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CURRICULAR PLANS FOR GRADES K-8 The Reading & Writing Workshop

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Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT ONE: Launching the Writing Workshop
OCTOBER	UNIT TWO: Approximating Small Moments
NOVEMBER	UNIT THREE: Looking Closely: Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists
DECEMBER	UNIT FOUR: Writing Pattern Books to Read, Write, and Teach
JANUARY	UNIT FIVE: Raising the Quality of Small Moment Writing
FEBRUARY	UNIT SIX: Procedural Writing: How-To Books
MARCH	UNIT SEVEN: Informational Books
APRIL	UNIT EIGHT: Authors as Mentors
MAY	UNIT NINE: Informational Books in Science
JUNE	UNIT TEN: Poetry and Songs

Your kindergartners will come to you this year full of stories and information. Some will come from homes in which parents invite their sons and daughters to add to the shopping list or to write stories for the dolls and teddy bears, and some will come from Pre-K classrooms in which children are invited to write, tell, and act stories. But for most of your children, it will be you who will introduce them to the world of written language. This is an enormously important responsibility because you will be the person who helps each and every child in your classroom know that he or she belongs in the world of written language. You will be the one

to convey that little marks on the page tell stories, carry jokes, give orders, change the world. And, you will be the one to help each child in your care come to believe that those little marks on the page will be a source of joy and laughter, friendship, and power.

The units of study that we sketch out here are based on almost three decades of work, teaching writing to kindergartners and learning from them about ways we can provide powerful help. These units draw on the knowledge not only of TCRWP staff members and researchers, but also of the thousands of teachers with whom we learn everyday. Of course these units have been carefully aligned with the Common Core State Standards. The TCRWP can provide anyone wishing such a document access to a chart that summarizes the links between the curriculum calendars and the Common Core. We hope the curriculum embedded here is useful to you, especially when combined with resources published by Heinemann, including the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* series (Heinemann, 2003) and the DVD, *Big Lessons from Small Writers*, which contains twenty-two videos that illustrate this curriculum (www.unitsofstudy.com). Of course, we expect you to alter these units based on all you know about your children and based on your own interests and passions. We would never imagine that any teacher would use any resource blindly; instead, please add and subtract according to what works for you.

Of course, as you revise these units, you will keep in mind the skills that your children bring with them into kindergarten. The data shows that at least two-thirds of children enter kindergarten already knowing their letters and sounds. Those children are ready to write whole sentences underneath their pictures, starting the first week of kindergarten. Because we would rather err on the side of being too supportive rather than not supportive enough, this curriculum calendar has been written with a more diverse kindergarten in mind. We've planned these units, assuming that many of your students enter kindergarten only knowing some of their letters and sounds. You will also find that you have students who may know several letters and sounds but do not know how to put them together to write words and sentences. If your students are notably more proficient than this, please rely on the first-grade curricular calendar, or on a mix of this one and that one, to provide your youngsters with the levels of challenge they'll need.

Those of you who worked with the TCRWP's curricular calendar from 2010–2011 will notice we have made some important changes while also maintaining a lot of last year's successful curriculum. We continue to recommend two units on personal narrative writing, at the start of the year and a third such unit in January, aimed toward lifting the level of writing. Before the winter holiday, you will find a familiar unit on pattern books. We have added a final part that teaches children to write pattern books that express an opinion. These pattern books provide special support for children's transition into conventional writing and reading. You will note that we continue to support two units that link writing and science. These units are revised—keeping and building on the good parts of last year's work (and there were many good parts to these two popular units).

You will also want to think about assessing your students by using Donald Bear's Developmental Spelling Inventory as well as the Letter and Sound Identification Assessment which is part of the TC Assessments. The TC Assessments can be found on www.readingandwritingproject.com.

In February and March, the units on nonfiction will build off one another. Then in April there is a return to personal narrative with a focus on using authors as mentors, since we wanted children to show their growth in writing personal narratives before they go off for the summer. Poetry and songs bring a new energy at the end of the year and are a wonderful send-off for children for the summer.

Special Words of Advice

There are five ways that we want to especially encourage kindergarten teachers to ratchet up the level of your writing instruction.

First, remember that your children are coming to you able to think of stories to tell and topics to teach. Chances are really great that it is absolutely no problem for them to think about something they have done, put that event onto the page, and tell the story of the event. It's also likely that kindergartners will have no trouble at all thinking about a topic on which they are experts and then teaching others all about that topic. You may find that the prospect of writing a story or an information book makes you break into hives out of nervousness and that you feel mired in writer's block. You are an adult and have the experience to know that everything you put onto the page is not going to captivate every reader. Five-year-olds, however, very rarely experience writer's block. They tend to have no trouble at all thinking up ideas for writing and they can get started at the drop of the hat. So you'll want to teach writing in ways that capitalize on your children's yearning to tell their stories, to teach the topics they know, and you'll want to avoid creating writer's block by suggesting that writers need to use tons of strategies in order to come up with an idea for writing.

Children also come to you with a knowledge of letters and sounds and of genres of writing. You may question whether this is, in fact, true of your students. During 2010, we began the school year by asking hundreds of kindergartners to do a piece of on-demand opinion writing and on-demand information writing, as well as the on-demand narrative writing, and we were flabbergasted by how much children already know, even at the start of kindergarten. The on-demand assessment tasks and continua for assessing student work are available on the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project web site at www.readingandwritingproject.com and we hope you draw upon this resource. You may decide to start the year simply by assessing narrative writing, postponing the other genre until closer to the time when you will teach that genre.

As children write, be scrupulous about not giving any reminders or assistance. Some kids may spend ten minutes, others may spend thirty. In any case, you will want to ask children to tell you their stories so that you can write a dictation on a Post-it to stick to

the back of their work. You'll eventually use these stories to show children and their parents how much children have grown over the course of their time in kindergarten, so propping them up now will defeat that purpose!

Once the writing time is over, collect the pieces, making sure that each piece contains the child's name and the date (as well as, if possible, a transcription if you cannot read the writing). Then you will want to see where your students fall on the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* by placing their on-demand pieces alongside this tool. A Level 3 on our continuum aligns with the Common Core State Standards expected by the end of kindergarten, and so this assessment will help inform the teaching that you will need to do across the year in narrative writing to get your students to this goal.

You needn't match every single trait—just look between the piece that the child has written and the touchstone texts for each level and do the best you can to locate the child's on-demand writing within the scale. Then, look ahead on the continuum to see the work you'll encourage her to do over the next few months and to see specific techniques that you can complement and teach. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing narratives that have a beginning, middle, and ending. Are children storytelling rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue? Are there details in their drawings? In terms of conventions, do they record letters and sounds? Can they draw representational pictures? Remember that after a couple of months of work in narrative writing, you'll redo this assessment, saying exactly the same things and providing the same conditions, and then watching to see how much your children have grown in that time. In fact, you will bring the September, October, and early November writing to your parent-teacher conferences and use those pieces to discuss children's growth. You'll then track student progress also in opinion and informational writing.

Secondly, keep in mind that kindergartners are easily able to (and apt to) write at least four or five three-page booklets a week for at least the first few months of kindergarten. As children get older and more proficient, they'll work longer on each page of their writing, writing sentences under their pictures, and they may write more like three booklets a week. But the larger point here is that your minilesson will often teach your students particular things that writers sometimes do. For exams, one lesson might teach writers that it helps to make characters in a story talk, and one way to do this is by adding speech bubbles into a story. That's a terrific minilesson—but if a child spent a full day's writing workshop simply writing speech bubbles on the three pages of his or her story booklet, that would hardly be a day's work! You can only support children working with lots of vigor and productivity if you set children free to start, write, revise, and finish a piece of writing and start another piece in a day, working without you if you do not happen to be at the child's side. A minilesson that helps writers write terrific endings might lead a writer to revise his or her ending on six stories accumulated in another child's writing folder, but even after revising six endings, it is likely that the writer would have more time to carry on as a writer. The focus on a minilesson should in no way be regarded as the work that a child will do in a day. In order to keep children drawing on all they have learned, classroom charts that

contain teaching points from previous minilessons are prominently displayed, and teachers often begin a minilesson by reviewing the strategies on a chart that are especially relevant for writers that day.

Finally, kindergartners are able to bring all that they are learning in reading to their writing. You will want to draw on your repertoire of strategies in reading to use similar strategies in writing. When kindergartners are reading books at levels A and B, we will say to a child, “Look at the picture and expect that the words and pictures will match.” We want them to understand that they are creating text in the same way when they write, and their pictures and words need to match as well. When we teach children to point crisply under words as they read their leveled books, we want them to understand that they can also do this when they read their own writing. When they read a book and ask themselves if something makes sense, we want them to bring that same question to their writing. Many teachers find it helpful to have children keep their book baggie nearby when they are writing.



UNIT THREE

Looking Closely

Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists

NOVEMBER

This popular unit was developed to serve three important purposes. First, it is designed to help children develop the foundational knowledge that will put them in good stead as they move from emergent toward conventional reading and writing. Approximately one month from now, we hope that most of your children are beginning to read leveled books and are writing in such a way that they (and you) can reread their writing. Prior to this unit, children were encouraged to read and write “as best they can,” even if that meant that they drew, told, and improvised exciting stories without really using many letters and sounds. This unit channels them to use letters and sounds to label items and list observations. You might say the unit positions children to slow down their reading and writing, pressing the pause button on their fast-paced plots, to write labels and sentences, not whole stories. Children, then, are able to take the time necessary to stretch out each word, listening not only to the first sound, but to every sound after that. The unit also channels children toward writing list books, pattern books, and books with simple sentences that will likely revolve around high-frequency words.

Then, too, the unit is designed to teach children that writing is not only a tool for storytelling; it is also a tool for learning about science. Writing is a means through which children can study and come to know about (and eventually to teach about) the wonderful world of science. This, of course, is an important part of the Common Core State Standards, which call for kindergarten writers to “use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts.” The Standards also state that kindergarten children will be able to “recall information from experiences or various sources in order to answer questions.” This unit allows them to begin to work toward these goals as they notice ways that they can write about the world around them.

It's difficult to overemphasize how important it is for children to understand writing as a tool for learning in the content areas. Many children are enthralled by any chance they get to study bugs, motors, electrical currents, and gravity. It is crucial that schools give children opportunities to learn about the world and to expand their background knowledge. It is equally important that schools let children know that in the real world millions of people use writing as a tool for organizing, holding on to, and using whatever the content is they want to learn.

Of course, a third reason the unit exists is because writing matters, and, because science matters. More specifically, providing children with opportunities to learn about *stuff* matters. Providing opportunities to see that learning about one thing leads to learning about lots of other things. Young children, of course, are dying to know how acorns turn into oak trees, where animals go in the winter, and why leaves fall from trees. It is a very good thing, then, when children are reading not only *words*, but also reading the *world* (Freire).

Before Launching the Unit

In this month, you will invite children to observe, collect, and study bits of their world. You can decide to channel this study toward any topic you like: birds, weather, water, plants, and so on. This write-up, however, is written as if you have invited the children to study plants and trees, especially the effects of autumn on plants and trees. Alter the following plans accordingly if you choose other topics. Whatever the topic, at the start of the unit you may tell your kids that they've been writing great stories, and authors often do write books that brim with stories. Tell the children that there are, however, other ways to write, and that in this unit they will learn to write like *scientists*.

Many classrooms adopt a tree outside the school building at their very own, to observe and study not just for this unit, but across the year, allowing children to see first-hand how trees respond to changes in the seasons. You'll want to nudge children to notice the changing colors of leaves, leaves falling, the difference between leaves and needles. As part of this, you'll probably want to connect some of your read-alouds and discuss how different parts of the tree are structured to allow it to survive the changing of the seasons year after year.

Once you have decided on the kind of writing the children will do, then provide them the materials that match your hopes. If you read ahead in this write-up, you'll see that we suggest you bring a few boxes of large zip-top baggies to school so that children can collect "stuff" on writerly walks to bring to your classroom. We suggest you gather trays or some other container in which to store the items children collect. We suggest you find books children can read or at least reread, after you have read repeatedly, on the topic you are studying. We recommend magnifying glasses. The key point is that you absolutely will *not* want to put all these materials out for the children from the start, because you'll use the materials to excite new work as the unit unfolds.

The materials matter because they help youngsters assume the new roles, the new identities. For this, you'll need special kinds of paper. You may, for example, give them blank researchers' notepads and colored pencils (they're better for capturing subtle details than the markers children may have used until now). Then again, you may give each student a clipboard. You may also decide to send these clipboards home so children continue to live "writerly lives" outside as well as inside the classroom. You'll need to organize the artifacts that students bring in from the world, making them accessible during writing time. You'll probably set up trays or baskets of these artifacts, moving them to the center of tables (or moving kids around trays on the rug) during work time so that children can shift between studying a leaf and writing about it.

Once your research materials have been distributed, you will probably want to inaugurate the unit of study by taking your children on a writerly/scientific walk somewhere, showing them that scientists find interesting things anywhere in the world: a little plant growing in the crack of the sidewalk, the rough feel of the bark on the trees lining the street, little beads of raindrops on the playground swings. Teach children that scientists and writers pay attention and say, "Wow!" They pull in close to really look, to really listen, and then capture whatever they see and hear on the page.

On some of your excursions, encourage children to collect objects to bring back to the classroom. When classes returned from neighborhood walks in years past, the students came in with red cheeks, huge smiles, and gallon-sized zip-top bags overflowing with leaves. They dumped their booty onto their desks and began observing. Some commented on the different sizes of the leaves, others discussed the colors, some counted how many leaves they collected, while others took leaves by the stem and rolled them in their fingers, pretending they were helicopters. They held up the leaves and looked with wide eyes and discussed their observations with all who would listen, growing the vocabulary that they would soon be writing in their books: "Look at this one, it is huge!" "I got a yellow jagged one!" The children were completely engaged and full of excitement and it lasted the entire unit.

As you help your children learn to value paying close attention to the world you'll probably want to read aloud books that celebrate this aspect of the writerly life. Try Byrd Baylor's *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* (1995), or *The Other Way to Listen* (1997). Joanne Ryder's books also illustrate the wide-awakeness you're trying to teach, as do Valerie Worth's poems, especially those in her work *All the Small Poems and Fourteen More* (1996).

Think, also, about the time frame for this month's writing workshop. If your writing workshops have been less than an hour until now, you will want to alter that for this unit. By now, children are able to work on their writing for far longer stretches of time than they could earlier in the year. Because this unit combines writing and science instruction, you'll want to extend the work even beyond an hour if you have time to do so.

Launching the Unit: Living Like Writers, Living Like Scientists

From the start of the unit, you will probably encourage children to write in three- to five-page booklets as they did when approximating Small Moments, because booklets have the lovely advantage of always containing another page and therefore providing built-in encouragement to keep going, to do more. The pages in the booklets need to contain plenty of room for nice, big observational drawings with labels. Remember, most kindergartners write with big letters, so they will need lots of space if they are going to write words to accompany their drawings.

By this time in the year, you'll probably want to provide each child with paper that contains at least a few lines at the bottom of each page, signaling that children should by now be writing sentences as well as labels. It's hard to emphasize the extent to which materials themselves convey expectations, and this is especially true if the materials change throughout the year, always marching a few steps ahead of children. The presence of lines at the bottom of each page should convey an important message to your students—but it will be equally important for you to supply students with tons of blank books, conveying the expectation that they will write a whole lot of these. One book a week would be far, far too little writing—they can write even more than one book a day! The more books your children write, the more opportunities they have to write words. Certainly you will want to encourage your kids to start another book as soon as they finish the first. Ask expectation-laden questions: “How many books have you written so far today?” “How many books do you think you'll write today?” “How many books do you have in your folder so far?” Be sure to celebrate the high volume and stamina that this unit is sure to generate. What could be more engaging for children than working with leaves and twigs, acorns and pine cones in hand?

It is predictable that a few of your children will jump from topic to topic, writing something different on each page of their booklet, or that some of your children will put all of their energy into their pictures, neglecting to attempt writing letters or words. The Common Core State Standards ask that kindergartners not only compose informative texts, but that they do so by naming a topic and by supplying some information about the topic. Therefore, it is important that you teach your writers to stay focused on one particular topic as they write. Use your conferring notes to keep track of the students who are not yet doing this, and meet with them in small groups to coach them into staying longer with one topic and adding labels to everything (spelling as best they can). As you confer with your individual writers, try to figure out a theory for each of your children, “What kind of writer is this? What does he or she tend to do often (not just one time)? Is there a pattern in this child's behavior as a writer that I could teach into?”

A few of your minilessons will probably teach students that as they study, they'll find themselves wanting to know more, and that the great thing is that more information is available in lots of places. One of those places is the pages of books. Before long, your children will no doubt convince you to allow them to keep book baggies or book bins, brimming with books on your topic, alongside the materials. Of course, adding books to the mix adds a world of instruction. “If you want to know the

scientific word for the little lines on a leaf—and of course, you’ll always want the scientific word—then the book can tell you!” The words will sometimes be long and hard to read, so you could teach yet more lessons about using academic vocabulary, encouraging children to not just copy the word, blindly, letter by letter, but to try chunking it so they can say the word, and then when they write, chunking it again so they can write it, chunk by chunk.

Of course, one child will help you make the discovery (that you’ll then share with the class) that the books can not only be sources for answers and information, they can also become mentor texts. You might say, “You know those science books at your tables? We can write books just like these about our own topics! About leaves or trees or our walk outside!” In a one-to-one conference, perhaps you and one writer will compare the book he was reading with the one he was writing—maybe even simply counting the number of pages in each. If his own book was shorter than the one the grown-up scientist had written, then your youngster could set that right with just a stapler and some extra pages. This work, of course, can become the centerpiece for a minilesson or a mid-workshop share session as you invite other students to engage in similar work. Before long, students will be pointing out to you that the books written by grown-up scientists all have at least one sentence and often more on a page, and your young scientists will resolve to do likewise. You can help students discover that some of their just-right science books are written in a patterned way and some contain a twist at the end. Naturally, youngsters will want to write in similar ways. You’ll see children writing list books with one phrase or label per page: *The leaf. The stick. The bark.* You should expect other children to be writing simple sentences or patterns like, *This leaf is yellow. This leaf is red. This leaf is green.* Again, the materials you provide will make all the difference.

Praise children’s remarkable ability to see the world. Encourage them to pick up bits and pieces, to put these things on trays, to examine them closely and to draw them with an eye for detail. Stop children as they work, holding up one drawing or another, and talk about the smart ways in which one child used shape and color or another used size to make the item look real. Make photocopies of some of their work in progress and hang it around the room or display it proudly on a shelf or taped to a chart. Congratulate children publicly for spending extended periods of time on one single drawing, adding more and more detail to it, saying “Ooh” and “Ahh” when a child fills an entire page with a drawing of a wee little acorn. That child has made a small item very big, and scientists (and writers) do the same thing.

Whether you have given your students colored pencils or markers, the unit will begin with a renewed commitment to making representational drawings, this time with writers working especially hard to capture details with precision, just as scientists do. In an earlier write-up, we pointed out that teaching children to draw representationally is significant work because this is teaching them to conjure up a mental picture of a topic and then to work to capture that image, that idea, with fidelity onto the page. The effort to put life onto the page, with detail, is fundamental to the writing process. Encourage children who are tracing to try to notice and draw the details on

their own so that their writing is a place to practice close noticing, drawing representationally, with an emphasis on the process of noticing and thinking, taking one's time, rather than a quick fix for a final product.

Of course, as part of teaching children to record what they see with detail, you will want to teach revision. You might, in the context of this unit, revisit the notion that when writers revise, what a writer is doing, literally, is re-vision, or re-seeing. The writer looks again, and this time sees information he or she had neglected to include in a first draft, usually leading the writer to add more into his or her text. A later lesson can involve teaching children that sometimes when the writer re-sees, the writer decides to do a whole new drawing, and perhaps this whole new drawing might be one that zooms in on an object, allowing the writer/scientist and the viewer to notice more. Scientists, of course, sometimes re-see using magnifying lenses. If you have any on hand, they will certainly fire up your children's work, especially if you saved them just for this part of the unit. Even if you don't have magnifying lenses, you can make "zoom lenses" from three-by-five index cards that have a one-inch hole cut out of the center to encourage children to focus on the smaller details of a larger object.

Of course this is writing time, so any drawing that children do will be a prelude to writing—and that writing needs to thread through most of every day's workshop. This means that as the year unfolds you should see children writing for increasing lengths of time, producing more and more text. As always, you'll need to use your understanding of what your children can do in order to guide each child toward the writing that he or she should be achieving.

For some small groups of children, you may teach them to make many labels each day, and as part of this, you will teach them to say words slowly, stretching them out, hearing the first sound, recording the letter that matches that sound, then rereading what they have written, continuing on through the word so the child hears and then records the second phoneme. As you do this, you will be helping those children draw on what they know about letters and sounds. Some children may still rely on letter names for their sense of the sound the letter makes. (This works as a starting strategy because usually the name of a letter contains the sound associated with that letter.) Some children will already be hearing and recording beginning and ending consonant sounds, if not all the phonemes in a word, and you'll want to teach strategy lessons to these groups of children to draw on their growing knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, known words and visual information when they write. This is important work to teach across all units, as the Common Core State Standards expect kindergarten writers to "write a letter or letters for most consonant and short-vowel sounds (phonemes)" by the end of the year.

For groups of children who are hearing and attempting to record most of the consonant sounds in a word (and starting to use and confuse vowels), nudge them to write a sentence under each picture, but be careful not to overstep—this unit is not meant to be a "fill-in-the-blank" unit where the teacher provides all the patterns, and the children supply the missing words. The big idea in this unit is that children will invent their own sentences and patterns, giving them an insider's understanding about language that will support them in reading as well as speaking and listening. If children are stuck,

you could refer them to the growing list of accountable talk prompts you should by now have displayed on a chart in your room. Surely by now your children are familiar with the prompts, “I notice . . .,” “I wonder . . .,” or “I think . . .,” During read-aloud, when you stop to give children opportunities to talk about books, you can coach them to use these prompts in their conversations; then all of these prompts and more can be used to inspire sentences in their science writing.

Throughout the first part in this unit, writing partners can play an important role in keeping your kindergartners engaged and independent. Teach your kids that when they are stuck they should first try their best and move on, but that sometimes we all need a little help. “During independent writing time, when you really aren’t sure what to do or can’t remember what something is called, you can whisper to your writing partner for help, then go right back to your own work.”

Each day you’ll probably want to also have some structured partner time. The excitement of all the science materials lends itself easily to children talking with partners—they go off to their tables and there’s all this exciting material waiting for them. Your children’s reaction should be “Yippee!” Why fight it? Make the most out of their talk by encouraging them to use the actual scientific vocabulary: *veins, stems, leaves, bark*, instead of vague language: *thing, stuff, it*. Some teachers find it helpful to actually have five minutes or so of partner time first before switching to independent writing time. You can direct your partner time by saying, “Take a few minutes to meet with your partner to talk about what you’re going to write today,” allowing children to be excited (and possibly noisy) while they are gathering ideas from what their partner says, before turning their attention to the writing and transitioning into quiet work time.

Writing More! Elaboration, Writing Sentences, Adding Details and Information

If you decide to nudge some groups of children toward list books, it might go like this: “I see the leaf. I see the acorn. I see the pine cone.” You will want to also teach them to elaborate—to think and write more. There are lots of ways to help children elaborate, and the most essential method will be to nudge them to write whatever they notice or think or wonder about an object. Helping children write whatever is on their minds will also entail teaching them to be inventive spellers, tackling words fearlessly. This means that if some children are currently writing with just one or two sounds, you will want to encourage them to slow down and listen for more sounds. If you notice other children starting to represent some vowel sounds, this will inform your word study, where you will want to spend a little time teaching them about short vowels and how to use them to spell. You may convene other groups to work on using known words to spell unknown words. All of this will be possible because children will be using their high-frequency words and patterns to write with greater fluency. Since much of their sentences will flow quickly, writers will have more energy to spell the tricky words with increasingly complex spelling strategies.

Some groups of children might benefit from learning to write different kinds of sentences (complex sentences, with a variety of language structures and punctuation). You might teach your whole class to notice that sometimes the books we read ask questions and suggest that some of them may want to try writing a book of questions. Some children might even try writing a book of questions *and* answers. Either structure will give kids plenty of practice with a new kind of sentence, and more options for kinds of books to write, and a new way to think about the science they are studying— scientists ask questions at least as often as they record facts. You can add both to the list of options they have collected by now (that list now includes all of the structures you’ve taught so far in this unit: label books, list books, books with sentences, now questions, questions and answers).

You can also teach elaboration by emphasizing not only what writers do (revise) but what scientists do. For example, you teach children that scientists usually write what they see first, but then they look again, this time for more details: “I see the leaf. It has little holes in it.” Of course, it is also important to teach children (if they are ready for this) to alternate between recording what they see and recording what they think; for example, “I see the leaf. Why is it red?” Children could also observe and write from photographs some of the time in the same manner.

Remember, as the unit progresses, children will be churning out a lot of little books. They will probably write approximately three a week, each with three to five pages. The lovely thing about this is that when you teach children something new, you can encourage them to revise previously written books, adding whatever you’ve most recently taught to those earlier books. This means that if a child draws and labels for the first week-and-a-half of this study, and then you teach her to write sentences, she might go back and reread her existing collection, this time adding a sentence to every page of her earlier books. If you teach another child that in addition to observing, he could also think, and if you suggest one way to revise is to ask questions, that child could reread all his books, extending them in that way, changing “I see the leaf” to “What do I see? I see the leaf,” or, “I see the leaf. I wonder why it is green.”

By now, you’ve done quite a bit of work to help children learn and use scientific vocabulary of the subject during read-alouds, shared reading, and science time. If your scientists are studying trees, their writing should include terms like *stem*, *veins*, *bark*, and *twigs*. Through read-aloud, shared reading, and during your science instruction, you may want to add scientific words to a science word wall, or chart. Add the words one or two at a time, as they come up in your reading and shared experiences. Write the words large on sentence strips or index cards, like you would for your usual word-wall words. You might include picture clues for these new vocabulary words to help your young readers access the meaning of the words when they glance up at the science word wall to find a word, not just when talking to partners, but also to use in their own writing.

Scientists Think, Make Connections, Predict, Have Ideas, Compare and Contrast—and So Do Writers!

You will also need to keep in mind the big work of the unit to be sure the work progresses. Be ready to show children other options for structuring their science writing (and be ready to invite them to make choices). For example, you might teach children that many scientists are interested in all the parts of an object, and you might invite children to write books about the parts of an object. This could be as simple as a child writing a book entitled, “The Tree.” One page could address one part of the object, saying, “The trunk,” and another page, “The branches,” and so forth. The book might end with a twist: “I want to climb it.”

So far the emphasis in this unit has been on making observations, collecting information and details, and recording those details on the page through drawing and writing labels and sentences—and for many kindergarten classrooms this can and should be the emphasis for the remainder of the unit. You can extend the work that they are already doing by adding new science material for kids to observe and look at; you can encourage them to study their just-right books for new ideas for things to try in their own writing; you can continue to meet with small groups of kids and coach them into labeling with more letter sounds, writing more words and phrases, sentences, and different kinds of sentences.

However, for some classrooms, particularly in classrooms where children are already beginning to write sentences, you may want to take the next step and teach your children new ways to think about the science content they’ve been studying. For example, you might teach your class that, yes, scientists (and writers) do record exactly what we see in front of us, right down to the last detail, but we also can push ourselves to think, “Why?” “Why do leaves change colors?” “Why does . . .” “What is the reason . . .” and then we can stretch our thinking even farther by making a prediction (or hypothesis). *Maybe* or *probably* are good prompts for encouraging children to hypothesize about the science artifacts in front of them, using all that you’ve taught them by now through read-alouds, science instruction, science walks, and so on.

Another option, either for small groups of children or for your whole class, is to arrange the science materials in ways that lend themselves to comparison and contrast. As mentioned before, you might place a basket of different kinds of leaves at each table for the writers to look at. Then teach your children that writers often look closely at objects to notice and write about what is the same and what is different. Together, you might sort a basket of mixed leaves, or pine cones, or twigs, talking about what makes them each the same or different as you go—perhaps even writing as you go. You might create a chart with your kids that lists some language for comparing and contrasting. “I noticed . . . is the same as . . .” “They both . . .” or “I noticed . . . is different from . . .” “One has . . . but the other has . . .”

As children become ready for more challenges, there will be a host of possibilities. You can nudge them toward more precise words, braver choices, or using comparisons to show what they mean: “Some leaves are as colorful as a party dress.” No matter

what structure your children select, you can extend what they do by encouraging them to wonder and to question, perhaps even letting their curiosity lead to small experiments. For instance, the question “I wonder why the leaf is waxy?” will ideally be followed with possible answers, and you will want to teach children helpful phrases such as, “Could it be that (or “because of”) . . . ?” The leaf scientist might conjecture that the wax on leaves lets the water roll right off of them, and that could lead to an experiment. Chances are good that you will not get to this work within your one unit, but it will likely spark continued work around a shared inquiry, preferably one that brings fascinating stuff into your room (and that brings your children out of the room!) long after the writing curriculum has moved on.

By this point in the unit, you have surely read aloud quite a few books about plants, trees, or whatever science topic you have chosen for the unit. Encourage your children to use what they know from the read-alouds as well as the science material in front of them. Teach them that we can also write books about what we know—not just about what’s in front of us. So, even if we have a stack of leaves in front of us, we can write books that are about “different kinds of trees” or “why leaves change color” or “trees in my neighborhood” because all these are things that we’ve studied this month as part of our unit. You might even make copies of the cover of each read-aloud to make an easy-to-see list of all the books you’ve read so far about the topic. You may want to display the read-alouds you’ve done in an easy-to-access part of the room, or even make a chart for each read-aloud (as you are reading it, of course) to remind kids of the key content they’ve learned in each read-aloud so that kids can access that information during writing workshop.

Finishing Up Our Books, Getting Ready to Present Our Work

As the unit nears its end, you may want to ramp up the rereading work that children are doing during writing workshop. Encourage them to use everything they know from reading workshop to read their own writing (to themselves and to partners during partner time each day)—pointing to one word at a time, making sure that the words make sense, rereading to smooth out their voices. You can teach your kindergartners that writers reread their own writing again and again to make sure that it makes sense, sounds good, and looks right. We read with our pencil in hand, ready to make changes as needed.

You’ll also want to make sure that your students have a clear sense of who their audience will be for publishing their work. Near the end of the unit, each of your children can pick one or two of the many books they have written in this unit to return to and publish. Will their published books be on display in the school library? Does your school have a science lab or science bulletin board? Perhaps you’ll invite another class to come and visit so that your children can present one or two of their books to a partner from another classroom. However you decide to publish, you can get the most out of this last part of the unit by reminding children that for the last few days,

they'll be getting their writing ready to share with other people, real live people, who are going to read their books. They can add more labels, more words, more details, maybe even add color, a cover, or an "about the author" page to "fancy it up" and get it ready to share.

Adaptations for Children Who Need Support

As the unit evolves, be sure that more and more children progress from hearing the initial sounds in words to hearing and recording all the phonemes. Identify the children whose spellings do not yet show that they've mastered the idea that each sound needs to lead to at least one mark, one letter, and give those children a great deal of repeated scaffolding. They should practice making labels every day, with you providing the support for stretching words out, hearing more constituent sounds so that those children should be able to graduate soon to writing sentences underneath their pictures. Your goal will be for them to write so that they can reread their writing, using one-to-one matching, and so that you can reread their writing too, or at least long stretches of it. You may want to suggest that when children progress to sentences, they first simply write, "I see the . . ." This may seem like fairly dull writing, but it is not dull to the children. Remember that these children are on the brink of learning to read conventionally, and one of the most important things they can learn is the concept of one-to-one matching. Even if a child writes a text as "boring" as, "I see the green leaf. I see the red leaf," and then the child reads that text back, pointing at each word as she reads it, that child is making gigantic strides.

It will be important for you to encourage children to leave spaces between their words (and through this, to develop more of an understanding of the difference between words and letters). If children squish their letters together without spaces between words, teach them to reread, making slashes where they might want spaces. Another way is to listen to what the child wants to say, and then repeat each word, making one blank on the child's page where each word will go. The writer can then touch each blank, saying aloud what he or she will write, and then record a word in each blank.

Additional Resources

This month, you are really providing yourself with a different path toward the same goals that were outlined in October. The unit provides your students with lots of support writing sentences. You should be able to read their writing, and they should be able to read it as well, using one-to-one matching.

If you have some students who do not know five to ten high-frequency words or who do not (at the very least) use beginning and ending consonants roughly correctly, you will want to really ramp up your instruction this month to ensure that this unit

provides those children with time to catch up. For these writers, the work on varied sentences and elaboration will be somewhat beside the point. The real goal for them will be to write so that people can read their writing.

On the other hand, for your more proficient writers, you can surely teach them to spread their wings during this unit.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit: Living Like Writers, Living Like Scientists

- “Today I want to teach you that writers are like scientists; we both live wide-awake lives, looking closely at the world around us to learn new things and to share what we learn with others. Like scientists, writers look at things differently—we notice things that most ordinary people just walk right past. Instead of walking past the everyday things, writers stop to jot down our thoughts and observations, using words and pictures to capture every detail. As scientists, we have already been jotting down a lot of things we are noticing about the trees and leaves around us, and today I want to teach you that writers can write down our observations in booklets, so that we can share what we learn about the world around us with others.”

- ▮ *Tip:* “Scientists don’t only draw careful observations of what we see, scientists also add labels beside our drawings so others know what things are. So, as we record what we see, we will want to be sure to do this too.”

- “Today I want to teach you that when we are writing like scientists, we need to try to capture what we see, exactly the way we find it. So if there is a hole in the leaf we are writing about, we don’t just make a dot, we draw a hole. We need to look closely as we draw and write about the things we see, including exact details as we see them.”

- “If we want others to read about our scientific findings, we need to help them to do this! In order for others to read our writing, we need to spell words the best we can. Today, I am going to teach you that one way you can be sure to get down as many sounds as you can is by stretching out your words slowly, writing down all of the sounds that you hear. You can say the word you want to write, listening to the first sound you hear to get the first letter down. Then, say the word again, listening for the next sound in the word; put down the letter that makes that sound. Keep doing this until you have as many sounds down as you hear! Remember to just do the best you can!”

- ▮ *Tip:* “You may have to say the word five times, but the more sounds you get down, the easier it will be for someone to read.”

- ▶ *Tip:* “As you write, you might stop to reread what you have recorded. You could put your finger under what you have written, as you read the word. Sometimes as you reread a word, you realize, ‘Oops. I forgot to put one of the sounds onto the paper,’ and then you can add more letters.”
- “Today I want to teach you that before we start writing, we plan what we will teach others, but we also plan for other things! We plan how we want our book to go and what it might sound like: Will it be a book that teaches what things are? Or what they do? Or do we want to ask our reader questions? We might even try a few ways our book could sound before we choose the one that best fits our plan.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers make plans to teach lots and lots! Before you start writing, you might look at your just-right books to see how long those books are, then you might say: I know lots of facts to make my book just as long! One way to do this is to say all of the stuff you want to teach across your fingers and then grab a booklet to write down all of the stuff you want to include so that you make books just like the ones you are reading!”
- “Writers often talk to others about what we are planning to write, before we even get our pencils ready. Today I want to teach you that sometimes it might help to work with a partner first, before we start to write a new book. We can ask our partner, ‘What are you going to write today?’ and listen carefully to all that our partner says. We might even get more ideas for what to teach just from listening to what our partner plans to do!”
- ▶ *Tip:* “When writers are stuck, first we try our best and move on, but sometimes we all need a little help. During independent writing time, when we really aren’t sure what to do, or can’t remember what something is called, we can whisper to our writing partner for help, then go right back to our own work.”

Part Two: Writing More! Elaboration, Writing Sentences, Adding Details and Information

- “As writers and scientists, we need to look again and again, adding to our pictures and our words. After we draw and write about a leaf, we look again at the leaf, really closely, maybe with a magnifying glass. We try to find any details we may have missed. Today I want to show you that as writers we can always add more details to our pictures and to our words.”
- *Tip:* “You may even decide to start a new page, zooming in on the details!”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers use drawings and labels to remind us of what we want to say, and then we can go back to add more, adding our ideas about the stuff we’ve put onto the page. Sometimes what we write on one page gets us started, and we end up writing in a pattern, saying similar things on every page.”
- “Scientists use lots of fancy words to talk to one another. For example scientists who look closely at birds call themselves ornithologists, and those who look closely at stars are said to study astronomy. Today, I want to teach you that when we are writing like scientists we will want to be more scientific and exact, using the same kinds of words that other scientists do. We can use the charts, books, and other words that we see around the room to make our words more precise and exact. As we write, we might stop to think, ‘Wait, do I know another word to describe this?’ or ‘Is there a word in the room that can help describe or name what it is that I am talking about?’ Then we can find those words and add them to our books.”
- “Today I want to teach you that as writers we often see what other authors have done in their books to get ideas for what we might do in our own. Writers look over a book and think, ‘How does this whole book go?’ and then think, ‘How do I want my book to go?’ For example you might read a book about leaves and ask ‘How did this writer sort the leaves?’ Then you might think about how you could sort your information in a similar way.”

Part Three: Scientists Think, Make Connections, Predict, Have Ideas, Compare and Contrast—And So Do Writers!

- “Writers, I am so impressed with how you have gotten the hang of looking closely at the things around you, making observations to then write about in your books the way scientists do. Today I want to teach you that scientists not only record what we see, but we also add information based on what we already know. We can write about all of the parts of an object, like a tree or a flower, even if the parts aren’t right there in front of us.”
 - ▮ *Tip:* “Even if we just have a stack of leaves right in front of us, we can write books about ‘Different kinds of trees,’ or ‘Why leaves change color,’ or ‘Trees in our neighborhood.’ We have learned all about trees and leaves and can say so much more than just listing the details that we see in front of us.”
- “Are you ready for a whole new kind of work? If you are, then today I want to teach you that scientists don’t just collect tons and tons of stuff, writing it all down in any old way. Instead scientists also try to figure out how to sort things into ‘piles that go together.’ Then scientists draw and write to teach people about why these ‘piles go together.’”

- “Today I want to teach you that scientists not only record exactly what we see right in front of us, and what we already know, but scientists can also push themselves to think, ‘Why? Why do leaves fall to the ground?’ As we write our books we can ask questions that start with ‘Why does . . .?’ or ‘What is the reason . . .?’ We can write our observations *and* thoughts *and* questions in our science books.”

► *Tip:* “Then we can stretch our thinking even further by making a guess or a prediction about the answer by saying, *maybe* or *probably* or *could it be*? We can use what we know about science to develop a good hypothesis (or guess) about the answer to our questions to include as well.”

■ “Today I want to teach you that writers often look closely at objects to notice and write about what is the same, and what is different. We can write what we notice using our chart of compare/contrast language: ‘I noticed . . . is the same as . . .’ ‘They both . . .’ ‘I noticed . . . is different from . . .’ ‘One has . . . but the other has . . .’”

■ “We want others to be able to read the books we write. So like we always do, we want to spell words the best that we can. Today I want to remind you that one tool we can use to check our words is the word wall. If you find words in your books that are on the word wall, check the word on the wall, get the spelling in your mind, then look away from the word wall and see if we can still remember how to spell the word. Write it down and do a final check to see if you were right.”

Tip: “We also need to be brave and do our best with hard-to-spell words. We don’t need to be scaredy-cat writers and only write the words that are on the word wall! No way! We are scientists, and scientists need to be brave enough to write the exact true word, even if we don’t know the exact true spelling of it we just do our best.”

■ “Today I want to teach you that science writers try to think of the best ways to describe what we notice, so that others can learn as much as possible about the topic that we are writing about. One way writers do this is to compare what we are writing about to something that people would already know and be familiar with, like ‘Some leaves are as colorful as . . . a party dress!’ If you think that most of your readers will know about dresses, then this comparison will help them to think about leaves. Comparing objects with familiar things can help people to really picture what you are writing about.”

Part Four: Finishing Up Our Books, Getting Ready to Present Our Work

- “Writers, we are in the home stretch of our unit. Do you know what a home stretch is? In a horse race, the home stretch is that final part in the track, when the finish line is right ahead, and the crowd starts cheering like crazy because pretty soon the whole terrific race will be over. Well, we are entering the final stretch of our unit. So our work will change, as it always does for writers when we are in the home stretch. You ready? Today I want to teach you that whether a writer is a scientist-writer, a story writer, a fairy tale writer, or a newspaper writer, writers always take the last few days to look back over all we have written to decide ‘What’s good here that is worth revising and sharing with the world?’ We put all our good stuff in a revision folder, and then we start revising it. And to ‘revise’ means to ‘re-see,’ to look again at what we have done and to ask, ‘How can I make this good work into terrific work?’ Writers reread our writing and put Post-its on all the parts where we think we can make our work even better—then we get going!”
- “Today I want to teach you that as writers we don’t just automatically put our books away on the ‘finished’ side of our folders when we think we are done. Instead we reread our books a couple of times and think to ourselves, ‘Do I have more to add to my labels? To my pictures? To my sentences? Do I have more to say about what I see . . . where I see it . . . and why it looks or feels this way?’ Writers often say more and think, ‘Wait, I want to tell more information, to be more specific.’ We don’t just say, ‘I see a hole in the leaf.’ We say, ‘I see a hole in a leaf, and maybe a caterpillar made the hole.’ Or, ‘This leaf has spikes. The spikes are on the top.’ We can add more into our pattern books when we think we have more to add.”
 - *Tip/Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “I saw some of you adding tons more labels—like you were labeling not just *leaf* but also *stem*, *edge*, *bug bite*, and things like that. And some of you were adding lots of words to your labels, like ‘skinny long stem.’ Some of you had written one sentence at the bottom of each page, like, ‘I see the leaf.’ And you thought, ‘I can add so much more!’ So you added more. I thought maybe I’d teach all of you to do what some of you were already doing, okay? So today I want to teach you that as writers we reread our books and we ask ourselves, ‘What do I think about this?’ and we add what we think to the page.”
 - *Tip:* “Writers sometimes reread our writing and find ourselves wondering and having questions about things. So, we add questions to get the reader wondering, too. For example, Jessica reread her book, ‘I see a hole.’ She added, ‘How did the hole get there? I wonder if a ladybug ate it.’”

- “Today I want to teach you that neither writers nor scientists wait for teachers to tell them how to revise our writing. No way! Writers don’t come up to teachers and say, ‘Please, Miss, how do I make my writing better?’ and then just do what the teacher says. No way. As writers we are the boss of our own writing. We reread our books and think, ‘What else can I add?’ And then we look to charts, books, or other kid writers to get tons and tons of cool ideas.”
- “Today I want to remind you of something you already know. We have already been fixing up our writing. Writers not only fix up our writing, we also fancy up our writing so that it is ready to be published.”
- *Tip:* “I’ve brought the list out from the last unit of ways to fix and fancy up our writing. Of course you know that we can look back on old charts to get ideas for what we can do, but we can also add to those old charts. I’m wondering if there are other ideas you have for how we could fix and fancy up our writing?”

NOTES



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GRADE

1



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Overview of the Year for First-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Launching with Small Moments
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Writing-for-Readers
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Realistic Fiction
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Procedural Writing: How-To Books
JANUARY	UNIT 5: Opinion Writing: Persuasive Letters and Speeches
FEBRUARY	UNIT 6: Authors as Mentors: Craftsmanship and Revision
MARCH	UNIT 7: Informational Books
APRIL	UNIT 8: Cross-Genre Writing Projects
MAY	UNIT 9: Informational Writing about Science
JUNE	UNIT 10: Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages

The 2011–2012 proposal for a writing curricular calendar is designed to align with the Common Core State Standards and represents one possible way that a year in first grade might unfold. You will notice that many of the writing units are similar to last year, but as you read deeper, you will notice several changes. This curriculum reflects the genres of writing that are spelled out by the Common Core State Standards

and gives children several opportunities to write in those genres: narrative, persuasive, informational, and poetry. The writing that students do in this grade will be the beginning of the fundamental modes of writing that students will be called upon to do with increasing sophistication and with decreasing reliance on scaffolds. First graders will write “Small Moment” stories by recalling an event and retelling it “across their fingers,” whereas when they are third graders, they will be writing plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a timeline or story mountain, revising the narratives so that beginnings and endings relate to what the story is really about. First graders will make and substantiate claims in persuasive letters, and by third grade children learn to use expository structures to persuade.

Your first graders will come to you as budding young writers ready to grow in leaps and bounds. Right away you will help them remember the confident writers they became last year in kindergarten and continue to build on this energy during the year ahead. This means, of course, that as teachers of first graders, you need to be sure your teaching does not repeat but instead stands on the shoulders of the previous year, and that it takes children as far as they can go. Because the units of study are designed to build on one another, a teacher at any one grade level can always use the write-ups for preceding and following grades to develop some knowledge for ways to support writers who especially struggle and those who especially need enrichment. This sometimes takes a little research since the kind of writing will not always be at a consistent time during the year. It is critical that you modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching and so that your grade level meetings can be occasions for sharing minilessons, sharing mentor texts, planning in ways that inform your teaching, assessing and celebrating children’s work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

As always, these units are provided as suggestions for you to study with your colleagues. We would never imagine that any of you would use these or any other resources blindly; instead we are certain you will sometimes add, sometimes subtract as you devise teaching that supports your growing writers. This curricular calendar, like all of our curricular calendars, has been adjusted to be in sync with the Common Core State Standards, and we have a document available that details the alignment. As you adapt and make the curriculum come to life, some other resources you might find helpful include the Units of Study for Primary Writing series, (Heinemann, 2003), *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2*, and the DVD, *Big Lessons from Small Writers*, which contains twenty-two videos that illustrate this curriculum. These can all be ordered at www.unitsofstudy.com.

