

Student Sample: Grade 8, Narrative

This narrative was written to fulfill an assignment in which students were asked to introduce a special person to readers who did not know the person. The students were advised to reveal the personal quality of their relationship with the person presented. The student who wrote this piece borrowed ideas from a fictional piece she had read.

Miss Sadie

Miss Sadie no longer sits in her rocking chair on her porch on summer days. But I still can see her. The old chair squeaking with every sway of her big, brown body. Her summer dresses stained from cooking in her sweet smelling kitchen. I see her gray hair pulled back in that awful, yellow banana clip. Most of all, I hear that voice. So full of character and wisdom.

I used to bring Miss Johnson cookies every summer day of 1988. I miss the days when I would sit on that shabby old porch and listen to her stories. "Melissa!" she would holler. "What 'chu doin' here? Come see me and my poor self, have ya?"

She once told me of her grandmother who escaped slavery, back when white men could only do anything, she would say. Her grandma ran for miles without food or water. It wasn't too long before her master came looking for her and took her home to whip her. I thought of how Blacks are treated today. I sighed. She would sing in her

soulful, blaring voice, old negro hymns pressed down from her mother and grand mother. I would sit there in amazement.

Once, Jimmy Taylor came walking by us yelling, "Melissa! Whattaya want with that old, fat, Black lady, anyways?"

Before I could retaliate, Miss Johnson said to me, "Now, you musn't. We must feel sorry for that terrible child. His mother must have done gone and not taught him no manners!" She actually wanted me to bow my head and pray for him. (Even though I went to his house and punched him out the next day.)

My friends would tease me for spending the whole summer with Sadie Johnson, "The Cuckoo of Connecticut," they called her. But I'm so very glad I did. She taught me then, to not care what other people thought. I learned that I could be friends with someone generations apart from my own.

My visits became less frequent when school started. I had other things to think about. Boys, clothes, grades. You know, real important stuff.

One day I was thinking, I haven't seen Miss Sadie in a while. So after school I trotted up to her house amidst the twirling, autumn leaves.

I rang her bell. The door cracked open and

the woman adjusted her glasses. "May I help you?"

"Miss Sadie, it's me, Melissa."

"T-T" she'd stammered. "I don't remember," she said and shut the door. I heard crying. I rang the door again and she screamed, "Please leave!" in a scared, confused voice.

I went home bewildered and my mother told me to stop bothering Miss Sadie. I said I wasn't bothering her. Mama said, "Miss Johnson has a disease. Alzheimer's disease. It makes her forget things... people, family even. And so, I don't want you over there anymore, you hear?"

Then, I didn't realize or comprehend, how someone so special to you could forget your own existence when you'd shared a summer so special and vivid in your mind.

That Christmas I went to bring Miss Johnson cookies. She wasn't there. I learned from a family member that she was in the hospital and that she'd die very soon. As the woman, a daughter maybe, spoke, my heart broke.

"Well, you make sure she gets those cookies," I said, my voice cracking and tears welling in my eyes.

Today, I've learned to love old people. For their innocence, for their knowledge. I've learned to always treat people with kindness, no matter how cruel they may seem. But mainly, I've learned, that you must cherish the time spent with a person. And memories are very valuable. Because Miss Sadie no longer sits in her rocking chair on her porch on summer days. I'm glad that I can still see her.

Annotation

The writer of this piece

- **engages and orients the reader by establishing a context and point of view, and introducing a narrator and characters.**
 - The writer engages the reader by entering immediately into the story line and orients the reader by skillfully backfilling information about the setting (*the old chair squeaking; that shabby old porch*) and the narrator’s experiences with Miss Sadie (bringing Miss Sadie cookies, listening to her stories, listening to her sing *old negro hymns*).
- **organizes an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.**
 - The writer begins in the present, when *Miss Sadie no longer sits in her rocking chair*, then—appropriately for a narrator engaged in reflection—creates an image with specific details of Miss Sadie as she was in the past (*every sway of her big brown body . . . her gray hair pulled back in that awful, yellow banana clip*).
- **uses narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and characters.**
 - Reflection: *My friends would tease me for spending the whole summer with Sadie Johnson, “The cookoo of Connecticut,” they called her. But I’m so very glad I did. She taught me then, to not care what other people thought. I learned that I could be friends with someone generations apart from my own . . . Then, I didn’t realize or comprehend, how someone so special to you could forget your own existence when you’d shared a summer so special and vivid in your mind.*
 - Dialogue: *I rang her bell. The door cracked open and the women adjusted her glasses. “May I help you?”*

“Miss Sadie, it’s me, Melissa.”

“I-I,” she’d stuttered. “I don’t remember,” she said and shut the door.
 - Tension: *I heard crying. I rang the door again and she screamed, “Please leave!” in a scared, confused voice.*
 - Reporting internal thoughts and reactions: *“Whattaya want with that old, fat, Black lady, any ways?” . . . As the woman, a daughter maybe, spoke, my heart broke.*
- **uses a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events.**
 - *no longer . . . still . . . used to . . . I miss the days . . . once . . . then . . . Today . . .*
- **uses precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.**
 - *The old chair squeaking with every sway of her big, brown body.*
 - *Her summer dresses stained from cooking. I smell her sweet smelling kitchen.*
 - *. . . her soulful, blaring voice . . .*
 - *. . . the twirling, autumn leaves.*
 - *The door cracked open . . .*
 - *“I-I,” she’d stuttered.*
- **provides a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.**
 - In the conclusion, the writer returns to the image in the beginning of the narrative (*Miss Sadie no longer sits in her rocking chair on her porch on summer days. But I still can see her*) to reflect on the importance of memories (*I’m glad that I can still see her*).

- **demonstrates good command of the conventions of standard written English (with occasional errors that do not interfere materially with the underlying message).**
 - Occasional sentence fragments were likely included for stylistic purposes (e.g., *The old chair squeaking with every sway of her big, brown body; Her summer dresses stained from cooking; Because Miss Sadie no longer sits in her rocking chair on her porch on summer days*).