

# Reading a Personal Narrative

## WHAT'S AHEAD?

In this section you will read a personal narrative. You will also learn how to

- identify an implied main idea
- discover a writer's purpose for writing

**M**ost pet owners you know probably have a dog, a cat, or maybe some fish. Ben Mikaelson, the author of the personal narrative on the next page, prefers a different kind of pet. His pet, Buffy, is a lot bigger than your average dog. However, Buffy's size is not the only thing that makes him interesting. As you read about Mikaelson's life with Buffy, consider these questions: What did the author learn about himself from his experience with his pet? Why do you think the author wants to share his experience with others?

## Preparing to Read

### READING SKILL

**Implied Main Idea** A **main idea** is the most important point in a piece of writing, but it is not always stated directly by the author. To identify an **implied main idea**, you have to use the clues that the author provides. These clues include details about the subject. The clues add up to an overall impression in the reader's mind about the main point the author wants to make. Ben Mikaelson, the author of the following personal narrative, makes several points about his pet. As you read, decide for yourself what the most important point is.

### READING FOCUS

**Author's Purpose** An **author's purpose** is the reason he or she writes a particular article or essay. An author might want to share information, express his or her feelings, influence you, or entertain you. As you read "Bear in the Family," think about what the author wants you to know about himself or his experience. Then, consider why he might want to share his experience with you.

## Reading Selection

Read the following personal narrative. In a notebook, jot down answers to the numbered active-reading questions in the shaded boxes. Underlined words will be discussed in the Vocabulary Mini-Lesson on page 25.

from Voices from the Middle

## Bear in the Family

by Ben Mikaelson

1 **A** knock on the front door brings Nicky, our dog, to her feet. Behind her, rising more slowly, is Buffy, our ten-year-old, six-hundred-pound black bear. Visitors seldom venture this far up the mountain. Our rustic log cabin, nestled up a winding canyon, is miles from the nearest paved road.

2 Nicky growls softly, and I praise her for alerting me. Buffy, however, lumbers over to the big arched door and stands up. He wraps a large paw around the elk-antler door handle and swings the thick panel open with an easy tug.

3 Today the visitor is a neighbor wanting to borrow eggs. Towering seven feet tall, Buffy blocks her entrance. As usual, the elderly lady comes armed with a marshmallow. Buffy licks it gently from her hand and moves aside. She tosses another treat to our dog.

4 It's humorous when Buffy opens the door to a stranger. The occasional proselytizer<sup>1</sup> or salesperson can

barely remember his or her name with a mountainous unchained bruin<sup>2</sup> looming over them. They do not see Buffy as I do—as a young, innocent child.

This child came to us ten years ago. Harboring an insatiable fascination for bears, I jumped at the chance to care for a young cub returned from a research facility. My wife Melanie agreed to help adopt this creature we had never met.

Before picking up our baby, we read dozens of books on bears and secured necessary licenses. I built a sturdy chain-link facility around two sides of the house. Our Buffy would have a spring-fed pond, a playground, a den, and plenty of running room. Finally, we were ready—we thought.

The twenty-pound, sixteen-week-old rascal who joined our family caught us unprepared. The first night, I lay in bed listening to his haunting cry, a

**1. How is Buffy like a child? Watch for more details.**

1. **proselytizer:** a person seeking to convert others to his or her religion.

2. **bruin:** a bear.

lost, mournful little sound. I crept out and sat near him in his den. After a few minutes he crawled on my lap and sucked the pads on his front feet, voicing his fear with a high-pitched clucking sound. I began to hum and rock him. When he finally fell asleep, I tucked him into the straw.

8 The first six months that Buffy lived with us, I rocked him to sleep every night. I spent hours feeding him, playing with him, observing him. At first, every utterance<sup>3</sup> and gesture puzzled me. Because Buffy's muscle structure and coordination resembled that of a human, his play was very humanlike. Emotionally the puzzle was much more complex. One moment he would stand and shake his head playfully at a neighbor's Angus bull. The next moment he covered behind me at the sight of a small bum<sup>4</sup> lamb.