For those of you who worked with the TCRWP’s curricular calendar from 2010–2011, we have made some important changes, but also kept a lot from last year. You will see that we continue to recommend you teach two units on personal narrative writing in succession, followed by a unit on fiction writing. Then, before the winter holiday, we hope you have time for a unit on nonfiction writing where you will teach the children to write procedural texts, texts that will teach their readers how to do something.

In January, we recommend you give children support in opinion writing—specifically writing persuasively. We have changed this unit to not only include letters but to

teach kids to write speeches as well. The February unit is a return to narrative writing, as called for by so many of you. We did not want to let the year go by without a return to this writing. Then in March a unit on nonfiction writing (Informational Writing) will be the foundation for the information in content writing that will come in May. The new April unit builds on what last year was a unit on independent projects, but now we are encouraging students to write in any genre of their choice. The point of this unit is to help students realize that they know so many different kinds of writing (genres) and they can write what they have been bursting to try all these past months and bring all that they have learned to their writing. This was added in recognition of the Common Core State Standards' emphasis on academic literacy and the wide range of forms and genres this can include. You will also see that we kept our poetry unit in June because we felt like it was a great way to revitalize the end of the year and send children off to the summer with extra energy. We do recognize that some of you might make the choice of moving poetry to April to coincide with National Poetry Month, as some did during the 2010–2011 year.

We recognize that you will have first graders entering your classroom with a wide range of skills—there will be some who are still fledgling writers and some who are ready for anything you put before them. Your teaching will need to be especially assessment-based and designed to support diversity. We encourage you to skim the documents written for kindergarteners and second graders, because those will help you understand ways you can support both your struggling and your strongest writers. At the very beginning of the year, and prior to beginning any unit, we encourage you to do an on-demand piece of writing, and use this data as a way to plan your minilessons for your children. If this is really going to be a true assessment, we cannot stress enough that you cannot scaffold kids' work during this assessment. Do not remind children of any examples, do not confer with kids, and do not give any spelling tips. Take note of what your students are doing from kindergarten. Did they grasp the concept of small moments? What do they know about qualities of narrative writing? What do they know about conventions? We suggest that you use the continua for assessing narrative, informational, and opinion writing. These tools are works in progress, and they are available on our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com. We invite you to use these documents with your colleagues in ways that you see fit. Even if you do not use these resources, look at the student writing to get a sense of what your children know well, what they are gesturing toward, and what is not yet in their control.

Special Words of Advice

If we have three suggestions for how first-grade teachers might lift the level of your writing workshops in the year ahead, these are the suggestions. First, when your children come into first grade they may seem young, but acknowledge the fact that they have come from kindergarten classrooms in which they have learned to write Small Moment stories across pages, have studied and implemented mentor author techniques in their writing, have written poems and how-to and all-about books, and then finished the year with folders bursting with stories. When they were in kindergarten they probably wrote

at least three or four stories a week. Your first graders will certainly write two to three stories a week. The more mature writers will be the ones to write two stories a week, and those stories will have paragraphs, not sentences on a page, including revisions from the start, and so on. Remember, the younger they are, the more stories they'll tend to write! You will want to make sure that your students begin this year by writing in three- or four-page booklets. Have single pages around so they can add more pages. Across the year, you will want to change the paper choice as you see children able to write more. Watch for kids that are squeezing in writing and adding more words to any space they see on the paper. They are ready for paper choices with more lines!

Secondly, it is important that children work with increasing independence. In your minilessons, it is crucial that you remind writers of all the many options they have to draw upon during that day's writing workshop. You can't under any circumstances expect that the work children will do on any one day is the work of the teaching point! If you taught writers that characters can actually talk, and that writers might add quotes or speech bubbles, you should expect children to be writing up a storm, using details and adding feelings and all the rest in addition to making characters talk. And as you confer, much of the instruction will not match the minilesson. That is, the minilesson should not tell writers exactly what they are all to do that day, and the conferences and small groups cannot be ways to be sure everyone does the same thing! You need to encourage children to take ownership of the choices they make, and to follow the essential principles and beliefs that inform writing workshops. The challenge is to help children write more, but without their writing becoming convoluted, confusing, or dull. Be sure that you read what your kids write, and confer and teach to lift the quality of their writing, from the fundamentals of structure to teaching children that revision is an everyday part of all writing.

Thirdly, when planning your units of study, draw on the assessment data and the writing pieces that have been sent up from last year's kindergarten teacher. This way, the work we are doing in first grade is not repeating kindergarten work, but building upon it. You want to remind your students that they have now graduated and are ready to rise to the challenge of first graders.

Assessing Writers at the Start of the Year

In your eagerness to get started, however, don't bypass the opportunity to collect baseline data. Before you rev kids up, before you remind them of all they know about narrative writing, devote one day's writing workshop to some assessment. We recommend you simply say, "Before we get started on this new year, I would love to see what you can do as writers of Small Moment stories, of true stories. Today, I'm going to give you a booklet that you'll use to draw and then write a story on one particular thing that you did. Make this an example of the best true story writing you can do. I hope your writing shows me what you can do as a writer. I'm not going to be helping you today—instead I'll just be observing you so that I can get to know you better as writers." Take a look at our website

(www.readingandwritingproject.com) for more on performance assessments and how to go about administering them.

Give children just forty-five minutes of actual writing time, and be scrupulous about not giving any reminders or assistance. Be sure kids have five-page booklets on which to write and approximately three to four lines on each page. You'll eventually use these stories to show children and their parents how much children have grown over the course of their time in first grade, so propping them up now will defeat that purpose!

Once the writing time is over, collect the pieces, making sure that each piece contains the child's name and the date, (and possibly a transcription if you cannot read the writing) and then put these pieces alongside the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* (www.readingandwritingproject.com). You needn't match every single trait—just look between the piece that the child has written and the benchmark texts for each level and do the best you can to locate the child's on-demand writing within the scale. Then, look ahead on the continuum to see the work you'll encourage her to do over the next few months, and to see specific techniques that you can compliment and teach. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing focused narratives (one small moment). Also, look to see if their writing has some structure (usually this will mean, for now, chronologically structured pieces). Are children storytelling rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue? Are there details? In terms of conventions, do they control capitalization and ending punctuation? Do they appear to care not only about what they write, but also about how they write it? We suggest that you not only use the continuum we have developed for narrative writing, but that you also find continua that we have developed for assessing informational and opinion writing to be helpful. These tools are works in progress and are also available at www.readingandwritingproject.com. We invite you to use these documents with your colleagues in ways that you see fit. Even if you do not use these resources, look at the student writing to get a sense of what your children know well, what they are gesturing toward, and what is not yet in their control.

Remember that after three months of work in narrative writing, you'll redo this assessment, saying exactly the same things and providing the same conditions, and then watching to see how much your children have grown in that time. In fact, you will bring the September, October, and early November writing to your parent-teacher conferences and use those pieces to discuss children's growth. Remember that you are always teaching toward tomorrow and toward independence. You will not want to lure kids to revise a piece of writing so completely and so extensively that you end up scaffolding them to do work with your assistance that is far beyond what they will be able to soon do on their own.

We recommend that you also assess students' growing control of spelling. We recommend administering Donald Bear's Developmental Spelling Inventory detailed in *Words Their Way*. You'll give your whole class what amounts to a spelling test, asking them to spell each of twenty-five words. To assess your spellers, you will need to count not the words but the features that are correct. The result is that you can channel your whole-class spelling instruction so that your teaching is aligned to the main needs you see across your class as well as differentiate instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.



UNIT FIVE

Opinion Writing

Persuasive Letters and Speeches

JANUARY

The Common Core State Standards call for a new focus on opinion writing, and this unit is part of a spiral curriculum that will help students develop their abilities to do this kind of writing. Students will be given the direct instruction and repeated opportunities they need in order to become proficient at stating an opinion and supplying supportive reasons for that opinion. Specifically, they'll learn to write letters and speeches that aim to persuade, or to argue. They'll learn not only the skills involved in opinion writing, but also the stance. Even six-year-olds can learn that if they work hard to make their writing sensible, persuasive, and supported by facts, their writing can actually effect changes in the world. A class of students in New Hampshire proposed that their state adopt a state animal and ended up addressing the state assembly. Children in a New York City classroom protested when a park was being turned into a parking lot and actually managed to save that patch of earth. Some teachers have found they can launch this unit by showing children the video clip of a young boy speaking to his local school board over zoning issues that result in long bus rides (search *Alex's Speech to the School Board* on YouTube.com). Other teachers have shown their children the video of a young girl who is about to receive her black belt, and speaks about karate (search *Karate Kid Speech with Subtitles* on YouTube.com). One way or another, you will want to teach your children that writers of letters and speeches see the world as it is, imagine what it could be, and use writing to imagine and to advocate for solutions.

Before the start of the unit, you will want to be sure that you conduct an on-demand assessment of your children's abilities to do opinion writing. To do so, tell your children that you know they have strong opinions and they already know a lot about writing, so you want to see what they can do, so you know what to teach them. Then ask your students to respond to the following prompt: "Think of an idea or opin-

ion that you have strong feelings about. Tell your opinion and tell why you feel this way. “You will want to give them a choice of several different kinds of booklets and letter-writing paper as they engage in this on-demand assessment. Be sure that you do not coach your children by adding a lot of reminders—the goal is to see your children’s understanding of what it means to write an opinion text, and to see their abilities to do so with total independence. After children do this work, compare their texts to the benchmark texts on the *RWP Opinion Writing Continuum* (see www.readingandwritingproject.com) and note the level of proficiency at which most of your students are working, and the next step for them. Note, too, some of the specific lines of development along which they are traveling, and ways in which you can extend what they can do. The good news is that you will be able to ask children to do the exact same thing at the end of this unit, and the growth should be palpable. The Common Core State Standards for first grade suggest that by the end of the year, children should be able to write texts that are equal to level 4 on the *RWP Opinion Writing Continuum* (although you are advised to look more specifically at the pieces in the appendix of the Common Core). Even just one day of assessing your students’ writing should help you see where they are and where they need to go, and this should help you know which children will need extra time and extra support. Those children, of course, will need to progress from where they are to the next step on the continuum before they can move toward grade level expectations—but with extra clear instruction, you should be able to accelerate their progress. Once you know what your students are already able to do as persuasive writers, you might then turn to *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* by Sarah Picard Taylor (*The Workshop Help Desk Series*, Heinemann 2008), as a reference to help you plan for this unit.

The unit begins, as many do, by exposing students to examples of persuasive writing, and by helping them generate ideas for persuasive writing they’d like to do. The goal during this early stage of the unit is for students to write a lot, freely. One could say, the goal at the start of the unit is for children to try writing persuasive letters—and to do so with enough independence that you can be free to study what they are doing and to teach in response. You’ll want to revel in children’s approximations, supporting their enthusiasm for getting ideas onto the paper. Then you will want to teach students a repertoire of tools and a lot of knowledge, too, that can allow students to revise their writing, making their best better. Students will revise the entire collection of persuasive writing they have generated, and will then use all their new knowledge to write new texts that will be better because of all the work preceding those texts. Eventually, those texts will also merit revision.

Preparing for the Unit

As with other units of study, you will need to do a little work behind the scenes to ready the classroom for this unit and, specifically, you’ll need to alter the materials in your writing center. If you start the unit by teaching persuasive letters, then the paper

trays that once held booklets to help children write sequenced narratives will now have letter-writing paper and envelopes. You may want to invite children to spend indoor recess or some other free time with you, helping co-create some of the paper choices before this unit of study begins. With an ink pad and thumbs, some kids have made little caterpillars, spiders, or butterflies to decorate upper corners of pieces of paper onto which you may have already printed light lines (make them light!) for the body of the letter, shorter lines for the salutations, and so on. If children can help you turn school paper into stationery, that's a great way to recruit their investment. Meanwhile, in the writing workshop, children can study letters they have received in their lives, noticing more about the way that letters are laid out on the paper. Children will be happy to put little lines onto the upper right-hand side of the paper, and to use this space to record a date. The most important thing is that the paper needs to have lots of lines for text—and some teachers even create stapled sets of papers for letters that spill beyond one page. Some teachers have found it helpful to provide youngsters with letter-writing paper that has been stapled into small booklets. Teachers, you may find it helpful to create a system for gathering addresses, envelopes, and stamps at the start of the unit. This provides an opportunity to engage parents. You may want to write to them, letting them know that their children will be writing letters to people in their families and communities and enlisting their support (above all, their help making sure letters are answered!). You might also send children home with little address books in which they can collect the addresses of people they want to write letters to during this unit, asking the parents to help them. Once you and your children have gathered and created all the materials they'll use during the letter-writing portion of this unit, they can help to organize the writing center. In some classrooms, the table where materials are laid out is renamed "Stationery Center" or "Post Office Nook."

Of course, once children are writing speeches, not letters, you'll want to support that work with different sorts of paper. Some teachers provide paper divided into sections to help students make and support several claims; with a small picture box at the start of each section in which the writer can indicate the main point of the speech or briefly note the reasons that will be provided. Many children will want to embed a chart, diagram, or illustration into their speeches, so you'll want to provide that sort of paper as well. Some teachers provide giant tag-boards so that children can make visual outlines of their speeches.

As in other units, you will want to select a few texts that your students can study and use as mentor texts. Using *Click Clack Moo* by Doreen Cronin is a fantastic way to fuel kids to think about the power of words on paper. In this book, a group of farm animals comes to the conclusion that they are being mistreated and band together to write letters of protest to the farmer, who in the end gives in to their requests. Kids will think, "If the animals can do it, so can we!" and soon they'll be tossing around ideas for ways they might right the wrongs around them. Another great children's book about persuasive letter writing is Mark Teague's *Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from Obedience School*, in which a dog uses several tactics to persuade his owner to let him come home from obedience school. Other books you might rely on as models for

persuasive writing are *Earrings* by Judith Viorst, *I Wanna Iguana* and *I Wanna New Room* by Karen Orloff, and *Don't Let the Pigeon Stay Up Late* by Mo Willems. Don't stop there—if you find other texts that embrace this genre then by all means use them!

Discovering and Noticing the Issues in Our Own Lives *and* Writing Lots and Lots of Persuasive Letters

It is not hard helping kids come up with ideas for what they might write about in a persuasive letter. Youngsters know plenty of things they like and don't like, want and don't want. If you start them off thinking about the things they think would be good *suggestions* for different aspects of their lives, they'll soon be brimming with ideas: the classroom needs more books, a pet rabbit, more time with fourth-grade reading buddies, a plot of land to grow some healthy food. Or their bedroom needs—the other bed (and its occupant) to be moved out, a new bedspread because the old one has holes and besides, it was okay when they were a little kid, but now, as a *first grader*. . . . Earlier, children will have walked through their lives, capturing small moments they could craft into stories; now you might encourage children to capture causes they can address. And over time, one challenge you might take up is helping children to think beyond the “I want” self-entitlement so common to children, who can sometimes think of themselves as the center of the world, toward a life of engaged, empathetic citizenship. With just a bit of modeling and encouragement, your children can progress from using writing to get their own personal wants met toward using writing to help make the world a better place. In order to help children see needs, injustices, neglected tasks, and so on, you can teach them to go through their lives, paying attention to what they see, thinking, “How could this be even better?” and jotting their ideas onto notepads. When you and your students are walking through the school, you can remind them to view that walk differently because they are writers. Writers see things that others would pass by and as part of this, writers see things that can inspire letters. You might even plan an alternate minilesson, taking a brief walk through the neighborhood with your youngsters carrying Tiny Topics notepads. Encourage children to see not just what *is* but also what *could be*—and then to jot down their ideas. You may need to point out the kinds of things children might look for to get them generating their own ideas. Maybe you'll stop and stare at a crack on the wall, scratch your head and say, “Hmmm. . . .”

As children set out from the classroom for home, you'll remind them to walk the streets as writers of persuasive letters, thinking, “How might I use writing to make the world better?” Of course, you'll take this one step farther and teach children that people need not physically walk through the world to notice things worth changing. We can sit at our desks or lie in bed and imagine the things we've noticed as we've walked through life.

If your writers have been capturing their thoughts in their notepads throughout this unit they will have a collection of ideas to rely on. You may want to read them a brief letter or two, without making too much of the specific characteristics but to be

sure they have some sense of the genre. Then you can urge them to start writing, putting their thoughts into letters. At this stage, you can expect lots of less-than-perfectly crafted letters—in fact, many will no doubt be trite and full of imperfections. That’s okay! The idea is to get children making their best approximations as they take on the new role of writing persuasively. You’ll have time to help children revise their letters as the unit progresses—and before the letters go out into the world, if you so decide.

Lifting the Level of Writing: Making Our Persuasive Letters More Persuasive

Within a few days of the unit’s start, your children will be writing up a storm, cranking out letter after letter, and you’ll want to think about skills to teach them. You’ll of course continue to raise the ante for writers, sharing ways they can make their letters even better. For example, you may introduce the idea that the most likely way to get results—to get what we’re asking for—is by providing well-thought-out reasons. A child writing to the principal to ask for more books might argue that the ones in the classroom are old or that there aren’t enough books by a favorite author.

Of course, there will be some children who, at the start of this unit, are not writing up a storm. These will probably be children who didn’t in the unit before this either, or the one before that one. Your challenge with these children will be to use the fresh start of this unit to give you a new way in with them. It will be really important to attach this letter to wants these children truly have, and to get the letters in the mail or hand-delivered as soon as possible so that the children see there can be payoff for writing. One youngster loved mustard and wrote French’s mustard company saying, “I love mustard on hot dogs, pancakes, rice, pork chops, cupcakes. . . .” The list went on. A week later a carton arrived from French’s mustard company, filled with jars of mustard! The youngster decided to write the Lego company next! Even if you must purchase those mustard jars yourself or implore the principal to grant one child his fondest wish, you’ll want to move heaven and earth to help writers who haven’t had a lot of success writing see that this kind of writing gets practical results.

During this next section of the unit, you can teach students to lift the level of letters they have already written by revising them. The revisions we’re suggesting you teach are fairly essential ones, and although they could be addressed in just a few added lines, they are best addressed through much more significant revisions. At least your more proficient writers, after a day or two of revising on the existing first draft of letters, will probably need to be prompted to progress to an entirely new second draft, which they can then continue to revise. Of course, children will also be generating new letters during this section of the unit. Expect that on any one day, some children will be revising a few previously written letters to add, say, more reasons to support their requests, while other students are drafting entirely new letters that reflect all they now know about persuasive writing. For most first graders at this time in the year, it should not take more than a day to write a letter with something like ten or fifteen sentences,

so this means children will be collecting files that are full of drafts of letters. Most of those drafts will be revised, and some will be rewritten in full. Teachers, hold on to big expectations for what your youngsters can produce because your expectations set the bar for them, and you'll be amazed at how much they can actually do.

Both the Common Core State Standards and the *RWP Opinion Writing Continuum* show that we can teach children to add reasons to support their opinions and therefore raise the quality of the writing. In order to write texts that are aligned with the Common Core expectations for first grade, encourage students to add reasons to their writing. You could demonstrate how writers come up with reasons by using one of your children's letters or one of your own—or one you write on behalf of the class. In minilessons, small-group work, and conferences, you'll tell children that to convince an audience of something, they'll need to use their best persuasive powers, to talk up their ideas, and to give lots of reasons. You'll show children the structure of a persuasive letter: the first part states the request (the *what*) and the second part states a reason or two that this is important (the *why*). As you teach children to lift the level of their persuasive writing, be sure to create a written record of the tips you give children so that they can draw on these throughout the unit and beyond. For example, you could make a chart titled "Making Your Letters Convincing" and item one could be, "Write *what* you want, then write reasons *why* this is important." Once you have taught this to children, you can steer them toward spending time rehearsing their letters so that they anticipate the structure—writing claims and providing reasons. You could teach children that one way to rehearse is to take hold of a piece of letter paper, touch the top of the page and say aloud the greeting, then touch the place where the writer might begin the letter and rehearse the opening lines. Certainly a letter doesn't begin straight away with a request without warming the reader up for that request. Writers can touch the next part of the page and say aloud the claim, express an opinion, or make a request. Then the writer can touch subsequent sections of the paper, first giving reasons. Eventually you may also teach writers that after giving a reason, it can help to say, "This is important because. . . ."

Some children, of course, will benefit from scaffolds that remind them of transitional phrases they can use to prompt elaboration. Make sure that you challenge children to continue using these phrases without the concrete prompts as soon as they are ready to outgrow a reliance on them.

Children can also return to old letters they have already written in the unit, adding in requests and reasons. This will turn those old letters into very messy drafts, but that's okay—your children will need to edit and recopy before sending them out. Teach children that in order to make a real-world impact, writers need to think very carefully about how we word our letters, writing in compelling ways and aiming to angle claims and arguments to convince the particular audience who'll be reading the letter. Children can also draw on what they know about Small Moment writing to create short anecdotes that will touch and move people, embedding these into arguments in ways that evoke a response.

Once you've taught children that they reread their own letters to be sure they have remembered to provide reasons, then you will probably want to help children who are

ready for this challenge to do this work well. Chances are that many of your children will write letters listing reason after reason, yet somehow their letters won't sound convincing. You can teach children that one way to be especially convincing is to tell a story of one particular incident, one small moment, when this particular reason was important. Your children have been writing Small Moment narratives all year, so it makes a lot of sense for you to teach them that they can write, "For example," and then tell the story of one particular time when their claim was important to them.

It is important that all of your teaching be brought to bear on all the letters that children have already written. In this way, children can begin to use this growing repertoire of knowledge to prompt them to revise some of the letters they wrote earlier in the unit. Meanwhile, the advice is also helping them as they continue writing new letters from the start. By this point in the unit, you probably will have been teaching for ten days or so, and your youngsters will probably have written and revised four to six letters.

Another part of this unit could be "Thinking Hard about Readers." This, of course, is an extension of your earlier work in writing-for-readers. Your big idea here could be that in order to write for readers, it helps for the writer to literally shift from being writer to being reader, role-playing the part of a reader looking over the piece of writing. When a writer shifts to becoming a reader, the writer is able to see where the letter feels like it is working and where it feels like it is not working. There are lots of reasons why a letter might not work and the ones you choose to highlight will vary depending on the work your class needs to do. If children are not spelling words with beginning, middle, and final sounds and using sight vocabulary to spell many words conventionally, you can certainly use the idea of potential readers as a good reason to push toward more conventional writing. Sometimes when a writer rereads what he or she has written, thinking about how the text will work for an audience, the writer will decide that only portions of the text feel as if they were written with a reader in mind. Perhaps the start of the letter feels warm, personal, as if there is a real relationship between writer and reader. There may be other places, however, where the letter loses its ability to reach a reader. A writer can reread to check which of these seems to be the case. Children can rewrite so as to establish a closer contact with readers, perhaps adding a more interactive beginning or ending, for example. Sometimes a letter is crystal clear. Other times, the reader reads it, asking, "Huh?" and "Whaaat?" A writer needs to be sure to anticipate and answer potential questions a reader might have. Writers can learn to ask themselves, "What do I want my reader to feel?" and then try out their letters on other readers, asking, "How do *you* think my reader will feel when she reads this part? That part?" All of this, of course, prompts revision. Children can work in partnerships, alternating between reading aloud their letters and listening, pretending to be the intended audience. Many teachers invite children to share their letters with their writing partners every day at the end of the writing workshop.

You'll need to decide, teachers, when to draw the line on revising letters in order to get them sent out into the world. It may be that after two weeks of work you ask kids to select two or three of their letters to mail out—they will probably have written many

more than that—and then you can help them edit, recopy, and send those letters. It might be that you decide to speed up that process, agreeing to type one letter from each child (correcting it) at the midway point, getting that letter sent out. It might be that you and the child decide which letters need to be perfect and which need to be the writer’s best spelling but not necessarily perfect. The anticipation that the letter will actually be mailed ramps up the need for editing, leading children to be willing to invest some extra work on spelling and use of conventions, so this is a good time to teach the conventions that are grade-appropriate (see the Common Core). Children can work together to fix misspelled words and to listen for places where they need end punctuation. You might put your current editing checklist out on the easel so children know they are responsible for the editing strategies you have taught in previous units. We encourage you to not wait until the end of the unit before making that trip to the post office or the mailbox, because the responses children receive to their letters will undoubtedly fuel their work. In any case, you’ll definitely need to send many of the letters out at the end of the month, if not before.

Noticing the Issues in Our Neighborhoods, Communities, and the World, and Writing Speeches to Address Those Issues

Many teachers like to have a final part in the road that nudges students to write speeches, or sometimes teachers spin this final part as an emphasis on letters that address concerns students have noticed in their local communities and the world. You may want to let children view speeches on YouTube.com in which someone asks for people to care about a cause: the dogs that are euthanized when unclaimed at dog shelters, the sea animals that are no longer good to eat because of high amounts of pollution in the water, or the senior citizens who no longer get hot meals because a Meals on Wheels program lost its funding.

You can help children listen to what speakers do that makes listeners care about the causes they represent. Do they tell the stories of one particular sea animal, one particular victim? Do they ask listeners to imagine that they were in the same situation? Teach children to listen, and to think, “What is this person doing that makes listeners care about the cause?” And teach them to think, “Let me see if I can try the same thing.”

Of course, children will notice that speakers include reasons, give details, and address their listeners. They may notice that speeches often begin with a hook that draws in the audience, such as the question, “Have you ever wondered why . . . ?” That is, they will notice that speakers do all that the children will have just been taught to do in their persuasive letters. And that persuasive writing will be similar, whatever the form in which it is set. But the best part is that this new form of writing allows children to make their own observations, using and transferring all they learned during the more scaffolded and teacher-supported early section of this unit.

You can also help children notice that in persuasive speeches the speaker often suggests solutions to a problem, and that to generate solutions it helps to conduct

research. One of the ways that a six-year-old can research is to interview people close to the problem.

Celebrating this unit will be exciting. Responses to letters will be coming in and these can be shared. Some schools create bulletin boards with copies of the letters, others include children's letters in the school newsletter. Children will want to put their thoughts and arguments out into the world not only by mailing letters but also by giving speeches. You can create a platform from which children can give their short speeches. Perhaps this will be the morning announcements on the loudspeaker or grade level "Town Hall"-style meetings. It may be that some of the kids give their speeches at the publishing party. If the audience for the speech is bigger than the school, you might obtain guardian permission to videotape the speeches and send them to the community members, leaders, or others who are the intended audience.

Additional Resources

Teachers, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to understand where your children are on the *RWP Opinion Writing Continuum*, which has been aligned with the Common Core State Standards. We suggest they should be at level 4 by the end of this year in order to meet the standards set forth for first-grade writers. This can help you familiarize yourself with the goals of this unit. You also need to assess at several key points throughout the unit. In other words, assess at the start of the unit and in ways that help you alter your planned pathway from the start, and also at many points along the way. For example, in Part One of the unit, you are hoping students generate lots of letters, coming up with topics and audiences and writing at some length. If your students are slow to generate topics, you'll want to teach either whole- or small-group lessons to equip those who need help with a strategy for doing so. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voiceovers such as, "By now, your hand should be flying down the page." "By now you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to shepherd them into writing more quickly, doing some diagnostic work to understand what is slowing them down.

During the second part of this unit, you will be looking for students' writing to begin to resemble persuasive writing. You'll look for the essentials—claims or requests, followed by reasons. Then you can look for other qualities of effective writing mentioned in the unit's write-up. Meanwhile, watch to see if students are engaged in revision. If you teach a new skill, you should see your writers going back to previous letters—to several of them—rereading to judge if they already do whatever you have highlighted, and then initiating revision when they don't do this. This part of the unit, then, supports revision as well as the qualities of good writing. You will also look for independence. On any one day, some children will be revising previously written letters and some will be writing new ones. Keep an eye on volume and be prepared

to set clear expectations. Absolutely require children to spend extra time during free moments if they haven't produced at least six letters each spanning most of the page by the end of ten days or so of work within this unit.

You'll look also for children's willingness and ability to edit. Note what they can do without help, and think about how you can help different groups of your children to progress in this arena. If some are not using end punctuation, for example, you can teach that now. If some are not rereading for meaning, notice when their writing makes no sense. You can do small-group work to support their growth in this area.

Finally, in the last part of the unit, you will see how children can transfer all they learned in this unit into a new genre. Children will be reading (actually, viewing) like writers, noting what others have done so as to emulate them.

The teaching points below are far from encompassing, nor are they set in stone. They are meant to help you imagine a possible pathway, one which will need to have detours, and alternate pathways to the same end, which may branch out very differently.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Discovering and Noticing the Issues in Our Own Lives *and* Writing Lots and Lots of Persuasive Letters to Make a Change

- "Earlier this year, you collected story ideas and then wrote stories. Well, today I want to teach you that a person can also collect ideas for writing letters that persuade people to do things. It can help to think of a part of your life, and then think, 'What might I want to argue for that relates to that part of my life?' For example, you can think, 'What might I want to argue for that would make this classroom even better?' You can do the same sort of work around any part of your life related to the world at large (and then write letters asking for those things)."
- "Writers, you have been writing about things you want—for your bedroom, for this classroom, and so on. Today, I want to teach you that writers of persuasive letters don't just ask and argue for things *we* want. We also use writing to ask or argue for things we think might make the world a better place. To do this, we look closely at the world around us in order to see issues and problems we want to address. We might walk around to get ideas, maybe taking notes in a mini-notebook, jotting down problems and ideas we have for how things could go better."
- ▮ *Tip:* See pages 25–27 in *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* for an illustration of how one teacher took her class on such a walk around her school to teach her students to live these wide-awake lives and find ideas for their letters.

- A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR THE WRITING WORKSHOP, GRADE 1, 2011–2012
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Part Two: Lifting the Level of Writing: Making Persuasive Letters More Persuasive

- “Today I want to teach you that you can write letters that make people listen to you. I know all of you want people to listen to your letters and to do what you ask—writers of persuasive letters almost say, ‘Please, please, please!’ to make people pay attention. But here is the thing: we could also say something else besides the ‘Please, please, please.’ We can add reasons—and those are what guarantee people will listen.”
 - ▮ *Tip:* “If you run out of reasons, picture the problem in your mind’s eye and then say or write, ‘One reason this is important to solve is . . .’ and ‘Another reason this is important to solve is . . .’ (note the use of the transitional phrases—‘Another reason . . .’).”
 - ▮ *Tip:* See pages 34–35 in *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* for more support with the use of transitional phrases like the ones mentioned above.
- “Writers, I know you are trying to make the letters you write as persuasive as possible. Some of you are continuing the letter you started yesterday and some of you are looking at your mini-notebooks for new ideas. Today, I want to teach you that another thing writers do to be more persuasive is to write a short Small Moment story (or mini-story) about the problem so the reader has a clear picture of what we hope to solve.”
 - ▮ *Tip:* See pages 31–33 in *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* to see how a teacher used the letter of a first-grade writer to show how she made a clear picture for the reader with a little mini-story.
 - ▮ *Tip:* “Writers, today I want to teach you that when we want to be more convincing, it helps to add details to the most important parts of the mini-story. We might go back and add these details into a letter we already wrote, or we might start a new letter and plan to add those details.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers add right into our letters the possible solutions to the problems and issues we want to solve. We can add these solutions to our letters so readers can know exactly how they can help solve the problem. First, we think of exactly what we want the other person to do, and then write it right there in our letter.”
- “Today I want to remind you that writers use checklists to help us look for ways to fix up our writing. And today, writers, I want to add one new thing to your checklists: Writers use a capital letter not just for the first letter in the first word of a sentence, but also for the first letter in a *name*. We can reread to make sure we write names—including the name of the reader who will receive our letter—using a capital letter.”

Part Three: Noticing the Issues in Our Neighborhoods, Communities, and the World, and Writing More Persuasive Speeches

- “Writers, you now know that in order to get things done in the world, it can help to write persuasive letters. Here is the thing I want to teach you today: Writers also sometimes get things done by writing persuasive speeches. To learn to do this, we do what we always do; we study work that others have done, and ask, ‘How does this kind of thing go?’ and ‘How could I do this myself?’ Then we get started!”
- “Writers, today I want to teach you that you can use all you already know about persuasive writing to make your speeches really work for your listeners. You can think, ‘What did I do in my persuasive letters?’ and then try to do similar things in your persuasive speeches.”
 - ▮ *Tip:* “Writers, you already know lots of ways you can make your letters more persuasive. You know that you can add a list of reasons, a mini-story, and even some details to make your letters more persuasive (show the chart of these things on the easel and gesture to each one as you talk). Today I want to teach you that we can use this little list that we made last week like a checklist to make sure our letter is persuasive.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way we make our writing readable. You can use punctuation to give readers little signs along the road of your writing so they can understand what you want to say. One sign is a period. Another is a question mark. And another is an exclamation point. Writers use all of these in our writing. We use periods to mark the place when we are done with a sentence that tells our readers something. We use a question mark to end a sentence that asks our readers a question. And, some of us use exclamation marks to mark the end of a really exciting sentence.”

NOTES



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE

2



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Overview of the Year for Second-Grade Writers

September	UNIT ONE: Launching with Nonfiction
October	UNIT TWO: Authors as Mentors
November	UNIT THREE: Writing and Revising Realistic Fiction
December	UNIT FOUR: Expert Projects: Informational Writing
January	UNIT FIVE: Opinion Writing: Persuasive Reviews
February	UNIT SIX: Writing Gripping Stories with Meaning and Significance
March	UNIT SEVEN: Using Nonfiction Texts as Mentors to Support Nonfiction Writing
April	UNIT EIGHT: Writing Adaptations of Familiar Fairy Tales and Folk Tales, and Perhaps Writing Original Fantasy Stories as Well
May	UNIT NINE: Informational Writing about Science
June	UNIT TEN: Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages

Second-grade teachers have some special challenges in the teaching of writing. Howard Gardner describes second grade as youngsters entering into “the age of competence,” suggesting that during the next three years, children need to develop the competence and the confidence to weather the self-critical, self-consciousness of the upcoming years. Of course, in many school systems, standardized tests rain down on children even when they are in third grade—so second grade is often the last reprieve for kids. It’s a window of time in which children can grow in leaps and bounds—if only those of us around them are willing to urge them on!

This means, of course, that as teachers of second graders, you need to be sure your teaching does not repeat but instead stands on the shoulders of the previous year, and that it takes children as far as they can go. And they can go far—especially for second graders who have been in writing workshops before this year, and are ready to draw on all they learned in order to work with increasing ambitiousness and independence. You will see that this year’s curricular calendar assumes that many of your children enter second grade with lots of experience to draw from, and that consequently, from the very start, minilessons invite children to draw on a repertoire of strategies that they’ve learned in past years. You will also notice that this year’s curricular calendar for second grade assumes that by the second half of the year, second graders are able to do vastly more than they could do at the start of the school year. Second graders come in like first graders and leave like upperclassmen!

Expect that if your students have been in writing workshops during first grade, most of them will begin second grade able to actually write—pen going down the page—for forty minutes a day, and most will work across five-page booklets, writing something like five to seven sentences on each page, completing several of these booklets each week, unless they are engaged in comparable amounts of revision. Remember that early next year, when your children enter third grade they will generally be expected to write about one notebook page of writing during one day’s writing workshop, and another full page of writing at home each night. Of course, your children will differ, and just as they will be reading books that differ in complexity level, so, too, the paper on which they write will differ. You’ll want to remember that the paper choices (like the book levels) need to change as the year unfolds. Be prepared to move children toward more challenging paper choices as soon as they are ready, giving them more lines on a page, smaller spaces between lines, and only small boxes for quick sketches. You will want to be sure that the number of sentences your students write grows steadily and dramatically—which means that during the writing workshop, children need to spend the lion’s share of time actually writing!

Any second grader who was in a writing workshop during the previous year, however, will already have experience choosing topics, getting started writing, and revising. This means that even at the very start of second grade, you can expect that your students will be able to draw on revision skills they learned during first grade, so from the start, they might use paper in a variety of ways to create different chapters and use flaps of paper to try a second way to start or end a piece or to write the most important part of the story, and they’ll be accustomed to using carets (if not page-

extensions) to insert missing information. This sort of revision should come effortlessly to your students—it will take a bit of your support to nudge students to go a step farther and write whole new chapters, and many of your conferences can support that kind of substantial revision.

Because children will enter second grade with a lot of knowledge about how to carry on as writers, it is important that they work with enormous independence and initiative. At the end of every day's minilesson, when you send them off to work on their writing, you will want to remind them of the full array of lessons they have been learning, of work they could be doing right away that day. The minilesson will have added one new strategy. Send the children off to draw from that full repertoire.

Notice how the minilessons following Unit One issue a wide-open invitation for youngsters to make decisions about the work they'll be doing on any given day—four kids might be starting a new piece of writing, another half-dozen might be using all the revision strategies they've been taught during previous years (or during a quick minilesson reminding them of those options) to revise up a storm. Try to maintain this spirit as the year unfolds.

As part of this, you'll want to be sure that your conferring is responsive to your students' different needs, which means that most of your conferring will not match the day's minilesson but will instead help writers self-assess, generate purposes, draw on strategies they think might work, and work with ambitiousness and resourcefulness. When you allow your children to take ownership of the choices they make as they write, you are following the essential principles and beliefs that inform writing workshops.

This curricular calendar, as all of our curricular calendars, has been adjusted to be in sync with the Common Core State Standards. A discussion of the Common Core State Standards that are addressed within a unit has been woven into the description of each unit and we have a document available that details the alignment.

This curriculum calendar also relies upon the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* series, published by Heinemann, and on *A Quick Guide to Teaching Second-Grade Writers with Units of Study*, a little book that is part of Heinemann's Workshop Help Desk series. These will help you make the adaptations necessary to *Units of Study for Primary Writers* so that those units are more applicable to second graders. You'll also want to secure Sarah Picard Taylor's book, *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2* (Heinemann, 2008). These books are all available through www.unitsofstudy.com.

Those of you who worked with the TCRWP's curricular calendar for 2010–2011 will see that we have made some important changes, but that we have kept a lot from last year. We have added an extra unit on informational writing. You will see that this year we are recommending that you begin the year with informational writing, reminding students all they know from kindergarten and first grade. We continue to recommend that you teach two units on personal narrative writing, with the first to come early in the year and the second, to come later in the year, aimed toward lifting the level of writing. The first unit on personal narrative writing is followed by a unit on fiction writing. We hope that before the winter holiday you have time for a second

unit on nonfiction informational writing, aligned to a unit on nonfiction reading. This was added in recognition of the Common Core State Standards' increasing emphasis on informational writing and academic literacy. You will see that the writing curricular calendar sometimes matches the reading curricular calendar—for example, we imagine that students are reading fairy tales and folk tales as they also write them.

In January, we recommend that you give children support in opinion writing—writing persuasively (a perfect ramp-up to the essays they'll write in third grade) through a unit on persuasive reviews. We learned from trial and error that it is important to return to narrative writing in February, and we will return to narrative writing in the spring. The nonfiction unit that follows *Gripping Stories* in March highlights reading and writing connections. We continue to support writing in the content area in May. We also decided to keep our Poetry unit in June. In many states, including New York State, poetry is part of the third-grade high-stakes tests, so we wanted the unit to be one that your students take with them to third grade. We also felt it would revive June and send children off to the summer with extra energy.

Before releasing any suggested curriculum for second graders, it is important to recognize that second graders are an especially diverse group—there will be some who are still fledgling writers, and others who are ready for anything you put before them. Your teaching will need to be assessment-based and designed to support the diverse range of writers in your care. We encourage you to skim the documents written for first and third graders because those will help you understand ways you can support both your struggling and your strongest writers. And of course, remember that these units are provided as suggestions for you and your colleagues. We would never imagine that any of you would use these or any other resources blindly. Add to this, subtract from it, as you construct teaching that is aligned with your local and state standards, that responds to your students, and that captures your imagination, represents your values, and helps you bring your best ideas about education to your students.

Assessing Writers at the Start of the Year

In your eagerness to get started, don't bypass the opportunity to collect baseline data. Before you rev kids up, before you remind them of all they know about informational writing, devote one day's writing workshop to some assessment. We recommend that you simply say, "What do you know a lot about? You can make a book that teaches others a lot about that." Your second graders will then have fifty to sixty minutes to do the best informational writing they can do. This performance assessment will allow you to plan your next teaching moves accordingly, and you will also have a baseline against which to compare the work students are able to do in informational writing across the year.

You'll not only use these pieces to inform your teaching plans but you might also eventually use them to allow both your students and their parents to reflect on growth over the year, so propping them up now will serve a dual purpose. You also want to see how children do with independence. Be sure they have booklets that contain plenty of

pages (at least five) and plenty of lines on each page (perhaps eight). Be sure children also know they can add more pages if they need additional space.

Once writing time is over collect the pieces, making sure that each piece contains the child's name and the date. Study their work alongside the *RWP Information Writing Continuum* that can be found on our website at www.readingandwritingproject.com. You needn't match every single trait—just look between the piece and the touchstone texts at each level and do your best to locate the child's on-demand writing within the range of sample pieces. Then look ahead on the continuum to see the work you'll teach writers over the next few months, and note specific techniques that your writers are probably already doing that you can complement (and teach). The Common Core State Standards suggest that by the end of second grade your children should be doing the work that is represented by Level 5 on the *RWP Informational Writing Continuum*, so you will want to keep this in mind as you plan for your teaching across the year. You will want to make sure that you do the same kind of assessment to see what your students need in narrative writing before you begin the units focused on narrative. Then after two months of work in narrative writing you'll redo this assessment, saying exactly the same things and providing the same conditions, and then you'll watch to see how much your children have grown in that time using the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum*. This too has been aligned to the Common Core State Standards, and you will expect your second-grade writers to write pieces that are in line with a Level 5 on our continuum. You'll bring the October and the November pieces to your parent-teacher conferences and use them to discuss children's growth. Noting each child's growth, comparing what he or she can do on the run and without assistance both now and after a bit of time, will help remind you that your teaching always looks toward tomorrow and toward independence. You will also want to notice your children's knowledge about conventions. You will not want to lure kids to revise a piece of writing so completely and so extensively that you end up scaffolding children to do work that is far beyond what they will be able to soon do on their own. You'd want to exercise caution, however, while assessing any developmental continuum. If you bypass listening and responding to a writer, using a continuum rather than the writer's intentions as the sole source of your instruction, then the tool will have made your teaching worse, not better. You will also see your children's knowledge about conventions grow in leaps and bounds this year. Children benefit most from instruction when it helps them become more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation.



UNIT ONE

Launching with Nonfiction

SEPTEMBER

Overview

The Pulitzer Prize-winning writer Donald M. Murray is credited with developing the writing process approach to writing. Murray taught college and graduate students to write, and taught journalists at places like *The Boston Globe*, *The Miami Herald*, and the famous Poynter Institute. He did not teach five-, six-, and seven-year-olds to write. The discovery that young children could do the work that professional writers were doing was left to others. But it was Murray who turned the field of writing around, challenging the old norms of instruction and calling for a new emphasis on teaching the process of writing. Murray's work always began with him telling students that they needed to live the wide-awake life of writers, experiencing their lives and then capturing those experiences on the page.

In order to get second graders to truly live wide awake as writers, we have decided to focus this unit on informational writing, drawing not only on what they know as writers, but also on what they know about the world. In this information age there is a greater demand for informational writing, and the Common Core State Standards call for second graders to write "organized informative/explanatory texts focused around one particular topic." The Standards state that second-grade writers should be able to "recall information from experiences and other sources in order to answer a particular question through their writing." By launching kids into this genre you can start by building on what your students already know about informational writing, while at the same time getting them to realize what they might do to lift their writing within this genre.

Teachers, before you launch this unit (like any unit), you'll want to think about your goals and to plan the general trajectory of the unit. You'll probably begin with a week in which you launch your writing workshop, rallying youngsters to engage in the work that they know how to do of choosing topics and writing booklets. During this first week, your instruction will probably remind youngsters of all that they already know how to do, and help them draw on that repertoire as they do that work. That is, they'll need to think, "What do I want to write about?" and to choose the paper on which they'll write, and then they'll need to write, write, write, writing fast and furiously. When they're done writing, they'll need to reread their writing, decide if it is done or if they have more work to do on it, and if they are done, to get started on another piece of writing. For the first few days of the unit you will want to allow your kids to write any kind of piece so long as they are writing! It's not until the second part of the unit that you will get all of your kids writing informational pieces.

There are a few things that are especially essential for this year and one of these is stamina. One secret to stamina lies in the paper that you give to your children. You will almost certainly want to start the year by providing kids with booklets, not single pages. Those booklets can each contain five or six pages, and for most of your children, each page can contain just a small box for the picture and plenty of lines—perhaps eight—for the writing. Remember, they have been writing in booklets since kindergarten, so they will expect this! It is impossible to overemphasize the power that the paper, itself, has for conveying expectations. Therefore you will also want to have varied paper choices to match the different text features that they might want to include in their informational books. Within this one unit, you should expect that second graders will write approximately eight five-page books. Those are very rough estimates and certainly many children can do a great deal more than this, of course, but don't expect that second graders will write only a page a day, or a book a month!

Of course, this writing process—choose a topic, get started, write fast, reread and maybe improve the writing, get started on another piece of writing—is hardly the perfect writing process, but it is a start. During the second part of this unit, we suggest you rally your students to work in more grown-up ways with their writing partners—and those more grown-up ways of working with partners will also be more grown-up ways of engaging in the writing process. By helping students use partners to help them write really, really well, you can teach kids to engage in more extensive planning for writing, thinking about alternate ways to make the text the best that it can be, and you can teach young students to engage in more extensive revision work.

