

Name \_\_\_\_\_

## *Narrative Poetry Mini-Project*

Enclosed are 6 different poems. Each poem has a different instruction (see below) for interacting with it! Finally, you will plan and compose your own narrative poem. This packet will be a **test grade**, with each assignment adding up to 100 possible points.

### Checklist and Rubric

**1. Annotate Poems**

“How I Learned English” \_\_\_\_\_ “Bat in the Bedroom” \_\_\_\_\_ **(20 pts)**

Doodles, comments, highlighting must be present for full credit

**2. Concept Maps**

“Blackberry Picking” \_\_\_\_\_ “Oranges” \_\_\_\_\_ **(20 pts)**

All bubbles must be filled in correctly for full credit

**3. Illustrate & Summarize**

“Close to Home” \_\_\_\_\_ “Flood” \_\_\_\_\_ **(20pts)**

On the back of the poem, draw a picture that illustrates the poem on the front. Then write a caption (1-2 sentences long) that explains the drawing and poem.

**4. Write your own narrative poem using plan sheet in packet \_\_\_\_\_ (40 pts)**

Plan sheet completed, final copy of poem (at least 20 lines) free of errors stapled in back of packet.

**Grade \_\_\_\_\_/100 pts**

# Narrative Poetry

What is narrative poetry? Narrative Poetry is a poem that tells a series of events using poetic devices such as rhythm, rhyme, compact language, and attention to sound. In other words, a narrative poem tells a story, but it does it with poetic flair! Many of the same elements that are found in a short story are also found in a narrative poem. Here are some elements of narrative poetry that are important:

- o character
- o setting
- o conflict
- o plot

Read these examples:

## Papa's Fishing Hole

I place my tiny hand in his  
as we walk to Papa's Fishing Hole.  
I hand him a wiggling night crawler  
fighting for his life.  
The deadly hook squishes  
through the worm's head,  
and I watch the brown guts ooze out.  
Papa throws the pole's long arm back  
and then forward.  
The line lands in a merky spot  
along the reedy shore.  
Now I get to reel it in.  
Nothing yet, he says.  
He casts again. I reel it in.  
Still nothing.

Three time's a charm, he says.  
He casts.  
A strike.  
We turn the crank together.  
The fish jumps from the water  
and his colors form a rainbow  
as he arches his body above the reeds.  
My Papa handles him  
with the skill of a master  
as I stop helping to watch him work.  
A stiff jerk, a quick reel, a stiff jerk again.  
The fish doesn't have a chance, I yell.  
I know. I know. I know, he says.

*-Elisabeth D. Babin*

Babin, Elisabeth D. "Papa's Fishing Hole." Tempest. Spring 1994. 27.

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## The Lie

Mother is in the hospital  
for an operation  
and Grandma Sanderson  
has come to take care of us.  
She's strict.  
If I'm two minutes  
late from play,  
she grips my wrist tightly  
and swings me to a chair  
to think about it.  
I skin my knee  
and get a deep cut.  
She looks worried.  
"When you go to school,  
ask the nurse what to do."  
On the way home,  
I remember I've forgotten.

I know this is more serious  
than being late from play.  
I imagine a spanking,  
early to bed for a week,  
or extra work on Saturday.  
She asks me what the nurse said.  
"Wash it very carefully  
with soap and water,  
dry it, put on vaseline  
and then place a band-aid over the top."  
(That's what Mother  
would have said,  
except she'd use  
iodine which stings.)

*-Donald Graves*

Graves, Donald. "The Lie." Baseball, Snakes and Summer Squash. Honesdale: Boyds Mill Press, 1996. 43-44.

Choose **one** of the poems and answer the following:

Who are the characters in the poem?

What do you know about the speaker in the poem?

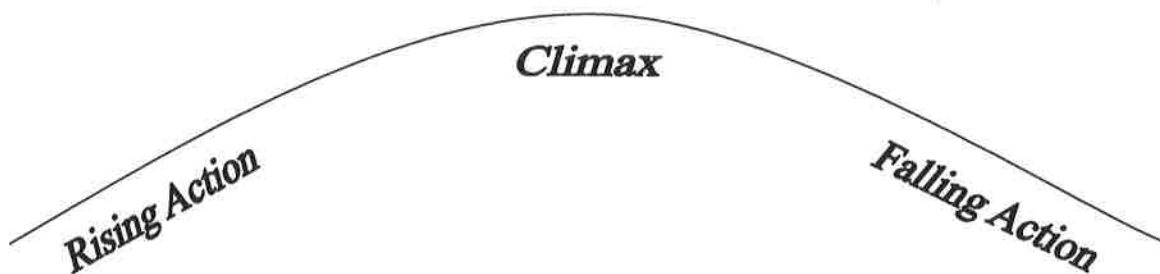
What character traits does each of the characters have? What evidence in the poem shows this?

