Narrative Essay

Definition of Narrative Essay

A [narrative](https://literarydevices.net/narrative/) [essay](https://literarydevices.net/essay/) is a type of essay that has a single [motif](https://literarydevices.net/motif/), or a central point, around which the whole narrative revolves. All incidents, happenings, and characters revolve around a single motif presented in the narrative. A narrative essay is similar to a simple five-paragraph essay, in that it has the same format. It is only different in that it is a narrative, having characters, incidents, and dialogues.

Difference Between a Narrative Essay and a Short Story

A narrative essay has a specific format, specific aspect to discover, and a specific motif. It revolves around that motif set by the writer prior to writing the essay. A [short story](https://literarydevices.net/short-story/), however, is different from a narrative essay in that it does not revolve around a pre-set motif, and that it does not have a specific format. Also, a short story always leaves readers at a critical juncture with the desire to discover more. In [contrast](https://literarydevices.net/contrast/), a narrative essay ends when the readers are fully satisfied. They do not wish to read any more or do not want to discover anymore.

Elements of a Narrative Essay

A narrative essay has three required elements: [character](https://literarydevices.net/character/), [theme](https://literarydevices.net/theme/), and [dialogue](https://literarydevices.net/dialogue/).

**Character**

Characters are an important part of a narrative essay. Even if the essay is autobiographical in nature, the person writing the essay is a character involving some other characters who act, behave, and do like all other characters presented in stories and novels.

**Theme or Motif**

A narrative essay revolves around a theme or a motif. This theme or motif is presented in its [thesis](https://literarydevices.net/thesis/)statement, which breaks it down into three distinct evidences. These three distinct evidences are then further elaborated through characters in body paragraphs.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue is used to capture the conversation between characters. In a narrative essay, dialogue is the third important element, without which the characters lose their worth and liveliness.

Examples of Narrative Essays in Literature

Example #1: *New Directions* (by Maya Angelou)

“Annie, over six feet tall, big-boned, decided that she would not go to work as a domestic and leave her “precious babes” to anyone else’s care. There was no possibility of being hired at the town’s cotton gin or lumber mill, but maybe there was a way to make the two factories work for her. In her words, “I looked up the road I was going and back the way I come, and since I wasn’t satisfied, I decided to step off the road and cut me a new path.” She told herself that she wasn’t a fancy cook but that she could “mix groceries well enough to scare hungry away and keep from starving a man.”

This paragraph is an example from a narrative essay of Maya Angelou. She has described how a girl looks, and how she behaves. She has also written direct dialogues to show that it is a narrative.

Example #2: *Saturday Evening Post* (by Russell Baker)

“When I burst in that afternoon she was in conference with an executive of the Curtis Publishing Company. She introduced me. He bent low from the waist and shook my hand. Was it true as [my mother](https://literarydevices.net/my-mother/) had told him, he asked, that I longed for the opportunity to conquer the world of business?

My mother replied that I was blessed with a rare determination to make something of myself.

‘That’s right,’ I whispered.

‘But have you got the grit, the character, the never-say-quit spirit it takes to succeed in business?’

My mother said I certainly did.”

In this piece from a narrative essay by Russell Baker of the famed *Saturday Evening Post*, the author has fully described the efforts of his mother by her dialogue. Both character and dialogue are very clear.

Example #3: *Only Daughter* (by Sandra Cisneros)

“Once several years ago, when I was just starting out my writing career, I was asked to write my own contributor’s note for an [anthology](https://literarydevices.net/anthology/) I was part of, I wrote: ‘[I am](https://literarydevices.net/i-am/) the only daughter in a family of six sons. That explains everything.’

“Well, I’ve thought about that ever since, and yes, it explains a lot to me, but for the reader’s sake I should have written: ‘I am the only daughter in a Mexican family of six sons.’ Or even: ‘I am the only daughter of a Mexican father and a Mexican-American mother.’ Or: ‘I am the only daughter of a working-class family of nine.’ All of these had everything to do with who I am today.”

In this essay, the author has given full description of a daughter – how she looks and how she behaves.

Function of Narrative Essay

A narrative essay describes people, presents their conversation, and narrates their experiences to teach lessons to readers. In fact, it is like a story, but different in that it is weaved around a motif. A motif is given before the incidents of the essay. Readers become aware of this single theme, central idea, or motif once they go through the essay. Its major aim is to provide information about life experiences and lessons learned from those experiences.