Still, even if you provide youngsters with partners and use partners to support a more ambitious writing process, this is just the very start of the year, so students will gesture toward more extensive rehearsal and revision, while for many children, their work will probably still cycle fairly quickly between rehearsal, drafting, revision, and editing. That is okay. One of your biggest goals is to launch all your writers in such a way that they can work with a lot of independence and zeal. Imagine that young writers are a bit like a group of kids who have gathered to play basketball. You are the coach. The kids are all standing around, looking at you. If you want to lift the level of kids' skills at playing basketball, you probably will not start by teaching just one small

group of kids a particularly tricky jump shot, or even teaching the whole group that jump shot. Instead, you'll first get all the kids playing the game, running up and down the court, making shots, and only after they are all playing the game with independence and confidence will you be in a position to lift the level of what they are doing. Similarly, at the start of the year, you'll probably want to first get all your youngsters cycling through whatever version of the writing process comes easily to them.

Finally, during the last part of this unit, you will return to the topic of revision, this time focusing on teaching writers to be resourceful and ambitious revisers of their writing. Of course, this time, they'll be revising toward the goal of publication as your unit reaches a culmination.

The minilessons that follow this write-up are "repertoire minilessons" that channel second graders to draw from their full repertoire of skills. These minilessons and this write-up combined will, we hope, help you encourage writers to draw on the full array of things they already know how to do. As part of this, writers will be channeled to write five-page booklets from Day One, to revise from the start of the year on, and to solve their own problems as they write.

Writers Draw on What We Already Know to Write Up a Storm, Then We Find Ways to Make Our Pieces Even Better!

From the moment your young writers enter your room, you will want them to draw on all they know as writers. This first part then, is a place to empower your students to get started independently, bringing all they have learned from kindergarten and first grade to their second-grade writing workshop. You will want to build on the fact that your writers will feel more grown-up as second graders, while still using this first week of school as a time to initiate the structures and routines that underlie any effective workshop. Some teachers have found it works to start your first minilesson by saying something like this to your writers: "You writers must be feeling very grown-up this year. Do you remember the first time you ever came to this school and you weren't sure where to go, or what to do? You were probably standing there, thinking, 'Where do I go? What do I do?' But I bet that this year when you came to school, you knew what to do! Well right now we are starting our writing workshop, and I have *huge* news to tell you. This is it: *You already know what to do.* And you don't have to sit there and ask, 'What do I do?' You can get started on writing, just like you can figure out how to get off the bus, go to the playground, line up, come into our room . . ."

If you were to start your year with a teaching point such as that one, you'd of course want, in the body of that minilesson, to tuck in comments such as, "You already know how to convene in the meeting area," and then you'd quickly summarize some of the things you assume children already know (but may have forgotten). You could also suggest children already know how to disperse from their meeting area to their work spaces (and again, this could allow you to review your expectations, perhaps acting out the transition from the meeting area to work spaces). If you do act this out, you will

probably want to physically show kids how to push in your chair, come swiftly to the meeting area, sit cross-legged on top of your writing folder in the assigned rug spot, and reread the charts that hang near the meeting area. The point is that you can say to youngsters, “You already know how to . . .” and then you can proceed to review what you are assuming children already know.

Teachers, you may worry about an opening minilesson that is so presumptuous. You may be thinking, “What if some of them *don’t* know what to do?” You may be thinking, “Yes, but this year I want them to do all those rituals in a better way than they did them before. Shouldn’t I clarify all the expectations right from the start?” If you start on Day One by teaching one strategy for generating topics for informational books, and if on Day Two, you teach a second strategy, you’ll never really know what your kids would have done, could have done, had you started the year by giving them an open invitation to go at it.

Over subsequent workshops, you will remind students not only of the routines they know, but also of the different purposes for writing and the qualities of strong writing they already know. In kindergarten and first grade your students learned to write for many different reasons. You might say, “I know that you are pros at writing Small Moment stories from your own lives, and I also know that you have written books to teach others about topics that you know a lot about. You have even written opinion pieces to persuade others to see your point of view! Wow! Not only do you know how to write for so many different reasons, but you also know how writers write in certain ways, depending on what they are trying to do in their writing. As experienced writers, you should have no trouble coming up with different topics or ideas that you might want to write about. And once you come up with your ideas you’ll be able to grab the booklet you need to get started right away.” While you will want to talk this up to your writers so that they feel empowered to do the work you’re asking them to do, you will also want to be aware of what you will need to remind them as they begin to stretch their ideas across pages.

Within your first few minilessons, you will want to teach at least one minilesson that communicates to youngsters that they should expect to make stories and books that are more grown-up! You might say to your writers, “You got started in your booklets in *really* grown-up ways. You know how to choose the right paper, to find your own topics, you even know how to start your books like grown-up writers do . . . but as I looked at your writing, sometimes the actual pieces didn’t look all that grown-up. I think you are ready to write more and to make your writing go from good to great!” Then you will need to teach them some new strategies to elaborate so that their books are a lot longer than they were during the preceding year. At this point in the unit, it is more important for students to be drawing on all that they know across all genres of writing, so that they are writing with great zeal and ambition, rather than to focus them to write only informational books right from the get-go. Some students may choose to write about small moments in their lives at this point while others will begin to write informational books about topics they want to teach others. The important thing is for you, as the teacher, to realize that the bulk of this unit is focused on informational writing so that you can be sure to demonstrate in your own writing the

choices you make in deciding what type of book to write. You may want to focus some of your lessons around the consideration of audience, and thinking about why a writer chooses to write a narrative or informational piece, allowing the writers in the room to make these decisions on their own. Be sure that you have different paper choices that align with the genre

You will want to revisit the stages of the writing process too, reminding students of all that they already know about each of those stages. For example, writers will come to you having already learned to plan their stories and books by telling or sketching them across pages, so you could say, “I’m sure you all remember how you tell your story or information across your fingers. And I see that many of you also draw pictures on each page to help you plan and remember what you want to write. Today I want to teach you that after you’ve rehearsed your piece, after you know what you’ll say, then your sketches on each page can be really *quick*—just enough to help you remember what you want to say so that you can get started on your writing right away!” This way, you remind the students of the strategies they already know for planning, while focusing on an important way to lift the level of second-grade writing, which is to devote less time to drawing and more time to writing. In general, you are going to want to be sure that your students devote five minutes or so to rehearsing for writing, not a full day!

Throughout this part, you also want to encourage your students to take ownership of their own writing, making decisions as they write to take their pieces from good to great. Your writers need to learn that they are the “bosses” of their writing. You may say to your writers, “I want to teach you that every day, you are in charge of your writing. Like a puppy, your pieces will beg for the things they need. Can you hear the barking? Everybody stop. Listen. Listen. What are your stories begging for? What information do you need to add to books? What do you need to pay attention to?”

The point in this part is that one way or another, you need to be sure that you rally kids to not only recall all that they have learned and to get started doing that work again, but also to work with zeal toward new and ambitious goals. It will also be important to notice where in the process students tend to get stuck—and to teach them how to get past that impasse. Children need to know how to come up with story ideas or topics to write about, to get started, write, finish, reread, revise, and get started on another piece, all without needing teacher involvement. They need to be problem solvers in their own writing. You might say, “When writers are stuck and don’t know what to do next, we think over our list of all the stuff we know how to do, and we *solve our own problems!*” That is, children need to be able to cycle through the writing process with independence, leaving you free enough to teach. If children are asking “Can I be done with this book and start another?” or “Can I get another sheet of paper?” refrain from answering these questions and instead coach writers to generate their own logical answers. Or at least say, “Of course. You do not need to ask me. You are the writer! You are the boss!”

Second-Grade Writers Work with Partners in Grown-Up Ways, Helping Each Other to Share Information Effectively

You will have begun the year teaching kids that they can draw on all they already know to write as well as possible, and inviting them to get going on their writing. After a week or so of such work, children will be ready for the unit of study to take on a new emphasis. There is no one way the unit could unfold—no set-in-stone progression to the unit—but our thinking is that if this year is going to maximize your students’ potential, you will want to rally them to work in increasingly powerful ways with each other. One of Murray’s key articles is titled “The Other Self,” and it suggests that when novice writers regularly read each other’s writing, thinking about ways that another person’s writing could be made even stronger, then writers learn to eventually become readers of their own writing, rereading their emerging draft, asking, “What’s working that I could build upon?” and “What’s not working that I could repair?” We suggest, then, that this second part of this unit might rally students to invest in partnership work to an extent deeper than they’ve experienced before. While supporting those partnerships, you can help students use partners to scaffold their engagement in the writing process. That is, while ostensibly supporting writing partners, you can actually support students’ engagement in the process of writing. “Partners help each other plan writing,” you can say. “Partners also help each other revise writing.”

After drumming up independence and confidence in the first week of second grade, allowing your students to write across genres of their choice, you will then want to shift the focus of this unit to informational writing. Therefore, while you tap into the repertoire of strategies that the students in your classroom already know, you will want to do so in ways that lift the level of informational writing in the room. You might start this part by validating the various genres that the students chose to write in during the initial part, and then you might say, “Now that you are second-grade writers, you not only know so many things about writing and what it takes to be a strong writer, but you also know so much about the world around you. You have learned so much in kindergarten and first grade, and so I thought it would be fun to spend the next couple of weeks writing informational books to teach others all that you now know.”

As we mentioned earlier, the Common Core State Standards call for a strong emphasis on informational writing, so we think it’s a good idea to get your students writing nonfiction texts right off the bat. The challenge when teaching this unit is to make sure that you are not simply giving students another month to write informational books, but that you are also ramping up the level of their informational writing. You will want to be sure that students enter this school year realizing that the expectation is not just that they dutifully fill up the pages of their booklets with facts that they know, but that instead, the expectation is that they actively, purposefully, work toward making their writing better and better. You will want to acknowledge the all-about and expert books that your students wrote in kindergarten and first grade, while at the same time letting them know that as second-grade writers they will be learning how to make these books even stronger. The writing that students were able to do at the

start of the school year—say, in their first on-demand informational assessment—is the starting line, and each week, each month, there should be visible evidence that each student’s writing has improved. It is especially important that now, at the very start of the year, each child sees his or her writing getting better, day by day, week by week, because if students start the year seeing themselves outgrowing their old selves in ways that are visible, then they’ll develop expectations for that growth curve being the status quo for second grade.

You might, for example, begin this portion of the unit by telling your students that you know they are accustomed to working with writing partners, but that you wanted to teach them that grown-up writers actually use partners in a really special way, and you thought maybe, just maybe, there would be a few second graders who might be ready to use partners like the professional writers do. Of course, your entire class will be on their knees, insisting they’re game for this, and with that drumroll you could point out the truth, which is that grown-up writers look hard to find writing partners who help us become better as writers. We know that a writing partner who isn’t just a “pat on the head, ‘Good Girl!’” partner, but who says, “You can do even more than this!” and helps us to do that, is worth a million.

It is important to recognize why writing partnerships are important, and you will want your second-grade writers to get this sense too. Partners can make pieces of writing—and writers—better. To make sure this happens, you will want to give your students strategies that allow their work in partnerships to pay off. You can teach students to take the responsibility of listening to each other’s work (and their own work) really seriously. Perhaps in partnership meetings, the writer will read aloud his or her writing, while the partner carefully listens and looks on with the reader, offering suggestions to improve readability. You might, for instance, illustrate what you don’t expect partners to do by showing what a disinterested partner might look like (leaning back in his or her chair, eyes scanning the room, yawning) and contrast that with a pantomime of an interested partner.

In this part, you will not only teach behaviors that allow for effective partnerships, but you will also want to teach strategies to help your writers lift the informational books they are writing. You will want to recognize what your children have already learned while writing all-about books in kindergarten and first grade, so that you are acknowledging how you expect so much more now that they are second graders. Instead of teaching one way that partners can help one another to elaborate on a topic, you will want to teach your writers to ask questions to one another in order to prompt places where more elaboration is needed. This is a good time to teach second graders, that not only is it important to add more to their books, but as sophisticated, grown-up writers, it is even more important to be deliberate in choosing the places to elaborate. You might say, “Today I want to teach you how you don’t just need to add more to each section of your book just to say you did, but instead you can use your writing partner to help you find the parts in your book where you need to add more.”

Writers Revise

Now that kids have been immersed in writing for a few weeks, you will want to remind them of all they know about revision. They may have entered second grade thinking of revision as a postscript to writing. If so, you'll want to teach them that writers shift often between drafting and revising, and you'll want to nudge students to draw on their repertoire of revision strategies without waiting to be prompted by a teacher. You won't need to teach each revision strategy in a self-contained minilesson, but instead you might introduce this part by saying, "Writers are like cooks. A cook doesn't just pour in some ingredients and then Presto! the soup is done. No way! Instead, the cook adds things, takes things away, and changes things until the writing (like the cooking) is the very best it can be."

Of course, once a text has been added to, tweaked, refined, it still requires extensive revision. You'll need to decide whether some of your writers might be game for attempting a second draft—most will probably use carets or revision strips to insert missing information. If your children have already been immersed in the workshop model, there is no reason to go back to introduce all of these forms of revision in separate minilessons.

Within this unit, you can teach your students that now that they are in second grade, and writing like second graders, they might be game to make their books like real books they might find on the shelves of the library. You might ask your writers to reread their own text as if it was a book they had checked out to learn new information about a topic. To talk up the value of learning from mentor texts you might say to your students, "If we want to write books that others will want to learn from, we can remember that other writers have already done writing that is like the work we are doing, and we can use their writing to make our writing better." Then again remind students what they likely learned in kindergarten and first grade about using authors as mentors when we write. You might take an author like Gail Gibbons, for instance, and encourage your students to notice the craft moves and elaboration techniques she uses to teach information in her books. They should already be familiar with using authors as mentors, and so you might even bring in charts from first grade when they looked at nonfiction texts as mentors to revisit how this might inform their own informational writing. In this third part, you really want to convey that as writers you expect your kids to be writing and revising all the time as they continue to learn new strategies to make their writing even better throughout the year. You want to get the students doing this as part of their everyday process, and not seeing revision as an end-of-the-unit means to publishing, but as a recursive process that allows them to consistently improve the pieces they are working on across any given unit. In this first unit you will want to clearly set the tone for ongoing revision. Therefore your students should be turning to mentors, charts, and partners throughout the entire unit to continue to make their books the best they can be as they progress through the unit.

Preparing for Publication

While focusing on content and trying above all to be sure your children are writing up a storm, you'll want to notice your children's spelling development, their command of the conventions of written language, and their stance toward writing conventionally. For now, you will see that some children write without a lot of concern for spelling, even the words they almost know correctly. Others obsess about spelling every word correctly, wanting your seal of approval for every decision. You need to be sure that you differentiate your instruction, helping those less concerned with spelling to take that extra second to remember to write correctly in upper or lowercase, pausing to spell word wall words correctly, and inserting end punctuation as they write. Alternatively, you'll want to help the children who see writing as little more than an exercise in spelling and penmanship to focus much more on writing quickly, fluently, with more focus on content. For all children, remember that rough-draft writing is not supposed to be perfect, and that as children grow older and more experienced as writers, more and more writing skills will become automatic and effortless for them.

At the end of the unit, children will choose their best work and they will revise more deeply and extensively, with help from you. One of the best ways for your writers to do this final revision work is to act as though they are teaching someone all about their topic. You might teach students to act as teachers when they get together with their partners to share the information in their books. In this role of "teacher" the writer will need to be prepared to respond to questions that his or her partner might have around the topic being taught. This will allow the writer to notice whether or not the information he or she has includes the most important things that someone might want to know about their topic. You will want to prompt the partners to stop the teachers to say, "But I don't understand. I don't know anything about soccer, and you mention that you need shoes to play, but will any old shoes work? What kind of shoes do soccer players wear? What makes shoes special and important to the sport?" This work aligns nicely with the Common Core State Standards for second grade where students are expected to ask for clarification and further explanation as needed about the topics under discussion, and they are also required to ask and answer questions about what a speaker says to clarify comprehension, gather additional information, or deepen understanding of a topic. This revision process can last for a few days, and it could, if you'd like, involve taping flaps of paper onto the bottom or the sides of a draft, using staple removers to open books up so that one page can be removed and a new one substituted, and so forth. Children will appreciate revision more if you make this as hands-on as possible. *The Craft of Revision* book from *Units of Study for Primary Writing* can give you additional ideas for minilessons during this portion of your unit.

After children revise their selected work, they will need to edit it. You will presumably already have a word wall featuring a dozen high-frequency words, and if you haven't done so already, teach your children that writers reread, checking to be sure they use word wall words correctly. Having taught this, from now on throughout the whole year you will want to remind children that they know how to do this and they

can do it without explicit instructions from you. Hereafter, after a child writes a draft of any story (even if the writer is not on the verge of publishing it) the writer needs to reread the text, checking that he or she spelled the word wall words correctly.

You will presumably also want to remind children to write with periods and capitals that signal the endings and beginnings of sentences. This concept is not simple, and although the Common Core State Standards expect that your students will have already gained command over such conventions in first grade, you will want to revisit this concept, particularly if you notice that students are not regularly attending to such things in their writing. If needed you will want to remind your writers to think of a sentence as a thought, then to write that thought down in a rush, then add the period. Moving to the next thought, you will want to begin to write it using a capital letter. The Common Core State Standards also expect that your writers will come to you already using commas to separate single words in a series, so again you might need to revisit this convention with those writers who have not yet grasped this concept, perhaps through small-group instruction. Either way you address such conventions, be sure that students understand that these are not just things to check while editing as they get ready to publish, but are important aspects of writing, and so from now on, they should do this always when they write.

Be sure you don't get overly invested in making September's published pieces perfect. Don't feel that the pieces themselves need to be more focused, more detailed, and more compelling than they are. These are little kids at the start of the year and their work will not be perfect. If you prop the work up so that it matches your high standards, then the work will not represent what your children can do, and later you and others will not be able to look at the progression of published pieces to see ways in which children are growing. This is September, and much of this unit has been consumed with empowering your kids to remember all that they come to second grade knowing how to do, so relax. You may choose to have your own private author celebration, and then hang the finished work within the safe confines of your own classroom if you need to do so in order to let the children's own work stand.

We recommend the simplest possible publishing party so that you get on to the next unit by the start of your second month of school. Perhaps just put writers into small circles where each one has a turn to read aloud, with the listeners chiming in after each author reads. Then gather the kids alongside the bulletin board where each writer leaves his or her work in the appropriate square, perhaps saying, as he or she does, "I'm proud of the way I . . ." Or, you could be the one to say what it is that you want to celebrate in each author's piece.

Additional Resources

As you approach this unit it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points and sample minilessons below, because, in the end, kids learn through the work they do, and the write-up is jam-packed with ideas, activities, and teaching to help you organize and create opportunities for children to engage in work

that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the broad invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but also to engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight.

In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of our teaching relies on you assessing your students often—not in big fancy ways, but by watching the work they do—and on you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to sustain that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because your students' work not only shows you what they can or can't do, it also shows you what teaching moves *you* can do next.

The minilessons that follow the teaching points are meant to help you reflect on this first unit of study and are by no means an all-inclusive account of the unit. These lessons are aimed mainly to get your kids thinking about all that they already know as writers. Of course, you will need to see what your students know as you assess the writing they do on Day One and throughout this unit to build upon their repertoire. You will obviously need to add many lessons (using the possible teaching points below, alongside the work that your students are producing), especially since a major aim of this unit is to ramp-up the informational writing that your students are working on.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Writers Draw on What We Already Know to Write Up a Storm, Then We Find Ways to Make Our Pieces Even Better!

- "Today I want to teach you that as second-grade writers you already know what to do during workshop. You can remember back to first grade and kindergarten and use all you know to come up with ideas for pieces of writing you want to make, to figure out what to do if you get stuck on a hard part or word, and how to revise your work when you are done. You don't have to wait for a teacher to tell you what to do—you can use all that you know." (Sample Minilesson A)
- "Today I want to teach you that when writers are trying to write long and strong we keep our mind thinking and our pen writing."
- "Today I want to teach you that writers think about what we want to say, who we want to say it to, and what kind of piece we want to make. We think about our choices and decide, 'Is this best to tell as a story or an informational book? Or should I write someone a letter about this?' Then we gather up the paper we need and begin to write."

- “Today I want to teach you that when writers are stuck and don’t know what to do next, we think over our list of all the stuff we know how to do, and we *solve our own problems!*” (Sample Minilesson B)
- “Today I want to teach you that *writers plan*. We either sketch, tell, or even jot a couple of notes about what we will write. This helps us to get our ideas and words organized and clear before we start writing or revising.”

Part Two: Second-Grade Writers Work with Partners in Grown-Up Ways, Helping Each Other Share Information Effectively

- “Today I want to teach you that as you write your informational books you can still use all that you have learned in first grade and even kindergarten. You will want to think about what you are an expert in and also who might want to learn about your topic. Really think about your audience and what it is that you want to teach them. As you write your book, keep your audience in mind, so that you are writing directly to the reader.”
- “Today I want to teach you that you don’t just fill up your booklets. You think, ‘What is the information I am trying to teach and why is this important?’ That helps your reader know why she should care about your topic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that grown-up writers actually use other writers in a really special way, and I thought maybe that some of you second graders might be ready to use your writing partners like professional writers do. We know that a writing partner who isn’t just a ‘pat on the head, “Good Girl” partner,’ but someone who says, ‘You can do even more than this!’ and helps us to do that, is worth a million.”
 - ▮ *Tip:* “You don’t add more to each section of your book just to say you did. Instead, you can use your writing partner to help you find the parts in your book where you need to add more.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers need partners to listen as we read, plan, and think about our writing. As we start second grade, it’s important to remember that writing friends really listen. Listeners look for things that we like in each other’s writing and also ask questions. This helps you not only give your partner compliments but also find tips that can help your writing get even better.”
- “Today I want to teach you that partners help each other become stronger writers. We help each other not just by noticing how much our partner has become a stronger writer but what kinds of goals we can set together.”

Part Three: Writers Revise

- “Today, I am going to teach you that writers are like cooks. Whenever good cooks think they’re done, they taste their food. Writers, we do the same thing! We don’t say, ‘We’re done!’ We read our writing to decide what we can do to make it better. We add things, we take things away, and we change things until our writing piece (like our cooking) is the very best it can be.”
- “Today, writers, I want to teach you that not only can you revise using strips and flaps to add into your booklets, but also by trying a second draft! You might rewrite your entire book or chapter inside your book. You could start from scratch, maybe with a new title or idea, and rewrite your book or chapter, putting more power behind your words.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when we are trying to write books we want others to learn from, we can turn to books that we have learned from to notice what those writers did, and we can use their writing to make our writing better.”

Part Four: Preparing for Publication

- “Today I want to teach you that as you revise your best book you have to really think, ‘What else do I need to include in my book to help teach others and to show that I really care about my topic?’ One thing you can do is meet with your writing partner to actually teach the information. Then you will see how your partner responds. We need to be prepared to respond to questions that our partners might have around our topic.”
 - ▷ *Tip:* “Your partner will be listening and asking questions like ‘But I don’t understand. What do you mean?’ or ‘Why is this important?’ This will help you notice what other information to include!”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers reread our writing like detectives. We search for words that need to be fixed up and spelled better. As second graders, you already know of many tools to help you to do this. You can use the word wall, charts in the room, what you already know about vowel patterns and chunks, or you might even turn to books about your topic to help you spell words the best you can.”
- “Writers use punctuation as we write to give directions to our readers when our thought or action ends and when a new one begins. When we edit our writing we will want to look at how we used punctuation to make sure that our thoughts and ideas are clear to the reader. Today I want to teach you to read your work carefully—like a detective—thinking about what changes you need to make.”

- *Tip: “Remember that a sentence is a thought. At the end of that thought is a period. The next thought begins with a capital letter. As we reread our work we read on the hunt for parts that we want to edit—and we use punctuation in a better and clearer way.”*

Sample Minilesson A

By Lucy Calkins

Connection

“Writers, you must be feeling so grown-up. Do any of you remember the first time you ever came to school and you weren’t sure where to go, or what to do? You were probably standing there, thinking, ‘Where do I go?’ ‘What do I do?’ It must feel so different this year, right? How many of you, when you got off the bus, had to just stand there and ask, ‘What do I do?’ ‘Where do I go?’ Well, right now we are starting our writing workshop and I have *huge* news to tell you. This is it. *You already know what to do. And you don’t have to sit there and ask, ‘What do I do?’* You can get started on writing, just like you can figure out how to get off the bus, go to the playground, line up, come into our rooms.”

Teaching Point

“As second-grade writers you already know what to do during workshop. You can remember back to first grade and kindergarten and use all that you know to help you come up with ideas for pieces of writing you want to make, to figure out what to do if you get stuck on a hard part or word, and how to revise your work when you are done. You don’t have to wait for a teacher to tell you what to do—you can use all that you know.”

Teaching

“Let me remind you of something you already know. After our minilesson it will be time for you to write, and I’ll say, ‘So Table one, you can get started. Table two, you can get started.’ If I had said that to you when you were a kindergarten student, what would you have done? Right now, pretend it’s three years ago and you are five, and it is the start of writing workshop, and I’ve said, ‘You can get started on your work.’ What would you have done? Thought?” (I act out a five-year-old, startled, paralyzed, and invite the kids to join me.)

“But you aren’t in kindergarten, are you? You are in *second grade*. So when I tell you, ‘You can get started on your writing,’ picture what you’ll do. . . . Make a movie in your mind of yourself doing that.”

“I wonder if some of you are picturing that you’ll look for the kind of paper you want to write on. I bet some of you are deciding on booklets with three pages, some on booklets with five pages. Are any of you picturing that you’ll choose your paper?”

Are you? You aren't just sitting there frozen going, 'Huh?' You are getting yourself started? Great."

"And are any of you picturing yourself thinking, 'Hmmm, what will I write about?' and deciding you'll remember true stuff you've done? Are you? Are ideas *already* coming to your mind, without a teacher telling you what ideas to have? You can think about stuff you are dying to tell people, right? And you can think about times you've had strong feelings.

"And . . . I know this is a long shot . . . but are any of you remembering that if you have a watermelon idea, like 'the day at the beach,' you can think about a small seed idea . . . like 'when a seagull ate half my hot dog.'"

"So writers, do you see that just like you already know how to get off the bus and make your way to the playground and to the classroom . . . you also already know how to write? And that means that from this day on, all this year long, you can get going on your writing, showing all that you know how to do."

Active Involvement

"So right now, will you picture what is going to happen when I say, 'Table one, will you get started on your writing?' Picture what kind of paper you are going to take from the pile . . . picture yourself thinking about a story you are going to write. . . . Remember back to first grade to help you out. What are all the things that you are going to do in workshop today? Turn and tell your partner."

Have your kids turn and talk. Listen for all the things that they remembered from first grade about workshop and writing. Let them talk for a minute or so and bring them back to the whole group.

"Second-grade writers, I listened to you talk and share with your writing friends about what you learned last year in first grade. Wow! I heard you say lots of things! You must have really been paying attention because I was *amazed* at all you have learned. I could go on and on and on about it. One important thing I heard was that you learned how to pick what to write about. I heard you say you learned that you can write about things from your own life, your own experiences. Turn right now to a writing friend and talk about some of the things in your own life you could write about."

Have your kids turn and talk once more briefly. This will help them generate ideas and get a strong start when they go back their writing spots. Listen for a few examples that you could share with the rest of the class.

Link

"Writers, let me stop you. I heard some of you say that today you want to write about the special people in your lives, like your family and friends. Some of you are going to write about your pets, a play date, and swimming at the pool. I even heard someone say, 'I'm going to write all about my karate class!' Yikes! you all have a lot of books to write."

"You have years of experiences swirling around in your seven- and eight-year-old minds just waiting to be written about. I know that you don't need anyone to *tell* you what to write about. I know you won't need to *ask* anyone what to write about because each of you is the one who knows these things. You were there. You are the one who saw stuff happen. You are the one who felt the feelings when those things were happening. You may have heard sounds and you may have even smelled smells—you are the one who was there. Even if someone in this room was also there, you had your own experience!"

"So guess what writers?! You are the *boss* of your own writing! Today is the first day of workshop and you have lots of ideas of books that you want to write. You learned so much last year that you are now experienced writers who know what you can write about. Don't forget those things! Use all that you know to help you as a writer. You have the ability to replay what happened like a movie in your mind. So writers, get going!"

Sample Minilesson B

By Lucy Calkins

Connection

"Writers, do you realize we have only been in school for a few days? I think that if we made a list of all the stuff you do as writers, it would be taller than most of you!"

You might select a student to dramatize just how long this list will be. "Turn that way, Marco, we'll make our list alongside your back. Let's see, hmmm . . ." (I reach down to the back of Marco's shoes and start making my hands crawl up his backside, as if we were singing the itsy-bitsy spider song and the spider was climbing up the water spout. I make a large hand-size step up for each new item as my goal is to reach his head.) "We learned that . . .

- "writers can think, 'What are the cool things I've done that I'm dying to tell people about?' and we can write about that."
- "writers can think, 'What are some times when I had huge feelings—like I was really sad, or really scared . . .' because those times make for stories that make *kids* feel the same stuff I was feeling."
- "when writers finish a story, we don't just sit there . . . ho hum. Instead we . . . ? (The kids chime in—'Start a new one.')
- "writers can write a paragraph on a page, not just one sentence."

- “it helps to write not big watermelon stories, but little tiny seed stories . . . and that if we have a big watermelon story like ‘I had fun at camp’ then we can think about the little seed stories inside that.”
- “And we learned that if we get stuck on a word—we can do the best we can, right? We can stretch it out and listen to the sounds, and think, ‘How do I write that part?’ and ‘Have I seen other words that have that part in them?’”
- “And we learned that we can read over our stories and find the most important page, and we can say, ‘This needs to be my best,’ and tear that page right out and write it again.”

(By this time, I’m up to Marco’s head.) “Our list of what we have learned is as tall as Marco! Pretty soon, one of you will need to stand on Marco’s shoulders and our list will be as tall as *two* of you!”

“Right now, will you and your partner list some of the things *you* have learned in writing workshop so far this year, and see how tall *your* list is? Partner Two, stand up to be the measuring stick and help Partner One think of things to add to your list! See how tall it gets.”

(Stopping them midway.) “I need to stop you guys but *holy moly*, you guys know a lot.” (I speak over the hubbub.) “I’m going to add one more thing to your list, so I need you to sit and I need all eyes up here. This is a really, really important thing, so I need total attention.”

Teaching Point

“Here it is. Today I want to teach you that when writers are stuck and don’t know what to do next, we think over our list of all the stuff we know how to do, and we *solve our own problems*! Sometimes, you get stuck and instead of saying, ‘I can solve my own problems’” (I make my arm into a muscle and speak in a commanding voice), “you say” (now I speak in a tiny squeaky voice and throw up my arms helplessly), “‘Help me, help me, I don’t know what to do. Help me, help me.’” (I borrow the voice of the little rabbit from the song, “In a cabin in the woods, a little old man by the window stood, saw a rabbit hopping by, knocking at his door—‘Help me, Help me’ the rabbit said, before those hunters shoot me dead.”)

“But after today, you don’t need to say, ‘Help me, help me.’ Instead you can say, ‘I can solve this myself.’ And you can pull out your list of all that you know how to do.” (I whip the list out of my pocket with triumph and hold it up, as tall as Marco.)

Teaching

“So writers, I’ve been writing a story about how I went to the zoo and saw a boa constrictor . . . pretend I got to that word—*boa constrictor*—and I start to think . . .” (I take on the needy voice and hand gesture), “‘Help me, help me, I don’t know what to do.’ You

know what I'm going to say to myself?" (I look around to see if the kids are gesturing to show they have their list, or calling it out.) "You are right! I'm going to say, 'Lucy, you don't need to say, "Help me, help me," you can say, "I'm going to solve this myself."' (I draw my imaginary list out of my pocket, holding it as high as Marco's head.) "Then I will think about all the stuff I know how to do . . . and pretty soon I'll remember, 'Wait, when you come to a word you don't know, you can write it as best you can,' and I'll start stretching out *boa constrictor* to hear the parts of those words, right?"

"So you see, writers, you don't have to say, 'Help me! Help me! I don't know know what to do!' You can take out the list of things that you know! You can use our charts in the room to help you when you get stuck in your writing."

Active Involvement

"But, oh my goodness, *what if* I finished writing my story about that trip to the zoo? What if I was *done*? And what if I knew I *could* start a new story but I wanted instead to revise my story? And what if I didn't know what I should do to revise, and I started to go to the teacher and . . ." (I'm just about to reenact the "Help me" pose but cut myself short to instead pass the baton to the children.)

"Let's pretend. Partner One, you are going to 'act stuck,' like you don't know what to do to revise your story. You are so so needy, and you just want *someone* to tell you what to do. Will you ask Partner Two for help in your most whiney squeaky little weak-kneed voice? Partner Two, your job is to remind Partner One what she or he can do. How can your partner use his or her own list of things that can help, as well as the lists in our classroom?"

"Partner One, remember, you just finished your story about the trip to the zoo, and you are really stuck and needy—pretend—Go!"

Over the hubbub, I called, "Partner Two, help Partner One. Don't tell Partner One how to revise! Remind her what she can use to help get herself 'unstuck'!"

Link

"So writers, you now have one more thing to add to your list of what you know how to do. You know how to solve your own problems! (And I pull out an imaginary list.) If any of you want a tiny version of our list of things you have already learned to do, I have put some of those lists on the middle of each table."

"Think about the work you are going to do today. How many of you are adding on to your story, letter, or all-about book? How many are doing what real authors do and revising? Will some of you be starting another story or letter? Okay—those of you who are starting a new story, letter, or informational book, will you get started? Will those of you who are going to be revising your books and letters you just finished, or even books that you wrote earlier this week, get started? Let's the rest of us watch to see if these writers start by rereading and thinking to themselves about their ideas for what they could do. They might even put Post-its on each page to tell themselves their ideas for making that page better. The rest of you can get started."

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point

"Writers, can I have your eyes up here? I loved watching you solve your own problems today! How many of you have been acting like weak and needy 'Help me, help me' writers today? None of you?! That's what I thought! And we still have twenty more minutes of writing time. How many of you think you will be able to keep yourself busy doing cool stuff for that whole time? Thumbs up if you think you'll be able to give yourself work to do, and you won't need to get into that 'Help me, help me' stuff. Right now, will you each tell your partner some of the stuff you are hoping to have time to do during the rest of today's writing workshop, and see if you all can not only give yourself ideas for what to do but can even give each other ideas?"

"Writers, can I stop you? I know you haven't each had time to talk yet, but I am pretty sure you can talk this out to yourself, so will you finish whatever you are saying and get started doing all this important work. And if you didn't have a chance to tell your partner what you plan to do, tell yourself your plans before you get started doing them. Then you can get back to work."

Teaching Share

"Writers, it is really helpful to talk over the work that you do. Right now, let's talk over the work that Jeremy did as a writer today, and think with him about the work he could do next. Then we'll do the same talking-over with our partners. This is Jeremy's writing. (I project an enlarged version of it, and read it aloud in a way that does not cast judgment on it, but doesn't make it sound absolutely perfect and done either.) Jeremy, can you point out some of the things you were trying to do to make this a great story, and show us where you did them?"

Jeremy talks about how he added details and I pull from him *why* he was adding those details, and where he added them, and how he went about coming up with details. Then I ask, "What else were you trying to do?" and when he runs low on intentions, I quiz more specifically, "What were you trying to do at the start of your story?" Then I ask the other children to talk to Jeremy about what they noticed, and other ideas they had for what he might possibly try. When children are too commanding about what he has to do, I caution them that Jeremy would need, in the end, to decide for himself. Then I channel all children to work in a similar way to think about Partner One's writing, starting with Partner One talking about what he or she wanted to do, how he or she tried to do that, making sure the writer talked about more than one intention.

NOTES



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE

3



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

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Overview of the Year for Third-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Launching the Writing Workshop
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Realistic Fiction
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Opinion Writing: Persuasive Reviews and Speeches/Letters
JANUARY	UNIT 5: Informational Writing
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Poetry
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Genre Studies
MAY	UNIT 8: Informational Writing: Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas
JUNE	UNIT 9: Revision

This curricular calendar details the Reading and Writing Project's proposal for a third-grade writing curriculum aligned with the Common Core State Standards. It has been extensively revised from the 2010–2011 version and will be revised again in the spring of 2012 to reflect the new learning we continue to pursue. Always, the Reading and Writing Project's curricular calendars outline, for each K–8 grade, a yearlong course of study that is part of a spiral curriculum. Fashioned with

input from hundreds of teachers, coaches, and principals, this curriculum stands on three decades of work in thousands of schools and especially on the shoulders of *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* (Heinemann, 2006), a series of books that capture the minilessons that Lucy Calkins and her coauthors presented while teaching many of these units of study.

This curriculum responds directly to the requirements spelled out in the new Common Core State Standards for third grade. It is also based on the New York State ELA exam and standards; if you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments.

Made up of units of study that tend to be a month in duration, the third-grade curriculum calendar guides you through instruction in narrative, argument, informational, and poetic writing that spirals through students' total school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and with decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write Small Moment stories by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders plot narratives using the graphic organizer of a timeline or a story mountain, revising the narratives so that beginnings and endings relate to what the story is *really* about. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable at writing opinion (or argument) texts. In first grade, for example, children make and substantiate claims in persuasive letters. By third grade, they learn to use expository structures in order to persuade. By fifth grade, students analyze informational texts to understand conflicting points of view and write argument essays in which they take a stand, drawing on evidence from research. Because the units of study are designed to build on one another, a teacher at any grade level can always consult the calendar for preceding and following grades for ways to support writers who especially struggle and those who especially need enrichment. This sometimes takes a bit of detective work, because units in, say, writing informational texts will not always bear the same title (they might be called all-about books at one grade and research reports at another), nor will these units necessarily be presented at a consistent time during the year.

While these curricular calendars support units that vary according to grade level, allowing students to work with increasing sophistication and independence over time, it is also true that all of the units aim to teach writers to write with increasing skill. Eudora Welty once said, "Poetry is the school I went to in order to learn to write prose," and indeed, work in any particular genre can advance writing skills that are applicable across genres. Interestingly, the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven, seventeen, or seventy years old. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, reimagining, and editing.

There is nothing inevitable about this particular sequence of writing units of study. There are lots of other ways teachers *could* unroll their writing curriculum. We lay out this one course of study for third graders because we believe it is a wise trajectory—

one that stands on the shoulders of the work these children will have done in the preceding year, that will enable them to meet the Common Core State Standards for third grade, and that sets them up for fourth grade. The other reason we lay out this single line of work is that the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's conference days and coaching courses cannot provide close support for hundreds of different iterations of a writing curriculum. For the schools who are working closely with us, the Project's writing-related conference days for third-grade teachers will support this particular line of work. Conference days usually precede the units of study by at least a week, if not by two weeks.

Many teachers make curricular maps based on these units, often following the format put forth in Wiggins and McTighe's *Understanding by Design*, and of course create minilessons that support these units. During the 2011–2012 school year, we will create a website where these and other resources can be shared. You can learn about this resource on our current website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. On this website, you will also find a bibliography of books that align to these units, most of which are available through Booksources.

Although we're excited about this curricular calendar, we also know that nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. It is critical that you modify this plan in ways that give you a sense of ownership over your teaching and reflect what you know about your students. We encourage you, however, to work in sync with your third-grade colleagues (and perhaps second- and fourth-grade teachers as well) so that your teaching can benefit from the group's cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade-level meetings can be occasions for swapping minilessons, planning lessons in ways that inform your teaching, assessing and glorying in children's work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

A Quick Guide to Changes from Last Year

There has never been more work invested in a curricular calendar than that devoted to this year's third-grade calendar. The changes between last year and this year are too extensive to detail in this overview. Many of the changes are the result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and the new attentiveness this has brought to informational and argument writing.

The first three units again support moving students progressively through narrative work. The revisions in these first three units are fairly restrained. Emphasizing narrative writing at the start of the year aims to increase student's fluency and volume and build essential writing skills. There are two main reasons for focusing on narrative. First, the exemplar of narrative writing included in the Common Core State Standards Appendix suggests that expectations for narrative writing are extremely high. Most of your students will not reach these ambitious levels unless you teach an ambitious sequence of narrative work. These standards are not for the weak of heart! Then, too, it is during this work with narrative writing that students learn to write

with fluency, with a command of conventions, with detail and structure. Later, all these skills can be transferred to other genre.

After three units that spotlight narrative writing, we recommend a unit on opinion writing, followed by one on informational writing. The unit descriptions for both of these units are essentially new, and the units have been carefully designed to take students to the level of expectation described in the Common Core State Standards. It is unlikely that these units will seem elementary for any of your students, but if so, the same units have been described with much more rigor in the fourth-grade curricular calendar. These two months are then followed by a month on poetry—the discussion of this unit is not dramatically different from last year.

We have created another new unit of study for March/April—genre studies. The point of the unit is to help students know that they can study a small collection of texts that represent a “kind of writing” and then try to write like those texts. That is, students could look at a few how-to texts, notice how the genre goes, and then try their hand at it. This work is scheduled at this time because it will help students read the array of genres that are included on the high-stakes New York State ELA, now looming on the horizon.

We’re suggesting a content-area reading, research, and writing unit in May. Students will again write informational texts, but where before they wrote on topics of individual expertise, now they will write on a whole-class research topic. Finally, we end the year with a crucially important unit on revision. During this unit, students are invited to revise work they’ve done earlier in the year—it’s a perfect way to tie the year together.

You and your colleagues may well make different choices from those we present here, and we welcome those choices. A year from now, we’d love to hear your suggestions for variations on this theme! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

Assessment

Who was it who said, “We inspect what we respect”? It will be important for you to assess your students’ growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. The Project recommends you use the Continua for Assessing Narrative, Informational, and Argument Writing, three tools we have developed and piloted to track student growth in those modes of writing. These tools are works in progress and the newest versions are available on the TCRWP website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter the instruments to fit your purposes. We hope they can help clarify the pathways along which developing writers travel. They will certainly help you identify where a student is within a sequence of writing development and imagine realistic, doable next steps for each writer. This can make your conferring much more

helpful and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

You'd want to exercise caution, however, while assessing a writer against any developmental continuum. If you bypass listening and responding to a writer and considering the writer's intentions, instead using a continuum as the sole source of your instruction, then the tool will have made your teaching worse, not better. Conferences always need to begin by pulling alongside a writer and asking, "What are you working on as a writer? What are you trying to do? What are you planning to do next?" Then you need to help the writer reach toward accomplishing his or her intentions. You do this by drawing on your knowledge of good writing and of how narrative, argument, and information writers tend to develop. This is where the assessment tool can be a resource.

It is crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of the school year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture the data representing what writers can do at the beginning of the year, you will be able to show parents and others all the ways in which they have grown as writers over the course of the year. In your autumn parent-teacher conferences, bring the writing a learner did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing he or she did just before the conference. Having the "before" and "after" pictures for comparison makes this conversation productive.

Even if you are not going to use the continua to assess growth in writing, we think you will want to get some baseline data on your writers. To do this, at the very the beginning of the year, devote one full day's writing workshop—fifty minutes—to an on-demand assessment of narrative writing, another full day to an on-demand assessment of informational writing, and ideally, a third day to a similar assessment of opinion (or argument) writing. We cannot stress enough that you cannot scaffold kids' work during this assessment. Do *not* remind students of the qualities of good narrative writing, do *not* share examples of powerful texts, and definitely do *not* confer with writers. This needs to be a hands-off assessment. The exact words that we suggest you say to your students are available on the TCRWP website. You will want to repeat these on-demand assessments several times during the year, after finishing some work in that mode of writing.

If you worry that saying, "Welcome to a new year. I want to begin by evaluating you," might seem harsh, you might soften this by saying that you can't wait until the end of September before having some of your students' writing to display on bulletin boards. Tell your youngsters they have only a day to work on the piece because you're so eager to have their writing up in the room. The problem with saying this is that it may tempt you to coach the writing, which utterly ruins its value as an assessment tool. The alternative is to tell students this writing is just for you to get to know them and then to store it in their portfolios.

In any case, you will want to study what your students come into the year able to do as writers—this will help you establish a baseline understanding of what your

students know about the qualities of good writing. Note whether students have been taught and are using essential concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing *focused* texts.

Grammar and Conventions

We recommend that you also take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically thereafter, to assess students' growing control of spelling. We recommend administering Donald Bear's spelling inventory detailed in *Words Their Way*. You'll give your whole class what amounts to a spelling test, asking them to spell each of twenty-five words. To assess your spellers, you will need to count not the *words* correct but the *features* correct. This can take a few minutes for each child, but it will enable you to channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that it aligns with the main needs you see across your students. It will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.

You will also want to assess your writers' command of the mechanics of writing through the lens of the Common Core State Standards for third grade. To understand which conventions of written language your children use with automaticity whenever they write, look at their on-demand pieces of writing. For third graders, ask yourself:

- Which children do and do not generally control end punctuation and lower/upercase letters?
- Which children do and do not tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which children do and do not include direct dialogue and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which children do and do not generally control their verb tenses?
- Which children do and do not generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?

If you have children who do not use end punctuation roughly correctly, who do not write in paragraphs, who seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout their writing, or who don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, embed instruction in all these things into your first two units of study. Establishing a long-term inquiry into punctuation, capitalization, and verb usage across the months is another way to support student growth in grammar. The hope is that many more of your students will do all of this (not perfectly, but as a matter of course) by your second on-demand narrative writing assessment, probably at the end of November.

