

## Grades 6-12, Prompt for Narrative Writing Common Core Standard W.CCR.3

Great historical events often have deep effects upon the people who live through them. Depending on the person and the situation, those effects can be very different.

You are going to read a short article about the Dust Bowl days in American history titled “Black Blizzard.” You will also look at some photographs taken during that time period. As you read and study the photographs, think about how this experience may have affected the individual people who lived through it.

Finally, you will write a narrative, showing how a particular small moment during this experience affected one person.

Remember, a good narrative:

- *Establishes a clear point of view*
- *Focuses closely on one character or characters*
- *Uses strong sensory details to make the character(s) and event come alive*
- *Uses precise language*  
*May use dialogue and description to capture the character(s) and event*
- *Concludes effectively*

Here are your choices for your narrative:

- A young child watching the “black blizzard” rolling in over the plains
- A young child, watching a tractor knock down his family home in Oklahoma, several years into the Dust Bowl drought
- A mother sitting on her front steps in a migrant camp in California
- An unemployed father, arriving at a squatter camp in California from Oklahoma

You will have three class periods to complete this reading/thinking/writing task. The narrative will have a single draft, and you may want to take some time to plan your writing before you begin work. When you have finished, be sure to proofread.

**Narrative Writing**  
**Common Core Standard W.CCR.3**  
**6-12**

*Teacher Directions*

- The article and photographs provide the information needed to address the prompt, and students should read the text independently before writing. Encourage students to refer back to the text while writing and to take notes.
- Students should be given three sessions for the prompt. Allow approximately 45 minutes for each, but the prompt should not be strictly timed. Students should be given as much time as needed to plan, write, and proofread.
- The writing must be done without help, but students may have access to personal dictionaries, or any other resources to support spelling and mechanics that they are accustomed to using while writing.
  - Be sure students have paper to take notes or do whatever pre-planning they might choose to do.
  - If students are writing by hand, provide lined paper from your classroom for writing. If they are using a word processor, make sure they save their work so it can be accessed the next day.
- This will be first draft writing, but encourage students to proofread and correct any errors they find.

## **Black Blizzard**

From *Teaching Students to Read Nonfiction*, Scholastic, 2003  
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Imagine this: You're eating breakfast one Tuesday morning, minding your own business. You chance to look out the window.

"Ma! Dad!" you yell, "It's back. Take cover!"

Even though it's nine A.M., the sky in the distance is pitch black. A dry tidal wave of dust and dirt – 7,000 feet high – is rolling, howling towards you. Your parents race to cram wet towels in the spaces under doors and windows, as the huge black cloud rumbles closer.

It's an eerie sight. In front of the cloud, birds fly and rabbits run, terrified. Soon the cloud is here. The sky is pure black. The wind is screaming, pelting your tiny house with dirt. Your mom hands you a wet towel, which you put over your face, but you can still taste the dust, feel it with every breath, gritty between your teeth. You huddle in the middle of the room with your family in total darkness, waiting for the dust storm to end.

### **A Natural Disaster**

In the mid 1930's, large areas of Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, New Mexico, and Colorado were hit by hundreds of these storms. Together, these storms made up some of the worst natural disasters in America's history.

The dust storms destroyed the land, ruined the economy of the whole area, and threatened the lives of most of the population. Everyone who could picked up and moved west. It became the greatest peacetime migration ever in America. How did it happen?

From 1900 to 1930, many families bought or leased small parcels of land in the Plains states, and built farms. The area was mostly dry grasslands, where crops are difficult to grow. With hard work, the farmers were able to grow wheat and corn, and to raise cattle.

But in 1931, a terrible drought fell across the middle of the nation. America was already suffering from the stock market crash of 1929 and the Great Depression. Now, from 1931 to 1935, farmers got almost no rain at all.

For five years in a row, their corn and wheat crops failed. Farmers had no income, and couldn't pay their mortgages. And soon their financial troubles were matched by the horror of their surroundings.

## **The Soil Blew Away**

With no rainfall, the soil in the area became loose, dry, and dusty. The region's native wild grasses, which had served to hold the soil together, had been replaced long ago by crops, which now dried up and blew away.

Soon, heavy winds began to howl, picking up the dust and soil. When the winds reached 50 or 60 miles an hour, they picked up the topsoil right off the ground. The flying dust buried roads. It flew through the walls and windows of flimsy farmhouses. It killed cattle, and ruined the engines of vehicles. Old people and children caught outside were suffocated. Thousands of others died slowly of "dust pneumonia."

The dust storms were the last straw for many area farmers. They had already suffered through five years with little or no income because of the drought. Now, banks and mortgage companies took their farms, sending tractors to knock their houses down and run them off the land. The farmers, with no other choice, packed up their families and meager belongings and headed west.

