

A few years ago when I was in 4th grade, my math teacher, Mr. Dobrin, gave me some math homework and I misheard him, thinking I had to do it another way. I asked my mom for help. She told me that I was doing it wrong:

“Michael, that’s not how you do that problem.”

“But this is the way Mr. Dobrin said to do it.”

“Babe, you must not have heard him right, because if you do the problem that way, you’re going to get it wrong.”

“Mom, Mr. Dobrin said...” I don’t even remember what I said, but I was explaining to her what I thought was the way to do the problem. I was getting mad because she kept disagreeing with me, and I started to feel tears coming up like they always did when I was upset.

“Stop wiping you eyes before you wipe them off,” Mom said. She would always say something like that whenever we did my homework because I didn’t understand a lot of things then, and the tears would start to come up all the time. After all, I didn’t think she knew what she was talking about.

Now I’m going to fast-forward to yesterday. One of the math problems Mrs. Karr gave us was: 10 times $\frac{1}{5}$ times -5 . I told Mom that the answer would be a positive number and she said it would be a negative number. I told her that Mr. Kakos said that if there are more positives than negatives the answer will be positive, but if there are more negatives than positives, the answer will be negative. She looked confused so I pulled out my math notebook to prove I was right and show her the rules that Mr. Kakos had us write down in math lab:

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 3:47 PM

Comment [1]: Could have started with a more interesting intro line, like dialogue, action, or reaction.

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 3:47 PM

Comment [2]: Memoir is written in 1st person

Jianna Taylor 1/7/14 4:59 PM

Comment [3]: Understands idea of paragraph formatting, but chose to have larger spaces between paragraphs rather than indenting. Makes the dialogue a bit prolonged.

Jianna Taylor 1/7/14 4:54 PM

Comment [4]: Good dialogue tag, as it shows writer’s frustration

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 3:47 PM

Comment [5]: Shows writer’s thoughts and feelings before the event and starts to give readers the idea that this frustration is recurring. Hints that something could be learned from this experience

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 8:45 AM

Comment [6]: Another hint of the learning or reflection to come; more thoughts and feelings in the lead up to the event

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 8:18 AM

Comment [7]: Transition word used to show passage of time

D(ifferent) S(ame)

S(igns) S(igns)

S(ubtract) A(dd)

Immediately she shouted: "Babe! This is MULTIPLICATION! Do you see an addition or subtraction in these problems?"

We both said no, but I think hers was a little louder than mine.

"The rules are different with multiplication and division versus addition and subtraction. In multiplication, if there is an odd number of negatives, it's negative. If there is an even number of negatives, it will be positive. Negative times negative is positive and positive times negative is negative. I know it's a lot of rules, but **thems** the rules!"

Then, she made me do problems on the calculator to prove that **she** was right, and the calculator agreed with her. **Why** did it have to listen to her? **Why** not me?!

Well, the good news is I don't feel the tears coming anymore when we have these discussions, but I do get a pit punch, a neck choke, or a bun box for 'giving my mom grief' and making her say: "Just kill me now!!!" I think I'm learning that I don't always have it right, and Mom might know what she's talking about. In short, I think I'm growing up.

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 8:19 AM

Comment [8]: Creative use of formatting to show something that was handwritten

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 8:20 AM

Comment [9]: Use of the nonstandard "thems" adds authenticity to the dialogue, helping it sound real and not stilted

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 8:21 AM

Comment [10]: Transition word to show the passage of time

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 3:48 PM

Comment [11]: Thoughts and feelings after the event show how the writer is reconstructing these events for personal significance rather than just retelling the facts of the story

Jianna Taylor 1/8/14 3:35 PM

Comment [12]: Conclusion ties up the memoir with the same playful humor that was used throughout, while also reflecting what was learned through the experience.

Content	High	Medium	Low
Memorable Moment	Clear memorable moment.	Memorable moment is somewhat clear.	Memorable moment is unclear.
New Understanding or Realization	The writer has made clear what they have learned or realized from this memorable moment.	The writer has made it somewhat clear what they have learned or realized from this memorable moment.	Meaning or learning is unclear from the experience.
Structure/ Organization of Memoir	Writer shows attitudes and feelings through events BEFORE the moment, during the meaningful moment and AFTER the moment.	Writer somewhat shows attitudes and feelings through events BEFORE the moment, during the meaningful moment and AFTER the moment.	Writer is not able to show attitudes and feelings through events BEFORE the moment, during the meaningful moment and AFTER the moment.
Style/Voice	Meaning is shown through several literary devices weaved into text including similes, metaphors, personification and onomatopoeia.	Meaning is shown through few literary devices weaved into text including similes, metaphors, personification and onomatopoeia.	Limited use of literary devices. Weak contribution to meaning.
Mechanics	Demonstrates solid grasp of standard writing conventions and uses them effectively.	Writer shows reasonable control over a limited range of standard writing conventions	Errors distract the reader and make the text difficult to read.

Teacher Comment:

This piece of writing was a culmination of the Launching the Writer's Notebook/Memoir unit and took students through the process of setting up their notebooks, generating potential story ideas, revising, and bringing their writing to a final draft.

One of the biggest challenges for 7th grade writers is focusing their memoir on a clear, memorable moment. This writer did an especially good job with that by first setting up that his frustrations with homework and his mom's help are recurring incidents, then focusing on one particular night of homework. Throughout his memoir, the writer shared his thoughts and feelings, allowing the reader to see the change in his thinking from beginning to end. This is essential to the memoir genre, especially as students spiral up and build upon skills learned in the 6th grade personal narrative unit.

It is clear by the end that writer feels he has grown from the experience, as he clearly reflects on the experience of his mom helping him with his homework. This reflective piece—missing from many 7th grade memoirs—is key to the genre and what differentiates it from the 6th grade personal narrative. Students often have trouble gaining enough perspective on their experience to reflect on it without becoming clichéd in their reflection. This writer strikes a nice balance between clearly expressing what he learned without overdoing it.

In this unit, students learned about how writers use literary devices to make their writing stronger. This particular student is still very concrete in his thinking, leading him to struggle in using literary devices. This would be something to address in future pieces and through conferences with the student.