You'll first teach any of these skills by embedding them into editing work (though this may be editing of just an entry), and then you'll expect the instruction to affect drafting. For example, if some students are not writing with end punctuation, teach them to read over their writing and put a period where a thought or action ends—this will eliminate a lot of run-on sentences quickly and with a minimum of fuss. Then you can teach them to write by having a complete thought, saying it to themselves, writing without pausing until they reach the end of that thought, and then placing a period on the page. Most students speak in sentences; they can write in them too.

You will also want to be sure that your young writers are not boxed into simple sentence structures. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: a subject did something, perhaps to someone or with something. "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These children may feel, in their bones, that the writing lacks something, and they may try to solve the problem by linking the simple sentences with conjunctions. "I went to the park *where* I rode my bike. *Then* I got an ice cream *and* I came home." But that doesn't solve the problem. Teach these children that it helps to tell when, how, under what conditions, with what thoughts in mind, a person did the thing he or she did. That is, the sentences can now look like this: "One sunny Saturday morning, I rode my bike to the park. While I was there, I got an ice cream. Noticing the time, I hurried home." It can also help to tell *how* one did something and provide details about the activity. "I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double scoop chocolate that melted all over me."

Those of you wanting to better understand syntactical complexity may find it interesting to measure your children's syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) in the grammatical sentences that your youngsters construct. Hunt calls these *T-units*. Suppose a student writes: "I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa." There are three independent T-units (or simple sentences), each short—just a few words. This is simple syntax. Even if the sentences were linked with the word *and*, there would still be three T-units, because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, if the sentence is "When I went to the store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa," there isn't anywhere a period could have been added, so it's a single T-unit comprising fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, a T-unit could contain yet more words per (and still be more complex): "Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, my cousin and best friend." Some writers who struggle with punctuation nevertheless use complicated syntax, which is terrific. It is important to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer's growing ability to write complex sentences with many words per T-unit (but don't use the term with your third graders!) should be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences.

Children benefit most from instruction when it helps them become more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than has them study mechanics in

isolation. Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after children have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—you need to hold your students accountable for using that skill as they draft (perhaps not perfectly, but at least attempting to use it). For example, during the editing portion of Unit One, you will probably teach all students to write in paragraph structure, alerting them to some of the cues for narrative paragraphs, such as when a new character enters, the time changes, or the setting changes. So at the start of Unit Two, when youngsters are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one child hasn't remembered that now he is the sort of writer who writes using paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach children that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time. Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Colons and semicolons will fit into the third unit as kids will be collecting, listing, and sorting all they know.

A *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only “fix” students' writing, or tell them to be “correct,” they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start using past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and they may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare to write longer sentences if they're not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include Bear's *unfamiliarity, familiarity and experimentation, using and confusing, mastery and control*.

In the third unit, teach students to recall the conventions you've already taught showing that they apply to non-narrative writing. Plan to revisit paragraph structure in non-narrative writing, teaching students to use paragraphs at new sections or where new ideas are introduced. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always teach students to use all the conventions they have learned so far to be effective editors of their own and others' writing and to write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions. Perhaps you will introduce the use of commas in a list, as writers typically include multiple examples in information books.

Later in the year, when students return to writing stories, might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. If needed, you will want to form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, you can help a small group of students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns or using apostrophes for possessives and contractions.



UNIT FIVE

Informational Writing

JANUARY

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of informational (or explanatory) writing, describing it as writing that is designed to “examine a topic and convey information and ideas clearly.” At the highest levels, informational writing and persuasive writing (as defined by the CCSS) blend. That is, many informational texts, especially well-written adult texts, teach information while also aiming to persuade readers to agree with certain ideas. The Common Core State Standards, however, differentiate these two kinds of writing, suggesting that if the overall purpose of a text is to teach important information, then one idea will probably not dominate the entire text, nor will the driving structure of the writing be claim/evidence. Instead, in informational writing, the driving structure is apt to be categories and subcategories: topics and subtopics that are signaled with headings and subheadings and with accompanying portals for information, including glossaries, text boxes, sidebars, diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visuals.

Your third graders have had some experience with informational writing already and most will be ready for you to help them begin to become more sophisticated in this work. If your students demonstrate (in an on-demand assessment) that they can introduce a topic clearly, separate it into subtopics, and organize their writing in separate pages so that appropriate information is grouped inside these subtopics, then you may want to bump up the level of the work. The fourth-grade version of this unit will give you ideas. We imagine that the important work for most third graders will be to lift the level of their all-about stories (which they have written in past years) by teaching different text structures, authority, and voice. You may also want to draw on the persuasive writing students did in the previous unit of study in which they supported an opinion or claim.

The fundamental thing to remember about informational writing is that the writer aims to teach readers about a topic. It's the kind of writing that kids will encounter in much of their nonfiction reading, such as the DK Readers, the Gail Gibbons and Seymour Simon books, the current event articles in *Time for Kids*, and their social studies and science texts. It's also the kind of writing for which it is easy to find lots of accessible mentor texts for kids.

Because informational texts are usually composites of smaller texts/chapters, often written in different structures and genres, any unit on informational writing is bound to stand on the shoulders of units in narrative, opinion, and procedural writing, as well as on units in nonfiction reading. This unit aims to help students harness all they know about all of these kinds of writing and use this knowledge to create texts that teach readers. If you are also using our content-area curricular calendar, your third graders will be set up to use writing to learn again in that unit, both to think through their topics during development and to help structure information as they draft and revise. You will want to turn to the RWP Informational Writing Continuum as both a way to assess where your students are with informational writing and as a resource for teaching.

This unit guides students toward creating lively, voice-filled, engaging informational books about topics of expertise. One of the rules of thumb in writing is that writers can only engage readers in a topic if the writer is engaged in that topic. The unit, then, assumes that students are writing about self-chosen topics of great personal interest. It could be that students care and know about subtopics they have studied during content-area instruction, and they can write with engagement and authority on a subtopic that falls under the purview of their social studies or science curriculum. However, if students are just embarking on a social studies unit and know only the barest outline about that subtopic, they would not be apt to write well about it. It is likely, then, that during this first nonfiction writing experience of the year, many students will write on topics of personal expertise. In May of this year, in the cross-curricular unit Informational Reading: Research, Reading, and Writing in the Content Areas, they will have opportunities to write in response to and about topics they are simultaneously studying in depth.

Teachers wanting to learn more about informational writing can refer to the Common Core State Standards and the samples collected within their appendix, to the RWP Informational Writing Continuum, and to the rich tradition of work in nonfiction writing done by leaders in the field of writing such as Don Murray, E. B. White, Roy Peter Clark, and William Zinsser.

Choosing Touchstone Texts That Align with Nonfiction Reading

You will probably want to search through your nonfiction texts to find two or three that can become exemplars for your work with informational writing. As you make this choice, you needn't think about the *topic* of the texts; instead, think about the *organizational structure* and the nature of the prose. You'll want to choose texts that

resemble those you hope your children will write in this unit. For example, suppose you choose a book about mushrooms that opens with a table of contents and includes chapters that tell about different kinds of mushrooms, as well as one that recounts a day collecting mushrooms, and yet another that is a plea to mushroom lovers of the world—these texts can be mentor texts for children who are writing about soccer or flat-coated retrievers or the Hudson River.

If you have decided to highlight certain features in your minilessons, you'll want to make sure the touchstone texts you select illustrate those features. For example, given that you'll probably emphasize the importance of categorizing information, you'll probably want to find model texts that have clear subcategories, with the information pertaining to one subtopic falling under one heading, and the information pertaining to another subtopic falling under a second heading. You may decide to look for writers who integrate facts with opinions and ideas. You may also search for exemplar texts in which an author writes with a vigorous voice. This means you'll look for books that engage the reader and that sound as if the author is speaking straight to the reader.

As you look for these mentor texts, we strongly suggest you go to the TCRWP website to find texts that other children have written. These will, of course, be closer to those your own young writers are apt to write than the texts written by professional authors—and your children may decide to produce their own texts that can replace those on the website! Send them to us if they do.

Once you've chosen an exemplar text or two, you're ready to begin. You'll want to provide a unit overview for your children. This will be easy to do, because this unit in the writing workshop comes a month after the unit on nonfiction reading in the reading workshop. In the reading workshop, your children will have read texts in which writers are teachers, laying out a course of study for readers. You might, therefore, say: "You, too, can write in such a way that you teach other people about the topics on which you are an expert."

Assessing Informational Writing

You will probably decide to launch the unit with an on-demand informational writing assessment. If you do, we recommend using the same prompt and same conditions as other Reading and Writing Project teachers have used, so you'll be able to analyze the writing your students produce by referring to the RWP Informational Writing Continuum (www.readingandwritingproject.com). This means that on the day before the assessment, you will say to your students, "Think of a topic that you've studied or know. Tomorrow, you will have an hour to write an informational (or all-about) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you'll have an hour to complete this." Then, the following day, give them sixty minutes, or one writing workshop, to show what they know about informational writing.

Many teachers find that after they have evaluated this on-demand informational writing and noted where it falls along the continuum, it can be helpful to give students a fast course on this kind of writing and then allow them to spend another writing workshop session rewriting what they have written, from top to bottom. This allows you to assess both what they know how to do without any instruction and what is easily within their grasp with just a few reminders.

This on-demand writing will help you know where your students fall in a trajectory of writing development and help you set your sights on very clear next steps. Level 6 of the RWP Informational Writing Continuum is aligned with third-grade Common Core State Standards, but if some or all of your students are not at this level, the continuum should help you aim for growth that makes sense for where your kids are.

This on-demand exercise should also help students realize that informational writing is well within their grasp, not something that requires days and weeks of preparation. In most classrooms in which students complete the on-demand assessment, teachers are pleasantly surprised by how much students bring to this unit of study and by the volume of writing students are able to produce in just one day's writing workshop. The work that students produce in the on-demand situation becomes the baseline, and you can increase expectations as the unit progresses.

Trying On Topics and Revising Those Topics with an Eye for Greater Focus

Early in any writing unit of study, you will generally teach writers strategies for generating the new kind of writing. In this unit, then, you will probably want to help your third graders use their writing notebook to brainstorm areas of expertise. This means teaching writers to pay attention to the topics on which they are authorities and consider which of those topics they might teach to others. For example, you could say, "If your baby brother annoys you, you could think, 'I could teach a course (or write a book) called "Annoying Brothers." 'Then you'd want to grab your notebook and write that idea down, then spend some time exploring the idea." You'll be wise to coach your stronger writers toward more focused topics. The subject *baseball pitcher* will make for better writing than *baseball*, but the more focused subject will also be more challenging. You might decide to teach children that writers "try on" ideas by brainstorming subtopics they could include in a particular nonfiction text.

To give your writers an idea of the sort of text they'll be writing, you'll want to highlight one of your mentor texts; you will probably want to choose one that contains a table of contents that introduces and divides the chapters, each of which takes up a different aspect of the topic. After all, writers don't just throw everything we know about a topic onto the page in a giant hodgepodge; we divide our knowledge up into different categories, writing with some completeness about one subtopic before approaching another. Of course, the table of contents is not as crucial as the presence of a clear organizational structure; nevertheless, it will make this concept

especially accessible to your students, so we recommend you choose texts with a clear table of contents.

You can teach your children that writers of informational writing sometimes list topics we know a lot about, star a favorite one, and then list subtopics that could become chapter titles within that one subtopic. Or we may make webs for each possible topic—as in a web on baseball with subtopics such as *the pitcher* or *great players*. By telling children about the optional ways writers use to structure our texts, you invite youngsters to buy into the work you are teaching and convey to them that no one particular strategy for organizing texts is critical but that doing so is essential.

Of course, creating a table of contents or a topic web is not enough to sustain the writing workshop for several days! In any unit, listing possible book titles and topics isn't the same as producing the writing, so you'll show students ways they can try out different chapters in their writer's notebook. To do this, you'll want to draw on what you've already taught your students in the content-area units. Remind them of the writing-to-learn strategies for dividing information in different ways and beginning to write based on these various structures. For example, you may have taught timelines and T-charts in addition to webbing: a third grader might use a timeline to think through everything a baseball pitcher does in a typical game or make a T-chart of what the pitcher does versus what the batter does in an at-bat. You will also probably have introduced annotated sketches, so the writer might draw the pitcher and pitcher's mound as a way to hold on to information: you can teach that this is also a way to show information. These different structures should prompt kids to think through their topic in new ways! Each of these structures could end up becoming a page or a chapter. You will revisit this during drafting.

Your student writers can also teach their subject to another child or two as a way to rehearse for writing about that subject. When doing this teaching, it will help if children list points across their fingers, use gestures and drama to reenact, refer to drawings and diagrams, and use an explaining voice. All of this will connect to the work children have done as nonfiction readers (see *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*).

It is important for you to realize that your teaching and your kids' use of strategies during this unit will be cyclical. You'll start the unit by teaching children to rehearse the possible chapters they may write and then to rehearse a chapter they select. After they write and revise a chapter or two, your writers will have cycled back to generating ideas for yet more chapters. This time, they will undoubtedly discard some of their original ideas in favor of ones they think will be more powerful.

Your teaching of rehearsal strategies will therefore not all take place within the first three days of this unit. Instead, as your writers cycle through the process of planning, writing, and revising chapters, your teaching, too, will shift among these parts of the process. You'll always need to support writers at any stage in their work. When midway through the unit you again address the topic of generating writing, you might teach writers that they can return to their writer's notebook to freewrite in ways that aim to grow ideas. You hope that as their pen flies across the page, ideas they've never

had before will come to mind. Writers can use conversation prompts to grow ideas, phrases such as *this is important because*, *this makes me wonder*, *as I write this I am realizing that*, and *the surprising thing about this is*. The goal of this writing would not be a wonderful chapter in the informational book—the goal is a new idea for a chapter. Perhaps, instead of a chapter about the goalie, the writer ends up with a chapter titled “A Soccer Team Is Like a Family.”

Using Different Text Structures to Plan and Organize Chapters Prior to Drafting

Just as your student writers will choose topics cyclically throughout the unit, so, too, they will plan their first chapter on the third day or so of the unit, then plan another chapter on, say, the fifth day, and another on, say, the ninth day, and so forth. So although we address this topic in one place here, it is important to keep in mind that every writer in this unit will be continually cycling between planning, drafting, revising a chapter, then planning another chapter.

Each time writers begin writing a chapter, the first thing we need to ask ourselves is “What kind of text will this be?” Presumably you will want to teach children that as they attempt to teach readers about a topic, it is helpful if a given chapter, like the book it is a part of, is sort of divided into a table of contents. A chapter on Lego special events might contain a paragraph about one contest in which people make Lego robots and compete for awards, another paragraph about another contest, and a third one about Legoland and the various events that are held there.

Of course, writers may plan to write a chapter that follows this outline, but doing so requires information. If we don’t have the information to produce such a draft (and can’t find it), we will need to reimagine how the text might unfold. That is, we make tentative outlines of a draft, collect any information we’ll need, and with this information in hand, we may look back at our tentative categories and reorganize them. Remember though that this is not a research unit, so you’ll encourage students to organize their chapters to record what they already know. You don’t want them setting themselves up for hours of research!

You may also want to teach children that sometimes it helps for a writer to give readers an overview of the contents and that one way to do this is by writing a topic sentence or, alternatively, by writing headings and subheadings. A topic sentence might say, “There are many players on a soccer team,” in which case the subsection could discuss the jobs of different players and then maybe the relative importance of the positions.

You may decide to coach all your children to create their first chapters using this expository structure, but eventually you will want to let your writers know that part of the job is to decide on the structure that best fits the piece. Some children will include chapters that are narratives. For example, an expert on dogs might tell the story of the day she got her first pet dog, tucking in lots of information about dogs.

You may want to lay out multiple paper options for students to choose from as they draft. In addition, you'll want to teach students that the paper writers choose should be based on the structure we think matches this particular chapter's information. For example, in a book about gymnastics, a chapter about the different events could be written using the boxes-and-bullets structure and this topic sentence: "There are many different events in the sport of gymnastics." If we choose this structure, we will probably need a page full of lines for writing. However, we might instead choose to put this information into an annotated diagram of a gymnasium, labeling and describing the parts. In this case, we'll need a sheet of paper with a huge picture box. Or we could choose two events to compare and contrast, such as the men's bar and the women's bar. In this case, we might want paper that has two side-by-side picture boxes with lines underneath. It's essential that we help our young writers see that each of these structures is a *choice*, that there is no one "right" way to present this information, and that it is up to us to find *or create* paper that matches the structure.

This is a great time to return to your class mentor texts and lead an inquiry into other structures used in nonfiction books. With your help, students might notice that within a book about pet fish, for example, there is a chapter or section on cleaning a fish tank and that this section is written in a procedural, or "how-to," structure. Students should also notice that even in a nonfiction book, there are often times when information is delivered through a story or vignette.

There are often times when an author chooses to promote a specific idea or opinion using a more persuasive type of writing, with a claim followed by supporting points. You can help your writers see that within a book about gymnastics, we could write a single chapter entitled "Too Dangerous for Young Girls" or "Gymnastics Helps Girls Stay Healthy" that supports the claim made in the title. Many teachers encourage young writers to make their last chapter a plea to make a difference in the world regarding the topic. Children might write, "People should take better care of their pets," or "Soccer teaches you sportsmanship," or "The beagles are the best dog in the world." Whatever the approach, the writer of such a chapter is writing a persuasive essay.

Drafting and Revising

When writing informational texts, it is important to think always about writing for an audience. Writers can ask, "What do I want to teach readers at the beginning? How can I draw in my reader? How can I give the reader an overview?" Writers will want to examine the sorts of leads we use when writing informational texts.

You'll probably find that the first chapters your children write are fairly bare-bones, so early on you'll teach students to elaborate. One place to begin is by teaching your students that it can help writers to embed anecdotes into our texts, taking what we know about small-moment writing to craft little stories that illustrate whatever we are teaching. Then, too, it can help to teach writers the discipline of writing in "twin sentences." Often it is good discipline to write a second sentence elaborating on what the

first sentence said. Say I wrote, “There are many kinds of dogs.” I plan to go on to talk about one kind of dog that I especially love. Before doing so, though, I can say to myself, “I need one more sentence to go with that first one.” This time, I write: “There are many kinds of dogs. They are divided into major categories such as hunting dogs, retrieving dogs, and the like, and within each broad category, there are scores of specific breeds; many breeds come in three sizes—big, medium, and small—although the names for those differ by dog.”

There are other ways of elaborating. Instead of simply writing a “twin sentence,” writers can become accustomed to moving up and down a level of abstraction (although you may not call it that). What we mean is this: if a writer has written a fact such as, “Dogs eat dog biscuits,” then the writer can try to write an example: “Dog biscuits are often shaped like little bones.” Writers can also elaborate by relating whatever we’ve just said to something the reader may know. For example, “Dogs eat dog biscuits. Dog biscuits are like cookies and cakes for your dog.” Of course, writers can also elaborate by evaluating information or giving an opinion. You will find examples of all this and more in your mentor texts and in the examples of student writing you’ll find on the TCRWP website.

As the unit proceeds and as you have time to teach more deeply, you may want to spend some time helping your student writers become analytic thinkers about their subject. Think about what this means: if you put a bees’ nest in front of kids and asked them to analyze it, what would you expect they’d think about? Analytic thought often involves looking at a subject and thinking about the parts of it. Take any topic—say, Lego pieces. What might it mean to think about “the parts” of a Lego block? But a writer could also write about the way people love playing with Lego pieces. Or a writer could write about the parts of the process of building something (that might be like writing about the parts of the writing process). Then, too, writers could think about the causes related to their topic or the relationships or the questions.

Your young writers will need to revise—just as they will need to choose a topic and draft—continually throughout the unit. You’ll teach a repertoire of tools for revision and reasons to revise, and expect them to revise any one chapter more than once as they come to learn new ways to revise. So early on, you may teach your writers to revise, making sure their draft can be chunked according to subtopic and anything extraneous is removed. Later you may teach your writers to be sure they answer readers’ questions when those questions are asked. Your writers will presumably be writing Chapter 2 or Chapter 3 once you teach this, and they will need to revisit completed chapters using this new lens.

In time, you may teach your writers to be sure they have incorporated the technical language of their topic, included diagrams and drawings to help readers understand, written with precision and detail that will keep their readers’ attention, integrated whatever they admire from published work, and so forth. Teach your writers to look for the gaps in their piece, searching for places they could say more, spruce up, even remove.

Children will look to mentor texts throughout the process, but you’ll especially use them to show writers how to incorporate the features of this genre into their books.

Children will love noticing how the author of their mentor text used illustrations and diagrams as teaching tools. You may also teach children to add other features such as glossaries, indexes, and back-cover blurbs to their finished pieces. During reading workshop, students will have noticed how headings help readers know what's to come and how the font size of these headings and subheadings cue readers to the importance of the information that follows. They can now use this in their writing, creating a chapter heading as well as smaller subheadings for later, more specific information.

Editing Informational Books and Preparing Them for Publication

You will want to remind your writers to draw on editing strategies you taught earlier. Before, presumably, you emphasized writing quickly, giving tricky words their best try, and moving on. You have probably already taught kids to use words they know to help them spell unfamiliar words. You'll want to keep referring to these strategies throughout January, not just at the end of the unit when your children are getting ready to publish. Once an editing strategy is introduced, it should become part of kids' automatic ways of working. In teaching editing, tell children that their texts are going to teach important information to their readers and thus need to be clear and accurate. How can readers learn about the topic if the writer's words are misspelled?

By now your kids will have studied many spelling patterns and high-frequency words through word sorts and the word wall. Certainly you will want to teach kids specifically how to use the word wall when they are working "on the run." Never assume that just because the chart or word wall is there, your kids will automatically use it! During the editing phase of this unit, you may want to teach your kids explicitly that when they use the word wall, they will find it helpful to look at the whole word, take a pretend "photograph" of it, and then write the *entire* word as best they can without peeking. They should try *not* to look at and copy the word one letter at a time—words are learned by practicing the whole word. This time of year is also a good time to do a quick informal assessment by looking across kids' independent writing to see which high-frequency words many kids continue to misspell. Even if these words are already on the word wall, you may revisit them again and again until most of your children have begun to spell them correctly in their independent writing.

This unit is a good time to teach children to use commas to offset definitions of words in context: "Rings, two circular handlebars hanging on ropes from the ceiling, require a huge amount of upper-body strength." This is also the perfect time to revisit paragraphing of new ideas. Remind children when and where to use paragraphs to signal a new idea. In addition, students are ready to investigate abstract vocabulary that advances an idea by signaling agreement (*in addition, furthermore*), comparing or contrasting a viewpoint (*however, on the other hand*), or interjecting (*or, yet*).

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Before embarking on this unit and deciding on the trajectory you will follow, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to better understand your students' level of competency with informational writing. You will probably want to evaluate the on-demand writing using the RWP Informational Writing Continuum. See *Assessing Informational Writing* (page 75) for the exact prompt that will get your kids writing and give you a sense of where their skills are already strong and where they need more support. Level 6 of the continuum aligns with the Common Core State Standards for third grade, but you will want to gear your teaching just above where your students actually are, perhaps using the continuum to guide your planning.

Of course, your assessment will be ongoing, not just at the start of this unit but at many points along the way, and you will use what you learn from studying your students' work to inform how you progress through the work outlined in the unit. The teaching points offered here are just one suggested way the unit could go. Your ultimate pathway will be based on observations you make of your students and assessments of their work.

In Part One of the unit, the goal is for students to generate a great many notebook entries, first generating topics they know a great deal about, then planning for possible chapters they might write in their books about those topics. Study your students' writing for evidence of strategy use and for volume. The goal is for students to write productively, move independently from entry to entry, and use a variety of strategies, such as writing possible back-cover blurbs or making lists of possible chapters for their books. If your students are slow to generate ideas, you may want to spend more time teaching strategies for choosing topics of expertise, either in small-group or whole-class sessions. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and call out mileposts: "By now, your hand should be flying down the page" or "By now you should have written half a page." You may need to coach a small group of students to write more quickly after diagnosing what is slowing them down. Then, you will turn your teaching toward helping your writers choose a seed idea for their books. It is important that they have a variety of topics from which to choose. If students struggle to choose a topic, they may need one-on-one coaching.

In the second part of the unit, you will support students as they plan how their chapters might go, using text structures that should be familiar to them from writing-to-learn work in social studies (see the TCRWP 2011–2012 Content-Area Curricular Calendar for specific teaching). In addition to choosing and possibly further focusing a topic, it is crucial at this point that your students have a strong sense of the subcategories that will fill the pages of their books. You will be helping students decide which chapters have enough information and which either need bolstering or, if that's not possible, need to be cut.

In the third part of the unit, your students will be drafting their informational books and may need a different level of support from the one outlined in this unit,

depending on their competence with expository writing. If your students have practiced different text structures in social studies and find them within reach, you will probably be able to use these teaching points. If your students need more support, you may decide to proceed more slowly, reteaching (or perhaps teaching for the first time) some of the text structures (like compare–contrast, problem–solution, pros–cons) that are mentioned in the content-area calendar.

The way you support your students during revision will depend on what you observe in your students' drafts. We recommend that you once again call on the RWP Informational Writing Continuum. Study your students' drafts through the lenses of structure, elaboration, and craft and identify the most crucial lessons within each of those categories to teach right away. During all parts of the unit but particularly this one, you will want to ensure that your teaching supports students' independence. Your teaching will support revision, but your writers may move from drafting sections to revising and back to drafting. Study your students as they work for evidence that they are using a repertoire of strategies and that they are making choices about what to work on next.

As you head into the final part of this unit, note how you can help your students edit themselves effectively. They will likely be using high-level vocabulary, and some may need additional spelling support, perhaps in small groups. Notice common punctuation errors and teach your students to avoid them, possibly through mid-workshop teaching points or minilessons.

Part One: Trying On Topics and Revising Those Topics with an Eye for Greater Focus

- “Today I want to teach you that writers of informational books study published writing, imagining the books we will create and paying close attention to ways that published authors entice readers to learn about a topic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers grow potential topic ideas in our notebook, thinking, ‘If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what would I teach?’ ”
 - *Tip:* “We don’t just list possible topics and then stop; rather, after quickly listing a few topics of expertise, we can write long in our notebooks to try out the topic, asking ourselves, ‘What’s all that I know about this?’ ”
- “Today I want to teach you that sometimes information writers write potential back-of-the-book blurbs, imagining how our books might go and why those books will interest our readers.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers try on possible topics, choosing one that we feel we can teach really well.”

- D *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Information writers often make a plan for how our books could go. One way we do this is by creating a table of contents for our work, determining the chapters that could go in the book based on smaller topics that fit into our bigger topic. Remember how our mentor text did this? You can try that too with the topic you’ve chosen for your book!”

- “Writers, today I want to remind you of strategies we’ve been using in our social studies classes. In social studies, we’ve been working hard to think through new information about different topics, and we’ve used writing to do this. Today I want to teach you that information writers in any subject can use those same strategies to write about topics in different ways. We can make webs, sketches, timelines, and T-charts about topics we’re focusing on as a way to show what we know in different ways.”

- D *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “I wanted to point out something I noticed today. _____ was trying out a web about _____. And he realized that each little bubble on his web could become a subtopic, or chapter, in his book. And then he decided to make a web about that subtopic, as a way to plan his chapter. Writers, this is a big idea I want to teach you: any writing strategy (sketching, timelining, writing to think) that we’ve tried on a big topic, we can also use to write about subtopics or chapters!”

- D *Teaching share:* “Partners, since this writing is all about teaching others, one way to try this out is by, well, *teaching* each other what we know so far and trying to be clear about how a book about this might go. We can turn to our partner and say our big topic, then list across our fingers how we think the chapters might go, point to any drawings or diagrams we’ve made to help us, and use a teacher voice.”

Part Two: Using Different Text Structures to Plan and Organize Chapters Prior to Drafting

- “Writers, remember how we started this unit? We tried to think hard about what we knew about a topic, and then we decided what the parts of this topic were. Most of you by now have settled on a topic and some chapters that are parts of that topic. Today I want to teach you that information writers often use this same process to plan for each chapter of our book! We treat each chapter topic the same way we did our first topic and we ask, ‘What do I know about *this* topic? What would the table of contents be for *this* topic?’ And we make sure that we are pushing to write in our notebook all the information we want to share with our readers about each part of our chapter topic.”

- “Writers, we’re ready for a next step! Because when information writers are this far along in our writing, we’re already thinking about drafting. You remember

from our other writing units this year that before we draft, we have a plan for how our writing will go. Today I want to teach you that for each chapter, information writers don't just think about *what* we will write, but now we plan for *how* we will write it. We ask, 'What kind of text will this be? Will it be a how-to? A problem-solution? An annotated diagram? A little story?' Then we try out that chapter using that same text structure."

■ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Information writers understand that the way the page looks helps make the information clear to readers. We choose paper that fits with the structure we're writing in."

■ *Teaching share:* "_____ realized something as she was writing. She had planned to have chapters about _____ and _____, but as she was planning how those would go, she realized she doesn't know enough about those subtopics to write those chapters. But that's okay! I want to remind you how, when we were writing persuasive letters, we learned that persuasive writers cut the parts that are weak from our writing, and the same is true of information writers. We can decide to cut the chapters that we don't have enough information for, and either come up with new chapter ideas or focus on the ones we know a lot about."

■ "Today I want to teach you that information writers often turn to mentor writers to discover new structures for our chapters and find models for the structures we already know. If we're stuck and can't think of how a certain chapter should go, or if we just want to be clearer about a structure we're already trying, we can look closely at how the mentor author organized information in a chapter or a section and try out that same kind of organization for a chapter we're planning."

■ "Information writers are not so different from opinion writers! Often information writers will include at least a section of our book that sounds more persuasive and that gets an opinion or an idea across to our readers. We know that kind of writing well, as we've just published our reviews and speeches! I want to teach you today that information writers might choose to include a chapter that shares an opinion. This might sound like, 'People should _____,' or 'This _____ is the best because _____,' or 'It's important to know about _____ because _____. Of course, these opinions would then be followed by reasons to back them up."

■ *Teaching share:* "Today I want to teach you that one way information writers rehearse before drafting is to teach all we know about our topic to a partner. We notice places where we need to collect more information and make a plan to either find out more about that particular subtopic or to replace it with one that we have more information about."

Part Three: Drafting and Revising

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers often start by drafting the pages we are most fired up to write about. As we draft, we keep in mind that we are setting up our readers to be experts.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers organize the information we have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. One way writers do this is by saying big or general ideas that readers need to know about the subtopic first, before getting to the smaller details.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions.”
- “Information writers study mentor texts, taking note of all the different kinds of information that writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Information writers often include explanations of important ideas, quotes from experts, facts, definitions, and other examples related to the subtopic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers include not only information but some of our own thinking about the information. Information writers might try writing a ‘twin sentence’ to elaborate on a sentence that was just written. We can push to say a little more about what we just wrote.”
 - ▮ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers also get more specific as a way to explain something to our readers. If we’ve written, ‘Dogs eat dog biscuits,’ we can then explain this by giving the reader a very specific image: ‘Dog biscuits are shaped like little bones.’ Or we might try using a comparison that connects the information to something the reader probably knows: ‘Dog biscuits are like cookies and cakes for your dog.’”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers stay on the lookout for places where we might need to define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. We keep in mind common ways that information writers teach important words and decide which way will be best for each word.”
 - ▮ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers, I want to remind you that, just as we revised across all our paragraphs in our persuasive reviews, writers of informational books revise all the chapters in a book. So remember, any time you’ve tried a revision strategy for one chapter, don’t stop there! See if that same strategy will help you with all your other chapters too.”

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers don’t just teach information with words, we teach information with illustrations, charts, diagrams, and other tools that might help the reader understand. Writers can study mentor texts to get tips on how to create and revise these text features.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers zoom in to study the structure of each subsection. We make sure the information is in the right section—that is, that each detail fits with the subtopic. Writers also zoom in on paragraphs within each subsection, thinking about whether the information in each paragraph fits together. Another way that writers study the structure of each subsection is to make sure we start with a sentence or two that tells readers what they will be learning about.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers revise the introduction of our informational books, thinking about how we can set our readers up to be experts in the topic and how we can draw readers in right from the start.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers revise our concluding section, taking care to sum up the important information and also leave readers with a big idea. The big idea can be a call to action, a warning, a recommendation, or maybe a powerful story. We can look back to our chart for persuasive writing to remember how to think about our audience and use an argument that we think will convince readers to share our feelings on a topic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic. We can use words like *in addition* or *also* when we are adding similar information and words like *however* or *on the other hand* when we are providing information that’s different or that shows another side.”

Part Four: Editing Informational Books and Preparing Them for Publication

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers edit carefully, taking care to make sure spelling and punctuation are accurate so that readers can best learn the information. Writers might use published resources to make sure vocabulary words are spelled correctly.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers celebrate all of the hard work we have done by getting ready to share the books we have created with others.”



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE

4



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Overview of the Year for Fourth-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Raising the Level of Personal Narrative Writing
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Realistic Fiction
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: The Personal and Persuasive Essay: Boxes-and-Bullets and Argument Structures for Essay Writing
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Informational Writing: Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books
JANUARY/FEBRUARY	UNIT 5: Historical Fiction: Tackling Complex Texts
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Poetry: Thematic Anthologies
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Literary Essay and Test Preparation in Writing
MAY	UNIT 8: Informational Writing: Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas
JUNE	UNIT 9: Memoir

This curricular calendar details the Reading and Writing Project's proposal for a Common Core State Standards-aligned writing curriculum in fourth-grade classrooms. This document has been extensively revised since 2010–11. The document will be revised a year from now, in spring 2012, to reflect all the new learn-

ing that this community of practice will do. The Reading and Writing Project's Curricular Calendar outlines for each K–8 grade a yearlong course of study that is part of a K–8 spiral curriculum. Fashioned with input from hundreds of teachers, coaches, and principals, this curriculum is supported by three decades of work in thousands of schools. It especially stands on the shoulders of Calkins' *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* (Heinemann, 2006), a series of books that conveys minilessons that Calkins and coauthors gave while teaching many of these units of study.

This curriculum responds directly to the requirements spelled out in the new Common Core State Standards for fourth grade. It is also based on the New York State ELA exam and standards. If you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments.

Comprising units of study that tend to be a month in duration, the fourth-grade curriculum calendar offers instruction in narrative, argument, informational, and poetic writing that fits into a spiral curriculum for work that crosses students' school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and with decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write "Small Moment stories" by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a time line or a story mountain, revising the narratives so that beginnings and endings relate to what the story is *really* about. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable at writing opinion (or argument) texts. In first grade, for example, children make and substantiate claims in persuasive letters; by third grade, they learn to use expository structures to persuade. By fifth grade, students analyze informational texts to understand conflicting points of view and write argument essays in which they take a stand, drawing on evidence from research. Because the units of study are designed to build upon one another, a teacher at any one grade level can always use the write-ups for preceding and following grades to develop some knowledge for ways to support writers who especially struggle and need enrichment. This sometimes takes a bit of research. Units in, say, writing informational texts will not always bear the same title (these might be called "all-about books" at one grade and research reports at another), nor will these units necessarily be at a consistent time during the year.

While these curricular calendars support units that vary according to grade level, allowing students to work with increasing sophistication and independence over time, it is also true that all of the units aim to teach writers to write with increasing skill. Eudora Welty once said, "Poetry is the school I went to in order to learn to write prose." Indeed, work in any particular genre can advance writing skills that are applicable across genres. Interestingly, the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven, seventeen, or seventy years old. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, re-imagining, and editing.

There is nothing inevitable about this particular way of unrolling a sequence of writing units of study. There are lots of other ways teachers *could* plan their writing

curriculum. We lay out this one course of study for fourth graders because we believe it is a wise trajectory. It stands on the shoulders of the work these children will have done in the preceding year, enabling them to meet the Common Core State Standards for fourth grade and setting them up for fifth grade. The other reason we lay out this single line of work is that the Reading and Writing Project's conference days and coach courses cannot provide close support for hundreds of different iterations of a writing curriculum. For the schools who are working closely with us, the Project's writing-related workshops for fourth-grade teachers will support this particular line of work. Conference days usually precede the units of study by at least a week, if not two weeks.

Many teachers make curricular maps based on these units, often following the *Understanding by Design* format, and, of course, teachers invent minilessons that support these units. During the 2011–12 school year, we will create a website where these and other resources can be shared. You can learn about this resource on our current website, www.readingandwritingproject.com, where you will find a bibliography of books that aligns to these units, most of which are available through Booksource.

Although we're excited about this curricular calendar, we also know that nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. It is critical that you modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching and so that your teaching reflects what you know about your students. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with colleagues from fourth grade (and perhaps third and fifth grades) so that your teaching can benefit from the group's cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade-level meetings can be occasions for swapping minilessons, planning lessons in ways that inform your teaching, assessing and glorying in children's work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

A Quick Guide to the Units—Changes from Last Year to This Year

There has never been more work invested in a curricular calendar than that which has been invested into this year's fourth-grade calendar. The changes between last year and this year are too extensive to detail in this overview. Many of the changes are the result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the new attentiveness this has brought to informational and argument writing.

The first two units support students moving along a progression of narrative work. The revisions in these first two units are fairly restrained. Some of you may question whether undue amounts of attention are being placed on narrative writing, but we do not think so, for a few important reasons. First, the exemplar of narrative writing included in the appendix of the Common Core suggests that expectations for narrative writing are extremely high. Your students (that is, almost all of them) will not reach these ambitious levels unless you teach an ambitious sequence of narrative work. These standards are not for the weak of heart! Then, too, it is during this work with narrative writing that students learn to write with fluency, with a command of conventions, with detail and structure. Later, all these skills can be transferred to other genres.

You will see that after two units that spotlight narrative writing, we recommend a unit on personal and persuasive essays, followed by one on informational writing. The unit descriptions for both of these units are almost completely new, and the units have been carefully designed to take students to the level of expectation described in the CCSS. These two months are then followed by a month on poetry: we've re-imaged this as a chance for students to practice some of the work with themes and perspective from reading workshop through creating thematic anthologies.

We're suggesting a content-area reading and writing unit in May. Students will again write informational texts. Whereas the first time they did this they wrote on topics of individual expertise, now they will write on a whole-class research topic. At the end of the year, we return to lift the level of narrative writing through reflection and new text structures in a unit on memoir.

We are aware that you and your colleagues may well make choices that are different than those we present here, and we welcome those choices. A year from now, we'd love to hear your suggestions for variations on this theme! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at: contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

Assessment

Who was it who said, "We inspect what we respect?" It will be important for you to assess your students' growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. The Project recommends you use the continua for assessing narrative, informational, and argument writing, three tools we have developed and piloted to track student growth in those modes of writing. These tools are works in progress and the newest versions of them are available on the TCRWP website (www.readingandwritingproject.com). We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter these instruments to fit your purposes. We hope they can help clarify the pathways along which developing writers travel. It will certainly help you identify where a student is in a sequence of writing development and imagine realistic, doable next steps for each writer. This can make your conferring much more helpful and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

You will want to exercise caution, however, while assessing a writer against any developmental continuum. If you bypass listening and responding to a writer, using a continuum rather than the writer's intentions as the sole source of your instruction, then the tool will have made your teaching worse, not better. Conferences always need to begin with a teacher pulling alongside a writer and asking, "What are you working on as a writer?" and "What are you trying to do?" and "What are you planning to do next?" Then the teacher needs to help the writer reach toward his or her intentions. We do this drawing not only on our knowledge of good writing but also on our knowledge of how narrative, argument, and informational writers tend to develop. This is where the assessment tool can be a resource.

It is crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of your year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture the data representing what writers can do at the very start of the year, you will be in a position to show parents and others all the ways in which they have grown as writers over the course of the year. In autumn parent-teacher conferences, bring the writing a learner did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing he or she did just before the conference. Having the “before” and “after” comparison makes this conversation productive.

Even if you are not going to use the continua to assess growth in writing, we think you will want to get some baseline data on your writers. At the very beginning of the year, devote one full day’s writing workshop—specifically fifty minutes—to an on-demand assessment of narrative writing, another full day to an on-demand assessment of informational writing, and ideally, a third day to a similar assessment of opinion (or argument) writing. We cannot stress enough that you cannot scaffold kids’ work during this assessment. Do *not* remind students of the qualities of good narrative writing, do *not* share examples of powerful texts, and definitely do *not* confer with writers. This needs to be a hands-off assessment. The exact words that we suggest you say to your students are available on the TCRWP website. You will want to repeat these on-demand assessments several times across the year, after finishing some work in that mode of writing.

If you worry that saying, “Welcome to a new year. I want to begin by evaluating you,” might seem harsh, you might soften this by saying that you can’t wait until the end of September before having some of your students’ writing to display on bulletin boards. Tell your youngsters that they won’t have a chance to work long on the piece because you are so eager to have their writing up in the room. This is why they need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in just one day. The only problem with this approach is that sometimes the idea that these pieces will be displayed has led teachers to coach into the writing, ruining the power of this assessment tool. The alternative is to tell students that this writing is just for you to get to know them and then to store it in their portfolios.

In any case, you will want to study what your students are able to do as writers at the beginning of the year. This will help you establish a baseline understanding of what your students know about the qualities of good writing. Take note of whether students have been taught and are using essential concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing *focused* texts.

Grammar and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

We recommend that you also take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically throughout the year, to assess students’ growing control of spelling. We recommend administering Donald Bear’s spelling inventory detailed in *Words Their Way*. You’ll give your whole class what amounts to a spelling test, asking them to spell each

of the twenty-five words. To assess your spellers, you will need to count *not* the words correct but the *features* correct—this can take a few minutes for each child. The result is that you can channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that your teaching is aligned to the main needs you see across your class. It will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.

You will also want to assess your writers' command over the mechanics of writing and look at their work through the lens of the Common Core State Standards for fourth grade. You will want to understand which conventions of written language your children use with automaticity whenever they write. To understand this, look at their on-demand pieces of writing. For fourth graders, ask yourself:

- Which children do and do not tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which children do and do not include direct dialogue and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which children do and do not generally control their verb tenses?
- Which children do and do not generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?
- Which children are beginning to compose complex sentences?

If you have children who do not use end punctuation correctly, who do not write in paragraphs, who seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout their writing, or who don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, embed instruction in all these things into your first two units of study. Establishing a long-term inquiry across the months on punctuation, capitalization, and verb usage is another way to support student growth in grammar. The hope is that many more of your students will do all of this (not perfectly, but as a matter of course) by your second on-demand narrative writing assessment, probably at the end of November. You'll first teach any of these skills by embedding them into editing work (though this may be editing just an entry), and then you'll expect the instruction to affect drafting. For example, if some students are not writing with end punctuation, teach them to read over their writing and to put a period where a thought or action ends. This exercise will eliminate a lot of run-on sentences quickly and with a minimum of fuss. Then you can teach them to write by having a complete thought, saying it to themselves, and then writing without pausing until they reach the end of that thought, whereupon they leave a period on the page. Most students speak in sentences; they can write in them.

You will also want to be sure that your young writers are not boxed into simple sentence structures when they write. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: A subject did something (perhaps to someone, with something). "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These children may feel in their bones that the writing lacks something, and they may try to solve the problem by linking simple sentences with conjunctions: "I went to the park *where* I rode my bike. *Then* I got an ice cream *and* I came home." But that doesn't solve the problem. Teach these children that it helps to tell when, how, under what conditions, with what thoughts in mind, the person did the something. The sentences can now

look like this: “One sunny Saturday morning, I went to the park. Not long after that, I got an ice cream. Noticing the time, I hurried home.” It can also help to tell *how* one did something and to tell about that activity. “I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double-scoop chocolate that melted all over me. . . .”

For those of you wanting to understand syntactical complexity more, you may find it interesting to measure your children’s syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) of the grammatical sentences your students construct. Hunt calls these the “T-units” (Hunt 1965). For instance, if a student writes: “I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa.” These are three independent T-units (or simple sentences) and each one is short, with just a few words. This is simple syntax. This would still be written in T-units of four or five words if the sentences were linked with the word *and* because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, the number of T-units would double if the sentence went like this: “When I went to the store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa.” Nowhere in that sentence is a place where a period could have been added, so this is all one T-unit composed of fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, the same sentence could contain yet more words per T-unit (and still be more complex): “Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, my cousin and best friend.” Some writers who struggle with punctuation show complicated syntax, which is terrific. It is important for teachers to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer’s growing ability to write complex sentences (with many words per T-unit—although don’t talk T-units with kids) should be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences.

Children benefit most from instruction when it helps them become more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation. Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after children have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—then you need to hold your students accountable for using that skill as they draft. For example, during the editing portion of Unit One, you will probably teach all students to write in paragraph structure. You will teach some of the cues for narrative paragraphs such as when a new character enters a scene, the time changes, or the setting changes. So at the start of Unit Two, when youngsters are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one child hasn’t remembered to use paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach children that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time. Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Colons and semicolons will fit into Unit Three as kids will be collecting, listing, and sorting all they know.

One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly

wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only “fix” students’ writing or tell them to be “correct,” then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they’re not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include unfamiliarity, familiarity and experimentation, using and confusing, mastery, and control (Bear 2008).

In Unit Three, teach students to recall the conventions you’ve already taught showing that they apply to non-narrative writing. Plan to revisit paragraph structure in non-narrative writing, teaching students to use it at new sections or where new ideas are introduced. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always teach students to use all the conventions they have learned until now to be effective editors of their own and others’ writing, and to write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions. Perhaps you will introduce the use of commas in a list, as writers typically include multiple examples in information books.

