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## NARRATIVE WRITING

There are many reasons to write, but one of the most common is to share a personal experience with others. Narrative writing allows the reader to share in the writer's experience, but the challenge is to describe that moment in a way that is meaningful and visual for the reader.



When it comes to narrative writing, there are five main characteristics (you will notice that they closely resemble the characteristics of expository writing – that is because, in essence, you are explaining your experience).

1. A good narrative tells one story completely and without straying into other parts that distract from or are not necessary for the main story.
2. Narratives explain the story through details that illustrate what happened. Those details must be given in a way that allows the reader to identify with them, even if they are not necessarily familiar with them. Description is key.
3. Narratives have a logical delivery structure. Usually this is chronological order, but other styles might be effective, depending on the topic.
4. The reader must be interested in the topic of the narrative, or see why it is important to them. Without a connection to the story, the reader will not identify with it.
5. The narrative must be personal and share with the reader an experience.

Read the following narrative about the story of the three little pigs, as told me one of them.

### The Three Little Pigs

Once upon a time there lived a sweet and loving mother pig with her three little sweet, innocent, smart pigs. I was one of those little pigs, but we had grown so big so quickly that we were forced to leave our home and build houses for ourselves.

We three pigs set off. Soon we met a man with some fresh straw. My brother took the straw and built a modest house of straw for himself. My other brother met a man with dry sticks. He built his traditional ranch house with those sticks.

But I was afraid that the wolf might blow my house down, so I built my house with the red bricks I found at a high-rise construction site. That high rise is right down the street from my favorite bakery.

The next day the Big Bad Wolf appeared. He easily blew down my brother's house of straw. Then he blew down my brother's stick house, but he could not blow down my house of bricks.

Suddenly the wolf got an idea. He climbed on the roof. Meanwhile my brothers and I put a giant cast iron pot of water on the fire to boil. The wolf began to come down the chimney. Into the pot fell the wolf with a giant splash!

That was the end of the greedy wolf and we lived together happily ever after in my brick house.



**Now answer questions 1-8**

Read the following story by Jeffrey Biggers about how he searched out a man for a lesson on how to play a traditional Mexican instrument. Biggers's essay "Searching for El Chapareke" was first published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1999.

### **Searching for El Chapareke**

By Jeffrey Biggers

Antonio Camilo, known as El Chapareke, was not easy to find, even though everyone seemed to have just spotted him when I inquired at the village gathering on Sunday. This was the day the canyon walls of Cusarare, a Tarahumara Indian village tucked into the Sierra Madres of Chihuahua in northern Mexico, bloomed with women in colorful skirts, legions of children trailed by dogs, men in their white shirts and sombreros, all cascading down the pencil-thin trails toward the plaza. The women — shifting babies saddled on their backs in *rebozos* — sat in groups by the mission walls, wordless for hours, drinking the weekly Coke, watching as the faithful went to attend mass, young men shot hoops, and the older men hovered around benches at the back of the plaza, waiting for the weekly outdoor meeting of the community cooperative. Pigs wandered down the road in idle joy, and the dogs fought on cue outside the small shop. The road to Cusarare was lined with stationary plots of families, many of whom had walked a few hours to reach the Sunday gathering. I looked everywhere for El Chapareke; I even checked the café — a broken-down school bus that had been restocked with small chairs, a wood stove installed in the driver's seat — but he was nowhere to be found.

I had been wanting to learn the *chapareke* instrument for weeks. It is one of the last remaining indigenous string instruments in Mexico, perhaps in the entire Western hemisphere. Often referred to as a Tarahumara Jew's harp, the *chapareke* is a dronal instrument that the player strums as he sucks and manipulates the wood for a melodic echo. Held up to one's lips like a flute, the instrument resembles a three-string bow. Here in the Sierra Madre Occidental, as chariots of tourists clamor into the region for a view of Copper Canyon and the occasional cave-dwelling Tarahumara Indian, and as drug dealers, military trucks, tourist buses, and logger flatbeds clash in traffic jams on the newly paved road, the Tarahumaras, like the traditional music of the *chapareke*, have retreated deeper into the elusive canyons. Antonio Camilo is considered one of the last remaining *chapareke* masters.

