

NAME

Chapter 3 Writer's Workshop (pp. 68–73)

Autobiographical Incident

Below is one writer's autobiographical incident. Read it aloud with a partner. Discuss how well the essay matches the key features listed in the workshop.

Writing Model

A Golden Opportunity

Have you ever dreamed of finding buried treasure? I have. However, I never thought that I would get the chance to try it until my family and I went on vacation last summer. That single day of my summer vacation made me into the history buff that I am today.

When I first heard that we were going to South Dakota on vacation, I immediately started whining. "Can't we go to Hawaii or someplace fun like that? I want to learn how to surf."

"Your mother and I want you to get to know your uncle, aunt, and cousins who live there," my dad said. "You'll have fun."

I hate to admit it, but he was right. Spending hours in a van turned out to be fantastic because my cousins tell hilarious jokes and stories. Also, I will never forget the bison and prairie dogs we saw at Badlands National Park. However, for me, the most memorable part of the trip was panning for gold.

When I walked into the Black Hills Mining Museum, I thought it would be like other museums. I would look at displays, watch a short movie, and see the gift shop. "The usual," I thought.

"Would you like to try panning for gold?" one of the museum guides asked me. The guide pointed to a stream in a corner of the museum. She explained that people in the area originally found gold by panning. A person who pans for gold goes to a stream where gold has been found, collects water and dirt, and swirls them in a pan.

Introduction that grabs reader's attention and hints at why event was meaningful

Uses dialogue to reveal characters' personalities

Brief summary of trip with emphasis on a single memorable experience: panning for gold

Consistent use of first-person point of view (*I* and *me*)

Writing Model

Gold is heavier than sand and about 19 times heavier than water, so the gold eventually sinks to the bottom.

Someone who pans for gold has to be patient and skilled. Soon two men panning next to me gave up and wandered away. I kept trying. I worked to move my wrist so that the water poured out of the pan but the sand stayed in. While I panned, the guide told me about the Gold Rush. It began there in 1875. She told me that John Perrett, also called “Potato Creek Johnny,” found a huge gold nugget weighing over seven ounces. Then she explained that some people believed that he had stolen the gold from another miner and melted it into one large nugget. Others thought he was just plain lucky.

“I’m not going to find any gold,” I told myself, “but it’s fun to think about.” Then I saw a flash of yellow in the bottom of my pan. “Is that what I think it is?” I asked excitedly.

“Sure is,” said the guide. I used the tip of my finger to move each speck into a glass bottle that was filled with water. “You’ve got about seven dollars worth of gold there,” she said.

I was happy to have a souvenir, but I wanted to learn more about what panning for gold was really like. I visited the rest of the museum and learned that prospectors braved heat, cold, storms, and violence as they tried to make their fortune. Many went back home with nothing in their pockets. A few lucky people became rich.

Panning for gold made me curious about what life was like in other times and places. Since then, I have started reading about gold rushes, pioneers during the 1800s, and many other historical events. A trip I thought would be boring turned out to be a great way to connect with the past. It opened up a new world for me.

Short sentence that breaks up a series of longer sentences

Uses transitions to help show the events in chronological order

Sensory detail that appeals to the sense of sight

Conclusion that sums up the experience and explains what the writer learned