ACTIVITY 2.5

Learning Targets

- Analyze the narrative techniques writers use to create a sense of pacing in
- Apply pacing to my own writing.

Pacing

Narrative pacing is an important part of telling a good story. A writer controls the rhythm of a narrative with specific choices in sentence length, word choice, and details. For example, a series of short sentences can heighten suspense and increase the pace, while a series of long sentences may slow the pace.

Preview

In this activity, you will read an essay and analyze its pacing. In addition, you will write your own narrative using the techniques you have learned so far in this unit.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read the following essay, mark the text and write notes about where the pacing or rhythm of the narrative changes and how these changes in pacing affect you as a reader.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meaning of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Matthews is the author of the memoir Ace of Spades published in 2007 by Henry Holt and Co. He is the son of an African American father and a Jewish mother. In his memoir, Matthews tells of growing up racially mixed in Baltimore, Maryland during the 1970s and '80s. The following essay was adapted from his memoir and printed in The New York Times Magazine on January 21, 2007.

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by David Matthews The New York Times

1 In 1977, when I was nine, my father and I moved away from the protected Maryland suburbs of Washington—and away from his latest wife, my latest stepmother—to my grandmother's apartment in inner-city Baltimore. I had never seen so many houses connected to one another, block after block, nor so many people on streets, marble stoops and corners. Many of those people, I could not help noticing, were black. I had never seen so many black people in all my life.

LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Graphic Organizer, Think-Pair-Share, Marking the Text

Literary Terms

Narrative pacing refers to the speed at which a narrative moves. A writer slows pacing with more details and longer sentences. Fewer details and shorter sentences have the effect of increasing the pace.

GRAMMAR & USAGE Semicolon

Writers use a semicolon to ioin independent clauses when two or more clauses are of equal importance. In paragraph 2, notice the sentence "I was black, too, though I didn't look it; and I was white, though I wasn't quite." In this sentence, the two independent clauses are about two aspects of the same problem. In paragraph 7, notice the sentence "I didn't contemplate the segregation; it was simply part of the new physical geography, and I was no explorer; I was a weak-kneed outsider, a yellowed freak." How do the independent clauses relate to one another?

My Notes

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COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

Focus Standards:

RI.9–10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

W.9-10.3b: Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

L.9-10.2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Additional Standards Addressed:

W.9-10.3a; W.9-10.3c; W.9-10.3d; W.9-10.4; W.9-10.9; W.9-10.10; SL.9-10.1a; SL.9-10.1c; SL.9-10.6; L.9-10.2a; L.9-10.4; L.9-10.6

ACTIVITY 2.5

▶PLAN

Materials: various commercials from YouTube

Suggested Pacing: 1.5 50-minute class periods plus homework

►TEACH

1 Remind students that this activity is part of a series of lessons that will provide them the opportunity to study mentor texts and to practice the technique in their own writing. The focus of this activity is pacing.

2 Review the term narrative pacing and discuss the impact of pacing on a narrative. Use several commercials to look at the impact of pacing on the audience. Use commercials that are fast-paced or slow-paced so students can understand the effect of pacing on audience reaction.

3 Read the Preview and the Setting a Purpose for Reading sections with your students. Help them understand the instructions for annotating the pacing of the essay, as well as for circling unfamiliar words. Explain to students that as they read the narrative this first time, they should annotate where the rhythm of the writing changes. Students should also pay attention and note how these changes affect the narrative pace.

4 FIRST READ: Based on the complexity of the passage and your knowledge of your students, you may choose to conduct the first reading in a variety of ways:

- independent reading
- paired reading
- small-group reading
- read aloud



Text Complexity

Overall: Complex Lexile: 1000L

Qualitative: Moderate Difficulty Task: Moderate (Analyze)

5 Direct students' attention to the Grammar & Usage feature, and discuss the information about the semicolon. After students read this text, return to this page and have them review and respond to the note. Then discuss how the writer's use of semicolons affects the pace of the essay.

ACTIVITY 2.5 continued

- 6 As students are reading, monitor their progress. Be sure they are engaged with the text and annotating the narrative pacing. Evaluate whether the selected reading mode is effective.
- 7 Have students review the information in the Grammar & Usage feature on the use of the dash. Ask students to discuss whether using a dash speeds up or slows down the pace, and give evidence for their choice by referring to the text. Remind students to apply this information as they respond to the narrative writing prompt on page 127.

