

Narrative Sample Response

Prompt: Write a narrative about two characters who form an unexpected friendship. Think about how their differences might initially cause conflict or misunderstanding. What circumstances bring them together, and what do they learn from each other? Show how their relationship helps them change, grow, or see the world differently.

The art room smelled faintly of paint, and sunlight poured through the windows, falling across tables scattered with brushes, jars, and scraps of paper. Students moved around, talking and laughing as they finished their projects. Luis, who always sat at the far end of the art room, balanced his sketchbook on his knee instead of the table, drawing quietly as the buzz of the class swirled around him. Strands of his dark, shaggy hair fell across his forehead from beneath his hoodie, which he often pulled up to cloak his face. He lived with his grandparents, who filled the small house with rules and routines, and he had learned early how to stay out of the way. Art was the one part of the school week he actually looked forward to, even though he rarely showed his work to anyone else. He preferred it that way. If no one looked closely, they couldn't judge him.

Across the room was Brianna, who was carefully lining up her pencils, a ritual she went through at the start of every class to help her feel prepared and ready. At home, she had a dozen of these little rituals: she folded her sisters' laundry so each shirt and sock was in its proper place, packed their lunches for school, and checked that everyone's homework was tucked neatly into their backpacks, which helped the household run smoothly even on busy mornings. Living with her mom and three younger sisters meant she had learned to keep the house running smoothly while her mom was at work. If she didn't stay organized, everything seemed to unravel.

When the bell rang, Brianna began gathering her supplies, stacking her sketchbook and pencils neatly in her bag, while Luis dragged his feet, leaning back in his chair. Before Brianna had reached the doorway, their art teacher, Ms. Hernandez said, "Luis, Brianna, I'd like you both to stay after class for a moment." She beckoned them over.

Luis slouched lower in his chair, dragging his feet as usual, while Brianna froze mid-step, her brow furrowed as she looked between him and the teacher. When they reached the front of the room and the chatter of other students had faded, Ms. Hernandez began, "I'm excited about this, and I hope you will be too. The Parent-Teacher Council has approved a proposal for a new mural in the front hallway of the school." She paused, her smile widening. "They asked me to select two students to design the mural. I'd like both of you to take the lead."

Brianna's eyes lit up, and she felt a flutter of excitement and nerves in her stomach, though she glanced at Luis, who always seemed so aloof. She thought, *He won't care about this—why him?*

Luis stiffened, his fingers curling around the straps of his backpack as he stared at the floor, unsure whether to smile or back away. He couldn't believe Ms. Hernandez had chosen him, but he wasn't so sure

about working with Brianna. She took control of everything she was a part of—lead in the school play, president of the student council, captain of the soccer team. He imagined her directing every brushstroke.

"The theme is *Community and Connection*," Ms. Hernandez continued. "It's a big project, and it will be seen by the whole school, so it's important that it feels meaningful. I chose you, Brianna, because you think ahead and make sure everything is organized, which this mural needs. And Luis, you see possibilities that others don't, and you bring energy to your work. Together, you can make something the school will remember."

Luis shifted his weight, tugging at the hem of his hoodie. *Brianna will probably try to make it sophisticated... and boring*, he thought.

Ms. Hernandez pulled a calendar from the bulletin board. "Here's the schedule: you'll have one hour after school each day to work on this together. By the end of the week, I need a full design ready so we can start painting. I'll check in periodically, but most of the work will be yours to decide."

Luis and Brianna exchanged a quick glance. "Okay... I'll do it," Luis said hesitantly. Brianna's shoulders straightened, and she met Ms. Hernandez's eyes. "Yes. *We'll* do it," she said, her voice steady. Ms. Hernandez's smile widened, and she gave them a reassuring nod before sending them to their next class.

The next day after school, Luis arrived at the front hallway, sketchbook in hand. Brianna was already there, spreading her notes out carefully on a long table that had been set up nearby. They nodded at each other without saying hello. The school was unusually quiet compared to the usual chatter of students coming and going. Brianna stepped back, assessing the space. For a moment, the hallway felt full of possibility.

Brianna broke the silence. "Okay, so, I think we should start by figuring out the overall layout and measuring the space for a blueprint. I was up last night thinking through a lot of ideas to go with the theme. Since it's 'Community and Connection,' it could be, like—"

Luis interrupted her, flipping open his sketchbook. "Yeah, so...I don't usually start that way."