More than one million people migrated west from the Plains states during that time. Poor, dirty, and hungry, they rumbled down Route 66, searching for work picking crops, digging roads – anything that would keep their families from starving.

## **Tough Times**

But things were tough in the West, too. There were not enough jobs for all the new arrivals. Few could afford housing. Most of the migrant families camped or "squatted" where they could.

Many native Californians resented the migrants, calling them "Okies," and spreading rumors that they were mentally retarded. They felt the migrants were ruining local schools with overcrowding. Mobs of local men, armed with clubs and ax handles, raided the squatters' camps and tried to beat the migrants into leaving.

Eventually, as America came out of the Great Depression, things began to improve for the migrants in California. Within a few years, the rains returned to the Dust Bowl, and people began farming again. Over the decades since, there have been several other serious droughts in the Plains states. But the Dust Bowl of the 1930's will always be remembered as the worst of all.



Dust storm coming in.  
*National Geographic*  
Used by permission of  
*National Geographic*



Top left: squatters tent in California. California State University, Bakersfield  
Used by permission of California State University, Bakersfield

Top right: Migrant Mother with children, Dorothea Lange photograph, 1936  
Used by permission of Dorothea Lange photograph

Bottom left: migrant child, Oklahoma (History.com, Dust Bowl Photo Gallery)  
Used by permission of (History.com, Dust Bowl Photo Gallery)

**File Name: N6P Black Mountains of Dust**

**Narrative**

**Grade 6**

**On-Demand Writing- Uniform Prompt**

### **Black Mountains of Dust**

I was sitting at a park bench when I saw the endless black heading towards me. "Mom look!" I screamed. My mom turned around and faced me. A look of pure horror was painted across her face.

"Margaret come on we need to go now!"

She shouted. We ran across roads and dried up cropt fields. We did not dare look back. Suddenly I wasn't running away from the black cloud. Instead I was face down in the dirt. Oh no I had tripped over my shoelace! I slowly looked up where was my mom? The cloud loomed closer and closer. I choked feeling the gritty dust in my throat. I tried to crawl forward but needles shot through my legs. Oh great in a time like this my legs fall asleep! A whiff of dust blew toward me, burning my eyes and making

everything blurry.

"Mom!" I screamed. "Mom!"

I tried to yell again but was choked by more dust. "Mom" I whined.

Where was she. I started coughing from all of the dust in my lungs and throat.

**Engages and orients the reader by establishing a context for the narrative that follows and introduces a narrator and characters. The narrator and her mother needing to escape the storm becomes the central focus /conflict in the narrative.**

**Uses narrative technique of dialogue to develop events. Event sequence to follow unfolds naturally and loically.**

**Uses transitional phrase to signal shift from one setting to another**

**Uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey events and develop characters**

**Uses the narrative technique of dialogue to develop events and characters; controls pacing by slowing down the action**

"Margaret! Darling come on!" My mom motioned me to get up but I shook my head.

My Mom flung me into her arms and ran, soaring farther away from the storm. After what seemed forever, my mom stopped running. Screams and yells echoed off walls. I covered my ears.

**Uses transitional clause to signal shift from one time frame to another**

A person right in front of us said:

"Get inside quickly!"

My mom answered "okay" and then I was carried into a building, that looked like the town hall.

My mom set me down in a corner, in the town hall and sat next to me.

"Mom?" I croaked.

"Yes Sweetie?" She said in a sweet voice, almost like honey.

"Is this going to happen ever again, this storm?" I asked my voice still thick with dust. She did not answer and I knew that she knew this wouldn't be the the last time the black mountains of dust attacked the plain states.

**Provides a conclusion which follows from and then reflects on the events and focus / conflict of the narrative, the dust storm of the Dust Bowl days**

In this on-demand narrative, the writer tells the story of a girl and her mother being caught in a dust storm during the days of the Dust Bowl. She focuses the narrative around the central conflict of trying to escape the storm. The protagonist/narrator is a girl who is terrified by the storm as she is caught up in it.

The writer organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically. Some development of the events and characters is done through dialogue. Some precise words and phrases, descriptive details, and sensory language are used as well. At times in the narrative, it would have been helpful to have had a bit more description along with the dialogue, but, in general, the writer controls plot and character development adequately.

Although not required by the Standards, the narrative concludes with reflection / foreshadowing about future dust storms, which follows effectively from the story line.



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**File Name: N6R How the Great Saltwater came to be**

**Narrative**

**Grade 6**

**Range of Writing**

### **How the great Saltwater came to be**

A long, long time ago, there were many gods. Two were Sarias the salt god, and Walior the water god. They argued quite a bit and all of the other gods were sick of it. So was a newt named Yellow-Belly. I was the middle of the summer and one day when the gods were on a ship, Yellow-Belly had also snuck aboard. Once again, they were arguing and Yellow-Belly decided to put a stop to it once and for all.