ACTIVITY 2.5 continued

Author's Stylebook: Pacing

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Dashes can provide emphasis. Notice the dash used in this sentence: "I froze, and said nothing-for the time being." Here, the phrase "for the time being" is emphasized. Dashes can also set off parenthetical information. as in this sentence: "And though I was used to some measure of instabilityvarious apartments, sundry stepmothers and girlfriends—I had always gone to the same redbrick single-level school." With this usage, the dash places more emphasis on the set-off content than parentheses would do.

render: pronounce equine: horselike stumped: baffled partisan: of one belief avidity: eagerness clause: part of a legal document

Му	Notes	

vicarious: lived through another

- 2 I was black, too, though I didn't look it; and I was white, though I wasn't quite. My mother, a woman I'd never really met, was white and Jewish, and my father was a black man who, though outwardly hued like weak coffee, was—as I grew to learn—stridently black nationalist in his views and counted Malcolm X1 and James Baldwin2 among his friends. I was neither blessed nor cursed, depending on how you looked at it, with skin milky enough to classify me as white or swarthy enough to render me black. But before moving from our integrated and idyllic neighborhood, I really knew nothing of "race." I was pretty much just a kid, my full-time gig. And though I was used to some measure of instability—various apartments, sundry stepmothers and girlfriends—I had always gone to the same redbrick single-level school. Nothing prepared me for walking into that public-school classroom, already three weeks into fourth grade. I had never felt so utterly on my own.
- 3 Mrs. Eberhard, my new homeroom teacher, made an introduction of sorts, and every student turned around to study me. The black kids, who made up more than 80 percent of the school's population, ranged in shades from butterscotch to Belgian chocolate, but none had my sallow complexion, nor my fine, limp hair. And the white kids, a salting of red and alabaster faces, had noses that were tapered and blunted, free of the slightly equine flare of my own, and lips that unobtrusively parted their mouths, in contrast to the thickened slabs I sucked between my teeth.
- 4 In the hallway, on the way to class, black and white kids alike herded around me. Then the question came: "What are you?"
- 5 I was **stumped**. No one had ever asked what I was before. It came buzzing at me again, like a hornet shaken from its hive. The kids surrounded me, pressing me into a wall of lockers. What are you? Hey, he won't answer us. Look at me. What are you? He's black. He looks white! No way, he's too dark. Maybe he's Chinese!
- **6** They were rigidly **partisan**. The only thing that unified them was their inquisitiveness. And I had a hunch, based on their avidity, that the question had a wrong answer. There was black or white. Pick one. Nowhere in their ringing questions was the elastic clause, mixed. The choice was both necessary and impossible: identify myself or have it done for me. I froze, and said nothing—for the time being.
- 7 At lunchtime that first day, teetering on the edge of the cafeteria, my eyes scanned the room and saw an island of white kids in a sea of black faces. I didn't contemplate the segregation; it was simply part of the new physical geography, and I was no explorer; I was a weak-kneed outsider, a yellowed freak.
- 8 In some way I wasn't fully aware of, urban black people scared me. I didn't know how to play the dozens or do double Dutch. I didn't know the one about how your mama's so dumb she failed her pap test. I didn't know that with the wrong intonation, or the wrong addressee, any mention of one's mama could lead to a table-clearing brawl. The black kids at school carried a loose, effortless charge that crackled through their interactions. They were alive and cool. The only experience I had with cool had been vicarious, watching my father and his bebop-era revolutionary friends, and feeling their vague sense of disappointment when I couldn't mimic their behavior. The black kids reminded me of home, but the white kids reminded me of myself, the me I saw staring back in the mirror. On that day, I came to believe that if I had said I was black, I would have had to spend the rest of my life convincing my own people.