What is the setting of the poem? (time and place)

What types of conflicts occur in the poem? (hint: there is more than one)

What is the mood of the poem?

Draw a small plot line. Tell what happens in the beginning, middle and end of the poem.



## How I Learned English by Gregory Djanikian

It was in an empty lot  
Ringed by elms and fir and honeysuckle.  
Bill Corson was pitching in his buckskin jacket,  
Chuck Keller, fat even as a boy, was on first,  
His t-shirt riding up over his gut,  
Ron O'Neill, Jim, Dennis, were talking it up  
In the field, a blue sky above them  
Tipped with cirrus.  
And there I was,  
Just off the plane and plopped in the middle  
Of Williamsport, Pa. and a neighborhood game,  
Unnatural and without any moves,  
My notions of baseball and America  
Growing fuzzier each time I whiffed.  
So it was not impossible that I,  
Banished to the outfield and daydreaming  
Of water, or a hotel in the mountains,  
Would suddenly find myself in the path  
Of a ball stung by Joe Barone.  
I watched it closing in  
Clean and untouched, transfixed  
By its easy arc before it hit  
My forehead with a thud.

I fell back, Dazed, clutching my brow,  
Groaning, "Oh my shin, oh my shin,"  
And everybody peeled away from me  
And dropped from laughter, and there we were,  
All of us writhing on the ground for one reason  
Or another.  
Someone said "shin" again,  
There was a wild stamping of hands on the  
ground,  
A kicking of feet, and the fit  
Of laughter overtook me too,  
And that was important, as important  
As Joe Barone asking me how I was  
Through his tears, picking me up  
And dusting me off with hands like swatters,  
And though my head felt heavy,  
I played on till dusk  
Missing flies and pop-ups and grounders  
And calling out in desperation things like  
"Yours" and "take it," but doing all right,  
Tugging at my cap in just the right way,  
Crouching low, my feet set.  
"Hum baby" sweetly on my lips.

ROBERT CRUM

## The Bat in the Bedroom

Was it there at all,  
the bat whose leathery  
extended wing  
we thought we saw hanging  
from the cat's mouth?  
And when one of us yelled,  
didn't the cat run off,  
leaving hell's image  
to flap around the room  
and bounce against the mirror?  
But under the blanket  
we trapped it with,  
no impression, no movement.  
Only our lightest  
prodding with a broom  
discovered a squeaking  
like a broken appliance.  
We called the police.

"Take a broom," they said,  
"and smash it." But we  
had no heart for the obvious.  
We put on our garden gloves,  
and using a dust pan and notebook  
we enfolded it in still more blankets  
and sheets.  
We threw the bundle into the air  
outside the house, but  
from its unravelling  
saw nothing, nothing at all,  
escape. What  
must the neighbors think  
to see us on the porch  
with our arms raised toward heaven  
while all around us  
the life of our bed  
floats down like parachutes  
people have fallen from.

*I don't know if you can call it a "date" or not, but the first girl who allowed me to walk with her was named Margie. I couldn't think of anything to do but walk around the block three or four times.*

## ORANGES

The first time I walked  
With a girl, I was twelve,  
Cold, and weighted down  
With two oranges in my jacket.  
December. Frost cracking  
Beneath my steps, my breath  
Before me, then gone,  
As I walked toward  
Her house, the one whose  
Porch light burned yellow  
Night and day, in any weather.  
A dog barked at me, until  
She came out pulling  
At her gloves, face bright  
With rouge. I smiled,  
Touched her shoulder, and led  
Her down the street, across  
A used car lot and a line  
Of newly planted trees,  
Until we were breathing  
Before a drugstore. We  
Entered, the tiny bell  
Bringing a saleslady  
Down a narrow aisle of goods.  
I turned to the candies  
Tiered like bleachers,  
And asked what she wanted —