9 Originally Buffy nursed from a bottle. When I tried to wean him, he refused to switch over to solid foods. Melanie solved the problem by substituting water. Buffy took one suck and

**2. What do you think is the point of this story about Buffy?**

angrily threw the bottle across the pen. Then he ran to retrieve it and sucked hopefully. A second time he

**3. utterance:** a sound made by someone; speech.

**4. bum:** sickly, lame.

flung it. By that night he had abandoned his beloved bottle. . . .

Our friendship with Buffy grew painfully slowly. His distrust made him reclusive. I realized that friendship depended on us somehow joining him in his world. That opportunity came all too soon.

On a midsummer's evening, I discovered a wild male black bear tearing at Buffy's pen. He had nearly broken down the gate. I shouted and threw rocks until the bear lumbered off; then I crawled in with little Buffy. The cub's tiny front feet pumped out from under his fuzzy rump as he ran frantically in circles. Fear quivered in every bawl. Finally he slowed and stared at me. Shaking, he clambered onto my lap and hugged me. I found myself crying. What instincts had caused a bruin to almost kill my Buffy?

We cuddled for a long while, Buffy nuzzling and hugging me. When he finally slept, I moved to set him down. He awakened and clung to me. I slept with him that night, cementing our friendship. Overnight we bonded and became family. Overnight I became his guardian, not only his provider.

**3. What feelings do the details in the paragraph below describe?**

**4. Do you think that this event was important to the author? Why?**

## First Thoughts on Your Reading

1. What is your overall impression of Buffy? of the author?  
What gives you this impression?
2. How do you think the author's experiences with the bear changed the author?

## Implied Main Idea

READING SKILL

**What's the Big Idea?** When you look for the main idea of a piece of writing, you are trying to identify the author's most important point. The main idea is usually only suggested, or **implied**, in personal narratives. In other words, the author does not want to tell you the main idea outright. Instead, the author wants you to discover the main idea by experiencing the events just as he or she did. It is up to you to look at the details and decide what one idea they all seem to support. Use the Thinking It Through steps below to find the implied main idea of paragraph 8 in "Bear in the Family." (It begins, "The first six months that Buffy lived with us . . .")

### THINKING IT THROUGH

### Identifying the Implied Main Idea

▶ **STEP 1** Read the paragraph and decide what important point the author seems to be making about the subject. This might be the main idea.

*As a young bear, Buffy seems to act a lot like a human baby.*

▶ **STEP 2** Identify details that support your guess about the paragraph's main idea.

*Buffy has to be rocked to sleep. He plays like a human, and he gets scared easily.*

▶ **STEP 3** Return to Step 1 and revise your guess if

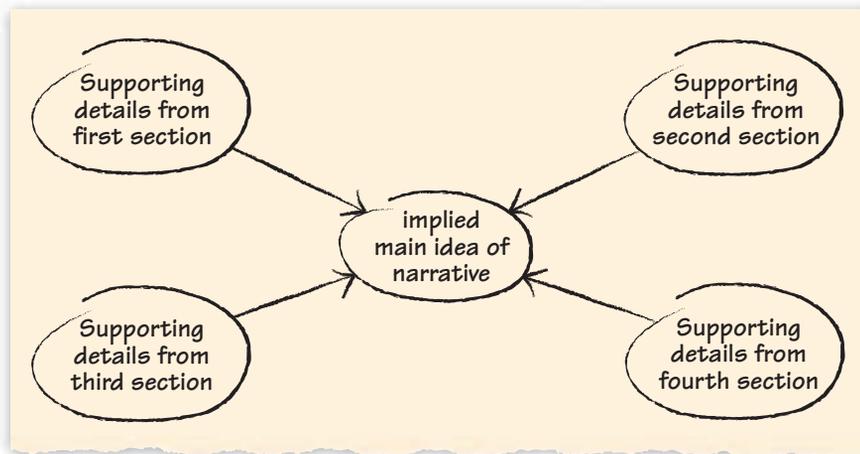
- few details support your guess, or
- many details seem to support some other point