Later in the year, when students return to writing stories, this might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. If needed, form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns, or apostrophes for possessives and contractions.



UNIT FOUR

Informational Writing

*Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively,
Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books*

DECEMBER

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of information (or explanatory) writing, describing it as writing that is designed to “examine a topic and convey information and ideas clearly.” At the highest levels, informational writing and persuasive writing (as defined by the CCSS) blend. That is, many informational texts, especially some well-written adult texts, teach information while also aiming to persuade readers to think certain ideas. The Common Core, however, differentiates these two kinds of writing, suggesting that if the overall purpose of a text is to teach important information, then one idea will probably not dominate the entire text, nor will the driving structure of the writing be claim/evidence. Instead, in informational writing, the driving structure is apt to be categories and subcategories. It’s also somewhat helpful to think of the features of argument versus informational writing—which are also described in the Common Core State Standards. Whether an argument is written in essays or in persuasive reviews or editorials, these texts are generally marked by a thesis or opinion and evidence that is parceled into paragraphs. Informational writing is often marked by topics and subtopics that are signaled with headings and subheadings, and with accompanying portals for information, including glossaries and text boxes or sidebars, and diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visuals.

The fundamental thing to remember about informational writing is that the writer aims to teach readers about a topic. Just as we help students think about information reading as a way of engaging in a course in which they are learning all about a topic, we need to help them think about informational writing as engaging in a course in which they teach all about a topic. An informational writer’s purpose, then, is to help readers become informed on a topic that feels very important to the writer. That’s the kind of writing your students will tackle in this unit. It’s the kind of writing that kids

will encounter in much of their nonfiction reading, such as the DK Readers, the Gail Gibbons and Seymour Simon books, the current event articles in *Time for Kids*, and their social studies and science texts. It's also the kind of writing for which it is easy to find lots of accessible mentor texts for kids.

Because informational texts are usually composites of smaller texts/chapters, often written in different text structures and genre, any unit on informational writing is bound to stand on the shoulders of units on narrative, opinion, and procedural writing as well as on units on nonfiction reading. This unit aims to help students harness all they know about all of these kinds of writing, using all of this in the service of creating texts that teach readers. The unit has the specific, added goal of teaching youngsters about qualities of good writing as these pertain to information texts. Students learn that focus is as important in informational writing as it is in narrative writing. Students progress, with experience and instruction, from writing rather cursorily about very broad, generic topics toward being able to zoom in on more specific topics and therefore write with a greater density of relevant information. Eventually, experienced writers learn that they can focus not just on a smaller subject but on a particular angle on (or aspect of) that subject. That is, for young people writing a four- or five-page book, usually those writing on the topic of tigers will work with less sophistication than those writing on the topic of the hunting patterns of the Bengal tiger. Students also learn to group their information into categories and, in time, into subcategories. With experience and instruction, students progress from grouping information into categories that appear to have been developed on the fly, based on the writer simply thinking, "Hmmm, what else do I have to say?" and then producing another chapter title, toward categories that are planned from the start and previewed early in the text, with the categories of information mirroring the logic of the text. That is, if the writer's goal is to compare the hunting habits of the Bengal tiger at different times of day, the text might be organized by time. Then, too, the unit supports writers' growing ability to substantiate claims with information and to elaborate on and analyze that information. Students come to learn that when informational writing is explanatory, the information that is included tends to be facts that explain a process, and when the informational text is anecdotal, the information is apt to include examples that are sometimes in the form of a story or vignette.

In addition to teaching students to progress along these continua, the unit channels students to work toward creating lively, voice-filled, engaging information books about topics of expertise. One of the rules of thumb in writing is that writers can make readers engaged in a topic only if the writer is engaged in and knowledgeable about that topic. It is likely, then, that during this first nonfiction writing experience of the year, many students will feel most knowledgeable about topics of individual expertise. The unit assumes that students are writing about self-chosen topics of great personal interest. It might be the case, for example, that they will be writing about topics such as skateboards, Facebook, and Arabian horses.

There are a couple of alternative ways you might decide to teach this unit. One is to draw on a study you have done in a content area. In classrooms that have brought to life units such as "Early American Leaders Teach Lessons in Leadership: The Making

of a Nation,” it might well be that students care about and know about subtopics they’ve studied within that unit, and they can write with engagement and authority on a subtopic that falls under the purview of their social studies curriculum. However, if students are just embarking on a social studies unit and know only the barest outline about that topic, they would not be apt to write well on that topic. A second possible way you could teach this unit is by drawing on the work students are doing in reading workshop. In reading workshop, your students will be embarking on research projects, delving deeply into topics and reading across texts to learn more. It could be, then, that your students will make information books based on these topics. If this is the case, you may want to begin this unit with three or four days of a double reading period, in which you will support your students’ reading and note-taking so that they begin work on information books with a bevy of knowledge on their chosen topics.

Teachers wanting to learn more about the sources for this unit should refer to the Common Core State Standards and the samples collected within their appendix, to the TCRWP’s *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing*, and to the rich tradition of work in nonfiction writing done by leaders in the field of writing such as Don Murray, E. B. White, Roy Peter Clark, and William Zinsser.

Getting Ready: Imagining the Texts That Writers Will Create and Choosing Touchstone Texts That Align with Nonfiction Reading

It is crucial that you select captivating, well-written mentor texts to support your students in this work. Choose just a small number of texts that resemble those you hope your children will write in this unit, making the choice not by the topic of the texts but rather with an eye to the structures within which you hope your students will write. For example, a book about the human body with clear sections, varying formats, and writing that fourth graders could potentially see themselves emulating would be more supportive than one about pets that is very complex and far different from the kinds of writing your students will do. Consider whether you want to choose several mentor texts that are structured differently so as to expand students’ sense of options, or whether you want to channel students toward a particular structure so that you can provide more scaffolding by holding the class more closely together and ensuring that the text you write as an exemplar matches the ones they will write. When selecting texts, you will likely find that some texts are narrative nonfiction texts. These might, for example, take readers through a timeline within the life of someone or something (people, animals, plants, rivers, wars, events). Some texts will be expository informational texts that teach all about a topic. Some texts will be nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish something such as a scientific experiment. Some texts, of course, will be a composite of all of these and other kinds of informational writing.

You’ll need to decide which features you’ll want to highlight in your minilessons and make sure the touchstone texts you select illustrate those features. For example, given that you’ll probably emphasize the importance of categorizing information, you’ll want to find model texts that have clear subcategories. You may want to empha-

size that informational writers write in sections or chapters, and you may want to use the very concrete example of writing that begins with a table of contents and is divided into chapters to illustrate this concept—in which case you will need books that contain a table of contents. Whether that is important to you or not, you will almost certainly want to show writers that information pertaining to one subtopic falls under one heading, and information pertaining to another subtopic falls under a second heading, and so you will want to select mentor texts that have headings and subheadings, if not chapters and a table of contents. You may decide to highlight the fact that writers integrate facts with opinions and ideas, in which case you'll want to select mentor texts that illustrate this clearly. You may also search for exemplar texts that blend clear, straightforward informational writing with voice. If so, you'll want to look for books that engage the reader and sound as if the author is speaking straight to the reader, with sentences embedded among the factual information in which the author relates that information to something more personal.

In the past month's nonfiction reading workshop, you emphasized the differences between narrative and expository nonfiction reading. You can build on this work by choosing mentor texts that contain some sections that sound more storylike (but are still informational) and some that are more courselike. For example, an information book that deals with the life cycle of a butterfly may contain sections that sound more like a chronological narrative while still incorporating facts, as well as other sections that sound like a lecture.

Once you've chosen an exemplar text or two, you're ready to begin. You'll want to provide a unit overview for your youngsters. This will be easy to do because in the reading workshop, your children will also be reading texts in which writers become teachers, laying out a course of study for readers. You might, therefore, say: "The authors that you are reading are functioning like your teachers. Well, you, too, can become a teacher, writing in such a way that you teach other people about the topics on which you are an expert."

Assessing Informational Writing

You will probably decide to launch the unit with an on-demand informational writing assessment. If you make this decision, we recommend using the same prompt and same conditions as other Reading and Writing Project teachers have used so that you will be in a position to analyze the writing your students produce under the same conditions, referring to the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing* (www.readingandwritingproject.com). This means that on the day before the assessment, you say to your students, "Think of a topic that you've studied or know. Tomorrow, you will have an hour to write an informational (or all-about) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you'll have an hour to complete this." Then,

the following day, provide them with sixty minutes, or one writing workshop, to show what they know about informational writing.

Many teachers find that after they copy what students have done during this informational writing and note where the work falls along the continuum, it can be helpful to give students a fast course on the topic and then allow them to spend a single day rewriting what they have written, from top to bottom, because this can allow you to assess what they know how to do without any instruction and what is easily within their grasp with just a brief amount of reminders.

This on-demand writing will help you know where your students fall in a trajectory of writing development and help you set your sights on very clear next steps. It will also help students realize that informational writing is well within their grasp and not something that requires days and weeks of preparation. Most classrooms of students who have done the on-demand assessment have been pleasantly surprised by how much students bring into this unit of study and by the volume of writing students are able to produce in just one day's writing workshop. The work that students produce in the on-demand situation becomes the baseline, and you can increase expectations as the unit progresses.

Part One: Launching the Unit: Information Writers Try on Topics, Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye toward Greater Focus

Your first goal will be to inspire kids to regard information books as inspiring and compelling. You will want to enter the unit with a class of writers who are dying to do this work. Show students some of your favorite published nonfiction books, including those you have selected as mentors, and tell them what you love about those books—or let students browse and mark and talk about favorite pages and parts. Sometimes, kids will turn first to the illustrations or interesting text features. If so, you can explain that there is an art to writing books that entice a reader into learning a lot. Writers do sometimes include illustrations or text boxes or grabber-leads that are intended as ways to collar the reader and bring that reader's attention to the rest of the page. You can help your students, too, to go from those initially appealing sections to the rest of the page—to the compelling anecdotes and descriptions that are as interesting, if not as eye-catching, as the passages. The DK readers and the Seymour Simon books in particular include a lot of vivid writing.

One way to recruit young writers to write with intensity is to share a vision with them right from the start of what will happen to their published pieces. Are you making a library of books about the solar system that will grace the shelves of the science classroom, be available for all young scientists, and be read to a younger grade or to students the following year? Are you adding to the nonfiction books you have available for independent reading in your classroom, so that students can find expert books on training for soccer, the history of the woolly mammoth, and how coyotes are beginning to live in cities? Or you may even decide to make nonfiction books you will send to schools where students are eager for beautiful texts in English, such as small

schools in Africa where classes are taught in English. One thing is for sure—kids knowing that their books will be handled and read by other readers (not just read aloud to other readers, but that individual, interested readers will turn the pages themselves, lingering over the words and images) really increases the intensity, and thus their stamina and zeal for doing high-level work. You may have on hand a few terrific information books that kids have made in prior years—if so, share them with students to inspire them.

After teaching your writers that information books can be compelling, your next goal will be to teach writers that one of the first things that an informational writer does is select a topic and focus that topic, narrowing it to the most interesting aspects of the topic. Your goal will not be to help writers come up with a topic for their writing—remember that if you catch someone a fish, they eat for a day; if you teach them to fish, they eat for a lifetime. Your goal, then, at the very start of the unit is to equip your students with a small repertoire of strategies that they can use again and again in life whenever they want to select a topic for informational writing. You'll probably want students to explore several possible topics (this makes it more likely that they will settle on a topic on which they have information and it gives you some time to cycle through the classroom, conferring with writers to edge them toward topics in which they seem especially knowledgeable and invested). Most teachers encourage writers to use their writer's notebooks as a place for recording ideas for informational writing. Some teachers suggest it helps to think, "If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what might I teach?" That question, for some children, can be a more supportive one than the more generic: "What am I an expert in?" Thinking "What would I teach this class?" leads a writer to consider not only his or her expertise but also the interests of a likely audience.

You could teach your students that some nonfiction writers try on ideas by writing potential back-of-the-book blurbs as a way to imagine how their books might go and why those books would interest readers. As writers collect ideas in their writer's notebooks, you'll want to make sure that rehearsal does not mean just writing a few words onto the page and calling it a day. You could suggest that writers record not just possible topics but possible subtopics within each topic. Writers could go further and think about subtopics within whatever subtopic interests them especially. Students will need conferences and small-group help to shift from writing about sharks to writing about sharks' eyes, and they might balk a bit at the idea of revising their topics. Keep in mind, however, that front-end revision during these early days will prove much more acceptable to students than later revisions that require them to discard many pages of work. Of course, some less proficient writers may have more success with broader topics—sharks, not shark eyes—and some more proficient writers may be able to handle a topic that is an idea, not just a subject (sharks' eyes are very different than ours).

Some teachers suggest writers engage in a bit of research to try on possible topics, and there may be some value in ascertaining whether there are any readily available and accessible texts on a topic. But remind your fourth graders that, in general, writers don't generally start from scratch. It would be much more of a challenge for someone

to write a book about training for basketball if he or she didn't play basketball or even watch it. For someone else, it would be a snap to get started with that—he or she could imagine the whole book and could thus focus on learning to organize information and write well.

Once your writers have spent a session or two trying on topics, you can teach your more advanced writers in a small-group session to begin thinking about a focus or perspective for their topics. Perspective does not necessarily mean that children will be writing opinions. But by grade five, the Common Core State Standards specify that information writers introduce a topic clearly and provide a general observation and focus. You may have some fourth graders in your class who are ready to do this work. For example, the topic “Cheetahs Are Endangered” suggests that the writer has a perspective or an angle on the topic and presumably the writer will go forward with this. Such a topic may seem at first to readers to be an opinion, making the text into opinion writing, but actually this is just the aspect of the topic that the writer has decided to highlight. To help your students make similar choices, each with his or her own individual topic, you'll probably want to help writers ask questions such as, “What do I want to say to my readers?” and “What do I feel is important for someone to know and feel after reading my piece?”

Probably by the share session at the end of the fourth day, you'll want each child to have chosen his or her topic with the stronger writers selecting more focused topics. The subject of “Soccer Goalie” or better yet, “The Challenges of the Soccer Goalie,” will make for better writing than “Soccer.” The less experienced writer, on the other hand, will have more success with the broader, more general topic, such as “Soccer.” Keep in mind that because the focus of this unit is on good writing, not on research, you'll want to encourage students to choose subtopics or perspectives (as well as topics) on which they have expertise. Some of these topics emerge from nonfiction reading students have done, and sometimes students will want to choose different topics. In general, the more specific and focused your writers' topics are, the more sophisticated their writing will be. Just as choosing a focused, zoomed-in, small moment enables a personal narrative writer to write with greater specificity and elaboration, choosing a focused topic enables an information writer to do the same.

Once writers have chosen a topic, you can move them toward planning the parts or categories for their topic. Teach them some of the different ways that writers plan for how their information texts will go. One way writers plan is to think of a table of contents for their work, determining the chapters that they could put in their book. Writers also might use boxes and bullets to plan, with their boxes containing topics and subtopics rather than claims (as in essay writing). If you have opportunities to do some small-group work to support this, writers will certainly profit from some close-in feedback. You can help writers understand that when breaking a topic into parts, the parts need to cover the entire topic. One can't write a book on the United States and write just about four randomly selected states—but one could write about the Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central United States. If that list of component parts of the United States included New York City in it, that would be odd, because usually component parts need to be of equal weight and parallel. It is helpful to teach stu-

dents ways that information pieces are typically divided. For example, information writers often use parts, kinds, or times. If some of your students struggle to think of categories or subtopics, you could teach them in a small group that writers can always go back and revise their topics, perhaps making them broader. That is to say, perhaps their original topic choice is really a subtopic under a broader category about which they have more to say. Additionally, you'll want to coach writers into creating categories that feel parallel in weight.

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

Just as your writers gathered a variety of information in their notebooks to support their essay claims, they will gather a variety of information to support their information books. After a few days of collecting ideas in notebooks, you will want to shift your writers into gathering the information that will fill up the pages of their books. First, you will need to teach that writers gather information for their books and make decisions about how much and what kind of research they will need to conduct.

You will want to remind your young writers of the importance of gathering a variety of information and information that comes from more than one source. This is a good time to teach them to bring forward all they know from the nonfiction reading and content-area units about growing ideas through note-taking and writing long about a topic. You can teach your fourth graders different ways to collect in their notebooks: sometimes they might make bullet points of facts; sometimes they might write long, growing some ideas about the facts they are collecting; and sometimes they also might keep a running list of difficult vocabulary words for a glossary. They might make summaries of what they are reading and organize those summaries in different ways depending on what they are reading. If you have been following the content-area units of study, your students will have a repertoire of strategies on which they can draw to use note-taking as a way to grow their thinking about a topic.

Because the information will need to be sorted into categories and subcategories, you may want the research to be collected in folders, with one folder for each subtopic. In this case, encourage children to collect notes on single sheets of paper, stored in the appropriate folder. Help children avoid collecting hodgepodes of disparate information stuck together into gigantic blobs.

You will need to decide whether you want part of this unit to include students doing short, focused, on-the-run research in which they locate and print online sources to supplement the information they already have. This probably should not become a unit where research overwhelms everything else, with students spending the majority of their time collecting rather than *writing*. Still, you will no doubt encourage writers to use sources to verify and extend their known information. For example, a writer creating an information book on "Great Artists of the Harlem Renaissance" might not know the exact years in which some artists were born and might feel that information would be useful. She could conduct an Internet search looking for this

specific information. Writers should also be encouraged to use more than one source to support their writing. The amount of research your writers do will, of course, be dependent on the amount you feel able to support.

Part Three: Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

At this point in the unit, your students will have a sense of the categories, or subtopics, they'll be covering in their information book, and along the way they will have been gathering information in their notebooks. You can teach your writers that one way to rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner, taking care to teach the information in subsections. Your writers will be accustomed to teaching each other information from the nonfiction reading units. In this session, a possible mid-workshop teaching point is to teach that informational writing is intended for a specific purpose and audience, as the Common Core State Standards for informational writing suggest, and that the purpose of this kind of writing is often to teach others about a topic. Teach your writers to note areas where their information seems weak and to make a plan to shore up weak areas by finding out more about that particular subtopic. Focus your coaching during this session on students having adequate information for each subtopic, because this will be key when you are later teaching your students to elaborate well. Remind your students, perhaps in a mid-workshop teaching point or a share, that writers revise during all stages of the writing process, and as they collect information in categories they might also revise their subtopics. If they find they have too much information for one subtopic, they might consider breaking it into two. Conversely, if they don't have enough information for a subtopic, they will need to either collect more information or perhaps eliminate the subtopic altogether.

After collecting information for a few days, your students will most likely be more than ready to put together the pieces of their essays and draft long and strong. You can teach your writers that as they begin planning for their drafts, it is important they look carefully at the texts that serve as mentors for this unit. You may highlight the texts that include a table of contents that contain different chapters, each of which takes up a different aspect of the topic.

You may want to lay out multiple paper choice options for your fourth graders to choose from as they draft. For example, if a student decides to write a then-and-now page they might look for paper with two side-by-side options with lines underneath. The paper structure supports the organization of the information on each page. It is important to note that young writers *can* create their own paper choice option if what they need or envision for their book is not in your room.

In one session, you could teach that information writers often start with the pages they are most fired-up about. You could teach your students different ways to approach drafting these initial pages. Teach them that when information writers draft, they keep in mind that they are writing in such a way to set up readers to be experts.

Teach your writers that information writers then draft one subsection at a time, remembering everything they want to teach the reader about that particular subtopic.

As an alternative, either in a minilesson or in a small group for writers who struggle with drafting, you could teach that one possible way students could draft is by starting with more visual texts (labeled diagrams with captions).

In the following session—or tucked into session one if your writers are more experienced—teach your writers that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. Often an effective way to organize information is to move from the general to the specific, giving first big ideas that the reader needs to know about the topic and then moving to the smaller details, like interesting facts. This is an excellent time to draw on partnerships. Partners can work together to share sections of text and to ask each other, “Did I answer all of your questions as a reader? Did I set you up to be an expert in this topic? Did I tell you enough in the beginning so that you could understand all of the parts at the end? Did you have any questions about specific ideas, parts, or even words after reading the whole section?” You may want to collect other questions or prompts partners can use to support each other and compile them on a chart with the questions listed here.

During this stage of the writing process, it is often tempting to teach your students to draft the entire book from start to finish, starting with the introduction. We encourage you to resist this temptation! One reason is that the introduction and concluding sections of an information piece have a different format and purpose than the body sections. Your students will need you to teach right away the format of the body sections, the parts of the piece that have a common structure and that will make up the bulk of the writing. Also, drafting an introduction before writing the sections of a book can limit the writer to stick closely to the shores of what he or she originally imagined in the introduction, which can lead to few revisions and potentially formulaic writing. It is important to leave room for your writers to make huge revisions to their original plans as they draft.

In another drafting session, you can teach your writers to make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions. You’ll want to keep an eye on volume during this session, reminding your writers to continue drafting body text along with planning text features and to incorporate all they know about quality expository writing into their drafts. You’ll want to refer to any of the charts you used during the essay unit that might support qualities of good informational writing, for example, charts that support elaboration prompts, transition words, or kinds of evidence to include in essays.

Part Four: Information Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

Plan to devote ample time to the revision portion of this unit. As in any unit of study, some, if not all, of your students will still be drafting as you begin your revision lessons.

Writers can incorporate the revision strategies you teach right away into their drafts, remembering that writers continually revise; they don't wait until "revision week" to use all they are learning about informational writing to re-see and re-work what they have already written. There are many powerful revision moves that information writers can make that fall into predictable categories. Most of the powerful revision strategies for informational writing fall into the categories of structure, elaboration, and craft. We encourage you to study the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing*, because expectations for each of these categories are clearly enumerated.

Remind your students that good writing does not happen in isolation. We highly recommend that you and your students call once again on your study of mentor texts. The use of mentor texts will be particularly helpful when your writers are thinking of ways to elaborate each section with a variety of evidence and ways to support each section with text features, such as charts and diagrams. For a list of leveled information books to use as mentor texts, visit our website, tc.readingandwritingproject.com, and click on the "Resources" tab at the top of the page. We also recommend that you use a demonstration text of your own informational writing that you revise in mini-lessons and use when conferring with your writers. You can also use other students' informational writing as mentor texts. You and your students can study the informational writing included in the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing* as well as the information pieces written by students that are posted on our website.

You might begin your revision work by teaching *elaboration* strategies for informational writing. It can be helpful during this time to angle your teaching and coaching toward teaching students the muscles that information writers need to develop—explanatory writing, descriptive writing, idea-based writing, and anecdote writing. In one session, you might teach your writers to study mentor texts, taking note of the variety of information that information writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Teach your writers to include explanations of important ideas, using an explaining language, and giving examples. Your writers can also include direct quotations from books or from people regarded as experts. You could create a chart with your students, highlighting types of details spotlighted in the Common Core State Standards such as: facts, definitions, concrete details, quotes, or examples related to the topic. In another session, you might teach your writers that information writers think about stories or anecdotes that help to explain or teach about a subtopic. For example, a student with the topic of "Great Artists of the Harlem Renaissance" might decide to include a story about Langston Hughes' childhood as part of a subcategory on the poet. During these sessions, you can focus your conferring on helping writers to synthesize and integrate information from a variety of sources—an easier task if your writers collected adequate information earlier in the unit.

In another session, you could teach your writers to include not only information but some of their thinking about the information. The Common Core State Standards specify that information writers should not only select and organize content but also *analyze* it. Writers can say more about their topic by including their own observations and ideas about what they are teaching. Writers could return to their notebooks to grow ideas, once again drawing on thought prompts, such as "This is important be-

cause . . .” and “This is connected to . . .”, and then think about where to add this thinking to their drafts. For example, after writing facts about cheetahs such as, “Cheetahs are endangered for several main reasons: They are losing their food sources, they are being hunted too much, they are losing their habitat, and their babies die easily,” the writer could then go on to offer some opinions or commentary about this, such as, “Two of those reasons are caused by humans hunting. People should stop hunting cheetahs and we should be careful to protect their habitats so they can survive.”

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of using domain-specific language, in other words, vocabulary and terms specific to the topic. Teach writers to be on the lookout for places to use and define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. The Common Core State Standards state that, by grade four and beyond, information writers should use *precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic*. There are several different ways that information writers teach vocabulary to their readers. The most supportive way to teach a vocabulary word (and often information writers choose this method for very difficult, technical words) is to write the word in bold and to state its definition outside of the text. Often this is done in the margin of the page on which the word appears. Another way information writers can teach vocabulary is to include the word and its definition as part of the text. For example, a writer might say: “The body of an octopus, called the mantle, helps it to breathe and swim.” A less supportive way to teach vocabulary is to include words in the text without definitions, leading readers to use context clues, for example, “The mantle of the octopus is connected to all eight of its legs and helps it to breathe and swim.”

Information writers are well-served to keep in mind the old adage, a picture is worth a thousand words. The Common Core State Standards remind us that writers don’t just teach information with text, they also teach information through *formatting* (e.g., headings), *illustrations*, and *multimedia*. These tools help readers to understand even more powerfully the information that the writer is teaching. You can support your students in this work by studying mentor texts with them to analyze how text features help us to teach additional information to our audience, such as how we teach important vocabulary through text boxes or glossaries, how we use annotated diagrams to clarify explanations, and how we may think across the headings and sub-headings or other text features on our pages to refine the journey we are taking our reader on. You may offer the opportunity for students to include interactive elements, such as “lift the flap” features, foldout maps and diagrams, or exploded details and charts. These often add compelling visual features to informational texts—and our kids need to improve their ability to synthesize and interpret these visual elements. Creating them as writers will only help them as readers.

You can also teach your information writers to revise with the lens of *structure*. In one session, you could teach that information writers make sure that they have grouped information into categories, thinking about whether the information included in each section fits with the subtopic. You might also tuck into this session the reminder that information writers also think about the order of information within

each category, thinking through whether they have organized the information in a way that best teaches the information to the reader. Even though you most likely taught this concept during the drafting stage, you will want to support your writers in the organization of their information within each section during your one-on-one coaching.

As part of this session, you could teach your writers that each section of an information text tends to have an introduction that previews for the reader what they are going to learn about in that section. The Common Core State Standards refer to this work as “orienting the reader.” For example, a section titled “The Cheetah’s Habitat” might start by saying, “There are many factors that are causing the cheetah’s habitat to become smaller.” This introduction to the section tells the reader that they will be learning about not just the cheetah’s habitat but also ways that it is being destroyed.

The Common Core State Standards lay out the importance of including introductory and concluding sections that are connected to the main topic and that reflect the most important information and ideas from the piece. Teach your writers to revise the introductory sections to their books, asking questions such as, “What do I want to teach readers at the beginning of my book? How can I draw in the reader right from the start? How can I give the reader an overview, an introduction, to my topic? Does my beginning set the reader up to become an expert in this topic?”

Teach your writers strategies for revising their conclusions as well. A conclusion should not only sum up the important information, but it should also leave readers with some big ideas. Your fourth graders will have just finished a unit of study on essay writing in which they used information to persuade. You could teach your students to use those same muscles here to compose a concluding section that is meant to convince the world of something the writer strongly believes about the topic. Teach your writers that a powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples. For example, a student writing about monarch butterflies might write a concluding section with a thesis-like statement such as, “Monarch butterflies are very important to plants.” Then, the writer could go on to give examples of different types of plants that monarch butterflies help to pollinate. Another writer, writing about sharks, might begin with a thesis that is a call to action to readers, such as, “Many kinds of sharks are endangered, and we should do our best to protect them.”

As you coach your writers, you can draw on published introductions and conclusions, noticing connections between the introduction and conclusion and the main points the author makes in the body of the piece. Study how well-written introductions and conclusions help the reader to know what to *really* pay attention to as they read.

Plan to teach your students craft moves that information writers make. Teach them to use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic. The Common Core State Standards suggest particular transition words at each grade level that will be excellent additions to your transition words strategy charts. Teach students to use transition words such as *another*, *for example*, *also*, *because*; as they become more sophisticated in their writing, teach them to use transitions such as *in contrast*, *especially*, *furthermore*, and *moreover*. Additionally, de-

pending on the skill level of your students, you can teach them some strategies to write with greater description and verve. You can teach them to embed imagery, anecdotes, and/or small scenes to paint a picture in the reader's mind.

You'll want to make sure you have strong writing partnerships going as students draft and revise. In addition to holding each other accountable to the strategies you'll be teaching, partners can support each other by playing the parts of students and teachers, taking turns teaching each other about their topic section by section and asking questions when the information isn't clear or fully developed. Particularly because the topics will be ones of personal expertise, writers may tend to gloss over important background information. Partners can help each other to identify places that need more support and clarification. These places might include discussions of important concepts or places where difficult vocabulary is used. You'll certainly want to create a strategy chart to support this partner work.

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

In teaching editing, tell children that their texts are going to teach important information to their readers and thus need to be clear and accurate. How can the reader learn about the topic if the writer's words are misspelled? In editing nonfiction books, teach children that the resources from which they got their information are great sources for correcting spelling of content-specific vocabulary. Remind them to bring forward all they know about conventions to this genre. In addition, you might also teach children another use of commas that shows up a lot in nonfiction—offsetting definitions of words that are defined in context. The Common Core State Standards for language remind us that as fourth graders' comfort levels with more complex sentence structures increase, so should their capacity to punctuate and capitalize correctly. Fourth graders should be able to use commas in compound sentences and in conjunction with quotation marks, both important grammar rules when writing texts that teach information and sometimes quote sources. Informational writing also provides a perfect opportunity to remind your writers about when and where to use paragraphs.

Then get ready to publish! You and your students should be tremendously proud of the independence and effort they have shown, and of the breadth of their expertise and their prowess as writers. Celebrate these achievements by giving your writers a chance to teach others what they have learned. You might do this in a gradewide celebration or by sharing with another grade or with parents. You might encourage your writers to present their work orally. You might teach them to make presentation boards and captions and to practice presenting their work. Or, you might encourage them to share visually. You could create a gallery of the finished books and to invite others to come for a visit. The Common Core State Standards recommend using technology tools as part of the publishing process. In tech-savvy classrooms, you might suggest that your writers publish electronically, perhaps in the form of a PowerPoint presentation or even as a blog or wiki. Sites such as blogspot.com and pbworks.com are free hosting platforms

that will also serve to teach your students some online formatting skills. You can set your students' permissions on these sites to protect their privacy.

Additional Resources

Teachers, before embarking on this unit and deciding on the trajectory you will follow, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to better understand your students' level of competency with informational writing. Level 7 of the continuum is aligned to the grade four expectations according to the Common Core State Standards. Of course, your assessment will be ongoing, not just at the start of this unit but at many points along the way, and you will use what you learn through studying your students' work to inform how you progress through the work outlined in the unit. The teaching points offered here are but one suggested way that the unit could go. The ultimate pathway will be based on observations you make of your students and assessments of their work. Here are some further insights about expectations during each part of this unit and how to plan to meet the needs of your individual learners.

In the first part of the unit, the goal is for students to generate a great deal of notebook entries, first trying out topics of individual expertise and then eventually choosing a seed idea and rehearsing for a draft. Study your students' writing for evidence of strategy use and for volume. The goal is that students write productively and move from entry to entry with independence, and that they use a variety of strategies, such as writing possible back-of-the-book blurbs or making lists of possible chapters for their books. You may have some writers who are reluctant to generate more than one or two possible topics. Support these students in reaching further for possible topic choices. If your students are slow to generate ideas, you may want to spend more time teaching strategies for choosing topics of expertise either in small-group or whole-class sessions. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voice-overs such as, "By now, your hand should be flying down the page" or "By now you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to shepherd them into writing more quickly and do some diagnostic work to understand what is slowing them down. Then, you will turn your teaching toward helping your writers choose a seed idea for their books. It is important that they have a variety of topics from which to choose. If students struggle to choose a topic, they may need one-on-one coaching during this time.

In the second part of the unit, you will be supporting students as they collect research and information to support their information books. In addition to choosing and possibly further focusing a topic, it is crucial at this point that your students have a strong sense of the subcategories that will fill the pages of their books. Toward the end of this part, your students should have not only a high volume of information but also a variety of information such as quotes, anecdotes, statistics, and the like to support each subcategory. If your students' information seems weak, you may need to

spend more time in this section teaching note-taking and research before moving on to drafting.

In the third part of the unit, your students will be drafting their information books and may need a different level of support than what is outlined in this unit, depending on their competence with expository writing. If your students have more or less an internalized sense of how expository writing “goes,” your progression through the unit will likely closely parallel what is outlined in the teaching points that follow. If your students need more support, you may decide to proceed more slowly through this part, drawing perhaps on some of the teaching you did in the personal and the persuasive essay unit.

The way you progress through the fourth part of this unit will very much depend on what you observe in your students’ drafts. We recommend that you once again call on the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing* as a tool with which to study your students’ drafts. Study the work with the lenses of structure, elaboration, and craft, deciding which are the most crucial lessons within each of those categories to teach right away. During all parts of the unit, and particularly this one, you will want to ensure that your teaching supports students’ independence. Your teaching will support revision, but your writers may move from drafting sections to revision and back to drafting. Study your students as they work for evidence that they are using a repertoire of strategies and that they are making choices about what to work on next.

As you head into the final part of this unit, take note of how you can support your students in being effective editors for themselves. Your students will likely be using high-level vocabulary and some may need additional spelling support, perhaps in small groups. Notice common punctuation errors and teach into these, possibly through mid-workshop teaching points or minilessons as needed.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit: Information Writers Try on Topics, Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye toward Greater Focus

- “Today I want to teach you that writers of information books study published writing, imagining the books they will create and paying close attention to ways that published authors entice readers to learn about a topic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers grow potential topic ideas in their notebooks, thinking, ‘If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what would I teach?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that some information writers write potential back-of-the-book blurbs, imagining how their books might go and why those books would interest readers.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers try on possible topics, choosing one that they feel they could teach really well.”

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for how their books could go. One way we can do this is by creating a table of contents for our work, determining the chapters that could go into our books.”

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers gather the information that will fill up the pages of their books. Along the way, we make decisions about how much and what kind of research to conduct. We collect these ideas in notebooks, taking care to collect a variety of information and information from more than one source.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers record not just facts but ideas. We can use thought prompts to say more about pieces of information that we collect.”

Part Three: Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

- “Today I want to teach you that one way information writers rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner. We take note of places where we need to collect more information and make a plan to find out more about that particular subtopic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers often start by drafting the pages they are most fired-up to write. As we draft, keep in mind that we are setting up our readers to be experts.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. One way writers do this is by saying big or general ideas that the reader needs to know about the subtopic first, before getting to the smaller details.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and side-bar definitions.”

Part Four: Information Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

- “Information writers study mentor texts, taking note of all of the different kinds of information that writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Information writers often include explanations of important ideas, quotes from experts, facts, definitions, and other examples related to the subtopic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers include not only information but also some of their own thinking about the information. Information writers might return to their notebooks to grow ideas, drawing on thought

prompts such as ‘This is important because . . .’ and ‘This is connected to . . .’ in order to say more.”

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers stay on the lookout for places where they might need to define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. Writers keep in mind common ways that information writers teach important words and decide which way will be best for each word.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers don’t teach information just with words; they teach information with illustrations, charts, diagrams, and other tools that might help the reader to understand. Writers can study mentor texts to get tips on how to create and revise these text features.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers zoom in to study the structure of each subsection. They make sure that the information is in the right section, that is, that each detail fits with the subtopic. Writers also zoom in on paragraphs within each subsection, thinking about whether the information in each paragraph fits together. Another way that writers study the structure of each subsection is to make sure to start with a sentence or two that tells the reader what he or she will be learning about.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers revise the introduction of their information books, thinking about how they will set up readers to be experts in the topic and how they can draw readers in right from the start.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers revise the concluding section, taking care to sum up the important information and also leave readers with some big ideas. A powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic.”

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers edit carefully, taking care to make sure spelling and punctuation are accurate so that readers can best learn the information. Writers might use published resources to make sure vocabulary words are spelled correctly.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers celebrate all of the hard work they have done by getting ready to share the books they have created with others.”

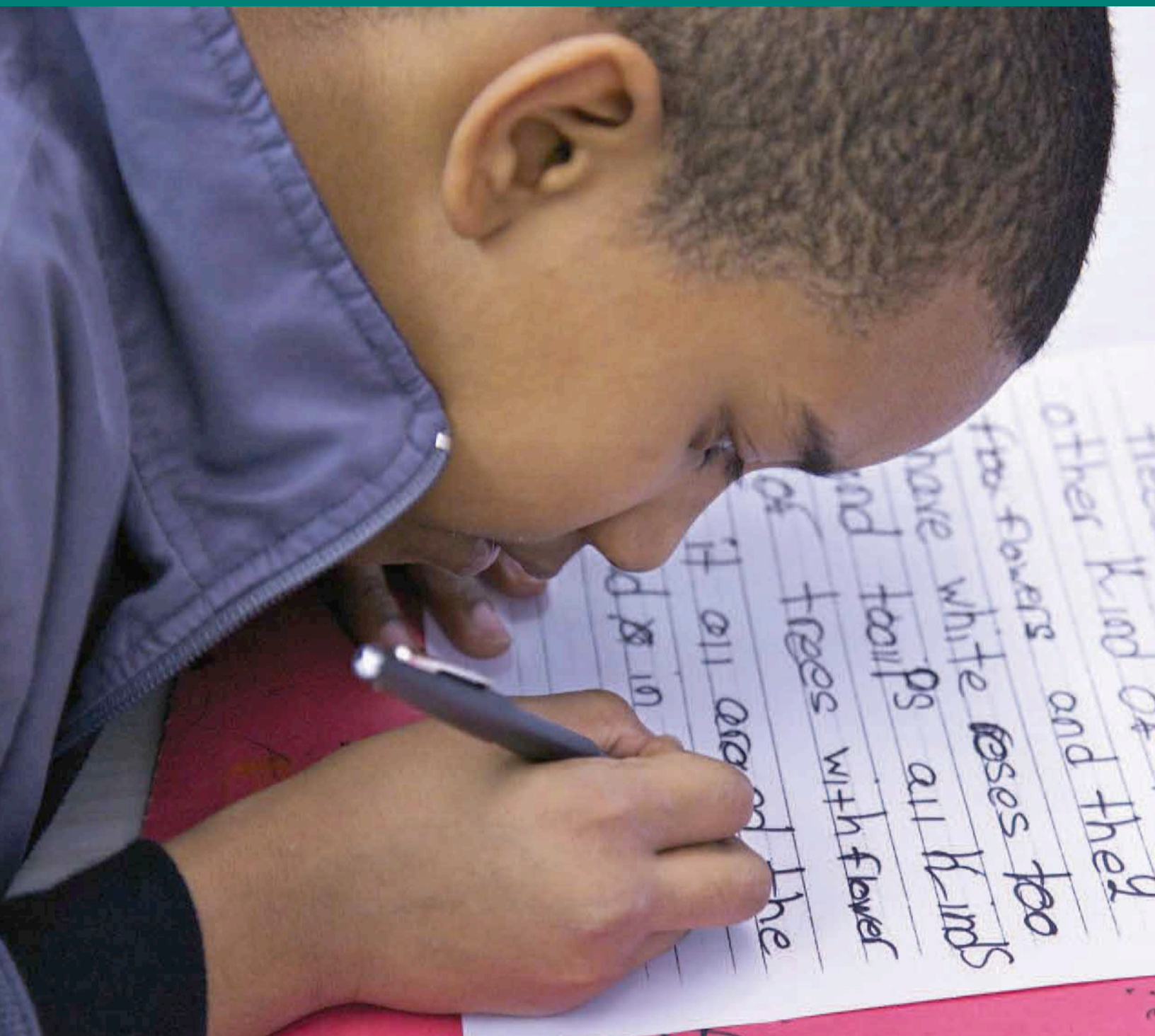
NOTES



A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE

5



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT



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Overview of the Year for Fifth-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Memoir
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: The Interpretive Essay: <i>Exploring and Defending Big Ideas about Life and Texts</i>
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Informational Writing: <i>Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books</i>
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Research-Based Argument Essays
JANUARY/FEBRUARY	UNIT 5: Historical Fiction or Fantasy Fiction
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Poetry
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Literary Essay and Test Preparation in Writing
MAY	UNIT 8: Informational Writing: <i>Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas</i>
JUNE	UNIT 9: Historical Fiction or Fantasy Fiction

This curricular calendar details the Reading and Writing Project's proposal for a Common Core State Standards-aligned writing curriculum for fifth-grade classrooms. This document has been extensively revised since 2010–2011, and the document will be revised a year from now, in spring of 2012, to reflect all the new

learning that this community of practice does in the upcoming year. Always, the Reading and Writing Project's Curricular Calendar outlines, for each K–8 grade, a yearlong course of study that is part of a K–8 spiral curriculum. Fashioned with input from hundreds of teachers, coaches, and principals, this curriculum stands on three decades of work in thousands of schools and especially on the shoulders of Calkins' *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* (Heinemann 2006), a series of books that conveys the minilessons that Calkins and coauthors gave while teaching many of these units of study.

This curriculum responds directly to the requirements spelled out in the new Common Core State Standards for fifth grade. It is also based on the New York State ELA exam and standards; if you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments.

Comprising units of study that tend to be a month in duration, the fifth-grade curriculum calendar offers instruction in narrative, argument, informational, and poetic writing that fits into a spiral curriculum for work that crosses students' school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and with decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write Small Moment stories by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a timeline or a story mountain, revising the narratives so that beginnings and endings relate to what the story is *really* about. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable of writing opinion (or argument) texts. In first grade, for example, children make and substantiate claims in persuasive letters; by third grade, they learn to use expository structures in order to persuade. By fifth grade, students analyze informational texts to understand conflicting points of view and write argument essays in which they take a stand, drawing on evidence from research. Because the units of study are designed to build upon one another, a teacher at any one grade level can always use the write-ups for preceding and following grades to develop some knowledge for ways to support writers who especially struggle and those who especially need enrichment. This sometimes takes a bit of research because units in, say, writing informational texts will not always bear the same title (these might be called "all-about books" at one grade and "research reports" at another), nor will these units necessarily be taught at a consistent time of the year.

While these curricular calendars support units that vary according to grade level, allowing students to work with increasing sophistication and independence over time, it is also true that all of the units aim to teach writers to write with increasing skill. Eudora Welty once said, "Poetry is the school I went to in order to learn to write prose," and indeed, work in any particular genre can advance writing skills that are applicable across genres. Interestingly, the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven years old, seventeen—or seventy, for that matter. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, reimagining, and editing.

There is nothing inevitable about this particular way of unrolling a sequence of writing units of study. There are lots of other ways teachers *could* plan their writing curriculum. We lay out this one course of study for fifth graders because we believe it is a wise trajectory, one that stands on the shoulders of the work these children will have done in the preceding year and one that will enable them to meet the Common Core State Standards for fifth grade and that sets them up for sixth grade. The other reason we lay out this single line of work is that the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project's conference days and coach-courses cannot provide close support for hundreds of different iterations of a writing curriculum. For the schools that are working closely with us, the Project's writing-related conference days for fifth-grade teachers will support this particular line of work. Conference days usually precede the units of study by at least a week, if not by two weeks.

Many teachers make curricular maps based on these units, often following the *Understanding by Design* format, and of course teachers invent minilessons that support these units. During the 2011–2012 school year, we will create a website where these and other resources can be shared. You can learn about this resource on our current website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. On this website, you will find a bibliography of books that align to these units, most of which are available through Booksource.

Although we're excited about this curricular calendar, we also know that nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. It is critical that you modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching and so that your teaching reflects what you know about your students. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with colleagues from fifth grade (and perhaps fourth grade) so that your teaching can benefit from the group's cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade-level meetings can be occasions for swapping minilessons, planning lessons in ways that inform your teaching, assessing and glorying in children's work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

Changes from Last Year to This Year

There has never been more work invested in a curricular calendar than the work invested in this year's fifth-grade calendar. The changes between last year and this year are too extensive to detail in this overview. Many of the changes are the result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards and the new attentiveness this has brought to informational and argument writing.

The fall of the year sees a greater emphasis on idea-based writing. The first unit of study this year is on memoir, and you'll see that there is an emphasis within the unit on harnessing narrative writing to a reflective stance. We want to teach students, in this unit, to really use writing to analyze their lives and the implications of pivotal moments in defining them. The second unit of study is a new unit on interpretive essays, in which we teach writers to be inspired by literature and to bring literature

into their lives. This version of the literary essay has caused great excitement among classrooms that piloted it, and we look forward to seeing fifth graders rise to the intellectual levels demanded here.

The third unit is also new. It is a unit of study on information writing. It is closely aligned with Common Core State Standards for informational reading as well as writing, and we hope to see children's nonfiction reading skills as well as writing skills improve as they learn to write dense, complex nonfiction. It is followed by another new unit of study, on research-based argument essays. In this unit, students will research a topic of interest, learning to evaluate texts not only for information but for the perspective and bias they offer on a topic. Then they will weave this knowledge into an essay in which the writers stake a claim on a topic and substantiate that claim with research. You may also want to adapt this unit for science classrooms. The unit descriptions for both of these units are almost completely new, and the units have been carefully designed to take students to the level of expectation described in the Common Core State Standards.