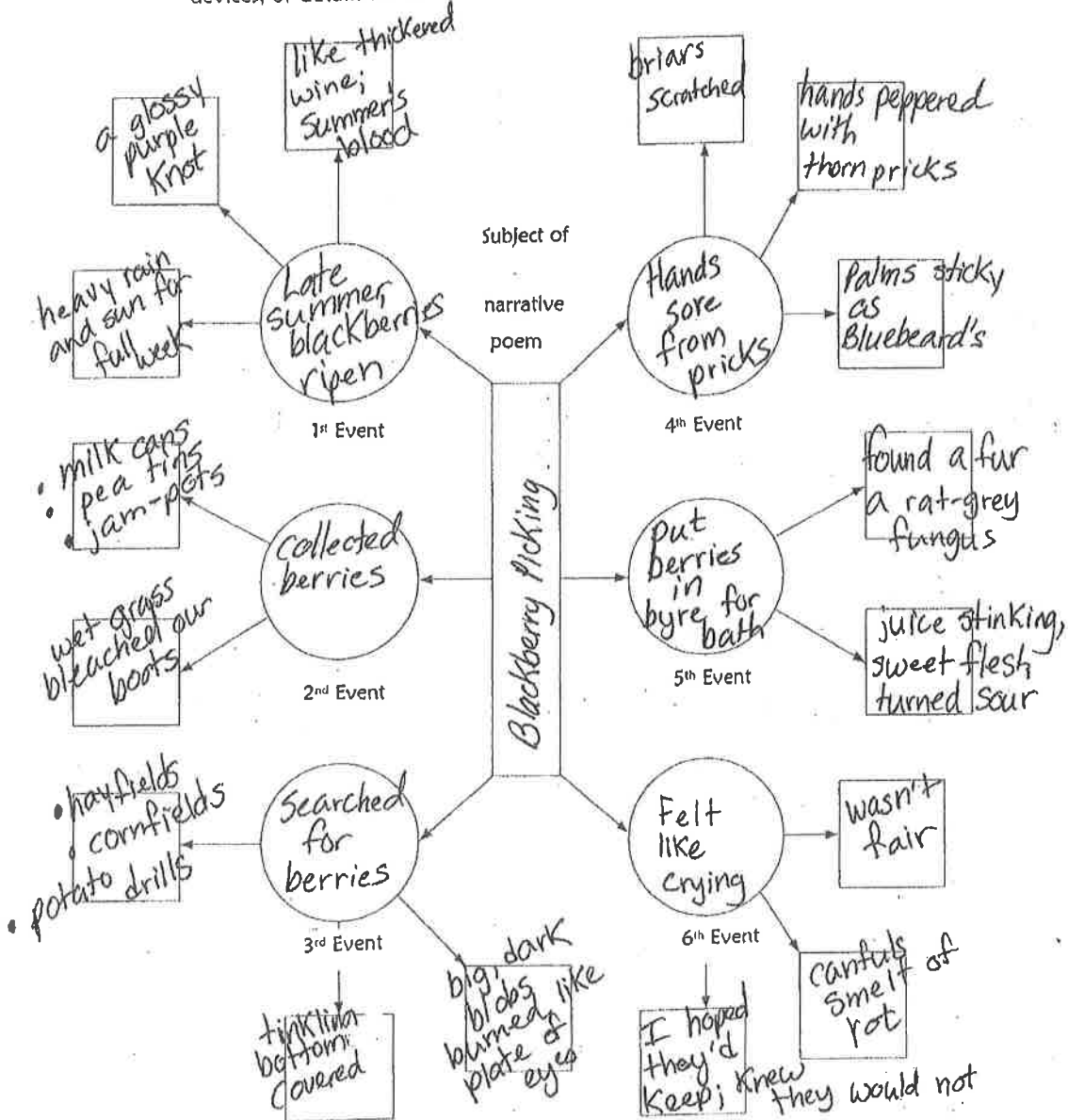
Light in her eyes, a smile  
Starting at the corners  
Of her mouth. I fingered  
A nickel in my pocket,  
And when she lifted a chocolate  
That cost a dime,  
I didn't say anything.  
I took the nickel from  
My pocket, then an orange,  
And set them quietly on  
The counter. When I looked up,  
The lady's eyes met mine,  
And held them, knowing  
Very well what it was all  
About.

Outside,  
A few cars hissing past,  
Fog hanging like old  
Coats between the trees.  
I took my girl's hand  
In mine for two blocks,  
Then released it to let  
Her unwrap the chocolate.  
I peeled my orange  
That was so bright against  
The gray of December  
That, from some distance,  
Someone might have thought  
I was making a fire in my hands.