I had already hooked up with a *conjunto* band in the village, a three-string fiddler and his guitar-playing son, who welcomed my banjo, referred to as *el pancho*, at the *tesguinadas*. These were the corn brew fiestas the Tarahumara held on religious holidays or whenever else a raucous social gathering was merited. We didn't really tune up; I plucked an open "G" for the traditional *pascal* or religious dances, and somewhere in "E" for the heart-breaking *rancheras*; after midnight it didn't matter — most of us were loaded to the gills by the *tesguino* corn beer, specks of mashed corn garnishing our grins.

I left for El Chapareke's *rancho* the next morning with nothing more than the instructions that he lived "over there" and somewhere near the waterfall. Starting at an altitude of 7,000 feet, I set off into the dense *pinetas* and canyons with a bottle of water, my banjo, and a small tourist *chapareke*. Women outside the sparse *ranchitos* and cabins either raced inside and locked their doors when I appeared on the scene or simply fled into the forests. They had been warned about ruthless chabochi men (the Tarahumara term for non-Tarahumara people) and government doctors wielding needles for vaccinations. Lugging my banjo to an overlook of the jagged *barrancas*, I finally happened onto an older woman stationed in front of a weaving loom, who was amused by my plight.

"You're looking for El Chapareke," she said. She pointed at a breathtaking ridge, and indicated that I needed to surmount it using whatever goat or human trails I could find, and then search for a trail along the back once I reached the top.

Hours later, I found the *rancho*, but not El Chapareke. I dropped in front of a pine, drank the rest of my water, played a couple of banjo tunes for his treacherous dog, and then made the trek home. I knew it was his place because the compound was littered with *chaparekes*.

When I returned to my cabin, having walked all day, I found that El Chapareke had hiked up to his *rancho* on a different trail, searching for me, since he had been informed by everyone in the village on Sunday that I was interested in learning his instrument.

We finally joined up the next week. Antonio came by my cabin, carrying a dried husk of the maguey cactus, his pocketknife, and a small piece of madrono wood. He was a small man, with sweet eyes and a grin that charmed. He had learned from his father and grandfather; the instrument had been passed down by his ancestors like corn seeds. Chatting with me as we listened to his own recorded cassette outside the cabin, he sat and carved three perfect pegs with his pocket knife, poked holes in the cactus, hew grooves for the strings, and strung and tuned the instrument with my banjo strings, instead of the traditional skunk's guts. My Scottish ancestors had used almost the same thing — thairms or cat guts — for their first fiddles. The tuning was not dissimilar to that of a mountain dulcimer — a D bass string with the other two strings tuned to G.

I told Antonio that I'd heard suggestions that the instrument might have been introduced by escaped African slaves, but he laughed at such a claim, as if it didn't matter. "This came from our land," he told me, "like our corn."

He glanced at my bluegrass banjo, which suddenly looked like a tank in comparison. "Where did that thing come from?" he said. I smiled. Though it hardly resembled its ancestor, which had a long flat neck hooked onto a skin-covered turtle shell or gourd, I told him the truth. "It came originally from Africa and African slaves."

The *chapareke* was the size of a small dulcimer, not quite a yard long, the strings hooked on the pegs. Antonio played numerous songs, usually with the 6/8 *pascal* and *matachines* rhythms of the Tarahumara religious dances, sounding more than an octave of notes by crinkling his lips on the dried cactus stem of hollow wood. The music was beautiful, crisp, and haunting as a Highlander harp. He stopped abruptly and smiled. "The rest is up to you." It was starting to rain. He had to make the long walk back to his *rancho*.

I once asked the guitar player in the village, who knew all of the latest *cumbias*, Mexican *norteno* polkas, and trio sounds from Vera Cruz, why he hadn't picked up the *chapareke*. No one in the village had bothered to learn.

He smiled, shaking his head, dismissing my comment as if it were a joke. "The next song is in E, Pancho," he said, nodding at my banjo. "This is a *cumbia*." I knew I would have to go searching for El Chapareke again for my next lesson.



**Now answer questions 9-15**