**ENG095 Narrative Analysis Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Per. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Lycke**

Emi Mahmoud, “A Young Poet Tells the Story of Darfur,” TED Talk, 2016

As you listen, work to identify the features of a narrative essay we have discussed in class. Mark in the transcript where you can see these features.

* A clear event (think smaller rather than bigger) (what?)
* A clear setting (where and when?)
* Vivid details (how?)
* A consistent point of view (whose story is this?)
* A clear point (so what?)

Questions for reflections:

1. What is the event Mahmoud talks about? Is there more than one, or is there a smaller more personal story inside a bigger one?
2. Where and when does the story take place?
3. What vivid details stand out to you? Why do you think they are effective?
   1. How does Mahmoud use language to engage the reader?
   2. Is there vocabulary you aren’t sure about?
   3. Where does the poetry in the story begin? What is its effect on the story?
4. Whose story is this? Think beyond the speaker’s name—what is her persona—what is the face she is showing you in the story?
5. What is the point of the story? What is her purpose, her argument?

The War in Darfur Overview

The “Darfur Genocide” refers to the current mass slaughter and rape of Darfuri men, women, and children in Western Sudan. Sudan is the largest country in Africa. The War in Darfur is a major armed conflict in the Darfur region of Sudan that began in February 2003 when the Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) rebel groups began fighting the government of Sudan, which they accused of oppressing Darfur's non-Arab population. The government responded to attacks by carrying out a campaign of ethnic cleansing (genocide) against Darfur's non-Arabs. This resulted in the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians and the indictment of Sudan's president, Omar al-Bashir, for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity by the International Criminal Court. Unrest and violence persist today.

TRANSCRIPT

I was 10 years old when I learned what the word "genocide" meant. It was 2003, and my people were being brutally attacked because of their race -- hundreds of thousands murdered, millions displaced, a nation torn apart at the hands of its own government.

My mother and father immediately began speaking out against the crisis. I didn't really understand it, except for the fact that it was destroying my parents. One day, I walked in on my mother crying, and I asked her why we are burying so many people. I don't remember the words that she chose to describe genocide to her 10-year-old daughter, but I remember the feeling. We felt completely alone, as if no one could hear us, as if we were essentially invisible.

This is when I wrote my first poem about Darfur. I wrote poetry to convince people to hear and see us, and that's how I learned the thing that changed me. It's easy to be seen. I mean, look at me -- I'm a young African woman with a scarf around my head, an American accent on my tongue and a story that makes even the most brutal of Monday mornings seem inviting. But it's hard to convince people that they deserve to be seen. I learned this in my high school classroom one day, when my teacher asked me to give a presentation about Darfur. I was setting up the projector when a classmate of mine said, "Why do you have to talk about this? Can't you think about us and how it will make us feel?"

(Laughter)

My 14-year-old self didn't know what to say to her, or how to explain the pain that I felt in that moment, and in every moment that we were forced not to talk about "this." Her words took me back to the days and nights on the ground in Darfur, where we were forced to remain silent; where we didn't speak over morning tea because the warplanes overhead would swallow any and all noise; back to the days when we were told not only that we don't deserve to be heard but that we do not have a right to exist. And this is where the magic happened, in that classroom when all the students started taking their seats and I began to speak, despite this renewed feeling that I didn't deserve to be there, that I didn't belong there or have a right to break the silence.

As I talked, and my classmates listened, the fear ebbed away. My mind became calm, and I felt safe. It was the sound of our grieving, the feel of their arms around me, the steady walls that held us together. It felt nothing like a vacuum.

I choose poetry because it's so visceral. When someone is standing in front of you, mind, body and soul, saying "Witness me," it's impossible not to become keenly aware of your own humanity. This changed everything for me. It gave me courage. Every day I experience the power of witness, and because of that, I am whole. And so now I ask: Will you witness me?

They hand me the microphone as my shoulders sink under the weight of this stress.

The woman says, "The one millionth refugee just left South Sudan. Can you comment?"

I feel my feet rock back and forth on the heels my mother bought,

begging the question:

Do we stay, or is it safer to choose flight?

My mind echoes the numbers:

one million gone,

two million displaced,

400,000 dead in Darfur.

And this lump takes over my throat,

as if each of those bodies just found a grave

right here in my esophagus.

Our once country,

all north and south and east and west,

so restless the Nile couldn't hold us together,

and you ask me to summarize.

They talk about the numbers as if this isn't still happening,

as if 500,000 didn't just die in Syria,

as if 3,000 aren't still making their final stand

at the bottom of the Mediterranean,

as if there aren't entire volumes full of fact sheets about our genocides,

and now they want me to write one.

Fact:

we never talked over breakfast,

because the warplanes would swallow our voices.

Fact:

my grandfather didn't want to leave home,

so he died in a war zone.

Fact:

a burning bush without God is just a fire.

I measure the distance between what I know

and what is safe to say on a microphone.

Do I talk about sorrow? Displacement?

Do I mention the violence,

how it's never as simple as what you see on TV,

how there are weeks' worth of fear before the camera is on?

Do I tell her about our bodies,

how they are 60 percent water,

but we still burn like driftwood,

making fuel of our sacrifice?

Do I tell her the men died first, mothers forced to watch the slaughter?

That they came for our children,

scattering them across the continent until our homes sank?

That even castles sink at the bite of the bomb?

Do I talk about the elderly, our heroes,

too weak to run, too expensive to shoot,

how they would march them,

hands raised, rifles at their backs, into the fire?

How their walking sticks kept the flames alive?

It feels too harsh for a bundle of wires and an audience to swallow.

Too relentless,

like the valley that filled with the putrid smoke of our deaths.

Is it better in verse?

Can a stanza become a burial shroud?

Will it sting less if I say it softly?

If you don't see me cry, will you listen better?

Will the pain leave when the microphone does?

Why does every word feel as if I'm saying my last?

Thirty seconds for the sound bite,

and now three minutes for the poem.

My tongue goes dry the same way we died,

becoming ash, having never been coal.

I feel my left leg go numb,

and I realize that I locked my knees, bracing for impact.

I never wear shoes I can't run in.

Thank you.

Check out Emi’s website at <http://emi-mahmoud.com/>.