Name: Seamus Heaney Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Concept Map

Use the circles to map out the events of the narrative poem in chronological order. Use the off-shoot boxes to fill in the imagery, poetic devices, or details for each event of the plotline.



"Blackberry Picking" by Seamus Heaney

Late August, given heavy rain and sun  
For a full week, the blackberries would ripen.  
At first, just one, a glossy purple clot  
Among others, red, green, hard as a knot.  
You ate that first one and its flesh was sweet  
Like thickened wine: summer's blood was in it  
Leaving stains upon the tongue and lust for  
Picking. Then red ones inked up and that hunger  
Sent us out with milk cans, pea tins, jam-pots  
Where briars scratched and wet grass bleached  
our boots.

Round hayfields, cornfields and potato-drills  
We trekked and picked until the cans were full,  
Until the tinkling bottom had been covered  
With green ones, and on top big dark blobs  
burned

Like a plate of eyes. Our hands were peppered  
With thorn pricks, our palms sticky as  
Bluebeard's.

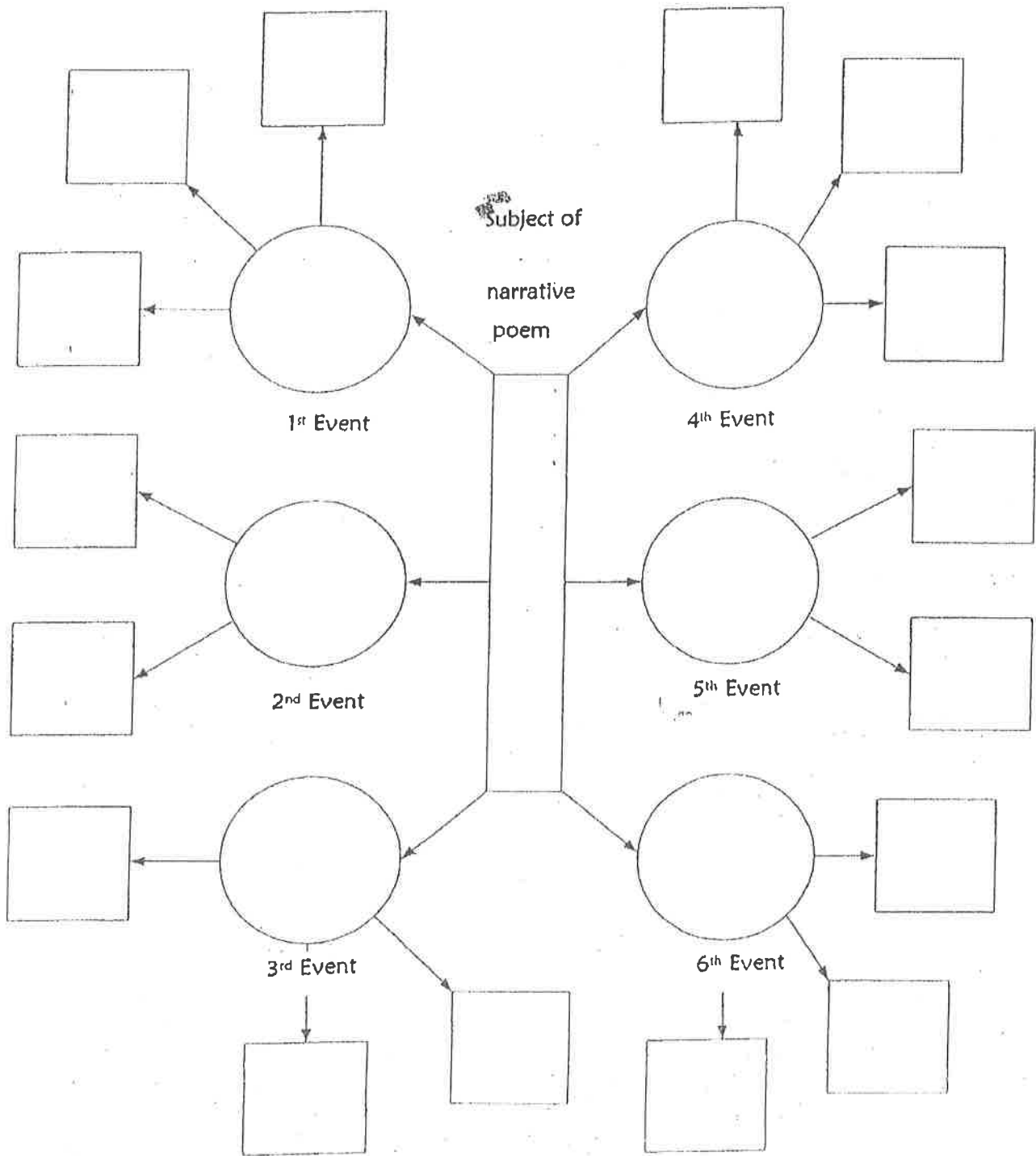
We hoarded the fresh berries in the byre.  
But when the bath was filled we found a fur,  
A rat-grey fungus, glutting on our cache.  
The juice was stinking too. Once off the bush  
The fruit fermented, the sweet flesh would turn  
sour.

