



Conversation Skills

**Narratives
Set the Scene**

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Narratives: Set the Scene

Telling stories (narratives) is a big part of conversations, whether telling about a recent trip, recounting an interesting incident observed at school, or describing a weekend event. Students who struggle with organization, perspective taking, or memory issues are often poor storytellers. They neglect to provide necessary details and leave their listeners disoriented. This straightforward worksheet provides educators and speech language pathologists with an easy way to teach students to provide orienting details when starting a simple, conversational story. Students receive visual and kinesthetic prompts to practice this skill. You will find that your students very quickly internalize the simple structure that *Narratives: Set the Scene* provides, establish a mental map, and generalize the skill of “setting the scene” for their stories into their everyday conversations!

Name _____

Date _____

SET THE SCENE!

When you tell a story (something that happened over the weekend, an incident you saw on the news, a plot line in a television episode) your listener needs to be able to imagine (often by visualizing) the context before you “get into” the story.

Start each of the stories below by giving the following information:

_____ **WHEN**

_____ **WHO’S THERE**

_____ **WHERE IS IT TAKING PLACE**

_____ **WHAT ARE PARTICIPANTS DOING at the start**

1. Tell about something that happened over the past weekend.
2. Tell about something you did on a vacation.
3. Tell a story about being sick.
4. Tell a favorite family story.
5. Tell about an episode of your favorite TV show.
6. Tell about a birthday celebration.
7. Tell about an interesting interaction you witnessed at school.
8. Tell about something that happened in your neighborhood.
9. Tell about a current event.
10. Tell something funny that happened to you or a family member.
11. Tell about something that happened during your childhood.
12. Tell about a recent holiday event.



Therapeutic Notes – Narratives: Set the Scene

Function of this worksheet and activity

Narratives: Set the Scene is a great tool for teaching individuals with attention deficit disorders, with any impairment of executive skills functioning, or on the autism spectrum how to start a story in an organized, comprehensive, and communicative partner-friendly manner.

So many of my students with A.S.D. or attention deficit disorders have trouble answering simple requests for information, such as “tell me about your summer” or “tell me about your internship experience.” Often, they will start a story without providing any orienting information, such as where they were, who was with them, or when the event took place. Individuals who struggle with theory of mind have a hard time putting themselves in others’ shoes. So when they tell about something that happened to them, they know what happened, and they struggle to understand and keep in mind just what their listener doesn’t already know, and hence needs to know. I created *Narratives: Set the Scene* to target this deficit, and have found that it provides a simple and tangible way for students to keep in mind what information they need to provide to listeners at the start of a verbal narrative and to practice providing that information.

Suggested procedure

After reading the short introduction to students and further discussing the importance of providing listeners with orienting details at the beginning of stories, I like to give an example. I start a story without providing any establishing elements: “Santa and one of the elves got into a fight”, and tell my students that I left out important information. Then I restart my story, using a pencil to check off each of the four orienting details: (when) “Last December, (who’s there) my brother and I, (where is it taking place) were at the Roosevelt Field Mall, (what are participants doing at the start) doing a little holiday shopping when we saw children lined up to sit on Santa’s lap. All of a sudden, Santa and one of the elves got into a fight.” My students and I then consider how the story is now clear and makes sense.

I erase my check marks and now it’s my students’ turn. I have them choose one of the requests for information (numbered 1-12). When they’re ready I have them start their story and as they provide each orienting detail I check it off. If they need a visual prompt, either to get started or because they have skipped a detail, a simple point to one of the details listed always suffices. Students choose another numbered request for information and continue with the task, relying on fewer and fewer prompts and taking over the responsibility of checking, until they are swiftly able to start their stories with all four orienting details without any kinesthetic or visual cues. I have found that many of my students quickly begin to generalize the skill of “setting the scene” for their narratives into their everyday conversations outside of our speech sessions!