Main Body Paragraphs-Anecdote-Incident

Explanation:

An anecdote, one of the many methods of development available to a writer, is a brief narrative which graphically illustrates what a writer is saying. Often the incident is humorous, but it need not be. This device can capture a reader’s attention and dramatize a point. Because it is lively and in narrative form, an anecdote is generally both easy to understand and easy to remember. Consequently, anecdotes or incidents, are frequently employed by writers to introduce a topic or to illustrate an idea which may otherwise require a great deal of explanation.

Examples: To develop a paragraph in an essay about problems children experience in school, I might make extensive use of anecdotes, such as in the sample paragraphs that follow. The same topic sentence is developed in both paragraphs. It is stated in the first and restated in the second.

A. Sometimes the explanation of a child’s difficulties in school can be deceptively simple. Consider, for example, the case of Tony, a fourth grader whose handwriting had rapidly deteriorated throughout the school year. No matter how often he was admonished to take his time, write carefully and be neat, Tony turned in work that was very difficult to read. His concerned parents took him to the family doctor for a checkup and to an ophthalmologist to rule out vision problems. Finally, one day, his exasperated mother said, ‘What are you going to do when you grow up and have a job and no one can read what you write?’ “But, Mom,” Tony replied, “I thought all men had bad handwriting. Dad and Grandpa and Uncle Ben do.”

B. Then there was Margaret, the third grader who resisted all her teacher’s efforts to encourage her to read. When the teacher spoke with Margaret’s parents, she suggested that if they would read on a regular basis, they would set a good example for Margaret and would help her to see that reading is a valuable skill. Margaret’s astonished parents replied that they read the daily newspapers, the Wall Street Journal, Time, Newsweek, an assortment of other magazines, and at least one novel or play a month. “I don’t understand,” replied the teacher. “Margaret says you never read.” Immediately the little girl’s father recognized the problem. “I know what’s wrong,” he said. “We always wait until Margaret and her brother have gone to bed and then we sit down to relax and read. No wonder she thinks we never read anything.” Again, the explanation was a fairly simple one.
Exercise A: Read the paragraph below and identify the various parts of the incident, such as the problem, background information, the incident, and is it stated or inferred?

To avoid the negative connotations of the word “left-overs”, Jane always described meals made up of little bits of this and that as a “smorgasbord.” Along with the two helpings of lasagna and one of roast beef, she might serve two portions of ham and a small dish of stew. To this she would add a fresh vegetable and some homemade bread. So when she answered “smorgasbord” to the inevitable question, “What are we having for dinner, Mom?” her children always acted pleased and Jane felt rather smug. After all, she didn’t have to hear the “Yucks” her friends complained about whenever they served leftovers. All was well until one day when Jane, her husband and her husband’s parents were discussing what restaurant to visit for dinner. When Jane’s mother-in-law suggested Sven’s because of its fine smorgasbord, Billy, the youngest child looked astonished. “But Grandma,” he protested, “I thought restaurants couldn’t serve leftovers.” Suddenly, Jane didn’t feel so smug anymore.

Exercise B: Try to use anecdote or incident in developing a few paragraphs. Some suggested topics are listed below, but you are not limited to one of them.

1. a problem with a mechanical device
2. how not to...
3. an unforgettable moment
4. an enlightening experience
5. a poignant moment
6. the day I realized my parents were human
7. “Do as I say, not as I do.”
Answer Key

A. The problem is to avoid negative connotations of “left-overs.” Background is the menu and Jane’s plan. The incident is the story of Billy’s astonishment. The point is that things do not always work out as it would seem they might. It is inferred.

B. Since answers vary, ask an instructor to evaluate your work.