I always felt like crying. It wasn't fair  
That all the lovely canfuls smelt of rot.  
Each year I hoped they'd keep, knew they would  
not.



# Concept Map

Use the circles to map out the events of the narrative poem in chronological order. Use the off-shoot boxes to fill in the imagery, poetic devices, or details for each event of the plotline.



FRANK STEELE

## Close to Home

I saw the snake again at dusk  
lying on the road. I had not known  
I was walking up to him. I figured  
I was just walking alone. But he lay there  
like an unfinished thought,  
not coiled, but with the randomness  
of something dropped from a height,  
a big snake. The ground was deciding him  
where he lay, snake-limp, yet snake-alert,  
In the calm with which things from below  
are always alive to light,  
even at dusk. As I came close  
to see his black and yellow markings,  
he took on that swirl behind his head  
(this is how snakes frown), his body  
flinching into the waviness  
that, reacting to a threat,  
looks like a threat. I felt my own neck bristle,  
the dog part of me. He flickered his black tongue  
as if jotting a note in the air  
and I saw that his slick head  
was oval, probably not poisonous.

I remembered the man who said,  
"I never ask 'em their pedigree. If it's  
a snake, I just kill 'em." I thought  
of my father, who had to stop the car  
on any country road and take out  
across the field with a stick.  
At this moment the snake began to unshrug  
the wad of himself, crossing  
the road like a spill. My dog neck went down.  
It's not true that snakes crawling  
make no sound, but they don't make much.  
  
When he had disappeared, the road came back,  
though it was not quite the same road.  
at nine o'clock I don't feel virtuous  
when I think of him a quarter-mile away,  
but the woods seem richer with a snake in them  
yellow and black, a sliding night  
that carries the day on its back,  
lighting up some of the dark places.

ANN STANFORD

## The Flood

When I sat beside the river  
thinking of waves higher than buildings,  
waves descending like barges down the smooth  
channel  
I thought I dreamed.

But the water came high—  
it filled the cellar  
covered grandmother's canned pears  
and the quilts by the fireplace.

It rose above grandfather's portrait,  
lapped at our feet on the second story.  
We looked down the stairs.  
Would the house hold?

Could we float on that Ark  
through the corn fields  
downtown past the first national bank  
and Gluth's grocery store?

Logs and fence posts piled up by the house.  
The pig flowed away, complaining.  
Night was coming down,  
the waters pushed at the foundations,  
our dog whined in the upstairs bedroom.

What could we do but sit there?  
We made a raft out of the bedstead  
and a plank off the bedroom dresser.  
We were ready to knock a hole in the wall  
for launching. But the stream began to go down.

It went down to mud. The crops were gone,  
the animals lost or dead. But we were alive.  
The old house as good a ship as any.  
Whenever I look at the river  
I think of those waves and wonder.