*The part about shaking his head at the neighbor's bull doesn't seem like something a baby would do, but a bear might. My revised main idea is that in some ways, Buffy acts like a human baby, and in others he acts like a little bear.*

**The Big Picture** Eventually, you will need to identify the implied main idea of the entire personal narrative. You can use the same process that helps you find the implied main idea of a paragraph (or section). Determine what point the author seems to be making in the narrative. Then, look for details throughout the narrative that support that point. If you find little support for the main idea you have chosen, revise your main idea. Look for the point that most of the details seem to support. A graphic organizer like this one can help you see how supporting details point to a narrative’s implied main idea.

**TIP**

Since not every paragraph has a main idea, you might want to examine a few paragraphs at a time and determine the main idea of each section.

**YOUR TURN 2****Identifying the Implied Main Idea**

- With a partner, identify the implied main idea in “Bear in the Family,” which begins on page 19.
- Divide the selection into four sections of equal length. With your partner, find details that support the main idea you identified. You may need to revise your main idea statement until you find support for it from each section.
- Finally, make a graphic organizer like the one above to record the implied main idea and the details that support it.

**READING FOCUS****Author’s Purpose**

**Be Reasonable** All writers have at least one reason, or **purpose**, for writing. You may find that many items you read are written for

more than one purpose. When this happens, one purpose is the main purpose and the others are secondary, or less important, purposes. Understanding why a piece was written helps you be a more aware reader. For example, an advertisement might make you laugh, but if you are aware that it is mainly trying to sell you something, you will understand the message better and be a better judge of the product. Here are the purposes writers use.

Purposes for Writing	
<b>to inform</b>	to give other people information that they want or need; to share a special knowledge
<b>to influence</b>	to convince other people to do something or to believe something
<b>to express</b>	to get to know oneself and to find meaning in one's own experiences
<b>to entertain</b>	to create a literary work or to say something in a unique way

As a reader, you can watch for clues about the purpose or purposes a writer is using in a piece. These clues can include

- illustrations, diagrams, maps, charts, headings, and bulleted or numbered items (**to inform**)
- words like *should* and *must*, and words that assign value such as *worst* and *best* (**to influence**)
- frequent use of the word *I* and emotional words (**to express**)
- use of vivid descriptions, dialogue, rhymes, drama, or humor (**to entertain**)

The type of writing can also help you determine a writer's main and secondary purposes. For example, a comic-book writer's main purpose is to entertain, but the writer may also want to inform. An author of a magazine article usually wants to influence. Sometimes, though, he or she will also want to entertain readers.

Read the paragraph on the next page from Esmeralda Santiago's autobiography, *When I Was Puerto Rican*, and see if you can figure out her purpose(s) for writing. If you have trouble, use the Thinking It Through steps that follow the paragraph.

## TIP

A writer may have only one purpose for writing, one main purpose and one secondary purpose, or even one main purpose and two or three secondary purposes.

It was raining in Brooklyn. Mist hung over the airport so that all I saw as we landed were fuzzy white and blue lights on the runway and at the terminal. We thudded to earth as if the pilot had miscalculated just how close we were to the ground. A startled silence was followed by frightened cries and *aleluyas* and the rustle of everyone rushing to get up from their seats and out of the plane as soon as possible.

Esmeralda Santiago, *When I Was Puerto Rican*

### THINKING IT THROUGH

## Identifying the Author's Purpose

► **STEP 1** Look for clues such as those listed on page 23 to help determine whether the author is

- providing information
- trying to influence you
- expressing personal feelings
- trying to entertain you

*She provides some information about why the flight was scary.*

*No, she doesn't say not to fly, just that this flight was bad.*

*No, she describes the situation and the reactions of the other passengers, not her own.*

*Yes, she tells what happened in a dramatic way, using vivid descriptions and details.*

► **STEP 2** Based on your answers, decide which purpose or purposes the author may have had for writing this piece.