Brianna huffed. "Okay, well, how *do* you usually start?" she asked, folding her arms in front of her chest.

Luis looked down, regretting having spoken so quickly. "Well... usually, I like to just sketch. You know, see what comes to me. *We* could do a few pages in our journals, then take it to the wall."

"That sounds chaotic," Brianna replied sharply. Luis stiffened.

For the next several minutes, they went back and forth. Brianna pulled out her ruler, carefully measuring the space and sketching straight lines to outline sections of the mural, insisting on proportion and scale. Luis, meanwhile, leaned over his notebook, following his intuition as he drew swooping shapes and imaginative patterns that didn't follow her guidelines.

"I can't plan this for you," Brianna said, exasperated. "If you ignore the space, the mural won't fit! *We* need structure."

Luis gritted his teeth. "Structure's boring," he said, feeling **reckless**. Since he'd moved here, he usually just stayed quiet, but now he was finding his voice again, wanting to push back.

Finally, Brianna threw her hands up. "Fine. Half the wall is mine, exactly how I've mapped it out. The other half... do it your way."

Luis grinned. "Deal," he said, flipping his sketchbook closed, ready to start.

Days passed with small arguments. Brianna measured carefully, outlined streets and buildings with rulers, and sketched realistic trees and flowers. Luis drew vines that spiraled unpredictably, clouds curled into swirling shapes, and imaginative figures stretched as if in motion. They worked silently, each focused on their own vision.

But then, halfway through the week, Ms. Hernandez stopped by. She leaned slightly on the table, looking from one side of the mural to the other. "Hmm... I'm not sure this is working," she said. "It feels like two separate projects. I know you both have great ideas, but they need to connect somehow. Remember, the theme is 'Community and Connection.' You either need to find a way to make this one mural—or start over."

Brianna bit her lip, thinking of all the careful measurements she'd made. Luis fiddled with the strap of his backpack, unsure how to change what he thought was already right.

Finally, Brianna said cautiously, "Maybe... we can find a bridge. Something that links our ideas instead of erasing them."

Luis tilted his head. "A bridge... like a path, or shapes flowing into each other?"

"Yeah," Brianna said. "We could keep the structure, but let your curves and swirls move through it. It'd feel like one piece, not two halves."

Luis thought it over. "Okay," he said. "Deal."

Over the next hour, they worked together differently. Brianna measured and outlined, keeping the streets and buildings precise, while Luis let shapes curl and bend through her framework. Slowly, their ideas began to weave together.

As they drew, they talked quietly. Brianna learned that Luis was still finding his way after moving here to live with his grandparents two years ago. There was a lot of change, and a lot of time spent alone. Luis learned that Brianna helped her mom manage three younger sisters, keeping the house running, making sure everyone was taken care of.

"You really do all of that at home?" Luis asked, adding swirling patterns to her river.

Brianna nodded. "Someone has to keep everything from falling apart."

Luis smiled. "I thought you were just bossy."

"And I thought you were quiet because you just didn't care," she said.

By the time Ms. Hernandez returned, the mural had changed. The streets ran right into gardens, trees bent over the rivers, and clouds twisted and swirled above everything. She leaned back, clearly impressed. "Wow," she said softly. "This is amazing. You really worked together. I can't wait for everyone else to see it." She grinned at them. "Ready for some paint?"

Luis and Brianna smiled at each other and nodded. "Ready," they said in unison.

As they packed up, Luis paused by the wall. He ran his fingers over the faint pencil marks, imagining how they would bloom in color tomorrow. Brianna, clipboard in hand, stepped back to watch him, a smudge of green on her cheek. For a moment, neither spoke. Then Luis tilted his head toward one of her straight streets that now bent gently into one of his rivers. "It actually... works," he said quietly. He wasn't just talking about the mural. For the first time, he realized that he could share his ideas, let someone in, and still make something meaningful.

Brianna smiled, brushing her hair back from her forehead. "Yeah," she said, stepping closer. "Yours make it feel alive. I'm glad we didn't erase either of our ideas." For once, she had let go a little by trusting someone else's ideas, and it hadn't made things fall apart. It had actually made them better.

He nodded, a little awkwardly, but he couldn't hide his smile. "Same time tomorrow?"

Brianna smiled playfully. "Where else would I be?"

Together they walked down the hallway, matching each other's strides.