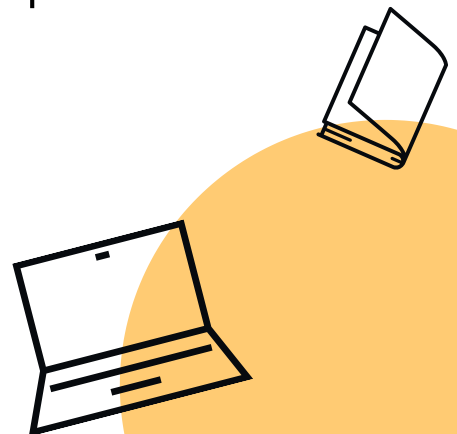


# Unit 3

## Creative Non-Fiction

### Overview

In this unit, students will write to express thoughts by using the writing process to produce a variety of written works. This unit introduces what storytelling is whether they're telling a true story or letting their imagination fly. Students will employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.



# Essential Questions

- How may the sharing of personal experiences become a platform for expressing universal truths?
- How do we address different audiences in our writing?
- What role do form and structure play in the writing of various types of nonfiction?

## Essential Learning Outcomes

- Students will use central subject matter that comes out of their own individual life experience and from their imagination
- Students will understand the creative process as a forum for critical as well as intuitive thinking, as well as problem-solving
- Students will practice the craft of writing dialog as a story telling tool.

## Unit Resources

[Intro to Creative Non-Fiction & Reading Links](#)

[Truth Tweets Activity](#)

[My Name Activity](#)

[Just Dialogue Activity](#)

## Videos

[Creative Non-Fiction Video Playlist](#)

# What is Creative Nonfiction?

*By Lee Gutkind at [creativenonfiction.org](https://creativenonfiction.org)*

<https://creativenonfiction.org/what-is-cnf/>

Simply put: Creative nonfiction is true stories, well told.

If novels are fiction and poems are, well, poetry, then what are memoirs? What about essays, narrative journalism, and so many other kinds of true stories that give us new ways to consider the world around us and our place in it? From books to magazine articles to podcasts, creative nonfiction surrounds us.

Share link with the class:

<https://creativenonfiction.org/what-is-cnf/>

Then as a class, brainstorm types of Creative Non-Fiction and have students share examples of favorites.

The label “creative nonfiction” can be applied to a number of nonfiction genres, including:

- Memoir
- Biography
- Autobiography
- Literary journalism
- Travel writing
- Nature writing
- Sports writing
- Personal essay
- Interviews

# Reading Creative Non-Fiction

*Creative Non-Fiction examples to share with the class*

<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/17/magazine/a-pet-tortoise-who-will-outlive-us-all.html>

<https://hippocampusmagazine.com/2021/11/teeth-by-gavin-paul-colton/>

<https://witanddelight.com/2021/12/our-view-of-self-deprecation-is-all-wrong-heres-why/>

<https://www.seasonedvagabond.com/cars-in-cuba>

<https://maximumfun.org/podcasts/judge-john-hodgman/>

# Tiny Truth Tweets

For a multimodal challenge, another popular mode of flash nonfiction are Tiny Truth tweets, a form popularized by Creative Nonfiction Magazine. Writers compose a true story on Twitter in 280 characters or fewer with the hashtag #CNFTweet, sometimes in response to a theme posted by the magazine's Twitter account. The editors' favorite tweets are retweeted daily, and a few are selected to be printed in the next issue of Creative Nonfiction's Tiny Truths column.

Far from the straightforward content of most tweets, Tiny Truths zoom in on a personal memory or feeling to gain insight about a more universal theme—whether about parenthood, coming of age, or the inevitable passage of time. Below are a few examples of Tiny Truths that seem to tell a larger, more complex story beyond the moment captured in the tweet:



As kids, my brother and I paddled a canoe. I sat behind him, watched his life jacket, sea soaked, orange, speckled like a ripening peach. As adults, we sit in a courtroom. I'm behind him again. His jumpsuit is faded—somehow, it's faded—withered like it's sea bleached. #cnftweet

12:33 PM · Nov 14, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone



When I was five, my older sister played softball, and I ran in empty fields, collected dirt, liked the feel of dust in my fingers, and grain on my shins. I chased boys around the bases, back before homeruns were metaphors, the sun blazing down on our little heads. #cnftweet

11:22 PM · Nov 13, 2019 · Twitter for iPhone

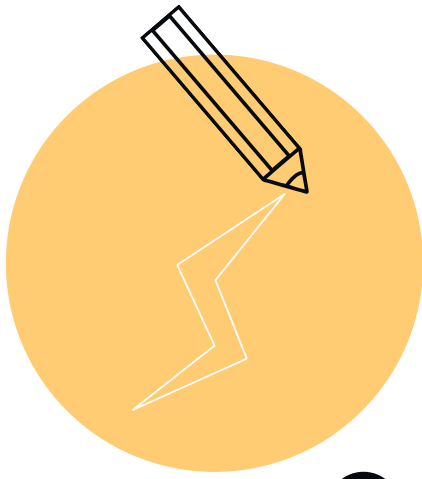
The form challenges writers to work within a set of natural constraints, and the results are often beautifully poignant. Tiny Truths are a wonderful opportunity both for your students to practice the art of concision on a popular platform and to host a class discussion about public writing and venues of publication.