These two months are then followed by a month on writing historical fiction or fantasy—you may choose one genre to teach now and save the other for the end of the year, aligning your unit with a parallel study in the same genre in reading. Both fantasy and historical fiction offer readers and writers the opportunity to work with complex texts. After this—poetry! This year we offer a new take on this unit, recommending that you capitalize on the thematic text set work that is happening in reading workshop and teach students to create thematic poetry anthologies. Then onward to literary essays, which are aligned with preparation for the New York State ELA.

We're suggesting a content-area reading and writing unit in May. Students will again write informational texts, but whereas the first time they did this in the fall, they wrote on topics of individual expertise, now they will write on a whole-class research topic.

Finally, we end the year with a return to genre fiction: the version that you chose not to teach in January.

We are aware that you and your colleagues may well make choices that are different than those we present here, and we welcome those choices. A year from now, we'd love to hear your suggestions for variations on this theme! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

Assessment

Who was it who said, "We inspect what we respect"? It will be important for you to assess your students' growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. The Project recommends you use the Continua for Assessing Narrative, Informational, and Argument Writing, three tools we have developed and piloted to track student growth in those modes of writing. These tools are works-in-progress, and the newest versions of them are available on the RWP website

(www.readingandwritingproject.com). We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter the instruments to fit your purposes. We hope they can help clarify the pathways along which developing writers travel. It will certainly help you identify where a student is in a sequence of writing development and imagine realistic, doable next steps for each writer. This can make your conferring much more helpful and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

You'll want to exercise caution, however, while assessing a writer against any developmental continuum. If you bypass listening and responding to a writer, using a continuum rather than the writer's intentions as the sole source of your instruction, then the tool will have made your teaching worse, not better. Conferences always need to begin with a teacher pulling alongside a writer and asking, "What are you working on as a writer?" and "What are you trying to do?" and "What are you planning to do next?" and then the teacher needs to help the writer reach toward his or her intentions. We do this, drawing on our knowledge of good writing but also on our knowledge of how narrative, argument, and informational writers tend to develop. This is where the assessment tool can be a resource. It is crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of your year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture the data representing what writers can do at the very start of the year, you will be in a position to show parents and others all the ways in which they have grown as writers over the course of the year. In autumn parent-teacher conferences, bring the writing a learner did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing he or she did just before the conference. Having the "before" picture for comparison to the "after" makes this conversation productive.

Even if you are not going to use the continua to assess growth in writing, we think you will want to get some baseline data on your writers. To do this, at the very beginning of the year, devote one full day's writing workshop—specifically, fifty minutes—to an on-demand assessment of narrative writing, another full day to an on-demand assessment of informational writing, and, ideally, a third day to a similar assessment of opinion (or argument) writing. We cannot stress enough that you must not scaffold kids' work during this assessment. Do *not* remind students of the qualities of good narrative writing, do *not* share examples of powerful texts, and definitely do *not* confer with writers. This needs to be a hands-off assessment. The exact words that we suggest you say to your students are available on the TCRWP website. You will want to repeat these on-demand assessments several times across the year, after finishing some work in that mode of writing.

If you worry that saying "Welcome to a new year; I want to begin by evaluating you" might seem harsh, you might soften this by saying that you can't wait until the end of September before having some of your students' writing to display on bulletin boards. Tell your youngsters that they won't have a chance to work long on the piece because you are so eager to have their writing up in the room, which is why they need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in just one day. The only problem with saying this is that

sometimes the idea that these pieces will be displayed has led teachers to coach into the writing, which utterly ruins the power of this as an assessment tool. The alternative is to tell students this writing is just for you to get to know them and then to store it in their portfolios.

In any case, you will want to study what your students come into the year able to do as writers—this will help you establish a baseline understanding of what your students know about the qualities of good writing. Take note of whether students have been taught and are using essential concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing *focused* texts.

Grammar and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

We recommend that you also take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically throughout the year, to assess students' growing control of spelling. We recommend administering Donald Bear's spelling inventory detailed in *Words Their Way*. You'll give your whole class what amounts to a spelling test, asking them to spell each of twenty-five words. In order to assess your spellers, you will need to count *not* the words correct but the *features* correct—this can take a few minutes for each child. The result is that you can channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that your teaching is aligned with the main needs you see across your class. It will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and your strongest spellers.

You will also want to assess your writers' command over the mechanics of writing and to look at their work through the lens of the Common Core State Standards for fifth grade. You will want to understand which conventions of written language your children use with automaticity whenever they write. To understand this, look at their on-demand pieces of writing. For fifth graders, ask yourself:

- Which children do and do not tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which children do and do not include direct dialogue and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which children do and do not generally control their verb tenses?
- Which children do and do not generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?
- Which children are learning to compose complex sentences?

If you have children who do not use end punctuation roughly correctly, who do not write in paragraphs, who seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout

their writing, or who don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, embed instruction in all these things into your first two units of study. Establishing a long-term inquiry across the months on punctuation, capitalization, and verb usage is another way to support student growth in grammar. The hope is that many more of your students will do all of this (not perfectly, but as a matter of course) by the time of your second on-demand narrative writing assessment, probably at the end of November. You'll first teach any of these skills by embedding them into editing work (though this may be editing of just an entry), and then you'll expect the instruction to affect drafting. For example, if some students are not writing with end punctuation, teach them to read over their writing and to put a period where a thought or action ends—this will eliminate a lot of run-on sentences quickly and with a minimum of fuss. Then you can teach them to write by having a complete thought, saying it to themselves, and then writing without pausing until they reach the end of that thought, whereupon they leave a period on the page. Most students speak in sentences; they can write in them.

You will also want to be sure that your young writers are not boxed into simple sentence structures when they write. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: A subject did something (perhaps to someone, with something). "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These children may feel, in their bones, that the writing lacks something, and they may try to solve the problem by linking the simple sentences with conjunctions. "I went to the park *where* I rode my bike. *Then* I got an ice cream *and* I came home." But that doesn't solve the problem. Teach these children that it helps to tell when, how, under what conditions, with what thoughts in mind, the person did the something, that is, the sentences can now look like this: "One sunny Saturday morning, I went to the park. Not long after that, I got an ice cream. Noticing the time, I hurried home." It can also help to tell *how* one did something and to tell about that activity. "I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double scoop chocolate that melted all over me. . . ."

For those of you wanting to further understand syntactical complexity, you may find it interesting to measure your children's syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) in the grammatical sentences that your youngsters construct. Hunt calls these the "T-units" (Hunt 1965). For instance, if a student writes: "I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa," these are three independent T-units (or simple sentences) and each one is short, with just a few words. This is simple syntax. This would still be written in T-units of four or five words if the sentences were linked with the word *and* because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, the number of T-units would double if the sentence went like this: "When I went to the store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa." Nowhere in that sentence is there a place where a period could have been added, so this is all one T-unit comprising fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, the same sentence could contain yet more words per T-unit (and still be more complex):

“Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, my cousin and best friend.” Some writers who struggle with punctuation show complicated syntax, which is terrific. It is important for teachers to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer’s growing ability to write complex sentences with many words per T-unit (although don’t talk T-units with kids) should be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences.

Children benefit most from instruction when it helps them become more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation. Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after children have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—then you need to hold your students accountable for using that skill as they draft (perhaps not perfectly, but at least attempting to use it). For example, during the editing portion of Unit One, you will probably teach all students to write in paragraph structure, teaching them some of the cues for narrative paragraphs, such as when a new character enters, the time changes, or the setting changes. So then at the start of Unit Two, when youngsters are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one child hasn’t remembered that now he is the sort of writer who writes using paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach children that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time. Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Colons and semicolons will fit into the third unit as kids will be collecting, listing, and sorting all they know.

One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only “fix” students’ writing, or tell them to be “correct,” then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and they may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they’re not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include *unfamiliarity, familiarity and experimentation, using and confusing, mastery and control* (Bear 2008).

In the third unit, teach students to recall the conventions you’ve already taught, showing that they apply to non-narrative writing. Plan to revisit paragraph structure in non-narrative writing, teaching students to use paragraphs at new sections or where new ideas are introduced. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always teach students to use all the conventions they have learned until now to be effective editors of their own and others’ writing and to write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions. Perhaps you will introduce the use of commas in a list, as writers typically include multiple examples in information books.

Later in the year, when students return to writing stories, might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. If needed, you will want to form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns or apostrophes for possessives and contractions.



UNIT THREE

Informational Writing

Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books

NOVEMBER

Overview

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of information (or explanatory) writing, describing it as writing that is designed to “examine a topic and convey information and ideas clearly.” At the highest levels, information writing and persuasive writing (as defined by the Common Core State Standards) blend, that is, many informational texts, especially some well-written adult texts, teach information while also aiming to persuade readers to think certain ideas. The Common Core State Standards, however, differentiate these two kinds of writing, suggesting that if the overall purpose of a text is to teach important information, then one idea will probably not dominate the entire text, nor will the driving structure of the writing be claim/evidence. Instead, in information writing, the driving structure is apt to be categories and subcategories. It’s also somewhat helpful to think of the features of argument versus informational writing—which are also described in the Common Core State Standards. Whether an argument is written in essays or in persuasive reviews or in editorials, these texts are generally marked by a thesis or opinion and evidence that is parceled into paragraphs. Informational writing is often marked by topics and subtopics that are signaled with headings and subheadings, with accompanying portals for information, including glossaries and text boxes or sidebars, and with diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visuals.

The fundamental thing to remember about informational writing is that the writer aims to teach readers about a topic. Just as we help students to think about information reading as a way of engaging in a course in which they are learning all about a

topic, we need to help them think about information writing as engaging in a course in which they teach all about a topic. An informational writer's purpose, then, is to help readers become informed on a topic that feels very important to the writer. That's the kind of writing your students will tackle in this unit. It's the kind of writing that kids will encounter in much of their nonfiction reading, such as the DK Readers, the Gail Gibbons and Seymour Simon books, the current event articles in *Time for Kids*, and their social studies and science texts. It's also the kind of writing for which it is easy to find lots of accessible mentor texts for kids.

Because informational texts are usually composites of smaller texts/chapters, often written in different text structures and genres, any unit on informational writing is bound to stand on the shoulders of units in narrative, opinion, and procedural writing as well as on units in nonfiction reading. This unit aims to help students harness all they know about all of these kinds of writing, using all of this in the service of creating texts that teach readers. The unit has the specific added goal of teaching youngsters about qualities of good writing as these pertain to information texts. Students learn that writing with focus is as important in information writing as it is in narrative writing. Students progress, with experience and instruction, from writing rather cursorily about very broad, generic topics toward being able to zoom in on more specific topics and therefore write with a greater density of relevant information. Eventually, experienced writers learn that they can focus not just on a smaller subject but on a particular angle on (or aspect of) that subject. For example, for young people writing a four- to five-page book, usually those writing on the topic of tigers will be working with less sophistication than those writing on the topic of the hunting patterns of the Bengal tiger. Students also learn to group their information into categories and, in time, into subcategories. With experience and instruction, students progress from grouping information into categories that appear to have been developed on the fly, based on the writers simply thinking, "Hmmm, what else do I have to say?" and then producing another chapter title, toward categories that are planned from the start and previewed early in the text, with the categories of information mirroring the logic of the text. If the writer's goal is to compare the hunting habits of the Bengal tiger at different times of day, the text might be organized by time. Then, too, the unit supports writers' growing ability to substantiate claims with information and to elaborate on and analyze that information. Students come to learn that when information writing is explanatory, the information that is included tends to be facts that explain a process, and when the informational text is anecdotal, then the information is apt to include examples that are sometimes in the form of anecdote or vignette.

In addition to teaching students to progress along this continuum, the unit channels students to work toward creating lively, voice-filled, engaging information books about topics of expertise. One of the rules of thumb in writing is that a writer can only make readers engaged in a topic if the writer is engaged in that topic. The unit, then, assumes that students are writing about self-chosen topics of great individual interest. As an alternative way to teach this unit, you might call on a previous content-area study. In classrooms that have brought to life units such as "Early American Leaders

Teach Lessons in Leadership: The Making of a Nation,” it might well be that students care and know about subtopics they’ve studied within that unit, and they can write with engagement and authority on a subtopic that falls under the purview of their social studies curriculum. However, if students are just embarking on a social studies unit and know only the barest outline about that topic, they would not be apt to write well on that topic. It is likely, then, that during this first nonfiction writing experience of the year, many students will write on topics of individual expertise.

Teachers wanting to learn more about the information source for this unit should refer to the Common Core State Standards and the samples collected within their appendix, to the TCRWP’s *Continuum for Assessing Information Writing*, and to the rich tradition of work in nonfiction writing done by leaders in the field of writing such as Don Murray, E. B. White, Roy Peter Clark, and William Zinsser.

Getting Ready: Imagining the Texts That Writers Will Create and Choosing Touchstone Texts That Align with Nonfiction Reading

It is crucial that you select captivating, well-written mentor texts to support your students in this work. Choose just a small number of texts that resemble those you hope your children will write in this unit, making the choice not by the topic of the texts but rather with an eye to the structures within which you hope your students will write. For instance, a book about the human body with clear sections, and varying formats, and writing that fifth graders could potentially see themselves in would be more supportive than one about pets that is very complex and far different from the kinds of writing your students will do. You will want to consider whether you will choose several mentor texts that are structured differently so as to expand students’ sense of options, or whether you want to channel students toward a particular structure so that you can provide more scaffolding by holding the class more closely together and ensuring that the text you write as an exemplar matches the ones they write. When selecting texts, you will likely find that some texts are narrative nonfiction texts. These might, for example, take readers through a timeline within the life of someone or something (people, animals, plants, rivers, wars, events). Some texts will be expository informational texts that teach all about a topic. Some will be nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish something, such as a scientific experiment. Some texts, of course, will be a composite of all of these and other kinds of informational writing.

You’ll need to decide which features you’ll want to highlight in your minilessons and to make sure the touchstone texts you select illustrate those features. For example, given that you’ll probably emphasize the importance of categorizing information, you’ll probably want to find model texts that have clear subcategories. You may want to emphasize that informational writers write in sections or chapters, and you may want to use the very concrete example of writing that begins with a table of contents and is divided into chapters to illustrate this concept—in which case you will need

books that contain a table of contents. Whether that is important to you or not, you will almost certainly want to show writers that information pertaining to one subtopic falls under one heading and information pertaining to another subtopic falls under a second heading, and so you will select mentor texts that have headings and subheadings, if not chapters and a table of contents. You may decide to highlight the fact that writers integrate facts with opinions and ideas, in which case you'll select mentor texts that illustrate this clearly. You may also search for exemplar texts that blend clear, straightforward informational writing with voice. If so, you'll look for books that engage the reader and sound as if the author is speaking straight to the reader, with sentences in which the author relates the information to something more personal embedded within the factual information.

During the concurrent nonfiction reading workshop unit, you will emphasize the differences between narrative and expository nonfiction. As such, you may choose mentor texts that contain some sections that sound more story-like (but are still informational) and some that are more course-like. For example, an informational book that deals with the life cycle of a butterfly may contain sections that sound more like a chronological narrative while still incorporating facts and other sections that sound like a lecture.

Once you've chosen an exemplar text or two, you're ready to begin. You'll want to provide a unit overview for your youngsters. This will be easy to do because in the reading workshop, your children will also be reading texts in which writers become teachers, laying out a course of study for readers. You might, therefore, say: "The authors that you are reading are functioning like your teachers. Well, you, too, can become a teacher, writing in such a way that you teach other people about the topics on which you are an expert."

Assessing Informational Writing

You will probably decide to launch the unit with an on-demand informational writing assessment. If you make this decision, we recommend using the same prompt and same conditions as other Reading and Writing Project teachers have used so that you will be in a position to analyze the writing your students produce under the same conditions, referring to the Continuum of Informational Writing (www.readingandwritingproject.com). This means that on the day before the assessment, you say to your students, "Think of a topic that you've studied or know. Tomorrow, you will have an hour to write an informational (or All-About) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you'll have an hour to complete this." Then, the following day, provide them with sixty minutes, or one writing workshop, to show what they know about information writing.

Many teachers find that after students do this informational writing and they copy what students have done and note where the work falls along the continuum, it can

be helpful to give students a fast course on the topic and then allow them to spend a single day rewriting what they have written, from top to bottom, as this can allow teachers to assess what they know how to do without any instruction and what is easily within their grasp with just a brief number of reminders.

This on-demand writing will help you know where your students fall in a trajectory of writing development and help you set your sights on very clear next steps. It will also help students realize that informational writing is well within their grasp and not something that requires days and weeks of preparation. Most classrooms of students who have done the on-demand assessment have been pleasantly surprised by how much students bring into this unit of study, as well as the volume of writing students are able to produce in just one day's writing workshop. The work that students produce in the on-demand situation becomes the baseline, and you can increase expectations as the unit progresses.

Part One: Launching the Unit—Informational Writers Try On Topics and Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye Toward Greater Focus

Your first goal will be to inspire kids to regard information books as inspiring and compelling. You want to enter the unit with a class of youngsters who are dying to do this work as writers. Show students some of your favorite published nonfiction books, including those you have selected as mentors, and tell them what you love about those books—or let students browse and mark and talk about favorite pages and parts. Sometimes, kids will turn first to the illustrations or interesting text features. If so, you can explain that there is an art to writing books that entice a reader into learning a lot. Writers do sometimes include illustrations or text boxes or grabber-leads that are intended to capture the reader's attention and bring her awareness to the rest of the page. You can help your students, too, to go from those initially appealing sections to the rest of the page—to the compelling anecdotes and descriptions that are as interesting, if not as eye-catching, as the passages. The DK Readers and the Seymour Simon books in particular include a lot of vivid writing.

One way to recruit young writers to write with intensity is to share a vision with them right from the start of what will happen to their published pieces. Are you making a library of books about the solar system that will grace the shelves of the science classroom, be available for all young scientists, and be read to a younger grade or to the students the following year? Are you adding to the nonfiction books you have available for independent reading in your classroom, so that students can find expert books on training for soccer, the history of the woolly mammoth, or how coyotes are beginning to live in cities? Or you may even decide to make nonfiction books you will be sending to schools where students are eager for beautiful texts in English, such as small schools in Africa where classes are taught in English. One thing is for sure—kids knowing that their books will be handled and read by other readers (not just read aloud to other readers, but that individual, interested readers will turn the pages

themselves, lingering over the words and images) really increases the intensity, and thus their stamina and zeal for doing high-level work. You may have on hand a few terrific informational books that kids have made in prior years—if so, combine these with colleagues and share them with students to inspire them.

After teaching your writers that information books can be compelling, your next goal will be to teach writers that one of the first things an informational writer does is to select a topic and to focus that topic, narrowing it to the most interesting aspects. Your goal will not be to help writers come up with a topic for their writing—remember, always, that if you catch someone a fish, they eat for a day, but if you teach them to fish, they eat for a lifetime. Your goal, then, at the very start of the unit is to equip your students with a small repertoire of strategies that they can use again and again in life whenever they want to select a topic for informational writing. You'll probably want students to explore several possible topics (this makes it more likely that they settle upon a topic they have information about, and it gives you some time to cycle through the classroom, conferring with writers to edge them toward topics they seem especially knowledgeable of and invested in). Most teachers encourage writers to use their writer's notebooks as a place to record ideas for informational writing. Some teachers suggest it helps to think, "If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what might I teach?" That question, for some children, can be a more supportive one than the more generic: "What am I an expert in?" Thinking "What would I teach this class?" leads a writer to consider not only his or her expertise but also the interests of a likely audience.

You could teach your students that some nonfiction writers try on ideas by writing potential back-of-the-book blurbs as a way to imagine how their books might go and why those books would interest readers. As writers collect ideas in their writer's notebooks, you'll want to make sure that rehearsal does not mean just writing a few words onto the page and calling it a day. You could suggest that writers record not just possible topics but possible subtopics within each topic. Writers could go further and think about subtopics within whatever subtopic interests them especially. Students will need conferences and small-group help to shift from writing about sharks to writing about sharks' eyes, and they might balk a bit at the idea of revising their topics. Keep in mind, however, that front-end revision during these early days will prove much more acceptable to students than later revisions that require them to discard many pages of work. Of course, some less proficient writers may have more success with broader topics—sharks, not shark eyes—and some more proficient writers may be able to handle a topic that is an idea, not just a subject (e.g., shark's eyes are very different than ours).

Some teachers suggest writers engage in a bit of research in order to try on possible topics, and there may be some value in ascertaining whether there are any readily available and accessible texts on a topic. But remind your fifth graders that, in general, writers don't often start from scratch. It would be much more of a challenge for someone to write a book about training for basketball if he or she doesn't play basketball or even watch it. For someone else, it would be a snap to get started with that—he or

she could imagine the whole book and could thus focus on learning to organize information and write well.

You might be tempted to encourage your fifth graders to choose topics from the nonfiction books they are reading. One note of caution—your fifth graders will be just starting the nonfiction reading unit of study. The goal of this first part of the nonfiction reading unit is to support fluency and reading with stamina. It is only later that the unit will support the reflection and note-taking work that students might use to support information writing. We strongly suggest that you steer your students toward topics of personal expertise so that they have a large body of knowledge on which to draw right away. These topics do not have to be personal in that they carry special meaning for your students; they just need to be topics that your students know a lot about. For example, students could write about a place they visit frequently on vacation, or they could write about their neighborhood in Brooklyn. Your students can do as much or as little research on topics as you are willing and able to support, but we do recommend that they have at least some information they can bring right away to the writing workshop.

Once your writers have spent a session or two trying on topics, you can teach either your whole class or (if your class is not experienced as writers) possibly just your more advanced writers to think about a focus, or perspective for the piece. Perspective does not necessarily mean that children will be writing opinions. But by grade five, the Common Core State Standards specify that information writers introduce a topic clearly and provide a general observation and focus. For example, the topic “Cheetahs are endangered” suggests that the writer has a perspective or an angle on the topic and that presumably the writer will forward this. Such a topic may seem at first to readers to be an opinion, making the text into opinion writing, but actually this is just the aspect of the topic that the writer has decided to highlight. To help your students make similar choices, each with his or her own individual topic, you’ll probably want to help writers ask questions such as “What do I want to say to my readers?” and “What do I feel is important for someone to know and feel after reading my piece?”

Probably by the share session at the end of the fourth day, you’ll want each child to have chosen his or her topic, with the stronger writers selecting more focused topics. The subject of “Soccer Goalie” or, better yet, “The Challenges of the Soccer Goalie” will make for better writing than “Soccer.” The less experienced writer, on the other hand, will have more success with the broader, more general topic, such as “Soccer.” Keep in mind that because the focus of this unit is on good writing and not on research, you’ll want to encourage students to choose subtopics or perspectives (as well as topics) in which they have expertise. Some of these topics emerge from nonfiction reading students have done, and sometimes students will want to choose different topics. In general, the more specific and focused your writers’ topics are, the more sophisticated their writing will be. Just as choosing a focused, zoomed-in small moment enables a personal narrative writer to write with greater specificity and elaboration, choosing a focused topic enables an information writer to do the same.

Once writers have chosen a topic, you can move them toward planning the parts or categories for their topic. Teach your writers some of the different ways that writers plan for how their information texts will go. One way writers plan is to think of a table of contents for their work, determining the chapters that they could put in their book. Writers also might use boxes and bullets to plan, with their boxes containing topics and subtopics rather than claims (as in essay writing). If you have opportunities to do some small-group work to support this, writers will certainly profit from some close-in feedback. You can help writers understand that when breaking a topic into parts, the parts need to cover the entire topic. One can't write a book on the United States and write just about four randomly selected states—but one could write about Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central United States. If that list of component parts of the United States included New York City in it, that would be odd, since usually component parts must be of equal weight and parallel. It is helpful to teach students ways that information pieces are typically divided. For example, information writers often use parts, kinds, or times. If some of your students struggle to think of categories or subtopics, you could teach them in a small group that writers can always go back and revise their topics, perhaps making them broader, that is to say, perhaps their original topic choice is really a subtopic under a broader category about which they have more to say. Additionally, you'll want to coach writers into creating categories that feel parallel in weight.

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

Just as your writers gathered a variety of information in their notebooks to support their essay claims, they will gather a variety of information to support their information books. After a few days of collecting their ideas in notebooks, you will want to shift your writers into gathering the information that will fill up the pages of their books. First, you will need to teach that writers gather information for their books and make decisions about how much and what kind of research they will need to conduct.

You will want to remind your young writers of the importance of gathering a variety of information and information that comes from more than one source. This is a good time to teach them to bring forward all they know from the nonfiction reading units about growing ideas through writing about a topic. You can teach your students different ways to collect in their notebooks: sometimes they might make bullet points of facts; sometimes they might write long, growing some ideas about the facts they are collecting; and they also might keep a running list of difficult vocabulary words for a glossary. They might make summaries of what they are reading and organize those summaries in different ways depending on what they are reading. If you have been following the content-area units of study, your students will have a repertoire of strategies on which they can draw to use note-taking as a way to grow their thinking about a topic. Because the information will need to be sorted into categories and

subcategories, you may want the research to be collected in folders, with one folder for each subtopic. In this case, encourage children to collect notes on single sheets of paper, stored in the appropriate folder. Help children avoid collecting a hodgepodge of disparate information stuck together into gigantic blobs.

You will need to decide whether you want part of this unit to include students doing short, focused, on-the-run research in which they locate and use print and online sources to supplement the information they already have. This probably should not become a unit where research overwhelms everything else, with students spending the majority of their time collecting rather than *writing*. Still, you will no doubt encourage writers to use sources to verify and extend their known information. For example, a writer creating an information book titled *Great Artists of the Harlem Renaissance* might not know the exact years in which some artists were born and might feel that information would be useful. She could conduct an Internet search looking for this specific information. Writers should also be encouraged to use more than one source to support their writing. The amount of research your writers do will of course be dependent on the amount you feel able to support. A word here on tracking and citing sources. In the following unit on research-based argument essays, you will teach your students more specifically how to carefully track sources as they research and later cite them as they draft and revise. But of course it is imperative that by fifth grade students learn to credit sources and avoid plagiarism. If you are teaching this unit in such a way that your students are doing a fair amount of research, you will likely want to teach them right away that information writers keep a list of books and other sources they use as they research so they can later incorporate these sources into their draft.

Part Three: Informational Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

At this point in the unit, your students will have a sense of the categories, or subtopics, they'll be covering in their information book, and along the way they will have been gathering information in their notebooks. You can teach your writers that one way to rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner, taking care to deliver the information in subsections. Your writers will be accustomed to bringing each other information from the nonfiction reading units. In this session, a possible mid-workshop teaching point is to teach that information writing is intended for a specific purpose and audience, as the Common Core State Standards for informational writing suggest, and that the purpose of this kind of writing is often to teach others about a topic. Teach your writers to note areas where their information seems weak and to make a plan to shore up weak areas by finding out more about that particular subtopic. Focus your coaching during this session on students having adequate information for each subtopic, as this will be key when you are later teaching your students to elaborate well. Remind your students, perhaps in a

mid-workshop teaching point or a share, that writers revise during all stages of the writing process, and as they collect information in categories, they might also revise their subtopics. If they find they have too much information for one subtopic, they might consider breaking it into two. Conversely, if they don't have enough information for a subtopic, they will need to either collect more information or perhaps eliminate the subtopic altogether.

After collecting information for a few days, your students will most likely be more than ready to put together the pieces of their essays and draft long and strong. You can teach your writers that as they begin planning for their drafts, it is important they look carefully at the texts that serve as mentors for this unit. You may highlight the texts that include a table of contents that contains different chapters, each of which takes up a different aspect of the topic.

In one session, you could teach that information writers often start with the pages they are most fired-up about. You could teach your students different ways to approach drafting these initial pages. Teach your fifth graders that when information writers draft, they keep in mind that they are writing in such a way to set readers up to be experts. Then teach that information writers often draft one subsection at a time, keeping in mind everything they want to teach the reader about that particular subtopic. If you feel your writers have a solid understanding of nonfiction text structures, remind them to draw on all they know about different ways that nonfiction texts can be structured as they draft, choosing the structure that will best support the information they are trying to convey. In some cases, a compare/contrast structure may best support the information; in others, boxes and bullets may be useful; and in others, a narrative structure may work best. Nonfiction writers often use a variety of structures within subsections, especially as texts become more complicated.

As an alternative, either in a minilesson or in a small group for writers who struggle with drafting, you could teach your writers that one possible way students could draft is by starting with more visual texts (e.g., labeled diagrams with captions).

In the following session (or tucked into Session I if your writers are more experienced), teach your writers that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. Often an effective way to organize information is to move from the general to the specific, giving first big ideas that the reader needs to know about the topic and then moving to the smaller details, like interesting facts. This is an excellent time to draw on partnerships. Partners can work together to share sections of text and to ask each other, "Did I answer all of your questions as a reader? Did I set you up to be an expert in this topic? Did I tell you enough in the beginning so that you could understand all of the parts at the end? Did you have any questions about specific ideas, parts, or even words after reading the whole section?" You may want to collect other questions or prompts partners can use to support each other and compile them on a chart with the questions listed here.

During this stage of the writing process, it is often tempting to teach your students to draft the entire book from start to finish, starting with the introduction. We encourage

you to resist this temptation! One reason is that the introduction and concluding sections of an information piece have a different format and purpose than the body sections. Your students will need you to teach right away into the format of the body sections, the parts of the piece that have a common structure and will make up the bulk of the writing. Also, drafting an introduction before writing the sections of a book can limit the writer to stick closely to the shores of what he or she originally imagined in the introduction, which can lead to few revisions and potentially formulaic writing. It is important to leave room for your writers to make huge revisions to their original plans as they draft.

In another drafting session, you can teach your writers to make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions. You'll want to keep an eye on volume during this session, reminding your writers to continue drafting body text along with planning text features and to incorporate all they know about quality expository writing into their drafts. You'll want to refer to any of the charts you used during the essay unit that might support qualities of good information writing, for example, charts that support elaboration prompts, transition words, or kinds of evidence to include in essays. If your students conducted research earlier and tracked sources they used, you can teach them here simple ways to cite sources as they draft. Note that in fifth grade, it is not required that their text be fully annotated. You can teach them stems to use to connect pieces of information with sources, such as: "According to . . ." or "In the book . . . by . . . , it says . . ." or "The author . . . teaches us that. . . ."

Part Four: Informational Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

Plan to devote ample time to the revision portion of this unit. As in any unit of study, some, if not all, of your students will still be drafting as you begin your revision lessons. Writers can incorporate the revision strategies you teach right away into their drafts, remembering that writers continually revise; they don't wait until "revision week" to use all they are learning about information writing to re-see and rework what they have already written. There are many powerful revision moves that information writers can make that fall into predictable categories. Most of the powerful revision strategies for information writing fall into the categories of structure, elaboration, and craft. We encourage you to study the *Continuum for Assessing Information Writing*, where expectations for each of these categories are clearly outlined.

Remind your students that good writing does not happen in isolation. We highly recommend that you and your students call once again on your study of mentor texts. The use of mentor texts will be particularly helpful when your writers are thinking of ways to elaborate each section with a variety of evidence and ways to support each section with text features, such as charts and diagrams. For a list of leveled information books to use as mentor texts, visit our website, www.readingandwritingproject.com,

and click on the “resources” tab at the top of the page. We also recommend that you use a demonstration text of your own information writing that you revise in mini-lessons and use when conferring with your writers. You can also use other students’ information writing as mentor texts. You and your students can study the information writing included in the *Continuum for Assessing Information Writing* as well as the information pieces written by students that are posted on our website.

You might begin your revision work by teaching into *elaboration* strategies for information writing. It can be helpful during this time to angle your teaching and coaching toward teaching them the muscles that information writers need to develop—explanatory writing, descriptive writing, idea-based writing, and anecdote writing. In one session, you might teach your writers to study mentor texts, taking note of the variety of information that information writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Teach your writers to include explanations of important ideas, using explanatory language and giving examples. Your writers can also include direct quotations from books or from people regarded as experts. You could create a chart with your students, highlighting types of details spotlighted in the Common Core State Standards, such as *facts*, *definitions*, *concrete details*, *quotes*, or *examples* related to the topic. In another session, you might teach your writers that information writers think about stories or anecdotes that help to explain or teach about a subtopic. For example, a student with the topic of “Great Artists of the Harlem Renaissance” might decide to include a story about Langston Hughes’ childhood as part of a subcategory on the poet. During these sessions, you can focus your conferring on helping writers to synthesize and integrate information from a variety of sources (an easier task if your writers collected adequate information earlier in the unit).

In another session, you could teach your writers to include not only information but some of their thinking about the information. The Common Core State Standards specify that information writers should not only select and organize content but also *analyze* it. Writers can say more about their topic by including their own observations and ideas about what they are teaching. Writers could return to their notebooks to grow ideas, once again drawing on thought prompts such as “This is important because . . .” and “This is connected to . . .” and then could think about where to add this thinking to their drafts. For example, after writing a fact about cheetahs, such as “Cheetahs are endangered for several main reasons: they are losing their food sources, they are being hunted too much, they are losing their habitat, and their babies die easily.” The writer could then go on to offer some opinions or commentary about this, such as “Two of those reasons are caused by humans, hunting and losing their habitat. People should stop hunting cheetahs, and we should be careful to protect their habitats so they can survive.”

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of using domain-specific language, in other words, vocabulary and terms specific to the topic. Teach writers to be on the lookout for places to use and define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. The Common Core State Standards state that, by grade four and beyond, information writers

should use “precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.” There are several different ways that information writers teach vocabulary to their readers. The most supportive way to teach a vocabulary word (and often information writers choose this method for very difficult technical words) is to write the word in bold and to state its definition outside of the text. Often this is done in the margin of the page on which the word appears. Another way information writers can teach vocabulary is to include the word and its definition as part of the text. For example, a writer might say: “The body of an octopus, called the mantle, helps it to breathe and swim.” A less supportive way to teach vocabulary is to include words in the text without definitions, leading readers to use context clues, for example, “The mantle of the octopus is connected to all eight of its legs and helps it to breathe and swim.”

Information writers are well served to keep in mind the old adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” The Common Core State Standards remind us that writers don’t just teach information with text; they also teach information through *formatting* (e.g., headings), *illustrations*, and *multimedia*. These tools help readers to understand even more powerfully the information that the writer is teaching. You can support your students in this work by studying mentor texts with them to analyze how text features help us to teach additional information to our audience, such as how we teach important vocabulary through text boxes or glossaries, how we use annotated diagrams to clarify explanations, and how we may think across the headings and sub-headings or other text features on our pages to refine the journey we are taking our readers on. You may offer the opportunity for students to include interactive elements, such as “lift the flap” features or fold-out maps and diagrams, or exploded details and charts. These often add compelling visual features to informational texts—and our kids need to improve their ability to synthesize and interpret these visual elements. Creating them as writers will only help them as readers. Remind your writers to also cite sources for visual elements they include, right in the text when information from a particular text or author helped them to create a text feature.

You can also teach your information writers to revise with the lens of *structure*. In one session, you could teach that information writers make sure they have grouped information into categories, thinking about whether the information included in each section fits with the subtopic. You might also tuck into this session the reminder that information writers think about the order of information within each category, thinking through whether they have organized the information in a way that best conveys the information to the reader. Although you most likely taught this concept during the drafting stage, you will want to support your writers in the organization of their information within each section during your one-on-one coaching.

As part of this session, you could teach your writers that each section of an information text tends to have an introduction that previews for the readers what they are going to learn about in that section. The Common Core State Standards refer to this work as “orienting the reader.” For example, a section titled “The Cheetah’s Habitat” might start by saying, “There are many factors that are causing the cheetah’s habitat

to become smaller.” This introduction to the section tells readers they will be learning about not just the cheetah’s habitat but also ways that it is being destroyed.

The Common Core State Standards lay out the importance of including introductory and concluding sections that are connected to the main topic, that reflect the most important information and ideas from the piece. Teach your writers to revise the introductory sections to their books, asking questions such as “What do I want to teach readers at the beginning of my book? How can I draw in the reader right from the start? How can I give the reader an overview, an introduction, to my topic? Does my beginning set up the reader to become an expert in this topic?”

Teach your writers strategies for revising their conclusions as well. A conclusion should not only sum up the important information but also leave readers with some big ideas. Your fifth graders will have had plenty of experience using information in order to persuade. You could teach your students to use those same muscles here to compose a concluding section that is meant to convince the world of something they strongly believe about the topic. Teach your writers that a powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples. For example, a student writing about monarch butterflies might write a concluding section with a thesis-like statement such as “Monarch butterflies are very important to plants.” Then the writer could go on to give examples of different types of plants that monarch butterflies help to pollinate. Another writer, writing about great white sharks, might begin with a thesis that is a call to action to readers, such as “Many kinds of sharks are endangered, and none more so than the great white. It is our responsibility to protect this amazing animal.”

Plan to teach your students craft moves that information writers make. Teach them to use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic. The Common Core State Standards suggest particular transition words at each grade level that will be excellent additions to your transition words strategy charts. Teach students to use transition words such as *another*, *for example*, *also*, *because*; as they become more sophisticated in their writing, teach them to use transitions such as *in contrast*, *especially*, *furthermore*, and *moreover*. Additionally, depending on the skill level of your students, you can teach them some strategies to write with greater description and verve. You can teach them to embed imagery, anecdotes, and/or small scenes to paint a picture in the reader’s mind.

You’ll want to make sure you have strong writing partnerships going as students draft and revise. In addition to holding each other accountable to the strategies you’ll be teaching, partners can support each other by playing the parts of students and teachers, taking turns teaching each other about their topic section by section and asking questions when the information isn’t clear or fully developed. Particularly because the topics will be ones of personal expertise, writers may tend to gloss over important background information. Partners can help each other to identify places that need more support and clarification. These places might include discussions of important concepts or places where difficult vocabulary is used. You’ll certainly want to create a strategy chart to support this partner work.

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

In teaching editing, tell children that their texts are going to teach important information to their readers and thus need to be clear and accurate. How can the reader learn about the topic if the writer's words are misspelled? In editing nonfiction books, teach children that the resources they used to get their information are great sources for correcting spelling of content-specific vocabulary. Remind them to bring forward all they know about conventions to this genre. In addition, you might also teach children another use of commas that shows up a lot in nonfiction—offsetting definitions of words that are defined in context. Fifth graders, according to the Common Core State Standards for language, should be able not only to use commas in the ways outlined in the fourth-grade unit but also to offset items in a series and to offset introductory information in a sentence, both of which are language structures often used in information writing. Particularly if you have supported your fifth graders' use of outside sources, teach them to use quotation marks accurately and to italicize or underline titles. Informational writing also provides a perfect opportunity to remind your writers about when and where to use paragraphs.

Then get ready to publish! You and your students should be tremendously proud of the independence and effort they have shown and of the breadth of their expertise and their prowess as writers. Celebrate these achievements by giving your writers a chance to teach others what they have learned. You might do this by hosting a grade-wide celebration or by sharing with another grade or with parents. You might encourage your writers to present their work orally. You might teach them to make presentation boards and captions and to practice presenting their work. Or you might encourage them to share visually. You could create a gallery of the finished books and invite others to visit. The Common Core State Standards recommend using technology tools as part of the publishing process. In tech-savvy classrooms, you might suggest that your writers publish electronically, perhaps in the form of PowerPoint or even as a blog or wiki. Sites such as blogspot.com and pbworks.com are free hosting platforms that will also serve to teach your students some online formatting skills. You can set your students' permissions on these sites to "private" to protect their privacy.

Additional Resources

Teachers, before embarking on this unit and deciding on the trajectory you will follow, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to better understand your students' level of competency with information writing. Level 8 of the continuum is aligned to the fifth-grade expectations according to the Common Core State Standards. Of course, your assessment will be ongoing, not just at the start of this unit but at many points along the way, and you will use what you learn through studying your students' work to inform how you progress through the work outlined in the unit. The teaching

points offered here are but one suggested way that the unit could go. The ultimate pathway will be based on observations you make of your students and assessments of their work. Here are some further insights about expectations during each part of this unit and how to plan to meet the needs of your individual learners.

In Part One of the unit, the goal is for students to generate a great number of notebook entries, first trying out topics of individual expertise and then eventually choosing a seed idea and rehearsing for a draft. Study your students' writing for evidence of strategy use and for volume. The goal is that students write productively and move from entry to entry with independence and use a variety of strategies, such as writing possible back-of-the-book blurbs or making lists of possible chapters for their books. You may have some writers who are reluctant to generate more than one or two possible topics. Support these students in reaching further for possible topic choices. If your students are slow to generate ideas, you may want to spend more time teaching strategies for choosing topics of expertise, in either small-group or whole-class sessions. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voiceovers, such as "By now, your hand should be flying down the page. . . . By now you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to shepherd them into writing more quickly and do some diagnostic work to understand what is slowing them down. Then you will turn your teaching toward helping your writers to choose a seed idea for their books. It is important that they have a variety of topics from which to choose. If students struggle to choose a topic, they may need one-on-one coaching during this time.

In the second part of the unit, you will be supporting students as they collect research and information to support their information books. In addition to choosing and possibly further focusing a topic, it is crucial at this point that your students have a strong sense of the subcategories that will fill the pages of their books. Toward the end of this part, your students should have not only a high volume of information but also a variety of information such as quotes, anecdotes, and statistics to support each subcategory. If your students' information seems weak, you may need to spend more time in this part teaching into note-taking and research before moving on to drafting.

In the third part of the unit, your students will be drafting their information books and may need a different level of support than what is outlined in this unit, depending on their competence with expository writing. If your students have more or less an internalized sense of how expository writing "goes," your progression through the unit will likely closely parallel what is outlined in the teaching points below. It is likely that your fifth graders will feel comfortable drafting fairly quickly and cycling back and forth between drafting and revising. Some of your students may benefit from additional support in small groups, for which you can call on teaching from other expository units. One such unit you could draw from is the fourth-grade personal and persuasive essay unit, which has a supportive progression through drafting.

The way you progress through the fourth part of this unit will very much depend on what you observe in your students' drafts. We recommend that you once again call on the Continuum for Information Writing as a tool with which to study drafts. Study

the work through the lenses of structure, elaboration, and craft, deciding what are the most crucial lessons within each of those categories to teach right away. During all parts of the unit, and particularly this one, you will want to ensure that your teaching supports students' independence. Your teaching will support revision, but your writers may move from drafting sections to revision and back to drafting. Study your students as they work for evidence that they are using a repertoire of strategies and that they are making choices about what to work on next.

As you head into the final part of this unit, take note of how you can support your students in being effective editors for themselves. Your students will likely be using high-level vocabulary, and some may need additional spelling support, perhaps in small groups. Notice common punctuation errors and teach into these, possibly through mid-workshop teaching points or minilessons as needed.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit—Informational Writers Try on Topics and Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye toward Greater Focus

- “Today I want to teach you that writers of information books study published writing, imagining the books they will create and paying close attention to ways that published authors entice readers to learn about a topic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers grow potential topic ideas in their notebooks, thinking, ‘If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what would I teach?’ ”
- “Today I want to teach you that some information writers write potential back-of-the-book blurbs, imagining how their books might go and why those books would interest readers.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers try on possible topics, choosing one that they feel they could teach really well.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for how their books could go. One way they do this is by creating a table of contents for their work, determining the chapters that could go in their books.”

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers gather the information that will fill up the pages of their books. Along the way, they make decisions about

how much and what kind of research to conduct. They collect these ideas in notebooks, taking care to collect a variety of information and information from more than one source.”

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers record not just facts but ideas. They can use thought prompts to say more about pieces of information that they collect.”

Part Three: Informational Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

- “Today I want to teach you that one way information writers rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner. They take note of places where they need to collect more information and make a plan to find out more about that particular subtopic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers often start by drafting the pages they are most fired up to write. As they draft, they keep in mind that they are setting up their readers to be experts.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. One way writers do this is by saying big or general ideas that the reader needs to know about the subtopic first, before getting to the smaller details.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions.”

Part Four: Informational Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

- “Information writers study mentor texts, taking note of all of the different kinds of information that writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Information writers often include explanations of important ideas, quotes from experts, facts, definitions, and other examples related to the subtopic.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers include not only information but some of their own thinking about the information. Information writers might return to their notebooks to grow ideas, drawing on thought prompts such as ‘This is important because . . .’ and ‘This is connected to . . .’ in order to say more.”

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers stay on the lookout for places where they might need to define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. Writers keep in mind common ways that information writers teach important words and decide which way will be best for each word.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers don’t just teach information with words; they teach information with illustrations, charts, diagrams, and other tools that might help the reader to understand. Writers can study mentor texts to get tips on how to create and revise these text features.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers zoom in to study the structure of each subsection. They make sure the information is in the right section, that is, that each detail fits with the subtopic. Writers also zoom in on paragraphs within each subsection, thinking about whether the information in each paragraph fits together. Another way that writers study the structure of each subsection is to make sure they start with a sentence or two that tell the readers what they will be learning about.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers revise the introduction of their information books, thinking about how they can set their readers up to be experts in the topic and how they can draw readers in right from the start.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers revise their concluding section, taking care to sum up the important information and also leave readers with some big ideas. A powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic.”

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

- “Today I want to teach you that information writers edit carefully, taking care to make sure spelling and punctuation are accurate so that readers can best learn the information. Writers might use published resources to make sure vocabulary words are spelled correctly.”
- “Today I want to teach you that information writers celebrate all of the hard work they have done by getting ready to share the books they have created with others.”

