiled at me as he held her out to me.

“We didn’t think we’d ever find her. It’s almost impossible to see in there with all the smoke, but she’s a smart little cat. Finally, we found her hiding in the basement among some boxes stored down there. The fire never got to that part of the house. She’s probably got some smoke in her lungs, but I think she’ll be fine.”

“Thank you” seemed too little to say to Dennis, but I think he knew how I felt. He grinned at me and turned back to the house. I held tight to Buffy and sat down on the ground, holding her and stroking her. She was shaking, but she was fine. Tyler climbed into my lap, and I just sat there, laughing through my tears, holding my pets.

It was just about then that my mom and my brother drove up. My mom jumped out and just hugged me tight. She didn’t even look to see if the house was there. She just held me. I had made a terrible mistake, one that resulted in so much loss for all of us, but really, we still had all we needed.

Annotation: This essay pulls the reader in with the specific details of the main character’s experience and emotions. Dialogue makes the story more interesting and realistic. The exposition sets the tone of the story, contrasting a normal morning to the disaster to come. The conclusion is logical and satisfying.

For more examples of student essays, see the Common Core State Standards Initiative site, which includes samples of actual student essays for all three writing genres and for all grades. Each essay includes helpful notes and explanations. The first set of essays is from an on-demand writing assignment. The second set shows a range of writing, usually with one or more short essays and one or more longer ones.

Link: <http://achievethecore.org/page/505/common-core-narrative-writing>