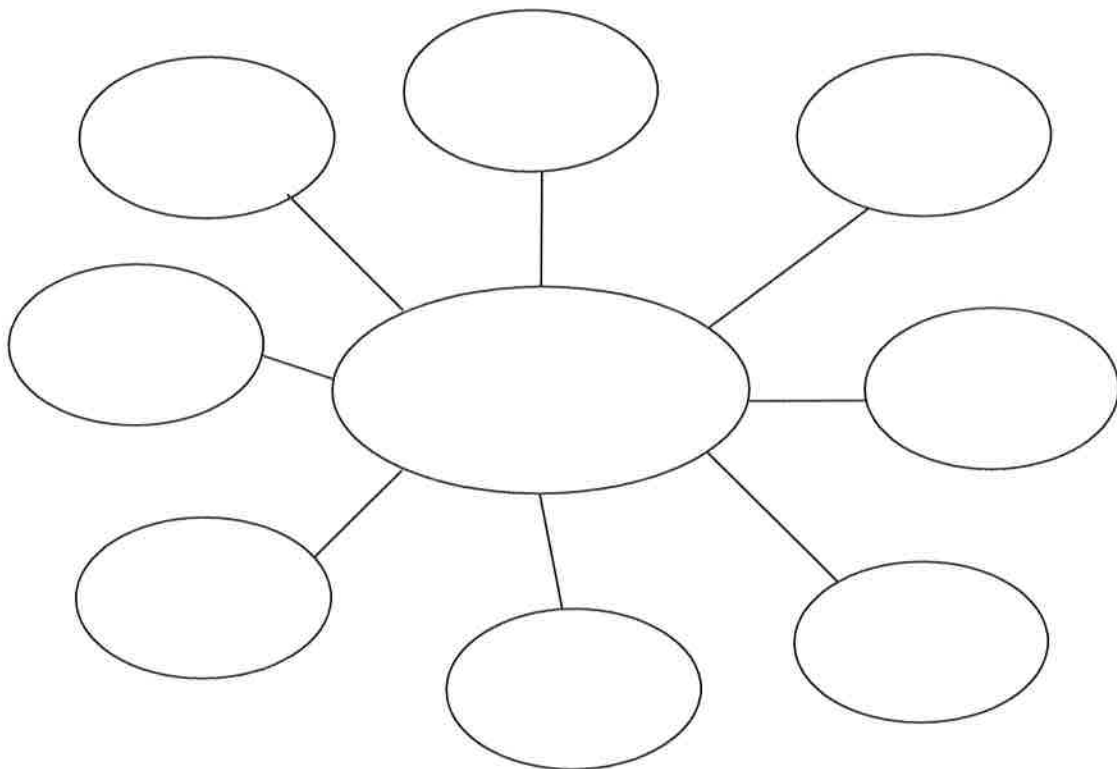
## Writing narrative poetry

When writing narrative poetry a good place to start is with your own life's experiences. Choose experiences that can be captured in a snapshot. Do you have a favorite photograph of you playing baseball when you were 6 years old? Or, how about the funny picture on your first birthday with you face full of cake? Maybe you can remember funny moment from a special vacation, or a moment with a grandparent that is very memorable. Remember, these are moment in time—not the whole event. A poem (unless you are writing an epic poem) captures snapshots, not 5 hour academy award winning movies!

Brainstorm 5 different “snapshot” experiences that you may be able to write a narrative poem about.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

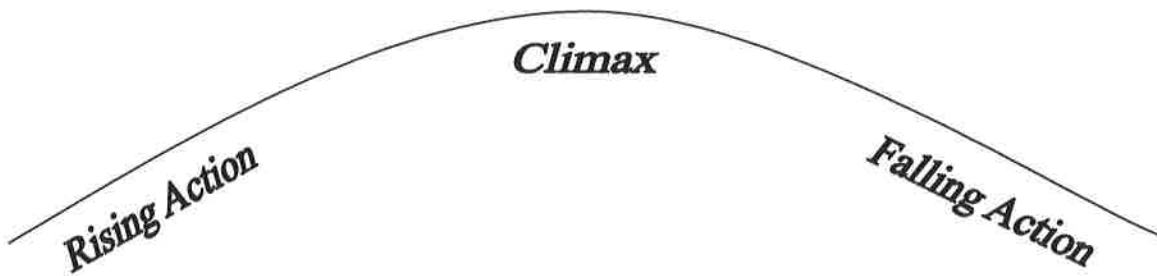
Next, gather sensory details about that experience. The best way I have found to do this is through clustering idea. Remember that not ALL the ideas need to be used in your poem, but don't leave hole in the poem that would prevent a reader from connecting to your poem.



Now that you have your images, choose character for your poem. What is he or she like? Who will be the speaker of the poem?

The next step, just like in when writing a short story is to determine the conflict. What are the inner and outer conflicts in the even that you have chosen? How is the conflict resolved?

To identify plot in you poem create your own plot line below.



Now, craft the lines of your poem. If it doesn't come together in the first draft, that's okay. Narrative poetry always takes a couple of drafts to get the spirit of the poem down on the page. Remember to include a wonderful title that adds to the meaning of your poem.