NOTES



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE

6



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Overview of the Year for Sixth-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Raising the Level of Personal Narrative Writing and Edging toward Memoir
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Realistic Fiction/Social Action Fiction
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Informational Writing: Nonfiction Books
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: The Personal and Persuasive Essay
JANUARY	UNIT 5: Historical Fiction
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Literary Essay: Analyzing Texts for Meaning, Craft, and Tone
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Writing Prompted Essays for the NYS ELA Exam
MAY	UNIT 8: Poetry
JUNE	UNIT 9: Independent Writing: Launching a Summer of Writing

The calendar starts with this overview of essential structures and assessment tools. Following in the calendar is a complete description of each unit of study that we hope will prepare you to teach these units with grace and expertise. We have differentiated units across grades in middle school, so that while sixth grade, for instance, launches with Raising the Level of Personal Narrative, seventh grade moves to memoir, and eighth grade begins collecting toward application essays. Of course, as you assess and get to know your readers, you might decide that you and your grade-level colleagues want to incorporate a writing unit from an alternate grade.

You'll notice the influence of the Common Core State Standards on these units of study—kids will need repeated practice and expert instruction to reach these standards, so we've thought carefully about the sequence of lessons and units. Nevertheless, you'll need to base your curricular decisions on your assessment of your students, and we encourage you to adapt and modify. We do encourage you to make these decisions as a grade, so that the grade above you can depend on the instruction and writing growth generated through your choices. And you may, of course, invent your own units. We'd love to hear your suggestions for variations! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to us at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The narrative for each unit should give you enough information to plan ahead. It will recommend some touchstone texts, for instance, and it will help you foresee and have a deep understanding of the probable arcs of your teaching. At the end of the unit, you'll also find a new toolkit of teaching points for the unit. The teaching points fit within an overarching path, within which are some "bends in the road," which are basically the smaller parts of the unit. The teaching points sometimes refer to lessons in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. These lessons may be helpful to you in your planning. Of course, you'll want to adapt the stories you tell and your discourse to your adolescent audience. We also think you may find Katherine Bomer's *Writing a Life*, Roy Peter Clark's *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer*, and Tom Romano's *Crafting Authentic Voice* useful as you teach middle school writers. This year we revised the teaching points to be sure they address a middle school audience, and we have several new units as well.

A couple of units may be helpful to content area teachers. The informational writing unit is easily taught in science and social studies as well as language arts. In addition, in seventh grade, there is a new unit on research-based argument essays, which is also easily adapted to science and social studies.

This curricular calendar suggests one possible way of imagining the writing curriculum for middle school classrooms across a school. You will see that we suggest month-long units of study and that the design of this suggested curriculum places a premium on supporting adolescents' growing abilities to write narrative and expository pieces. This curricular calendar takes into account the New York State ELA exam and the state's standards; if you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments. Remember that we present this calendar as one optional and suggested progression. We are aware that you and your colleagues may well make choices that are different than those we present here, and we welcome those choices.

This yearlong course of study is part of a K–8 spiraling curriculum in which students receive instruction in narrative, expository, informational, poetic, and procedural writing across their school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write "Small Moment stories" by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders do similar work at a more advanced level when they make and revise timelines asking, "What is the heart

of my story?" and elongate that section of the story. Fourth and fifth graders, however, may plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a "story mountain," with the goal of including two small moments (or scenes). They revise the pieces so that beginnings and ends relate to what the story is *really* about. Stories by middle school students expand more globally, making statements about what matters in the world. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable of writing expository texts, until they can write college essays with grace and power.

While the suggested curriculum varies according to grade level, supporting increasing sophistication and independence, it is also true that the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven years old, seventeen, or seventy for that matter. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, reimagining, and editing.

There is nothing haphazard in this sequence of units of study for writing. On the other hand, nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. Modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with colleagues on your grade level so that your teaching can benefit from the group's cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade-level meetings can be useful occasions for swapping minilessons, planning lessons in ways that inform your teaching, assessing students' work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

Writer's Notebooks and Independent Writing Lives

One of the crucial elements of the writing workshops described here is the writer's notebook. It's in the notebook that students will collect moments and experiment with writing craft. They'll rehearse stories, gather research, reflect, and make plans. You'll want to make sure that all your writers have notebooks that suit them as writers—some prefer plain, some like to decorate, some like narrow lines, some prefer wide, some prefer a digital form. You can provide composition books, which are around fifty cents when purchased in bulk at most supply stores, or students can choose, find, or make the notebook that most makes them want to write. We just want them to write—they should get to choose the surface/medium.

Your writers will really develop in stamina, fluency, and skill when you conceive of the notebook as the place where we write a lot, we write often, and we use our newest skills. That is, tell your students that the notebook in October should look profoundly different than it did in September. All the writing craft we work on in drafting and revising in September we incorporate on-the-run in our notebook entries in October, and from then on. So the notebook is the place where we are changing as a writer. It's also where we get the most volume of writing. Just as runners get better by running and piano players by practicing, writing becomes easier the more we do it. Every professional writer

says that it takes discipline, not just a natural gift, to write. So you'll want to decide how much you want your students to write outside of school and then help students to meet these goals. If students have to write even ten or fifteen minutes a night, that's between one and two pages of writing. If they do that five days a week, that's ten to twenty pages a week, which is hundreds of pages across the school year. The student who has been held to this standard will be a profoundly different writer than one who writes only in class.

You'll also want to decide what students write in the notebook. In class, they'll often be immersed in a genre study, such as memoir or realistic fiction or essay. Sometimes, they'll want to continue this work at home. Sometimes they'll want to experiment with craft lessons you've taught, for homework. All this continuation work is good. It's also important, though, that students conceive of themselves as independent writers and decide what kind of writing they want to do in their notebooks—and then do a lot of it. Encourage your students to continue writing anecdotes, vignettes from their lives, all year, so that they keep learning how to use writing to make sense of their lives and get lots of practice in telling their own stories with purpose, craft, and power. You may find that some of your writers really want to experiment with fiction as well. You'll have secret graphic novelists, fantasy writers, gossip girls, narrative poets, and so on. Others will want to write nonfiction, including articles and books. If you do decide to open up the genre choices for their independent writing homework, you'll often get lots of writing volume. Here's the thing—you also have to make some time in the curriculum for kids to come out of their notebooks and publish some of this independent writing. When writers know that they'll be able to publish some pages of their graphic novel (or the whole novel across the year), or scenes from their fantasy story, or a series of small books that are ghost stories, they write more, and they hold themselves to higher levels of craft.

We do recommend, therefore, that you find some time to help students work on independent writing for homework. Teach some lessons on “going on” as a writer and on “pursuing the writing you're passionate about.” Show them how to collaborate if they wish and how to find mentor texts to raise their craft up. Give some time in class toward growing as an independent writer, and you'll find that your students have reasons to incorporate the craft and structure lessons they're learning in their genre studies. Then make some publishing opportunities, a few times a year. You can either publish all at the same time, or you can have a rotating schedule and a publishing wall that students are in charge of. Hold your kids to high standards. Have your poets create anthologies, themed chapbooks, or poetic novels. Have your graphic novelists make versions of books that already exist as well as originals. Have your fiction writers create series. Encourage them to write a lot; instill a sense that their independent writing lives matter.

You may find Colleen Cruz's *Independent Writing* helpful as you plan independent writing as a strand of the curriculum. You may also want to meet with colleagues and decide on how much time you can protect for independent writing, how many publishing cycles you might offer, and what publishing celebrations you can organize. You'll get volume, engagement, independence, and trust from your adolescents.

Assessment

Who was it who said, “We inspect what we respect”? It will be important for you to assess your students’ growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. As part of this, we encourage you to start off the year by giving students Donald Bear’s spelling inventory; we describe this in the section below on conventions of written language. We also recommend you use the assessment tool that TCRWP has developed and piloted to track student growth in narrative writing, argument writing, and informational writing. These tools continues to be a work in progress. The newest versions are available on the TCRWP website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter the instrument to fit your purposes. We especially recognize that it would be helpful to add more levels so that growth in writing can become more apparent, and you are invited to work with your colleagues to do so—and to share what you create with our organization! Whether or not you add your own levels, though, the tool will help you be accountable for supporting growth in writing. It especially clarifies the pathways along which developing writers travel as they become proficient. It allows you to identify where a student is in a sequence of writing development and to imagine realistic, doable next steps for each student. This will make your conferring much more valuable and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

That said, be aware that there are instances where we have seen the assessment tool make teaching *less* responsive to writers’ intentions. If when using the tool, you approach a student in the midst of writing and you bypass listening and responding to the student, looking only at the draft and using only the narrative continuum as your resource, then the continuum will have made your teaching worse, not better. Conferring always needs to begin with a teacher pulling alongside a writer and asking, “What are you working on as a writer?” and “What are you trying to do?” and “What are you planning to do next?” Always, the teacher needs to help the writer reach toward his or her intentions. When we draw on all we know, not only about good writing but also about how narrative or non-narrative writers tend to develop, the assessment tool can be a resource.

It is absolutely crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of your year, or even arrive already drafted in the spring of the prior year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers, especially from their grade school experience. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture and compare the data representing what students can do at the very start of the year with what emerges after a few months of working with you, you will be in a good position to show parents and others all the ways in which students have grown as writers over the course of the year. In autumn parent-teacher conferences, you’ll want to bring the writing a student did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing the student did just before the conference. To do this, of course, it is crucial that you capture the “before” picture for comparison to the “after.” Adolescents strongly benefit from this type of reflection and self-evaluation of growth.

Your students may bring a portfolio with them to the grade, or you may want to give a quick on-demand task in narrative writing so that you can see their independent writing levels. When you look over students' work, take note of whether they have been taught and are using rudimentary concepts. For example, look for evidence that students are writing *focused* narratives. You will want to see if they are writing structured pieces (for now this will usually mean chronological). Can these pieces be described as stories? That is, does the main character (the writer, in this instance) proceed through a plotline of actions and reactions? Are students *storytelling* rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue and details? Writing with consistent end punctuation? Developing their characters? Angling the story to highlight their focal point? Do they seem to care not only about *what* they write but also about *how* they write it?

From the beginning of the year, a system that will be helpful to set up is a folder for each student containing their on-demand pieces, published pieces, and other samples of their writing from each unit of study. This system is important not only for ongoing assessment, developing a system where adolescents can reflect on their growth, and reporting to families at report card time but also because some units of study (such as the revision study in June) will require students to draw from their previous work.

Spelling, Mechanics, and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

We recommend that you consider having teachers take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically throughout the year, to assess students' growing control of spelling and language features. We recommend you do so by giving your whole class what amounts to a spelling inventory, asking them to spell each of twenty-five words. You may want to use the spelling inventory devised by Donald Bear, available on the TCRWP website. After giving the students the spelling inventory, you will need to count not the *words* correct but the *features* correct. This can take a few minutes for each student, but the result will be that you will be able to channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that your teaching is aligned to the main needs that you see across most of your class. It will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.

Meanwhile, you will also want to understand which conventions of written language your students use with automaticity when they write. The easiest way to do this is to look at the on-demand piece of writing. For middle school students, ask yourself:

- Which students do and do not generally control ending punctuation and lowercase/upercase letters and capitalization conventions?
- Which students do and do not tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which students do and do not include direct dialogue and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which students do and do not generally control their verb tenses?

- Which students do and do not generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?
- Which students do and do not control complex sentences and their internal punctuation?

If you have students who do not use end punctuation in a roughly correct manner, do not write in paragraphs, seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout their writing, or don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, then you will want to embed instruction in all of these things into your first two units of study.

If your students do all these things but are confusing tenses and subject-verb agreement, then teach this more advanced work and expect students' command of it to progress more slowly. In either case, you will want to be sure that your students are not boxed into simple sentence structures when they write. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: A *subject* did *something* (perhaps to *someone* or with *something*). "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These students may feel in their bones that their writing lacks something, and they might try to solve the problem by linking the simple sentences with conjunctions, but that won't necessarily solve the problem. For example, "I went to the park and I rode my bike and I got an ice cream. . . ." Teach these students that it helps to tell when, under what conditions, or with what thoughts in mind the *subject* did *something*. Then, sentences might look like this: "One sunny Saturday morning I went to the park. Because I wanted to have some fun, I rode my bike. After that, I got an ice cream. Then I came home." It can also help to tell *how* one did *something* and to tell about the receiver of the activity. "I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double scoop of chocolate that melted all over me."

For those of you wanting to understand syntactical complexity more, you may find it interesting to measure your students' syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) of the grammatical sentences that your students construct. Hunt calls these the "T-units" (Hunt 1965). For instance, if a student writes, "I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa," these are three independent T-units (or simple sentences) and each one is short, with just a few words. This is simple syntax. This would still be written in T-units of four or five words if the sentences were linked with the word *and* because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, the number of T-units would double if the sentence went like this: "When I went to the store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa." Nowhere in that sentence is a place where a period could have been added, so this is all one T-unit comprised of fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, the same sentence could contain yet more words per T-unit (and still be more complex): "Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, who was glad to see me." Some writers who struggle with punctuation show some complicated syntax. It is important for teachers to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer's growing ability to write com-

plex sentences (with many words per T-unit) should also be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who may use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences. For fourth graders, the average length of a T-unit is eight words. Be pleased if your students are writing most of their sentences with this many or more T-units.

Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after students have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—then you need to hold students accountable for using that skill as they draft, or at least see that they are attempting to use it. For example, during the editing portion of Unit One, you will probably need to teach all students to write in paragraph structure, teaching them some of the cues for narrative paragraphs such as when a new character enters, the time changes, or the setting changes. So then at the start of Unit Two, when students are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one student hasn't remembered that now he is the sort of writer who writes using paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach students that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time.

Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Writers who include lots of description will be more ready for clauses set off by commas. That is, students benefit most from instruction when it helps them to be more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation.

One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only “fix” students’ writing or tell them to be “correct,” then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and they may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they’re not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include *unfamiliarity*, *familiarity* and *experimentation*, *using and confusing*, and *mastery and control*.

In the third unit, teach students to recall these conventions as they turn to non-narrative writing. You may want to reteach ending punctuation, showing how it affects the tone of non-narrative writing. You will want to reteach paragraph structure in non-narrative writing as well. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always be teaching students to use all the conventions they have learned so they can be effective editors of their own and others’ writing and write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions.

When students are writing stories might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. They will benefit if they have

opportunities to pay attention to punctuation in reading, read-aloud, and shared reading. This fluency work, done in the guise of pursuing prosody, can help readers see more meaning in the text just because of the way it is read. If needed, you will want to form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns or between apostrophes for possessives and contractions.



UNIT FOUR

The Personal and Persuasive Essay

DECEMBER

Our students are not short on opinions: what to wear, which music is cool, what is simply “unfair.” Adolescents we have talked with sometimes feel, however, that they are unheard, that the adults in their lives do not take them seriously. They say they have a lot to offer their schools, their communities, our world, but to adult ears these opinions come off as just complaining. Part of this is due to the fact that sometimes their (or even other adults in our lives’) opinions are given more as a list of demands or a complaining rant than as thoughtful suggestions. The ability to not just have an opinion but support it clearly and persuasively is a powerful life skill. Entire industries are built around convincing the public that this politician is the one to trust, or that this car is the one to buy, or that this cause is worth fighting for.

The Common Core State Standards keep in tradition of your and our work, in making essay writing one of the prominent fixtures of your writing year. Sixth graders who have grown up in TCRWP writing workshops will have studied essay in the past through units like the personal and literary essay. They will have learned ways to develop claims, support them with details, and angle those details to clearly support their thesis. This unit is an extension of that work, supporting your writers in holding onto what they already know and then moving further into crafting clear and supported arguments. This unit combines essential work from personal essay and then, through a series of quick drafts and revisions, extends students’ thinking about essays to support them writing in more purposefully persuasive ways. This, then, gives our students flexibility in the kind of style and tone they want to use in future tasks, for future audiences.

Use Performance Assessments to Steer Your Teaching

You will want to begin the unit by setting aside one day for an on-demand opinion writing assessment. The TCRWP's Common Core aligned Opinion Writing Assessment Tool will be available to you through our website. You could say to your students: "Think of an idea or topic that you have strong feelings about. Write your opinion and give reasons that tell why you feel this way. Use everything you know about essay writing, letter writing, speeches, and reviews." When you tell your students about the task, don't set them up for it by quickly reviewing the characteristics of opinion writing or by otherwise trying to scaffold them to be successful with opinion writing. This is the pretest and your hope will be that your students see themselves making giant strides during the interval between this preliminary assessment and the end-of-the-unit culminating assessment. Of course, after your students do a quick on-demand opinion essay, you will want to study what they have done to adjust your plans for this unit accordingly.

Have a Sense of the Trajectory of Your Student's Work across the Entire Unit

The first part of this curricular calendar unit largely relies on the book, *Breathing Life into Essays*, although there are some new spins. The revisions especially align the unit to the Common Core, although *Breathing Life into Essays* is already closely aligned, and the revisions have also been made with an eye toward students being primed to write on-demand, structured, thesis-driven, flash-draft essays on standardized tests. The current iteration of the unit also sets the stage for quick-writing that students will be doing across the curriculum, including in their response to reading and during a later unit on literary essays.

The overarching plan is that the unit begins by supporting personal essays that are structured in a main claim with supportive examples or reasons, which is one of the most common ways in which essays are structured. Then the unit moves toward persuasive essays, which are structured similarly, save for the presence of a counter-argument. More specifically, the unit starts with students writing two flash-draft essays, done in conjunction with on-demand performance assessments, and then devotes a week and a half to helping students slow down and learn the moves that are required for writing essays well, doing this as they work on a single personal essay across a week and a half.

Next, about three weeks into the unit (when students have complete roughly four flash-draft personal essays), the focus on the unit will shift to persuasive essays, probably written around the same topic as the personal essay. The work with persuasive essays proceeds more quickly, with students writing and revising a small collection of

persuasive essays during the final week of the unit. All told, then, students write seven or eight essays within this month-long unit, building upon skills each time.

Launching the Unit

Even if your students have grown up in writing workshops, it is likely that you'll find when you review students' on-demand writing that their on-demand essays do not demonstrate what the students were taught about opinion writing during previous years' work with reviews, persuasive letters, and essays. If this is the case for your students, we recommend you start this unit by devoting a day to helping them remember the three or four most important aspects of this kind of writing that they should already know, and by then giving them the chance to spend one quick day working furiously to revise their on-demand essays (including scissoring them into paragraphs and adding transitions or rewriting them altogether). One good way to support this work is to, if possible, allow your students to have next to them an essay they wrote the previous year. This visual aide of what the writer already knows often helps knowledge come rushing back. Be sure you keep the originals and give them duplicate copies to work on in this way as you'll want to preserve the baseline data against which you can show them their growth across the month. Instead of waiting to teach these for the first time once students are deep within the unit, you may decide to remind writers now that they already know these tips and then see if, with just some reminders, they can demonstrate abilities to do that work. After revising their first essays, with lots of coaching from you but quickly—all in one day—give students a second on-demand opinion-writing assessment, this time reminding them before they start to work that they'll want to state a claim, to indent, to use transitions and topic sentences, and to write an introduction and conclusion. Reminding students to do these things will not mean that they do, in fact, do them. You and your students will learn a lot about their abilities in opinion writing when you then study each student's second on-demand draft as well as the original one. This will show you whether a student can, in fact, do this work and simply forgot about doing it at the start of the unit. Of course, that may not prove to be the case at all, which will be important for you to know.

By the end of Day Three, you will probably see that every student's work already shows dramatic improvement, which will then be a powerful way to start a unit. You can help students notice the amount of improvement there has been in their essays just from the first three days of the unit, and you can use this as a way to teach students that throughout the unit, they should expect their work to grow in leaps and bounds. That is, if students make dramatic progress between Day One and Day Three, you can teach them to expect this kind of progress from themselves, and remind them that they'll have another chance to write an on-demand opinion piece before long. Imagine how amazing their essays will be by three weeks from now if they have already improved so much!

Starting Work toward the Personal Essays That Students Will Draft and Revise across Almost Two Weeks: Essayists Grow Compelling Ideas in Writer's Notebooks

If this is your students' first experience in expository/essay writing, you probably will not have done the revision work previously described, although you will hopefully have still devoted a day to an on-demand assessment of students' opinion writing. Ask students to do this even if you know they will fail miserably because this will allow them (and you) to later look back and see the amount of progress that they have made over the course of the unit.

For students who are new to this kind of writing, once the on-demand writing activity is over, you will probably want to teach them that some people divide the world of texts into two categories: narrative and expository writing. You may give each of those kinds of writing multiple names so that the students understand that the writing they will be doing during this unit is also called opinion, or essay, writing. It is important for kids to grow up with a felt sense for the ways narrative and expository (essay/opinion/persuasive) writing are different from each other. They should be able to hear a piece of writing that sounds like this: "One day I woke up early, looked at my clock, and leaped out of bed. I wolfed down a quick bowl of Cheerios . . ." and say to themselves, "That's a narrative." And they should be able to hear a piece of writing that starts like this, "There are many kinds of cereals, and even many kinds of Cheerios. There are, for example, regular Cheerios, Honey Oat Cheerios . . ." and say to themselves, "That's expository." And writers should be able to list differences between the two kinds of writing. Narratives are organized by time, telling what happened first, then next, and next after that. Expository pieces are organized by subtopics, telling all about this category, then that one, and finally that one. Narratives are written so that a reader can experience something, living in the shoes of the character. Expository pieces are written to teach or to get a big idea across to readers. (Teachers, be careful that you use the domain-specific language correctly yourself, guarding against referring to the writing your students do in this unit as "stories." They will not be writing stories, and it is important that they and you are clear that there are different conventions for different genres of writing. Of course, all of this is very complicated because, in fact, essay writing almost always includes anecdotes, which are small stories.) Maybe here is where we add that according to the Common Core we need to bring what we know about narrative writing to help us write opinion essays.

If your students are proficient enough that they have been taught to read stories (both true stories and fiction) interpretively, aware that stories are not just about characters engaged in a plot but are also about ideas, and are accustomed to reading stories and thinking, "What ideas is this author wanting me to think about?" then you can help students realize that although there are differences between the two kinds of writing, there are also similarities too. Both pieces of writing are made from ideas and from stories. In narrative writing, the story comes forward, and in essay writing, the idea is forwarded. But a writer could take a topic of personal importance—say, the writer's

struggles to fit into his or her peer group—and could write either an essay or a narrative about that topic. Each of those pieces of writing could actually convey the same idea and contain the same story, but in the narrative, the story would be 95% of the text; in the essay, that one story would probably be closer to 20% of the text (although it could be a lot more) and there would probably be other stories as well. Students could be shown that many topics could be fertile ground for a personal essay or a personal narrative. For example, the first day of school this year could be a perfect subject for a story, or an essay. Getting one's hair cut—a perfect subject for a story, or an essay. Trick-or-treating, watching cartoons last Saturday morning, the day the moving truck came—these could all be grist for the narrative mill, or the essay mill.

This can be the drumroll for the portion of the unit in which you support writers to work with great investment for two weeks on one single personal essay. This is the portion of the unit that relies on the minilessons in *Breathing Life into Essays*. The book, however, allows this work to stretch across three weeks, and teachers relying on the book have often extended that time. In the year ahead, we are suggesting that instead of extending the time, you consolidate it. To do this consolidation, start by deciding that you will be able to devote only the first three days (and evenings and the weekend, hopefully) to helping your students experience what it means to be the sorts of people who grow compelling, provocative ideas through using their writer's notebooks. You can draw on the first few sessions in *Breathing Life into Essays* or on this write-up to help you do this teaching.

In *Breathing Life into Essays*, the minilessons encourage students to take a few days to roam about through their lives and their thinking, generating lots of entries (often three or four in one day's writing workshop) about a whole host of topics. Then, at the end of the week, students zoom in on one sentence-long idea, which becomes their thesis statement for an essay. In that version of this unit, all the early entry writing ends up being valuable only as a way for writers to practice living as the kind of people who grow compelling ideas in writer's notebooks because all that a given writer takes from the generating-entry phase of the unit is a sentence or two.

Recently, when helping a group of teachers work through this unit themselves, Calkins found that if students begin the unit with a general sense of the terrain they want to mine in their personal essays and then use all the generating-entry strategies that will be mentioned within this write-up to mine that one preselected area, the entry-writing phase allows writers to generate insights and anecdotes that stand a chance of becoming part of the essay they eventually write. It is not all that hard for students to recognize the big topics of their lives: tensions between the student and a sibling, the months spent at summer camp, the joy and pressure of soccer, the lure of a particular video game.

You will probably want to take a day to teach students a strategy that often helps them find the areas in their lives that matter. This strategy is equally helpful once students have found the terrain in their lives that matters and found an earlier entry in their writer's notebook in which they wrote about that terrain. Either way, you can show students that it is powerful to reread their entries and their published narratives, asking, "What bigger idea might this entry be about?" In your minilesson, for example,

you might reread an entry of your own writing. Perhaps at first you just reread it and mutter, “I don’t see an idea here—it is just about (whatever).” Then show students that instead of just flicking the page of your notebook to another entry, hoping that the next one has ideas right on the surface, you instead do some work to generate ideas. The work is really writing-to-learn or free-writing. To teach students how to do this, after looking somewhat blankly at an entry you have written, pick up your pen and shrug as if you are totally unsure if this is going to yield something, because as you start writing, you have nothing in mind to say. Then reread the entry, muttering it to yourself, and when you come to the end, write, “The thought I have about this is . . .” and then keep writing, unsure what the thought is that you have about the entry. Show students that thoughts surface as you keep your pen moving. You may be writing “off from” the entry, writing a paragraph at the end of the entry, or you may be jotting notes in the margins of your entry, annotating it. Either way, this is fast note-taking writing where the aim is not good writing; instead the goal is simply to find the terrain and the insights that can become an umbrella idea or topic for your upcoming work on a personal essay. You may, for example, reread an entry you wrote about the time when you really, really wanted a bike (after all, everyone else had one) and finally got one. In the margin of this entry, you might write “not having as much money as my friends” and “peer pressure” and “gifts that I have really liked” and “adventures on my bike.” You’ll want to show students that one of their topics or global ideas matters to you, and so you settle upon that as the area in which you’ll be writing your essays during the upcoming unit. For example, you may circle “adventure” to jot notes about that topic. By the end of this one day—it may be your fourth day in the essay unit—your students should all have decided upon the terrain they’ll explore in their personal and persuasive essays. This is a far cry from having settled upon their thesis statement. You’ll want the thesis to emerge after another two days (and evenings) exploring this chosen terrain.

The first three sessions of *Breathing Life into Essays* can help you teach writers strategies for generating thoughtful entries about their chosen topic. One of these minilessons reminds writers that just as earlier in the year, when they were writing *personal narrative*, they generated content for their writing by jotting down a person who mattered to them and then listing *small moments* they spent with that person. The minilesson then suggests that writers become accustomed to taking strategies they have used in other contexts and tweaking them to fit onto whatever new work they are doing. In the essay unit, writers could now record the big terrain in which they’re writing, and they could jot *big ideas* they have about that terrain. You could illustrate this by taking our topic—say it is “adventures with my bike”—and jotting big ideas you have about that topic: a new bike can let a kid get away from home, growing up and leaving home, fitting in with a pack of kids, parents controlling their kids. Of course, essays contain embedded stories, and so you could also show students that you can take any one of the ideas that you are growing about the topic and jot Small Moment stories to that idea. That is, after circling the jotted note “a new bike can let a kid get away from home” you could list “the time when my parents thought I’d been kidnapped because I didn’t come home for supper,” “the time I snuck out of the house to get to D’s house . . .” Your goal is not

just to channel students to write about ideas, it is also to help them move fluidly back and forth between collecting small moments that demonstrate ideas and elaborating on those ideas.

If a student's grandmother has been growing elderly before her eyes, she might jot "Nana" and then list big ideas she has about her: "It is hard to watch the strongest person in your life become needy, my grandmother is teaching me that few things matter more than family ties . . ." After listing ideas in such a manner, writers can either shift to collecting Small Moment stories related to one of those ideas or they can take one of those ideas and generate new thinking around it.

Of course, if you teach a particular strategy for generating essay entries, this doesn't mean the entire class needs to use the strategy you have just taught! Students by now should be accustomed to selecting the strategy that works best for them on any given occasion, drawing on their growing repertoire. That is, the strategy you introduce in a minilesson on a particular day must not be that day's assignment for all students.

Another strategy that might appeal to some writers is that of taking an object related to the terrain (a backpack, say, for a writer writing about homework) and jotting ideas the writer has about that object. If you demonstrate this strategy, show writers they can again write before they have an idea of what they will say, using free-writing to generate ideas, and show them they can again use phrases such as "The thought I have about this is . . ." or "This makes me realize . . ." For the student who has decided to write about homework and who focuses on his knapsack, the writer might write that he is overwhelmed by the weight of his backpack. His writing might take a turn and address the way that homework is now overwhelming his life. This then can lead to yet more related thoughts in a stream-of-consciousness sort of way. Once a writer gets started writing about an idea, she needs to take that idea and roll it out in her mind and on the page. The goal, for now, is not especially wonderful writing—it's writing-to-learn, it's yabbering on the paper.

The important thing to emphasize that during this phase of the writing process, when students are writing entries to grow ideas, is that their entries will not look like miniature essays. That is, the student writing about the weight of his backpack will not have written one paragraph about the books that are in it, one about the papers that are in it, and one about whatever else is in there. Instead, this writer may have rambled from writing about the weight of the backpack to remembering olden days when life was easier, to jotting topics about free time. During this phase of the unit, your emphasis will instead be on teaching writers to free-write in their notebooks. The goal is to help kids realize the value of writing at length without a preconceived content, trusting that ideas will surface as they go along. You will be helping them write ideas that are original, provocative, interesting, fresh, and insightful. You will also help them reach for the precise words to capture their thoughts and, for your most advanced students, to use metaphors for thoughts that don't easily fit into ordinary words. If some students seem to struggle to grasp what it means to write about ideas, not facts, the teaching share in Session III can help you clarify the difference between a fact and an idea.

As students write entries in which they attempt to grow ideas around their chosen topic, you'll want to watch the problems they encounter and be ready to help them

with those problems. You are apt to find that students struggle to write at any length when they are writing about their ideas. A student writes, “I feel like homework is taking over all my free time. I don’t have time to play outside any more. I miss the evenings when I used to play basketball in the park.” But then, the writer stops. What else is there to say? It’s far easier to write at length when one is chronicling what one did first, next, next, next . . . but when one is writing what one thinks, one needs to have the thought in order to record it, and the well of thoughts on any one topic can go dry. For writers who struggle to elaborate when they are writing about ideas, it will help if you are ready to give them tools to push past their first thoughts. Many teachers have found it incredibly helpful to teach these students to use thought prompts to prime the pump of their ideas. Once a student records an idea, the student can use a “thought prompt” to get himself or herself saying more. Earlier in this write-up, we mentioned the power of the sentence starter, “The thought I have about this is . . .” It is equally powerful to equip students with follow-up sentence starters, such as, “In other words . . .” or “That is . . .” or “The surprising thing about this is . . .” or “This makes me realize . . .” or “To add on . . .” You’ll notice students will extend their first ideas and use writing as a way of thinking. In *Breathing Life into Essays* Session IV, you’ll find a list of these thought prompts (set within a minilesson), which you can adapt to teach writers to use these prompts.

The trick is to push students to *truly* develop their thinking on the page. It is helpful to tell students that thought prompts are not just ways to keep them putting words on the page, but that they are prompts to actually push writers to *think new things*. We have found that in our minilessons it helps if we demonstrate explicitly how these thought prompts ask us to think. And so we might position ourselves as “the thinkers,” and the students as “the prompters.” For example, if you started with an idea like “My Xbox let me invite people over for a reason” you’d begin by thinking aloud whatever thoughts you already had about that idea. “My Xbox let me invite people over for a reason. It gave me something to talk about with people, and I could say, ‘Hey, why don’t you come over and play?’” The trick here is that whenever you get stuck and can’t think of anything else to say, then another person almost hands you a thought prompt, a sentence starter such as, “In other words . . .” You repeat that sentence starter and keep talking (about the original idea). “My Xbox let me invite people over for a reason. It gave me something to talk about with people, and I could say, ‘Hey, why don’t you come over and play?’ In other words, getting an Xbox paved the way to making friends.” If you again pause, as if your well of thoughts is temporarily dry, someone might help you prime your thinking with another thought prompt: “The surprising thing about this is . . .” The Common Core discusses linking categories using words or phrases.

You can set up writers to work with partners, where one partner is “the thinker” and one is “the prompter,” and have them mimic your demonstration. Of course, the students will need to go on to do this work on their own in their notebooks, and they will need to be their own “prompter,” taking thought prompts (or sentence starters) from a list and using them to keep themselves thinking and writing. All of this work will help later in the unit when you ask kids to elaborate their thinking as they draft.

Remember, this work on elaborating and all the strategies for generating thinking will all be shoehorned into just a very small number of days early in the unit. This means that the work on thought prompts may, for example, end up as small-group work for those students needing this help. And it means that you will probably only teach one or, at the most, two strategies for generating ideas and anecdotes. Your students, of course, can also think of their own wonderful ways to collect ideas and anecdotes.

Teach Writers to Choose an Idea, to Write It as a Thesis, and to Build the Structure for the Essay

By the fourth or fifth day of this unit, you'll want to teach kids to choose a seed idea, also known in this instance as a thesis statement, and to plan their essay, designing their infrastructure. This is Common Core-aligned work, as your writers will "create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose." The bulk of your work at this stage is to coach students into selecting a structure that will work for their thesis. You'll try to do that work within a day, but it will no doubt spill beyond that time. (Just to help you orient yourself, after students draft and revise their thesis statements, they'll collect ingredients to combine into essays, devoting a day or so to each of the kinds of things that they'll probably write. By Day Nine or so, you'll remind writers about endings, beginnings, and transitional phrases, and help them select their most powerful material to tack together into a draft.)

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. For now, young essayists will select a seed idea. You can refer to Session VI in *Breathing Life into Essays* for support in this. Encourage students to select an idea that seems especially important, fresh, and worth developing. The lesson in Session VIII teaches students how to revise possible thesis statements with the purpose of matching more specifically what the writer wants to say in the essay. Students will reread all they have written and box out a claim, an idea. You may suggest they rewrite this claim six or eight times, trying to consolidate it, to clarify it. To do this, however, they also need to be imagining a plan for the essay as a whole, because the plan for the essay often influences the claim. To help students plan the essay, you can remind them that when they wrote narratives, they used timelines, story mountains, or minibooks to plan out the sequence of what they would write. When writing essays, it is equally important to plan out the sequence, but this time planning the sequence will involve categories or sections or reasons. Once students have selected and articulated an idea ("Getting an Xbox helped me to make friends." for example), you will want to teach them to think about the categories they'll include in their essays.

The most accessible and common way to do this is for the writer to make a claim ("Getting a bike helped me grow up") and then list reasons for that claim, with each reason as a bullet, a topic sentence for another portion of the essay. When teaching writers to write in this way, it works best if you encourage writers to restate the claim over and over, each time adding the transitional word *because* followed by a reason:

Getting an Xbox helped me to make friends because it gave me a way to start conversations.

Getting an Xbox helped me to make friends because it allowed me to see myself as “one of the gang.”

Getting an Xbox helped me to make friends because it gave me confidence, since I was now good at something.

Repeating the stem of the thesis over and over results in a list that is full of redundancy, but this can eventually be eliminated: “Getting an Xbox helped me to make friends because it gave me topics to start conversations, to see myself as one of the gang, and because it gave me confidence.” Don’t fret if writers don’t have three bullets; two is just as good.

You will decide if you want to teach the whole class or a subset of the class another possible way to organize an essay. The most popular alternative in TCRWP workshop classrooms during recent years has been a structure in which the writer writes his or her first thought on a subject, and then his or her later thought on the subject, creating an essay that is organized as a journey of thought. There are a few templates that writers have adopted and adapted when working within this frame. Try using a template like this one, for example, to capture your ideas about getting a bike, or your mother, or summers, or going to bed, or anything else: “I used to think . . . but now I think . . .” “I used to think that playing with toy guns was awesome, but now I think it’s scary.” “I used to think that going to bed was boring, but now it is heavenly.” “I used to think that a dog was just a pet, but now I realize that a dog can be part of the family.” “I used to think that a bike was just a toy, but now I realize it’s part of growing up.” There are, of course, adaptations on that template. “If you have never . . . you probably think it is . . . but after you . . . you realize it is . . .” “When I started to write about . . . I wanted to say . . . but after thinking more deeply about it, I realize what I really want to say is . . .”

Another way to help writers write an essay that deals with multiple angles on one idea (which correlates to Level 4 work in Webb’s “depth of knowledge”) is to suggest that writers can build the essay around the idea, “My thoughts about _____ are complicated.” This essay, then, can proceed to say, “On the one hand, I think . . .” and “On the other hand, I think . . .” That will work best if the two sides of the idea are parallel to each other.

My thoughts about video games are complicated.

- On the one hand, they distract me from other work.
- On the other hand, they help me make friends.

During this planning day, your students will each craft a main idea (a claim or a thesis) and several parallel supporting ideas. Teachers sometimes refer to the main idea and supporting statements as “boxes-and-bullets.”

If essay writing is new for students, we have found it helps if students take their thesis and record it on the outside of a folder, then make smaller internal folders for each of their bullets (topic sentences) and proceed to collect a small pile of papers within each folder. After a few days of collecting and revising the small pile, a student will spread out the contents of each small folder, select the best material for that body paragraph, and rewrite the selected material into that body paragraph. This is described in Session IX of *Breathing Life into Essays*, from the *Units of Study* series. This work can be done in a fashion that detours around the folders, with writers essentially developing each of their “bullets” on a different sheet of paper. The main problem with bypassing the folders is that such a plan generally means that writers postpone revision until they are revising large swatches of text, which often leads them to do little revision, and therefore does not ratchet up their skills as much as they otherwise could.

The Common Core State Standards discuss this when advising that you introduce a topic and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer’s purpose.

Gathering Material for an Essay, Then Selecting the Most Compelling and Appropriate Material and Constructing a Draft

When it is time to teach students to collect materials to support their topic sentences, you will probably want to keep showing them that they can first collect microstories that illustrate their ideas. As part of this instruction, you’ll want to also teach students to angle these stories so they highlight and support the idea the writer wants to advance, and to learn to “unpack” those stories, just as a teacher debriefs after a demonstration in a minilesson. *Breathing Life into Essays* Sessions IX and X are minilessons that will help you teach this. After teaching students that writers sometimes collect angled stories, students will have a lot of opportunities to practice this technique and become proficient at it because they will collect angled stories within each of their folders, substantiating each of their topic sentences. They also, of course, may revise these to bring out the point they want to make. Keep in mind that during one day of a writing workshop, a student will need to collect (and ideally revise) at least three angled stories, filing these in the appropriate folders. It would most certainly not be considered a day’s work for a student to write one tiny anecdote supporting one of the student’s three topic sentences! Furthermore, if students take a day to write an anecdote illustrating one of their topic sentences, chances are good that the narrative will overwhelm the rest of the essay. Generally, within essays, writers write with tight, small anecdotes.

Essayists “unpack” their microstories by adding a sentence or two after the story in which they discuss how the story illustrates the main idea. A little boy wrote about how glad he was that his father taught him skating tricks. Then he wrote a story about watching his father do a 360-degree turn and then trying it himself. The boy’s story ended, “I came to in the boys’ bathroom with blood on my head.” The story was totally

transformed when this writer added the line, “I’m still thinking about how glad I was my father had taught me to do the 360-degree turns.”

Writers can also collect lists, or quotes, or statistics, or other students’ stories to support their topic sentences. Many teachers use Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech as a model text for these lists. This is specifically described in Session XI of *Breathing Life into Essays*. Although you will probably not have time to teach a full mini-lesson on this, in a small group or during a mid-workshop teaching point, you might show students how statistics, observations, citations, quotations, and so forth can enrich their work. When you coach students, you will want to help them select *compelling* evidence from the material they collect in these folders and also help them ensure that the evidence closely supports their claim. Eventually, you will need to teach writers to sort through the materials in each folder, writing well-structured paragraphs.

Once writers have selected the most powerful and pertinent support material for each of their topic sentences, they staple or tape or recopy this information into a paragraph or two that supports each topic sentence and in this manner construct the rough draft of an essay. If your students are especially on target and you want to add some complications to the unit, you can teach them that writers look over our material to decide what we have and figure out the best way to use that to good effect. For example, if a writer has a single story that makes her point in an especially powerful way, she may decide to let the essay revolve mostly around that one story. She will then write (or rewrite) the story to be sure it carries the idea and then mine that one story for insights and big ideas. That is, if your students are proficient enough that you want them to understand the breath and flexibility of essays, and if they are not under any compulsion to create thesis-driven five-paragraph essays, then you’ll probably want to show them that as they draft and revise their essays, they make decisions based on the material that they have on hand. But if you want to help writers produce competent, well-structured essays quickly, you may decide to not introduce the full range of options and choices just yet.

Persuasive (or Opinion) Essay

When students are writing what we call “personal essays,” for the most part they are writing around ideas that no one can really argue with. Because the source of most material for this essay comes from the writer’s experience, a classmate or reader cannot really say “That’s not true.” In other words, if I write an essay driven by a thesis that says, “Being an only child can be lonely,” and I support that idea with stories of my own loneliness, I remove the possibility for argument, as it would be bizarre for someone to tell me my experience is mistaken.

This is important, because as you are teaching your students the root moves of essay writing you want to make sure that they are focused primarily on the writing work—the logical progression of support for a thesis—rather than the art of argument. However, once you have reached a point where the foundations of essay are in place, it is important that you then carry the work forward into argument-driven essays that

strive to not only name your own experience and ideas but that also try to convince the reader that something is true, and to write to try to make a real difference in the world.

The Founding Fathers changed the course of history by creating a country based on an idea: an idea of a nation where sound argument, not bloodlines or brute force, would rule the day. In this country, therefore, the power to speak one's mind, to speak it clearly and persuasively, is more than a right: it is a necessity. Every day, we are called upon to explain ourselves and our beliefs—to noisy neighbors, to intransigent insurance companies, to education politicians. We defend against false accusations, we atone for mistakes, we plea for change, we stand up for what's right. Or, we don't do these things and our lives are a little darker, a little more guilt-ridden, a little lonelier. The art of articulation, of making ourselves understood, takes practice. One of the best ways to practice speaking up is by speaking out in writing. Students need opportunities to craft logical, fluent arguments that hit home. This part offers them chances to speak out to make a difference in their lives. Students are invited to write persuasive arguments for particular audiences and to make those arguments as strong as possible. This is mentioned in the speaking and listening standards of the Common Core.

To begin this work, you might want to gather your students in the meeting area, refocusing their attention on this slightly new part and building their enthusiasm for the new work ahead. You might tell your class that because they have done such a stellar job of writing personal essays, they are ready now to learn something that every citizen of the world must learn—the power of argument. You might say, “Today we are going to begin to be very brave. Yesterday we were content to write essays where we simply told the world what we thought or how we felt. You have become writers of ideas, and you have learned to find stories that back up your ideas. Today we are going to learn how to find the things that we not only believe in ourselves but that we think other people should believe, too. Things that other people—people in this class even—might disagree with. This takes bravery, and I know that you are all very brave indeed.”

You might then want to show your students that when you look at some of the ideas you had during the personal essay unit, ideas like “Being an only child is difficult,” that you see how no one could really argue about that issue because it is so personal to you. You can model for them how you begin to collect more persuasive ideas by asking yourself some questions, such as, “How could the world change for the better?” or “Is there anything that people do that I think is wrong or unfair?” or “Some people think . . . but I think. . . .” Your students will see your ideas transform from clear but personal statements into bold persuasive mottos, like “People should stop putting only children down,” or “Parents of only children should make sure that their kids are involved in lots of groups” or “Some people think that being an only child is bad for you, but I think that it is the best way to grow up, even if it is hard sometimes.” You will want to encourage your students to branch off into other directions from their original idea as well, using these persuasive questions to help them generate a long list of things they wish they could change in the world.

Before long notebook pages will be spilling over with strong opinions. “No one should be mean to people,” “Cats are better than dogs,” “Some people think video games are bad for you but I think they can be good, too.” Inevitably as your students

share these ideas with the class you will hear grumbles of disagreement. You might even be surprised at the vehemence with which your students voice their disagreement. “No, they are not!” and “That’s not true!” will be common refrains, and when you hear these words, you can quiet your class and let them know that they have arrived in the land of argument.

Once this buzz is in the air, you will most likely want to fuel the fire with talk. As students have ideas they now see as arguments to be fought for, you may want to teach them that one way writers prepare to argue their point is to make sure they have thought carefully about both the reasons they think they are right as well as the reasons other people may disagree with them. This means that you will be teaching your students to debate as a way to begin planning their essays. For the first part of the day, then, you will want to teach your students that sometimes a good writing partner is your fiercest critic. As your writers propose their ideas, their writing partners can take the stance of their opponent in a debate. You can model this for your class, asking a strongly verbal student or colleague to play the role of opponent. “People should stop putting only children down,” you might begin, to which your writing partner will respond immediately, “Why do you say that?” “Well, because people say that only children are selfish, but that isn’t always true.” You have just drafted one bullet in your plan, but your writing partner is not satisfied. “Well, but sometimes they are.” Now you will have to think hard about what your response will be. “*That may be true,*” you might say, “*but it’s not like calling only children selfish helps them. So I guess what I am saying is you shouldn’t put them down because it doesn’t help them and only hurts them.*”

Set up your students for debate with a strong demonstration and send them off. You will, of course, need to coach some of your more reticent students. Many students will back down at the first sign of disagreement, and you will need to pump them up to assert their ideas. Remind them that the point of debate is to come up with new and better ideas, and that when we debate we are not afraid to be wrong, or to change our thinking, but we must push forth our ideas.

