

“New Directions” by Maya Angelou Literary Analysis: Narrative Essay

A **narrative essay** is a short piece of nonfiction in which the author tells a story about a real person or event. In a narrative essay, the author chooses to include **significant details** that help move the story forward or that help to make his or her point about the subject. For example, if Maya Angelou were writing a narrative essay about her own childhood, she would include the significant detail that she and her brother Bailey spent much of their childhood living with their grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas. In such an essay about her childhood, however, she would not mention the fact that in 1993, at President Clinton’s inauguration, she recited her poem “On the Pulse of Morning.” That would not be a significant detail for an essay about her childhood. As you read, notice how the author’s choice of significant details influences your impressions of the people and events he or she describes.

DIRECTIONS: *Follow the directions to answer each numbered item.*

1. In no more than two or three sentences, summarize the story that the author tells in the essay.

2. Now, look back over the essay. Find two significant details that Angelou includes about (a) Annie Johnson’s appearance, (b) what she says, and (c) what she does. Write the details exactly as Angelou expresses them, enclosing the words and phrases in quotation marks.

(a) Annie Johnson’s appearance _____

(b) What she says _____

(c) What she does _____

3. Think about why Maya Angelou wrote this essay. What points or main ideas do you think she makes in this essay? _____