SCAFFOLDING THE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

- 1. Key Ideas and Details (RI.9-10.3) What contrast does Matthews make between his old neighborhood and his new one? When Matthews discusses his old neighborhood, what words does he use to describe it? How is the description of the way the students in his new school focus on the question of his race different from that situation?
- 2. Craft and Structure (RI.9-10.6) Identify Matthews's purpose in telling this story from

his childhood. How does his use of narrative elements in the essay help him to achieve his purpose? To identify Matthews's purpose, think about what all the details of his first day in his new school focus on. Then reread the last paragraph. What decision does he make in his last paragraph, and how does he word that decision? Next, reread the text and focus on the narrative details of indirect dialogue and description. How do those details help to make his main point?

¹ Malcolm X (1925–1965) was an African American minister and civil rights activist who was assassinated in 1965.

² James Baldwin (1924–1987) was an African American writer and social critic.

ACTIVITY 2.5 continued

My Notes

- 9 Lunch tray in hand, I made a final and (at least I like to tell myself) psychologically logical choice, one I would live with, and wrestle with, for a full decade to come: I headed toward the kids who looked most like me. Goofy bell-bottoms and matching Garanimals? Check. Seventies mop-top? Check. Then a ruddy boy with blond bangs lopped off at the eyebrows looked up from his Fantastic Four comic book, caught my eye across the cafeteria, scooched over in his seat and nodded me over.
- 10 That was it. By the code of the cafeteria table, which was just as binding in that time and place as the laws of Jim Crow³ or Soweto⁴, I was white.

Second Read

- Reread the essay to answer these text-dependent questions.
- Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer
- 1. Key Ideas and Details: What contrast does Matthews make between his old neighborhood and his new one?
 - Matthews writes that his old neighborhood was integrated, so he didn't have to think about his race at school. In contrast, in his new neighborhood, the students segregate themselves in groups of black and white kids. RI.9–10.3
- 2. Craft and Structure: Identify Matthews's purpose in telling this story from his childhood. How does his use of narrative elements in the essay help him to achieve his purpose?
 - Matthews's purpose is to show that in 1977, social pressure forced him to identify as a white person although he was of mixed race. His use of narrative elements, such as indirect dialogue and description, help show how rigid the other students were. RI.9-10.6
- 3. Knowledge and Ideas: Matthews makes the point that the "code of the cafeteria table ... was just as binding in that time and place as the laws of Jim Crow or Soweto." During the 20th century, the laws Matthews refers to enforced segration of black and white people in the United States and South Africa. Does his essay prove that his comparison is valid?
 - Matthews says that "Nowhere in their ringing questions was the elastic clause, mixed," which would have allowed him to give the correct answer. Instead, they are unified in forcing him to choose. He also says he had to "identify myself or have it done for me." Furthermore, he describes the segregation in the cafeteria, which again forces him to make a choice. Although the laws he is discussing are social rather than political, his essay does prove that his comparison is valid. RI.9-10.8
- 3 Jim Crow is a name given to laws that enforced racial segregation in the United States from after the Civil War until 1965.
- Soweto is a part of a city in South Africa where black Africans lived under the policy of apartheid.

SCAFFOLDING THE TEXT-DEPENDENT QUESTIONS

3. Knowledge and Ideas (RI.9-10.8) Matthews makes the point that the "code of the cafeteria table ... was just as binding in that time and place as the laws of Jim Crow or Soweto." During the 20th century, the laws Matthews refers to enforced segregation of black and white people in the United States and South Africa. Does his essay prove that his comparison is valid?

The question asks if Matthews shows that the segregation in his new school is as binding as if it were enforced by laws, rather than society. To answer that question, consider: What is the one thing that his classmates want to know about him? Do all the students want to know, or just some of them? How is the seating arranged in the cafeteria?

ACTIVITY 2.5 continued

- 8 After the first reading, ask students to **share** their thinking about the essay with a partner. Discuss the parts of the essay that are telling a story rather than explaining thinking. Ask students to focus on the one piece of dialogue. How does this dialogue become the impetus for the entire essay?
- 9 Based on the observations you made during the first reading, you may want to adjust the reading mode. For example, you may decide for the second reading to read aloud certain complex passages, or you may group students differently.
- 10 SECOND READ: During the second reading, students will be returning to the text to answer the text-dependent comprehension questions. You may choose to have students reread and work on the questions in a variety of ways:
- independently
- in pairs
- in small groups
- together as a class
- 11 Have students answer the text-dependent questions. If they have difficulty, scaffold the questions by rephrasing them or breaking them down into smaller parts. See the Scaffolding the Text-Dependent Questions boxes for suggestions.

