

The Green Literacy Approach to Personal Narrative

We created the following commentary to help show how the personal narrative genre can expand from an individual viewpoint to encompass an entire community or movement.

In reading and literature classes, teachers and students alike acknowledge the acts of one important individual person: the main character. Readers consider the fate of the protagonist, the journey of one person whose life radically changes due to their heroic act. In literary analysis, we explore whether the character's actions appear strong or weak. Does she overcome obstacles? Does her action help the whole? In the conventional sense, personal narrative invites young readers to "live" a hero's life. Text and images support imagination. The ability to role play and a keen sense of wonder can lead to critical thinking as young people imagine themselves doing courageous actions, similar to the feats in the text and illustrations.

With critical discussions, a personal narrative can swell into the study of how one's life connects to others and how heroic feats become one of many threads that weave through a community story. The personal narrative of one person may become symbolic for an entire community. Biologist and author Rachel Carson (1962) wrote the bestseller *Silent Spring* as well as other books. Her writing is credited with advancing the global environmental movement. Late in the 1950s, Rachel Carson focused on synthetic pesticides. *Silent Spring* brought environmental concerns to an unprecedented audience. While the movement met fierce opposition, it spurred a reversal in national pesticide policy, including a ban on dichloro-diphenyl-trichloroethane, better known as DDT. Rachel Carson's work inspired a grassroots environmental movement that led to the creation of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Carson's story does not represent all environmentalists, yet most people recognize her as a symbol of the environmental movement. In her case and many others, the personal narrative takes on mythic proportions that impact the community's shared story. A personal narrative, then, is more than the narrative of one person's life and often represents the story of the movement, community, or natural resources.

As we begin to shift our thinking, we begin by acknowledging that a personal narrative expands from the inward journey of an individual outward to the community's story, particularly to those who support that individual.

Pause and Consider: How can I lead classroom discussions that balance the focus between an individual, the people in the movement or community, and the natural resources that need to be conserved?

REFERENCE

Carson, R. (1962). *Silent spring*. Houghton Mifflin.