*Because she describes the scene vividly, I think the main purpose is to entertain. A secondary purpose may be to inform.*

### YOUR TURN 3

## Identifying the Author's Purpose

Use the Thinking It Through steps above to help you determine the author's purpose(s) for writing "Bear in the Family," on pages 19–20.

Go to the Chapter Menu for an interactive activity.

## MINI-LESSON VOCABULARY

### Context Clues

Writers of personal narratives use precise words to communicate their experiences vividly. Some of these words may be unfamiliar to you, though. You can figure out an unfamiliar word by looking at **context clues**—clues from the words and sentences that surround the unfamiliar word. Try using context clues to understand the un-

derlined word in this sentence beginning at the bottom of page 19.

The first night, I lay in bed listening to his haunting cry, a lost, mournful little sound.

If you need help, the Thinking It Through steps below can show you what to do.

### THINKING IT THROUGH

#### Using Context Clues

- ▶ **STEP 1** Skim the word's context to see how many times the word appears. Look at all of the clues to its meaning.
- ▶ **STEP 2** Look carefully at all of the details that might provide a clue about the meaning of the word. Decide how the clues might be related to the unfamiliar word, and make a guess about its meaning.
- ▶ **STEP 3** Use your definition in place of the word in the passage. Check to see that it makes sense.

The word appears only once, so there is only one group of clues to help me figure out its meaning.

The words cry, haunting, and lost appear near the word. Haunting sounds scary, and cry and lost sound sad. Maybe Buffy is scared or sad. The sentence describes the sounds Buffy is making. He is lonely and afraid. I guess mournful means "sad."

". . . his haunting cry, a lost, sad little sound." Sad seems to fit in the sentence, and it makes sense with the rest of the paragraph.

### PRACTICE

Using the steps listed above, figure out the meanings of the words below. The words are underlined in "Bear in the Family" to help you see the context.

1. lumbers (page 19)
2. insatiable (page 19)
3. covered (page 20)
4. reclusive (page 20)
5. clambered (page 20)

## MINI-LESSON TEST TAKING

### Identifying Implied Main Ideas

When you take a reading test, you may be asked to identify the implied main idea of a reading passage. The passage will usually be two or more paragraphs long. If the following passage and question were on a reading test, how would you approach them?

Bats have many helpful features. Since bats have a good sense of smell, they can easily find food and their roosts. While some bats can see to move about and find food, other bats that cannot see well depend on echoes. As they fly, the bats that use echoes make high-frequency sounds that bounce back to them, telling them the locations of objects around them. Five hook-like claws on each foot allow bats to hang safely from rocks and trees.

Although bats have a reputation for being dangerous, they tend to be shy. They come out only at night, and they live in dark places. Bats use their special features to avoid contact with predators. Bats stay away from predators such as cats, snakes, and owls by hanging from their claws in high places.

Which of the following is the implied main idea of the passage?

- A. Bats are dangerous to humans.
- B. Bats are well equipped to survive in the wild.
- C. Bats are vulnerable because they cannot see or smell.
- D. Bats are afraid of most other living things.

### THINKING IT THROUGH

### Identifying Implied Main Ideas

- ▶ **STEP 1** Figure out the main point the passage seems to be making. This might be the passage's main idea.
- ▶ **STEP 2** Look for details in the passage that support this main idea, and reconsider your answer if necessary.
- ▶ **STEP 3** Eliminate answer choices that do not fit your answer. Then, select the choice that the passage supports best.

*Bats have features that help them survive in the wild.*

*Bats have a good sense of smell; some bats see well, and others use echoes to move and get food; claws help them hang in high places where predators cannot reach them.*

*Choice A is wrong because bats are shy and avoid humans. Choice B sounds like my answer and has a lot of support. Choice C is wrong because bats have a good sense of smell and some can see. Choice D may be true, but there is no information here about that. I'll choose B.*