

Writing an Eyewitness Account

Topic

Observing and Writing About What You See

Objective

Students will observe an unexpected event and then write about what happened, including relevant details.

Materials

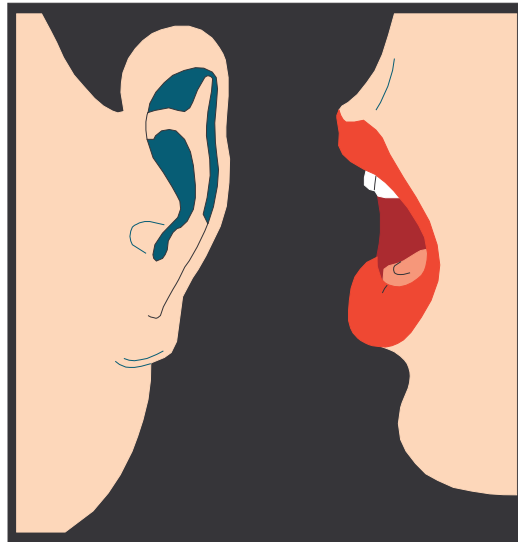
- paper for writing and/or computer paper
- pencils, pens
- word processor and/or typewriter (optional)
- reproduced copies of pages 55 and 56

Preparation

1. Make copies of pages 55 and 56.
2. Prearrange the assistance of one adult and two students on a given day.

Procedure

1. One day before the day you plan to conduct this simulation, play the old game of “telephone” with the students. Whisper a message into the ear of the first student. In turn, that student is to whisper what he or she heard to the next student, and so on until all the students have received a message. The game works best when the message is a simple one such as, “Mary went to answer the phone, but when she got there the phone was dead.” Vary the difficulty of the message with the level of the students in the class. Whisper the message only once, and instruct the students to do the same. When the last student has received a message, instruct the students to write down what they heard without saying anything until all have finished writing. Then have the last student say aloud the message received. Compare the messages each of the students heard. Discuss how messages change when passed from one person to the next and how difficult it sometimes is to get an unexpected message straight. Go on to the rest of the day’s lesson.



Writing an Eyewitness Account *(cont.)*

Procedure (cont.)

2. This part of the simulation should take place the day following the game of “telephone,” and requires the help of another adult and two students from outside the present class. These persons should be ones you can rely on to keep a secret.

Tell them that you wish to prepare an activity for your class which will increase your students’ abilities to observe and report, and you need them to be actors.

3. Give the students and adult actors the script on page 55. Ask them to learn the script. Plan ahead the day on which you are going to complete the simulation, but do not tell the students in your class that anything unusual is going to occur on that day.
4. On the day which has been planned, direct the actors to act out the script as printed. The entire scene should take no more than two or three minutes to complete.
5. When the actors leave the room, do not discuss with the students what has just happened. Instead, distribute the questionnaire on page 56 and direct them to answer the questions.
6. Collect the papers which the students have completed. Discuss their responses to the questions and how they might better observe and record another event for which they are unprepared. Explain to them that often after an automobile accident or an altercation of some sort, different witnesses will give varying and sometimes contradictory accounts of what occurred. When this happens, it can cause problems for police officers or other officials trying to discern what really occurred.

Follow-Up

1. An ability to observe and make accurate written reports is essential for many careers and professions. Give the students several opportunities to observe and report in order to hone their abilities. Some possibilities might include three-minute observations followed by written descriptions of the following:
 - people going into and out of the school office
 - people on the sidelines watching a game
 - students at one table in the school cafeteria
 - students waiting for the bus after school
2. Have students write a description of a character, real or imagined. Explain that one can tell what a person is like by the way that person looks, by what that person says, by what that person does, and by what other people say about that person. Their characterizations should include a physical description and an example of that person doing something which shows that person’s character or personality.

Eyewitness Script

Characters

Boy

Girl

Teacher

Classroom Full of Students

Principal or Another Adult

Scene: *A classroom. The students are not expecting anything other than a normal class. They await instructions from the teacher, who is finishing taking the roll. Suddenly a loud commotion sounds from outside the door. Enter BOY with GIRL following, obviously angry with each other.*

Action

GIRL: Give me back my binder! Now!

BOY: Forget you! I'm not going to give you back anything! Keep away from me!

GIRL: Give it to me right now. Ms. _____, make him give me back my binder! He keeps pestering me, and I'm not going to take it anymore! *(She turns back to the boy.)* I hate you, you creep!

TEACHER: What on earth is going on here? Both of you, head right straight to the office, you hear? What do you think you're doing?

(Teacher picks up classroom phone.)

TEACHER: Office, please! Right away!

(The principal bursts through the door.)

PRINCIPAL: Come on, you two! Right now! Sorry, Ms. _____. This won't happen again!

(Principal ushers the disruptive students out through the door.)

Eyewitness Questionnaire

You have just witnessed an unexpected event. Answer these questions about what happened to the best of your ability.

How many people were involved? _____

What did the people do? _____

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Describe person #1. | Hair color: _____ | Eye color: _____ |
| | Approximate height: _____ | |
| | Obvious characteristics: _____ | |
| | _____ _____ _____ | |

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Describe person #2. | Hair color: _____ | Eye color: _____ |
| | Approximate height: _____ | |
| | Obvious characteristics: _____ | |
| | _____ _____ _____ | |

| | | |
|---------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Describe person #3. | Hair color: _____ | Eye color: _____ |
| | Approximate height: _____ | |
| | Obvious characteristics: _____ | |
| | _____ _____ _____ | |