ACTIVITY 2.5 continued

12 Direct attention to the Language and Writer's Craft: Sentence Variety feature. Review the definitions of each type of sentence, and have volunteers read aloud the example sentences.

13 Have pairs continue to collaborate by rereading the narrative and looking for an example of each type of sentence. Then have them complete the **graphic organizer** by adding an original sentence of each type.

14 Have pairs share their examples with the class.

ACTIVITY 2.5

Author's Stylebook: Pacing

My Notes

Working from the Text

Language and Writer's Craft: Sentence Variety

A variety of sentence types gives prose a natural rhythm. Simple sentences consist of one independent clause. Compound sentences consist of two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction. Complex sentences consist of an independent clause and one or more subordinate clauses. Compound-complex sentences have two or more independent clauses as well as at least one subordinate clause.

Consider these examples from the essay:

Simple Sentence: "I had never felt so utterly on my own."

Compound Sentence: "Mrs. Eberhard, my new homeroom teacher, made an introduction of sorts, and every student turned around to study me."

Complex Sentence: "I was neither blessed nor cursed, depending on how you looked at it, with skin milky enough to classify me as white or swarthy enough to render me black."

Compound-Complex Sentence: "I was black, too, though I didn't look it; and I was white, though I wasn't quite."

PRACTICE With a partner, reread the essay looking for at least one example of each of these sentence types. Then write your own examples.

Sentence Type	Example from Text	Original Example
Simple (one independent clause)	Possible response: "I was stumped."	Any simple sentence.
Compound (two or more independent clauses)	Possible response: "The choice was both necessary and impossible: identify myself or have it done for me."	Any compound sentence.
Complex (one independent clause and at least one dependent clause)	Possible response: "At lunchtime that first day, teetering on the edge of the cafeteria, my eyes scanned the room and saw an island of white kids in a sea of black faces."	Any complex sentence.
Compound- complex (two or more independent clauses and at least one dependent clause)	Possible response: "My mother, a woman I'd never really met, was white and Jewish, and my father was a black man who, though outwardly hued like weak coffee, was—as I grew to learn—stridently black nationalist in his views and counted Malcolm X and James Baldwin among his friends."	Any compound- complex sentence.



4. What is the overall impact of sentence variety on the pacing of the essay? Provide details from the text to support your answer.

Narrative Writing Prompt

Write a narrative about a time when you made an important decision about yourself. Vary the pacing in your narrative by working in simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex sentences. Be sure to:

- Use descriptive details to help the reader understand your story.
- Provide a smooth progression of experiences or events, using transitions to move through the story.
- Vary the pacing through the use of details and sentence types and lengths.

Check Your Understanding

After completing your narrative, work with a partner and share your stories. Identify the change in pacing and the sentence types each of you used in your stories.

My Notes

ACTIVITY 2.5 continued

15 After completing the Language and Writer's Craft activity, have students summarize the impact of sentence variety on the pacing of the essay. They should be able to provide evidence from the text.

16 Ask students to complete the Narrative Writing prompt either in class or for homework. Tell students that the writing prompt is a chance to practice using sentence variety to affect pacing. You might make special note of juxtaposing a short sentence against a long one or combining several short sentences to achieve an effect.

17 Check for student understanding by having students read their narrative to a partner and listen to the partner's narrative. Or you might have pairs read each other's narrative aloud. Have readers emphasize the pacing of the narrative as it is controlled by sentence variety and punctuation.

ASSESS

Use students' responses to the writing prompt to evaluate their understanding of narrative writing. Check that they have included descriptive details, varied sentence types to control pacing, and used effective transitions.

Informally assess students' understanding of how varying sentence types affects pacing by circulating and briefly participating in each pair's discussion.

► ADAPT

If students have difficulty varying sentence types to affect pacing in their own narratives, have them practice on a story that is not their own: Have them rewrite a fairy tale or an episode from a fairy tale, using different types and lengths of sentences to control pacing as they build suspense or slow the action. Discuss when the action should be faster-paced and slower-paced, and what types of sentences work well in each case.