# My Name

Sharing the story behind our name is a way to tell a story about ourselves, our culture, and our family history. And if there isn't a story behind it, we can talk about how we feel about it and describe what it sounds like. In this activity, students use video to introduce themselves to their classmates by discussing the origin of their name. This project asks students to connect their names (and identities) to their personal and familial histories and to larger historical forces. Share the mentor text from Sandra Cisneros.

“My Name” by Sandra Cisneros  
excerpted from *The House on Mango Street*.

In English my name means hope. In Spanish it means too many letters. It means sadness, it means waiting. It is like the number nine. A muddy color. It is the Mexican records my father plays on Sunday mornings when he is shaving, songs like sobbing. It was my great-grandmother's name and now it is mine. She was a horse woman too, born like me in the Chinese year of the horse-- which is supposed to be bad luck if you're born female-but I think this is a Chinese lie because the Chinese, like the Mexicans, don't like their women strong. My great-grandmother. I would've liked to have known her, a wild, horse of a woman, so wild she wouldn't marry. Until my great-grandfather threw a sack over her head and carried her off. Just like that, as if she were a fancy chandelier. That's the way he did it. And the story goes she never forgave him. She looked out the window her whole life, the way so many women sit their sadness on an elbow. I wonder if she made the best with what she got or was she sorry because she couldn't be all the things she wanted to be. Esperanza. I have inherited her name, but I don't want to inherit her place by the window. At school they say my name funny as if the syllables were made out of tin and hurt the roof of your mouth. But in Spanish my name is made out of a softer something, like silver, not quite as thick as sister's name Magdalena--which is uglier than mine. Magdalena who at least--can come home and become Nenny. But I am always Esperanza. would like to baptize myself under a new name, a name more like the real me, the one nobody sees. Esperanza as Lisandra or Maritza or Zeze the X. Yes. Something like Zeze the X will do.



## ● My Name Activity

*Respond to the following writing prompt with two or more paragraphs.*

*Be sure to use correct grammar and punctuation.*

Explain what your name means. Does it have a special meaning?  
How did you get your name?  
Do you have a nickname? How did you arrive at that nickname?

If you could change your name, what would you change it to?  
Would a name change make you feel differently about yourself?  
Why?

Try to include a personal anecdote about your name. Has your name ever gotten you into trouble?

## The topic is your name.

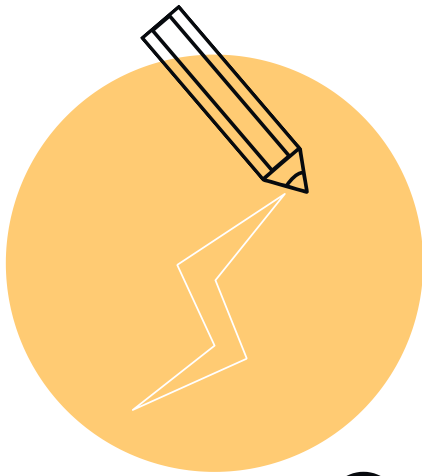
Your purpose is to inform us about your name, and the audience is your classmates.

Before you begin writing, read the following questions. You may use these questions, but you don't have to. You can say anything about your name.

- Do you know why your parents chose your name? Who chose it? Were you named after a particular person? Why were you named after him or her? Are you like that person or different from him or her? How?
- Does your name have a nickname? What is it? How do you feel about it? Do you use it? Why?
- Do you use your middle name instead of your first name? If so, explain why.
- Has anyone ever commented on your name? What did he or she say? How did that comment make you feel?
- Do you think your name causes people to treat you in a particular way? How? Cite an example or two.
- Would you change your name if you could? Why or why not? What would you change it to? Why did you select this name?
- Would changing your name make you feel different than you feel now? How? Why?

Try to add metaphors to your writing; consider what your name would be if it were a color, a day, a car, a tree/flower, animal, or feelings and sounds you associate with it. Review how Cisneros creates a name that conjures up meanings beyond the surface to reveal the character's personality.



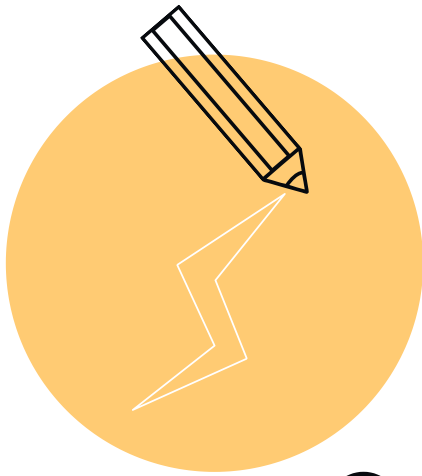


## ● Just Dialogue

*Discuss the following points on how to write good dialogue.*

- Dialogue is a conversation between two or more people.
- Dialogue is essential to fiction writing.
- Dialogue brings characters to life and adds interest.
- Dialogue must do more than just duplicate real speech.
- Writing dialogue consists of the most exciting, most interesting, most emotional, and most dramatic words.





## ● Dialogue Activity

*Divide students into pairs.*

- Show them a picture of people talking. Pictures involving a literary work they are reading are most effective.
- Instruct pairs to invent a situation and write a dialogue of at least 20 lines.
- Encourage students to include explanatory material and to write more than just “he said...she said.”
- As students create their dialogue, write the following functions for dialogue on the board:
  - Provide Information
  - Describe a Place or Character
  - Create a Sense of Time
  - Create Suspense or Conflict
  - Move the Story Forward
  - Reveal a Character’s Thoughts
  - Summarize What Has Happened
  - Create a Sense of Place