“Sarias how can you put up with that insolent Walior? You guys should have a battle and whoever loses will be dead and you won’t have to worry about arguing anymore.”

Meanwhile up in the sky the other gods are trying to figure out a way to get the two gods to stop arguing but they didn’t want it to be in a violent way. They have no idea what the shrewd newt Yellow-Belly was up to.

Yellow-Belly gets Walior alone and now he want Walior to have a battle too. “Walior why are you just sitting here you guys should have a battle to the death so that you won’t have to argue about who’s right anymore.”

“Well Yellow-Belly I don’t know what if I lose and get killed?”

“Walior are you really asking me that? Of course you won’t lose and get killed. I mean you are the better of the two. You are more handsome and way stronger. You have nothing to lose by having a battle because Sarias is sure to lose.”

“Of course you are right Yellow-Belly and that is a great idea.”  
Now Yellow-Belly has Walior eager to do battle with Sarias, but what if Sarias doesn’t agree?

**Engages and orients the reader by establishing context for narrative to follow. Main characters are introduced - Sarias the salt god, Walior the water god, and the most important character (protagonist) the newt Yellow-Belly. The arguing between the two gods becomes the focus / conflict of the narrative.**

**Uses dialogue to develop characters and events, so that the plot develops.**

**Uses transitional clause to signal shift in setting**

**Uses dialogue to develop character, which shows the reader how clever Yellow-Belly is**

“So Sarias have you made up your mind on whether you will have a battle with Walior?”

“No not really because I am worried that Walior might win.”

“Oh you mean that great buffoon. He couldn’t beat you if your eyes were shut and your hands tied up my lord. You have no need to worry about him because YOU are sure to be the winner. You are smaller sure but you have cunning and fearlessness on your side. I mean, have you lost a battle yet? No, because you are the best god ever.”

**Uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details to develop action, events, and characters**

“I guess you are right and I will do as you suggest. But what about Walior?”

“Oh don’t worry about him my lord I have already taken care of him. He will die at your hand.”

“All right you gods are you ready for your battle? You know who will win and you don’t need to worry about it.”

**Uses dialogue to develop character. This time, the dialogue is between the two gods, which again shows the reader how clever Yellow-Belly has been in setting up this action.**

“So Sarias, you sure you want to do this? You know that I will win because I am much more handsome and I am way stronger.”

“Even so Walior I am more cunning and I haven’t lost to any beast yet.”

“There’s always a first time Sarias.”

There was a great battle that lasted 8 days and 8 nights. Eventually Sarias emerged victorious. As he was standing over Walior and gloating: “Ha ha I have killed you W...”

**Uses transitional clauses and words to signal shifts from one timeframe to another**

As he said this Walior reached up and slashed him in the stomach. As Sarias fell from the pain, his great-sword plunged into Walior’s heart. And so the great Sarias won the battle but he died in the end from his stomach wound because Walior had been very vicious and had cut a major artery. And so they both died because of a newt who was fed up with their antics. After they died, they both had left behind great quantities of both salt and water. The other gods saw it and they had to figure out what to do with all of that salt and water.

**Uses precise sensory language**

They were smart and they did the smartest thing that they could think of. They mixed all of the salt with all the water, and they made salt water. Then they picked a HUGE place to distribute all of it and there is now salt water because of that crazy newt, Yellow-Belly.

**Provides a conclusion which follows from the events and focus / conflict of the narrative**

But of course, Yellow-Belly had to be punished. However, the other gods were so happy because they didn't have to deal with arguing between the deceased, that they didn't want to punish Yellow-Belly very much. They just sentenced him and all of his descendants to a life in pond water with NO talking.

In this narrative, the writer tells the story of how the seawater became salty, in the manner of a myth or legend. She focuses it around the conflict between two gods, the god of salt and the god of water. The protagonist is the newt, whose interests and actions to get the gods to stop arguing drive the plot of the narrative.

The writer has organized a well-structured event sequence that unfolds naturally to develop the story line. She uses transition words, phrases, and clauses to move the plot along, and to signal shifts in time frame and setting (“*meanwhile*”, “*up in the sky*”).

The writer makes the tricky and clever character of the newt very clear throughout. Most of the action and character development is done through dialogue. There is some precise descriptive sensory language used, as well. At times, it would be helpful to have a bit more description or “narrator voice” along with the dialogue, but in general the writer controls this plot and character development well.

The narrative concludes with “how we got salt water,” which follows well from the narrated events.

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