After your students have debated their ideas with their writing partners, send them off immediately to draft flash essays. You may want to quickly help them see how their essays may go. For many students the familiar boxes-and-bullets will still be the best form of an essay for their argument, and the debate has simply helped them to make their reasoning more persuasive. For other students, however, it may make more sense for their essays to directly argue with those who may disagree, by writing three- to four-paragraph essays that follow a structure as follows:

Thesis

- I think . . .
- You may think . . . but . . .

As students begin to draft, you will want to largely reinforce what you taught them during the personal essay unit. You will also want to teach your students to be especially

careful when choosing their language, because much of persuasion rests not so much on what we say as in how we say it. Make sure that your students know that they should be extra sure to choose words that mean exactly what they are trying to say, and that they are careful not to either exaggerate or underwhelm their ideas. Students can always use their writing partners to help find the words they are searching for. Acting out what you are trying to say persuasively can help students feel their conviction, and from this conviction comes their voice.

This part in the essay unit is about writing drafts fast and furious, tucking in strategies as we go, so many teachers choose to have their students write a few of these flash-drafts before moving on to revision. This has made essay writing an energetic and productive time of the year, and many of us feel that this is the right direction to go. If your students are writing flash-drafts each day, then you will want to help them make each draft better than the one before. Brief, vivid anecdotes that bear on the issue will help make their essays alive, full of voice, and very convincing. You could remind your class that in the personal essay unit they learned to write other people's stories as well as their own, and that in persuasive writing these stories become great backup for our own thinking. Mentor texts provide inspiration for other types of material kids will want to collect. For example, many well-written pieces of persuasive writing rely on an image that functions as a central metaphor. You could also teach the children that nothing is more persuasive than facts. Writers who want to hit home use precise information to do so, and this could mean that, as part of this unit, a teacher will teach students how to use the Internet to search for precise evidence such as statistics or a quotation to illustrate a topic sentence. Your decision will depend on several factors, including time and access to technology.

Any of these strategies can help your students lift the level of their writing as they flash-draft essays, or you can use them as revision strategies later on. Some may work as whole-class lessons, while others can serve as your small-group instruction or conference work.

After a few days of drafting many essays, you will most likely see your students producing well-structured, well backed-up, somewhat persuasive essays. When you teach them to revise one or two of their essays for publication, then, you might want to focus on the somewhat persuasive part, helping them to make their essays as persuasive as possible. You may gather your students around you again, congratulating them on the work they have done so far, and then saying something like, "Writers, you are at a critical point in your writing. You have good arguments about great ideas. The problem is that a *good* argument may not win the debate. We need *great* arguments. And the way to make our arguments great is to make sure there are no holes in them." Certainly here you could weave a connection to the times students have argued with their parents over a late night or new toy, pointing out that to convince a parent to bend, your argument needs to be air tight, not just good enough.

Sending your writers back to their writing partners is a good way to help them find any counter-arguments that need addressing in their essays. They can read their essays to their writing partners. and their writing partners will take the stance once again as the opponent to their argument, looking for places to disagree. If the essayist reads,

“One reason why cats are better than dogs is that cats don’t need to be taken on long walks in the cold,” our writing partner will jump in with, “Yeah, but you have to change their litter box and that is totally gross.” We will want to teach our writers to address this counter-argument using phrases like, “While some people argue . . . in fact . . .” or “Some people think . . . but I think . . .” For example, our writer will revise his essay by adding in, “Some people think that cleaning out the litter box is worse than taking dogs out for walks, but I think that walking dogs in the winter or in the rain is worse because it lasts for much longer.” By writing directly to the possible disagreements, our writers will strengthen their arguments and their essay writing.

Along the way you will want to highlight a few revision goals. Most important, teach students that writers reread and revise, taking our readers into account. Teach them that writers pretend to be our own readers. We step outside of ourselves, pick up the text as if we have never seen it before, and we read it. We notice the sections that are convincing, and those that make us flick the paper away. We notice where the draft loses energy, and where it makes the reader feel skeptical. Of course, revision is another time for studying mentor texts. Teach students to go back to their pieces and try out the kinds of rhetorical gestures that their mentors have made, including the use of purposeful repetition (as in Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I have a dream” speech) and the use of “zingers” that drive home the point in a quotable way. If your students have done outside research, you can teach them to paraphrase that information here, being sure to show them how to either cite their source inside of the text or as a separate works cited page.

Many teachers have chosen to make this publication a bigger deal than other essay celebrations: leaning on the persuasive elements and holding debates, filming essays as speeches, or having students create podcasts around their work. If we have been pushing our students to write as persuasively as possible, we will also want to help them try to make a difference in the world by making sure their writing gets into the hands of people who could be changed by it. However you celebrate, be sure to remind your students of all they have learned in this weighty unit. They will have, in their rigor and stamina, found that their essay writing muscles have developed exponentially.

Editing and Grammar Support Writing Workshop

Now that your year is well underway, it is a good time to raise the bar on your students’ grammar expectations. By now in your year you should have a sense of the strands of conventions work your students are undertaking. Essay is a great opportunity to look to tense, if that is work you have been developing in your room. Noticing how in anecdotes that take place in the past, verbs should be conjugated to match that time period, whereas when the voice of the essay flips back to narration or ideas, writers may either stick with past tense or decide to use present. Alternatively, you might decide to have your students look at sentence combining. Students have a difficult time recognizing that a sentence can be simple: The cat *ate* the fish; compound: The cat *took* the fish **and** *buried* it in the garden; or complex: The cat *ate* the fish **because** he *could not dig* a

hole in the concrete. The work begun in this unit will lay the foundation for more challenging work, such as fragments, later in the year.

This is also the perfect time to revisit paragraphing of new ideas. Persuasive writing provides an opportunity to remind students about when and where to use paragraphs to signal a new idea. In addition, students are ready to investigate abstract vocabulary that signals connections: *and, thus, furthermore, rather*; compares or contrasts a viewpoint: *however, on the other hand*; or interjections: *or, yet* used to advance an idea. This inquiry work might begin in read-aloud where you might begin to tune your students' ears to hear the words that signal agreement, viewpoint, or interjection. Collect the words on a chart by category. Students can use this resource when writing notebook entries or drafts.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

As you approach planning this unit of study, it is important that you read the full unit overview first. It will provide you with a thoughtful rationale and a fuller sense of teaching decisions than just this list can provide. Through reading the overview you will have a stronger grasp on the goals of this unit, and when crafting your own teaching points you will build from this perspective.

Perhaps even more important, be certain to begin with assessment of your students before planning, either holding an on-demand assessment, as described in the Overview, or looking over student work from the previous unit on informational writing. Ultimately, the teaching points listed below provide just one path of the instruction that has proven to be rigorous and effective within classrooms, but you need to tailor this list to your students based on your assessment of them.

If your students come to you with a very strong sense of essay writing, so much so that you feel this unit is well within their grasp, then you might instead decide to teach the Seventh Grade curricular calendar's "Research-based Persuasive Essay" unit, which goes steps further. If your students need a great deal of support in writing essay and writing workshop in general, however, then you might turn to teaching suggested in *Breathing Life into Essays* in the *Units of Study* series, which provides a more scaffolded approach to essay writing that moves at a different pace than the unit described here.

Part One: Starting Work toward the Personal Essays That Students Will Draft and Revise across Almost Two Weeks: Essayists Grow Compelling Ideas in Writers' Notebooks

- "Today I want to remind you that we write not just to tell stories but also to teach and share big ideas. While sometimes we write narrative stories that take us on beautiful journeys, living in the shoes of a character, other times we write expos-

itory pieces, which contain clear, organized writing that explains ideas by telling all about this category, then another, then another. Today, think of an idea or topic that you have strong feelings about. Write your opinion and give reasons that tell why you feel this way. Use everything you know about essay writing, letter writing, speeches, and reviews.”

- “Today I want to teach you that essayists don’t just write about any old topic. We write about the things that really and truly matter to us. One way we discover our terrain, the topics that pull at our hearts and our minds, is by mining our writer’s notebooks and discovering what ideas lie between the lines of our stories. As we read through our stories, we think, ‘What bigger idea might this be about?’ Then we annotate our stories, circling words and writing quick notes about the ideas; in those notes, we find our terrain.”

- *Mid-workshop:* “Writers, you have infinite resources to which you can turn as you are coming up with ideas for essays. We can find ideas by living wide-awake lives, giving thoughtful attention to the stuff, the grit, that others might walk past. We listen to the purr of our cat, we notice how each person in our family reads the newspaper differently, we study the stuff that accumulates in desk drawers, we overhear arguments, and we let all this sink into our minds and our notebooks. Then we write, ‘This makes me think . . .’ or ‘I’m realizing that . . .’” (Taken from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)

- “Today I want to teach you that once writers have discovered our terrain, our work as essayists has just begun. The thing about topics that are really important to us is that we will have a ton of ideas about that topic. One thing we can do to grow our ideas is to jot all the big thoughts around the topic in our notebooks.”

The following teaching points may be used for small groups, conferring, mid-workshop teaching points, or teaching shares, depending on the needs of your students:

- *Mid-workshop:* “Readers sometimes fully develop thoughts by collecting small moments that demonstrate big ideas then elaborating on those ideas. As we jot our ideas, you may jot a small moment that connects.”
- *Small Groups/Conferring:* “Sometimes, to grow big ideas you may want to think of an object related to your terrain. Writers sometimes jot ideas about that object, which can lead to even more ideas about our terrain.”
- “When we write, we don’t just stop after stating an idea. We push ourselves further to fully flesh out that idea. One way we can do this is by using thought prompts that grow our ideas. We might write an idea, then continue by writing, ‘The thought I have about this is . . .’ or ‘In other words . . .’ or ‘That is . . .’ or ‘This makes me realize . . .’”

- *Teaching Share:* “Sometimes writers need a little push from a partner to really allow their idea to flourish. One way writers can help one another is by allowing our partners to ‘write-in-the-air’ as we provide them with thought prompts to push their thinking.”

Part Two: Writers Choose an Idea, Write It as a Thesis, and Build the Structure for the Essay

- “Writers, we have spent the last days journeying through one terrain that is really important to us. We are kind of like tourists visiting a city for the first time, strolling through the streets, noticing one thing, then another, then another. Today, I want to teach you that we don’t just continue through our writing like tourists. Eventually, we settle in on one idea, one that truly jumps out to us as important, and live in that idea. When we settle into an idea, we don’t want it to be just any idea, so we go back and reread all our entries, pulling out the one that is most important. Then we write it again and again in different ways, until it truly expresses what we are trying to say.”
- “Today I am going to teach you that essay writers, unlike narrative writers, do not make a timeline or a story mountain and then progress straight into drafting. Instead, we often pause at this point to plan (or frame) the main sections of our essay. We plan the sections of our essay by deciding how we will support our main idea. One way we may organize our ideas is by writing our claim over and over, following each time with the word *because* and a reason why that claim is true.”
 - *Small Groups:* “Sometimes, writers adopt a different structure for our essays. Rather than stating a claim, then supporting it with one reason, then another, then another, we might follow a journey of thought. We may use the structure: ‘I used to think . . . but now I think . . .’ and then write to develop how our thinking has changed over time.”
 - *Small Groups:* “Yet another way to write about an essay is by considering multiple angles on one idea. Writers sometimes build an essay by using the structure: ‘My thoughts about _____ are complicated. On the one hand, I think. . . . On the other hand, I think . . .’”

Tip: Teachers, you may want to provide the additional support of actually creating files and folders for students to organize their ideas. They can record their thesis on the outside of a folder, then make smaller internal files for each of their bullets, or topic sentences. Then, they will collect small piles of paper with ideas and small moments that pertain to the topic sentence within each folder.

Part Three: Gathering Material for an Essay, Then Selecting the Most Compelling and Appropriate Materials and Constructing a Draft

- “Today I want to teach you that the most important materials writers collect when writing essays are stories! One way we can support our topic sentences is to collect microstories, stories that are angled so they highlight and support our ideas.” (Adapted from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
- *Mid-workshop*: “Students, remember, revision is a process that doesn’t just come at the end of writing. It is something you do constantly. You are collecting so many stories! That means you are also going to be doing a lot of revision, taking time to consider, ‘How can I say this more clearly?’ and ‘How can I angle this to better support my ideas?’”
- “Don’t you find sometimes that you tell a story that really illustrates something, but the person you are talking to looks at you, completely puzzled and just says, ‘Huh?’ What I want to teach you today is that sometimes writers can add a sentence or two at the end of a story that clearly explain how the story illustrates the main idea, so that our audience will much more readily see the point of our stories. You might say, ‘This shows . . .’ or ‘This made me realize . . .’ or ‘This made me think . . .’ and link it back to your thesis.”
 - ▶ *Mid-workshop*: “Today I want to teach you that writers of essays are collectors, collecting not only our stories but also stories of others, as long as these stories illustrate our main ideas.” (Taken from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that as we prepare ourselves to draft our essays, we sort through the materials in each folder, thinking, ‘Is all of my information here? How will this part look in the end?’ We consider whether our evidence fits with each point and whether we have enough variety of evidence to support each point. Then, we can develop, add, or take away points as needed.”
- “Today I want to teach you that after writers plan and collect for our essays (as you have done), the day comes to put everything together. Once a writer has planned and collected, then presto! The pieces of the essay can rise into place. It won’t be finished—writers revise essays just like we revise any other kind of writing. But in the space of a single day, you can go from a bunch of entries in some folders to a rough draft of an essay. Today I will teach you how to carry your entries from folders into essay form.” (Taken from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
 - ▶ *Small Groups/Conferring for Writers in Need of a Challenge*: “Today I want to teach you that sometimes writers look over our materials to decide what we have and figure out the best way to use our evidence to support the main point of the essay.”

Part Four: Persuasive (or Opinion) Essay

- “Today we are going to start a brave endeavor. Yesterday we were content to write essays where we simply told the world what we thought or how we felt. You have become writers of ideas, and you have learned to find stories that back up your ideas. Today we are going to learn how to find the things that we not only believe in ourselves but what we think other people should believe, too. Things that other people—people in this class even—might disagree with. This takes bravery, and I know that you are all very brave, indeed. First things first, persuasive essayists collect ideas. You may come up with ideas by asking yourself, ‘How could the world change for the better?’ or ‘Is there anything that people do that I think is wrong or unfair?’ or ‘Some people think . . . but I think . . .’ Then, collect these ideas in your notebooks.”
- “Today I want to teach you that one way writers prepare to argue their point is to make sure they have thought carefully about both the reasons they think they are right as well as the reasons other people may disagree with them. Writers often enter debates with their writing partner, who will take the opposite stance, to practice standing up for their own beliefs.”
 - *Mid-workshop:* “Writers, you are now prepared to flash-draft an essay. Remember, one way to structure your essay is in boxes-and-bullets form, starting an argument, then backing it up with elaborated supports.”
 - *Small Groups/Conferring:* “You have now thought about your own argument as well as the way someone could counter your idea. Today I want to teach you another possible way writers structure persuasive essays: persuasive essays may start with a thesis followed by the elaboration of the writer’s opinion. Then, the writer might state the counterargument and the reasons why we feel it isn’t true.”
- “Writers, don’t you find that when you are arguing a point with someone, your opinion is most easily swayed when they use undeniable facts to support their claim. Well, I want to teach you something—this is absolutely true of persuasive writing. Writers, we can make our written arguments very difficult to speak against when we use truths about our world to support them.”
 - *Mid-workshop:* “I want to remind you that we don’t let go of all the strategies we learned to boost up the level of our personal essays. You have learned so much about how to craft gorgeous essays: using vivid, to-the-point anecdotes; adding in other people’s stories; supporting ideas with quotes. All of those strategies that helped you in personal essays will also make your arguments in persuasive writing powerful.”
 - *Small Groups/Conferring:* “Writers sometimes rely on an image or object that functions as a central metaphor to support their argument in persuasive essay.”

- “Writers, you are at a critical point in your writing. You have good arguments about great ideas. The problem is that a *good* argument may not win the debate. We need *great* arguments. And the way to make our arguments great is to make sure there are no holes in it. One way we can check for gaps in our argument is by turning to our writing partners again, allowing them to search for places they can disagree.”
- “Today I want to teach you that as we revise our essays, sometimes we pretend to be our own readers. We step outside of ourselves, pick up the text as if we have never seen it before, and we read it. We notice the sections that are convincing and those that make us flick the paper away. We notice where the draft loses energy, and where it makes the reader feel skeptical. Then rewrite or take away parts that aren’t powerful and add pieces we feel are missing.”
 - ▮ *Mid-workshop*: “Remember, as we revise, one way we can improve our own essays is by studying mentor texts. Writers might go back into our pieces and try some of the moves that our mentors have made. We might use purposeful repetition, like Martin Luther King, Jr.’s ‘I have a dream’ speech, or we might use ‘zingers’ that drive home the point in a quotable way, like President Obama’s ‘Yes, we can’ speech.”

Part Five: Building Expository Writing Muscles—Revising for Structure and Elaboration

- “Today you’ll continue to cement your selected material into paragraphs, but I know you will also want to learn a bit about how essayists write introductions and closings for our essays. Specifically, I want to teach you that essay writers often use the beginning of an essay as a place to convey to readers that the ideas in the essay are important. The lead briefly places the essay into context.”
 - ▮ *Mid-workshop*: “Introductions are so important because they both draw the reader in and set them up to know what ideas they will find in the essays. I want to teach you something else that will also pump up your writing: we don’t just start our essays powerfully, we end them powerfully, too. We leave our readers with a strong sense of our argument and the feeling that they have just read something really important and heartfelt.”
- “As with most situations, when we are looking for something in particular in our writing, we will find it. Today I want to teach you, as you are editing, that it is important to look at your work through many different lenses. Read and reread your work, each time focusing on one particular convention. One time, you may look for spelling. Another, you may look for fragments or run-ons. By dedicating each reading to one convention, your mind will be clear and focused, allowing you to clarify your writing bit by bit.”



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Overview of the Year for Seventh-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Memoir
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Realistic Fiction/Social Action Fiction
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Informational Writing: <i>Nonfiction Books</i>
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Research-Based Argument (Persuasive) Essays
JANUARY	UNIT 5: Historical Fiction
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Literary Essay: <i>Analyzing Texts for Meaning, Craft, and Tone</i>
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Writing Prompted Essays for the NYS 2011 ELA Exam
MAY	UNIT 8: Poetry
JUNE	UNIT 9: Independent Writing: <i>Launching a Summer of Writing</i>

The calendar starts with this overview of essential structures and assessment tools. Following in the calendar is a complete description of each unit of study that we hope will prepare you to teach these units with grace and expertise. We have differentiated units across grades in middle school, so that while sixth grade, for instance, launches with *Raising the Level of Personal Narrative*, seventh grade moves to memoir, and eighth grade begins collecting toward application essays. Of course, as you assess and get to know your readers, you might decide that you and your grade level colleagues want to incorporate a writing unit from an alternate grade. You'll notice the influence of the Common Core State Standards on these

units of study—kids will need repeated practice and expert instruction to reach these standards, so we've thought carefully about the sequence of lessons and of units. Nevertheless, you'll need to base your curricular decisions on your assessment of your students, and we encourage you to adapt and modify. We do encourage you to make these decisions as a grade, so that the grade above you can depend on the instruction and writing growth generated through your choices. And you may, of course, invent your own units. We'd love to hear your suggestions for variations! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to us at: rwproject@tc.columbia.edu.

The narrative for each unit should give you enough information to plan ahead. It will recommend some touchstone texts, for instance, and it will help you foresee and have a deep understanding of the probable arcs of your teaching. At the end of the unit, you'll also find a new toolkit of teaching points for the unit. The teaching points fit within an overarching path, within which are some "bends in the road"—basically the smaller parts of the unit. The teaching points sometimes refer to lessons in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. These lessons may be helpful to you in your planning. Of course, you'll want to adapt the stories you tell and your discourse to your adolescent audience. We also think you may find Katherine Bomer's *Writing a Life*, Roy Peter Clark's *50 Tools for Writers*, and Tom Romano's *Crafting Authentic Voice* useful as you teach middle school writers. This year we revised the teaching points to be sure they address a middle school audience, and we have several new units as well.

There are a couple of units that may be helpful to content area teachers. The information writing unit is easily taught in science and social studies as well as language arts. In addition, in seventh grade, there is a new unit on research-based argument essays, which is also easily adapted to science and social studies.

This curricular calendar suggests one possible way of imagining the writing curriculum for middle school classrooms across a school. You will see that we suggest month-long units of study, and that the design of this suggested curriculum places a premium on supporting adolescents' growing abilities to write narrative and expository pieces. This curricular calendar takes into account the New York State ELA exam, and the state's standards; if you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments. Remember that we present this calendar as one optional and suggested progression. We are aware that you and your colleagues may well make choices that are different than those we present here, and we welcome those choices.

This yearlong course of study is part of a K–8 spiraling curriculum in which students receive instruction in narrative, expository, informational, poetic, and procedural writing across their school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write "small moment stories" by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders do similar work at a more advanced level when they make and revise time lines, asking "What is the heart of my story?" and elongating that section of the story. Fourth and fifth graders, however, may plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a "story moun-

tain,” with the goal of including two small moments (or scenes), and they revise the pieces so that beginnings and ends relate to what the story is *really* about. Stories by middle school students expand more globally, making statements about what matters in the world. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable of writing expository texts, until they can write college essays with grace and power.

While the suggested curriculum varies according to grade level, supporting increasing sophistication and independence, it is also true that the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven years old, seventeen, or seventy for that matter. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplary texts, drafting, rereading, revising, reimagining, and editing.

There is nothing haphazard in this sequence of units of study for writing. On the other hand, nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. Modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with colleagues on your grade level so that your teaching can benefit from the group’s cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade level meetings can be useful occasions for swapping minilessons, lesson planning in ways that inform your teaching, assessing students’ work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

Writers’ Notebooks and Independent Writing Lives

One of the crucial elements of the writing workshops described here is the writer’s notebook. It’s in the notebook that students will collect moments and experiment with writing craft. They’ll rehearse stories, gather research, reflect, and make plans. You’ll want to make sure that all your writers have notebooks that suit them as writers—some prefer plain, some like to decorate, some like narrow lines, some prefer wide, some prefer a digital form. You can provide composition books, which are around 50 cents when purchased in bulk at most supply stores, or students can choose, find, or make the notebook that most makes them want to write. We just want them to write—they should get to choose the surface/medium.

Your writers will really develop in stamina, fluency, and skill when you conceive of the notebook as the place where we write a lot, we write often, and we use our newest skills. That is, tell your students that the notebook in October should look profoundly different than it did in September. All the writing craft we work on in drafting and revising in September, we incorporate on-the-run in our notebook entries in October, and from then on. So the notebook is the place where we are changing as a writer. It’s also where we get the most volume of writing. Just as runners get better by running, and piano players by practicing, writing becomes easier the more we do it. Every professional writer says that it takes discipline, not just natural gifts, to write. So you’ll want to decide how much you want your students to write, outside of school, and then

help students to meet these goals. If students have to write even ten or fifteen minutes a night, that's between one and two pages of writing. If they do that five days a week, that's ten to twenty pages a week, which is hundreds of pages across the school year. The student who has been held to this standard will be a profoundly different writer than one who only writes in class.

You'll also want to decide what students write in the notebook. In class, they'll often be collecting toward a genre study, such as memoir, or realistic fiction, or essay. Sometimes they'll want to continue this work at home. Sometimes they'll want to experiment with craft lessons you've taught, for homework. All this continuation work is good. It's also important, though, that students conceive of themselves as independent writers and decide what kind of writing they want to do in their notebooks—and then do a lot of it. Encourage your students to continue writing anecdotes, vignettes from their lives, all year, so that they keep learning how to use writing to make sense of their lives, and get lots of practice in telling their own stories with purpose, craft, and power. You may find that some of your writers really want to experiment with fiction as well. You'll have secret graphic novelists, fantasy writers, gossip girls, narrative poets, and so on. Others will want to write nonfiction, including articles and books. If you do decide to open up their genre choices for their independent writing homework, you'll often get lots of writing volume. Here's the thing, though—you also have to make some time in the curriculum for kids to come out of their notebooks and publish some of this independent writing. When writers know that they'll be able to publish some pages of their graphic novel (or the whole novel across the year), or scenes from their fantasy story, or a series of small books that are ghost stories, they write more, and they hold themselves to higher levels of craft.

We do recommend, therefore, that you find some time to help students work on independent writing for homework. Teach some lessons on “going on” as a writer, and on “pursuing the writing you're passionate about.” Show them how to collaborate if they wish, and how to find mentor texts to raise their craft up. Give some time in class toward growing as an independent writer, and you'll find that your students have reasons to incorporate the craft and structure lessons they're learning in their genre studies. Then make some publishing opportunities, a few times a year. You can either publish all at the same time, or you can have a rotating schedule, and a publishing wall that students are in charge of. Hold your kids to high standards. Have your poets create anthologies, themed chapbooks, or poetic novels. Have your graphic novelists make versions of books that already exist, and originals. Have your fiction writers create series. Encourage them to write a lot; instill a sense that their independent writing lives matter.

You may find Colleen Cruz's *Independent Writing* helpful as you plan independent writing as a strand of the curriculum. You may also want to meet with colleagues and decide on how much time you can protect for independent writing, how many publishing cycles you might offer, and what publishing celebrations you can organize. You'll get volume, engagement, independence, and trust from your adolescents.

Assessment

Who was it who said, “We inspect what we respect”? It will be important for you to assess your students’ growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. As part of this, we encourage you to start the year off by giving students Donald Bear’s spelling inventory, and we describe this in the section below on conventions of written language. We also recommend you use the assessment tool that TCRWP has developed and piloted to track student growth in narrative writing, argument writing, and informational writing. These tools continue to be a work-in-progress. The newest versions are available on the TCRWP website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter the instrument to fit your purposes. We especially recognize that it would be helpful to add more levels so that growth in writing can become more apparent, and you are invited to work with your colleagues to do so—and to share what you create with our organization! Whether you add your own levels or not, though, the tool will help you be accountable for supporting growth in writing, and it especially clarifies the pathways along which developing writers travel as they become proficient. It allows you to identify where a student is in a sequence of writing development, and to imagine realistic, doable next steps for each student. This will make your conferring much more valuable, and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool! That said, be aware that there are instances where we have seen the assessment tool make teaching *less* responsive to writers’ intentions. If, when using the tool, you approach a student in the midst of writing and bypass listening and responding to the student, looking only at the draft, and using only the narrative continuum as your resource, then the continuum will have made your teaching worse, not better. Conferring always needs to begin with a teacher pulling alongside a writer and asking, “What are you working on as a writer?” and “What are you trying to do?” and “What are you planning to do next?” Always, the teacher needs to help the writer reach toward his or her intentions. When we draw on all we know, not only about good writing, but also about how narrative or non-narrative writers tend to develop, the assessment tool can be a resource.

It is absolutely crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of your year, or even arrive already drafted in the spring of the prior year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers, especially from their grade school experience. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture and compare the data representing what students can do at the very start of the year with what emerges after a few months working with you, you will be in a good position to show parents and others all the ways in which students have grown as writers over the course of the year. In autumn parent-teacher conferences, you’ll want to bring the writing a student did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing the student did just before the conference. To do this, of course, it is crucial that you capture the “before” picture for comparison to the “after.” Adolescents strongly benefit from this type of reflection and self-evaluation of growth.

Your students may bring a portfolio with them to the grade, or you may want to give a quick on-demand task in narrative writing so that you can see their independent

writing levels. When you look over students' work, take note of whether they have been taught and are using rudimentary concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that students are writing *focused* narratives. You will want to see if they are writing structured pieces (for now this will usually mean chronological). Can these pieces be described as stories? That is, does the main character (the writer, in this instance) proceed through a plot-line of actions and reactions? Are students *storytelling* rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue and details? Writing with consistent end punctuation? Developing their characters? Angling the story to highlight their focal point? Do they seem to care not only about *what* they write, but also about *how* they write it?

Set up a folder system at the beginning of the year for each student that contains their on-demand pieces, published pieces, and other samples of their writing from each unit of study. This is important not only for ongoing assessment, developing a system where adolescents can reflect on their growth and reporting to families at report card time, but this is also important because some units of study (e.g., the revision study in June) will require students to draw from their previous work.

Spelling, Mechanics, and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

We recommend that you consider having teachers take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically throughout the year, to assess students' growing control of spelling and language features. We recommend you do so by giving your whole class what amounts to a spelling inventory, asking them to spell each of twenty-five words. You may want to use the spelling inventory devised by Donald Bear and available on the TCRWP website. After giving the students the spelling inventory, you will need to count not the *words* correct but the *features* correct—this can take a few minutes for each student, but the result will be that you can channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that your teaching is aligned to the main needs that you see across most of your class, and it will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.

Meanwhile, you will also want to understand which conventions of written language your students use with automaticity when they write, and the easiest way to do this is to look at the on-demand piece of writing. For middle school students, ask yourself:

- Which students generally control ending punctuation and lower/uppercase letters and capitalization conventions?
- Which students tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which students include direct dialogue, and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which students generally control their verb tenses?
- Which students generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?

■ Which students control complex sentences and their internal punctuation?

If you have students who do not use end punctuation in a roughly correct manner, do not write in paragraphs, seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout their writing, or don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, then you will want to embed instruction in all of these things into your first two units of study.

If your students do all these things but are using confusing tenses and subject-verb agreement, then teach this more advanced work, and expect students' command of it to progress more slowly. In either case, you will want to be sure that your students are not boxed into simple sentence structures when they write. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: A *subject* did *something* (perhaps to *someone* or with *something*). "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These students may feel in their bones that their writing lacks something, and they might try to solve the problem by linking the simple sentences with conjunctions, but that won't necessarily solve the problem. For example, "I went to the park and I rode my bike and I got an ice cream . . ." Teach these students that it helps to tell when, under what conditions, or with what thoughts in mind the *subject* did *something*. Then, sentences might now look like this: "One sunny Saturday morning I went to the park. Because I wanted to have some fun, I rode my bike. After that, I got an ice cream. Then I came home." It can also help to tell *how* one did *something* and to tell about the receiver of the activity. "I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double scoop of chocolate that melted all over me."

For those of you wanting to understand syntactical complexity more, you may find it interesting to measure your students' syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) in the grammatical sentences that your students construct. Hunt calls these the "T-units" (Hunt 1965). For instance, if a student writes: "I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa," these are three independent T-units (or simple sentences) and each one is short, with just a few words. This is simple syntax. This would still be written in T-units of four or five words if the sentences were linked with the word "and," because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, the number of T-units would double if the sentence went like this: "When I went to the store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa." Nowhere in that sentence is there a place where a period could have been added, so this is all one T-unit comprised of fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, the same sentence could contain yet more words per T-unit (and still be more complex): "Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, who was glad to see me." Some writers who struggle with punctuation show some complicated syntax. It is important for teachers to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer's growing ability to write complex sentences (with many words per T-unit) should also be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who may use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences. For fourth graders,

the average length of a T-unit is eight words. Be pleased if your students are writing most of their sentences with this many or more T-units.

Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after students have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—then you need to hold students accountable for using that skill as they draft, or at least see that they are attempting to use it. For example, during the editing portion of unit one, you will probably need to teach all students to write in paragraph structure, teaching them some of the cues for narrative paragraphs such as when a new character enters, the time changes, or the setting changes. So then at the start of unit two, when students are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one student hasn't remembered that now he is the sort of writer who writes using paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach students that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time. Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Writers who include lots of description will be more ready for clauses set off by commas. That is, students benefit most from instruction when it helps them to be more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation.

One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only “fix” students' writing, or tell them to be “correct,” then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and they may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they're not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include *unfamiliarity, familiarity and experimentation, using and confusing, mastery and control*. In the third unit, teach students to recall these conventions as they turn to non-narrative writing. You may want to reteach ending punctuation, showing how it affects the tone of non-narrative writing. You will want to reteach paragraph structure in non-narrative writing as well. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always be teaching students to use all the conventions they have learned until now so they may be effective editors of their own and others' writing, and write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions.

When students are writing stories, this might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. They will benefit if they have opportunities to pay attention to punctuation in reading, read-aloud, and shared reading. This fluency work, done in the guise of pursuing prosody, can help readers see more meaning in the text just because of the way it is read. If needed, you will want to form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns, or between apostrophes for possessives and contractions.



UNIT SIX

Literary Essay

Analyzing Texts for Meaning, Craft, and Tone

FEBRUARY/MARCH

Much as there are things about our own life stories that we can learn only from the systematic study of our dreams, there are things about the human condition that we can learn only from a systematic study of literature.

—ELIF BATUMAN (from *Why Criticism Matters: From the Critical Impulse, the Growth of Literature*)

This unit is newly written this year and offers a variety of structures for literary essays—you may want to confer with colleagues across grades to decide what kinds of analysis and structures you'll offer each grade. Another way to think about differentiation, though, is to think about which writers in each class are ready for more complex thinking and writing craft. Regardless, increasingly we've come to think that middle school students will benefit from writing literary essays each year to develop their analytical skills as well as their skills at argument writing. Middle school students are poised for more analytical, academic work both as readers and as writers about reading. It's worth pausing for a moment to consider multiple rationales for this work so that your invitation to students around more sophisticated, critical reading and more elaborated, text-oriented writing is broad enough to convince the multitude of adolescents in your classrooms. We, their teachers, know this work is important: for the sake of our kids' futures in school, we must teach them to read closely and to write coherently about the ideas, the themes, the implications of the texts they are reading. The Common Core State Standards call for this work over and over again: not only in the standards for opinion writing, but also in the standards for speaking and listening,

in the research standards, and even, to some extent, in the informational writing standards. In short, this task, writing about reading, could be seen as the gold standard of the CCSS—partly because the ability to reflect on ideas we have from our reading (of fiction and nonfiction) is essential to college and career achievement.

But there are reasons to read critically that cut deeper than the current standards movement: “We want to be the kind of people,” you might say to your students, “who don’t just see the surface of things. We don’t want to take others for granted; we don’t want to believe everything that advertisers or even reporters tell us. But this kind of work takes practice: it’s not always easy to find a deeper meaning. Writing is one of the best ways we have to push our thinking to new levels. And when we write about reading, when we push ourselves to articulate an idea from a text, and to be precise about it, when we map out how that idea begins and grows throughout a book, that’s often when we come to new thinking. In this unit, we’re going to practice using writing to think clearly and deeply about reading. You might also make connections to the earlier personal and persuasive essays: “Just as we used the essay form to tackle complex ideas about our lives and the world, we can use the essay to make sense of literature. And a deep understanding of literature will also help us think differently about ourselves and our world.”

Toward these ends, we recommend that you introduce your students to a variety of literary essay structures: a claim followed by multiple supports from one text; a claim followed by multiple supports from more than one text; and a claim followed by support from a text and support from personal experience, a structure that has been prompted for on the SAT, and, explicitly or implicitly, in many college application essays. For seventh and eighth graders, you may also want to teach from the third part of this write-up, which describes essays that bridge fiction and nonfiction, either through pairing fiction with nonfiction around a same theme or time period (a structure favored by the New York State ELA exam for the past several years), or by incorporating secondary criticism into a literary essay (a “critical lens” essay as it is referred to in New York State Regents curriculum), or by including an analysis of historical or cultural context.

Note that although this unit will certainly build muscles that will serve students well in a testing environment, you will still have a chance to teach kids to write prompted, timed reading responses during the test prep unit that follows this one. So the point here is not to practice taking a test; it is to help students understand the crucial moves that ensure more coherent, insightful literary essays such as they may write in high school and beyond, and to develop the analytical muscles that will help them in any argument writing.

The unit is strategically placed to support the synthesis and critical reading skills that they will be developing simultaneously in a reading workshop unit on interpretation and that are so crucial to higher-level comprehension of fiction; it will also give students significant opportunities to develop and practice the skills needed to write extended essays. We will recommend a likely path for each grade, but you will need to assess your students and decide what will make sense for them, specifically.

For example, if you teach seventh grade, but most of your students did not receive a passing grade on last year’s New York State ELA and you know from analyzing the test results that the writing on the test really held them back; or if in an on-demand setting

they demonstrate that they need support with basic essay skills, you may decide to follow only the first and second parts of this write-up and spend more time coaching your writers in the art of quickly organizing a plan and executing it with accuracy. However, if you have a small group of sixth graders who are reading above grade level and can easily spin out a coherent, accountable, five-paragraph thesis-driven essay, you will want to turn sooner to Part Two and teach them to mine more than one text for traces of author's craft.

The Common Core have shined a spotlight on evidence-gathering and crafting in expository writing: middle school standards for opinion writing expect students to do more than find relevant evidence for a claim about a text; by seventh and eighth grade, the CCSS ask students to analyze the development of a theme and to be able to demonstrate this reading skill through writing. This implies that the writers must be able to discuss not just what a piece of text evidence demonstrates, but how it does so. While these appear in the CCSS document as mere line items, deep and sustained teaching and learning have to take place for these practices to truly sink in and for students to be able to demonstrate them successfully. This unit, with a focus on finding multiple sources of evidence to back up interpretive statements, gives you a chance to lift the level of the work students do in the heart of their essays, in the body paragraphs, and will allow for more extensive writing about reading during writing workshop, thereby not stealing precious reading time from reading workshop.

Note that if you want to really help students truly understand the challenge and the rewards of writing about reading, it's important that at some point they have a chance to write about a text they have read themselves that is squarely within their independent reading level. When writing about whole-class texts, especially if those texts are not within an essayist's independent reading level, that essayist will tend to be over-reliant on class interpretations and teacher interpretations. This might not seem so bad, because these interpretations are probably justified and strong; the problem is that if the writer does not fully understand the leap from text to interpretation and is only repeating a leap someone else has made, the resulting essay is likely to be thin on elaboration: the writer will simply not have the insights that make for strong argument. Since this unit offers opportunities for several essay cycles, you might think about how to make sure all students, at some point, are writing about a text they've chosen and can read well.

The Plan of the Unit

In the first part of this unit, you will invite your students to develop, hone, and support a claim about one text. The claims that your students craft will undoubtedly connect to Post-its, readers' notebook work, and club talk that is happening concurrently in reading workshop. But in writing workshop, you will show them how to stretch an idea about a text and try it out many different ways.

Right away, you will want to emphasize revision of body paragraphs. You may say to your students, "I know that you know how to write 'the text says,' but in this unit, we're going to try a lot of different ways to point back to the text in our writing, so

we're not stuck and so we can make it sound more natural." If you are choosing to teach this middle school version of literary essay, your students should already have a solid sense of how an essay goes (and you will have taught into this earlier in the year during the personal, persuasive, or research essay unit), so only a couple of days need be spent on developing a thesis and rough outline.

In the second part of this unit, you will teach students to build an argument that cuts across more than one text. This will match up with instruction and club talk in reading workshop, since students will be engaged in thinking, jotting, and talking about more than the book: finding places where texts are similar, and also digging deeper to think about how two books that ostensibly advance the same theme actually do so in different ways.

You will teach possible structures for comparison and give students the opportunity to practice quick drafting and multiple revisions. If you are teaching sixth or seventh grade, this may be where you spend the most time. You may, in fact, choose to have your students try out a few different essays quickly at the start of this part to practice different structures, then revise across those essays as you teach them techniques for bringing in clear evidence from more than one source. You will also teach them how to look for different kinds of evidence, and how sometimes we can move back and forth between ideas and anecdotes from the stories and ideas and anecdotes about our own lives as a way to show the significance of a literary theme.

The CCSS rightly point to the importance of multimedia literacy, and ask that we prepare our students to notice that the medium in which a text is delivered matters to the experience of that text. You may therefore decide in this part to ask students to write about the differences between the book version of a chapter or scene and the film version or dramatized version of the same scene.

A final part in this unit, mostly intended for seventh- and eighth-grade students, introduces secondary criticism and other source material outside of the text itself: these outside sources can contribute to an essayist's treatment of a work of literature. You might teach students how to integrate and analyze a quote from another critic; how to discuss historical details, or bring in a nonfiction text or texts to contextualize or compare a novel's setting and therefore its treatment of a theme; or how to use the conventions of a given genre as backdrop for a literary analysis. These tasks match the CCSS expectations for seventh and eighth graders and preview the Regents-level and AP work that will be expected of them in high school.

Now let's take a closer look at the likely progression of these cycles.

On-Demand Assessment to Determine Where to Focus This Year's Literary Essay Work

Teachers, before you embark on this unit, you will want to assess your students and reflect on which pathway will be most suited to your students, and which components of literary essay you will need to make the most of in your teaching. As with most writing units, you will want to begin this work on literary essay by finding out what

students can do when working within this genre. To do this, you will probably give an on-demand essay prompt that asks them to take forty minutes and, within that amount of time, to write a quick literary essay about a familiar read-aloud text. You might say something like, “We’ve read and talked about ‘On the Bridge’ a lot. Right now, I want you to write a literary essay in which you tell readers an idea that you have about ‘On the Bridge’ and then show evidence that supports the idea, drawing on details from the text.” Be sure you have multiple copies of the assigned text so that students can hold copies in their hands and illustrate their capacity and tendency to cite specific evidence.

When you look at your students’ essays, the Opinion/Argument Writing Continuum, developed by TCRWP, may help you understand your students’ levels of proficiency and the pathway they can travel to progress toward increasing levels of proficiency. This continuum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards in Opinion Writing, so it may help you chart your students’ progress toward those standards. (There are also exemplar texts in the appendix of the Common Core and you’ll want to calibrate against them as well, although they are not on-demand texts produced without adult input.) Of course, you can use the Common Core and the TCRWP continuum to look not only at goals that some external evaluator might set, but also at the next steps that your students need to take. If their essays match the Common Core descriptors and exemplars for fifth graders, for example, then you’ll need to aim for them to write like the Level 8 exemplar . . . just don’t settle for that level of achievement!

Part One: Writing Literary Essays That Explore a Theme or a Character in a Single Text

Generating Ideas from Reading: Developing Compelling and Supportable Claims about Literature

It will be crucial that you find ways to bring the energy of reading workshop into writing workshop this month. You will want to draw on the passion, the commitment, the obsession that our young readers develop for the characters and worlds of their reading lives as the fuel to jumpstart literary essays. “Don’t even put your books away,” you might say as a transition from reading into writing time. “We’re going to need them today and this whole month for our writing work.”

By this time in the year, and in their reading lives, your students have learned that we can use literature to think about important truths in the world. Whether you’re teaching an interpretation unit concurrently or not, you will want to remind students that texts offer more than one meaning. You might spend a few minutes the first day reprising ideas from a whole-class conversation about a read-aloud as a way to punctuate this point. In the very short story “Carrots” by Adam Bagdasarian, you might say, “You had really different ideas even though you all heard the same story. Some of you said this taught us that we have to remember that grown-ups are not always so grown up; some of you said this was about how grown-ups ask too much of kids; and

some of you said it's really about how kids will forgive anything. There's no right answer here—all of these ideas can be connected back to the same short story."

You will then teach students to try out an idea that they've had, either about a read-aloud text or a book they've read independently, and to try writing that idea in a number of different ways, writing a longer piece off of it as well to find what's inside it. They should be used to this kind of work from earlier essay units, and most students will be coming to you chock-full of ideas from reading workshop: you may just need to put up a chart or table-tents with thought prompts such as "This makes me realize . . ." "I'm still wondering . . ." "On the other hand . . ." and most kids should be ready to go. (See the write-up for sixth-grade personal/persuasive essay for a detailed discussion of this kind of writing-to-learn work.)

It's likely, though (actually, it's certainly the case!), that some students will stare blankly at you and plead, "But I have no ideas about my reading." In this case, you'll need to offer some fruitful ways to come up with good ideas. Some of this might be reprising your reading workshop lessons, but you'll want to put a new spin on them in hope that they'll have more traction in a new setting.

We can trust that the pivotal moments in stories are places to revisit and ask, "What does this moment really mean? What is it teaching the character or me?" You can also teach students that when we're writing about reading, we think about likely themes that we've encountered before and ask, "What does this book have to say about . . . ?" Some likely themes in adolescent literature are: growing up, the individual versus the group, trying to be good in a flawed world You can go back to some of your reading charts to find these core themes and use them to help scaffold kids' thinking.

We have found that character-based ideas tend to be more accessible and more easily supported, so if your class, or a small group of students, is in need of extra support in interpretation or in finding accountable text evidence, you may choose to angle the work toward character-based ideas, such as "Katniss, the heroine of *The Hunger Games*, values her family's well-being more than her own." In reading workshop, however, you will most likely be lifting the level of interpretation toward naming and tracing themes in a text: a theme would emerge not just from a single character's arc, but across characters and the other story elements as well (setting and plot). A theme-based claim about *The Hunger Games* might read, "*The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins, teaches us that self-sacrifice has the power to right wrongs in the world."

You will also want to point out, perhaps in a mid-workshop, that some ideas only emerge at the end of the story (this is especially true in shorter texts). In that case, it will be impossible to provide evidence from across the text to support that claim. For example, if, in the story "Carrots," our idea is "Kids forgive the people they love," we are in trouble—that idea doesn't show up until the very end, when the narrator is reflecting on his father's apology. At the beginning of the story, when the narrator is recalling his father's unprovoked outburst at dinner, he does not sound forgiving at all; in fact, he's incensed. So we might have to modify our thesis to: "At first, it seemed that 'Carrots' was just another story about how unfair adults are to children, but by the end of the story, we learn that, in fact, children can forgive almost anything if they are loved."

Moving Quickly to Crafting Thesis Statements That Set Up a Clear Essay Structure

You will then, after only a couple of days spent writing longer pieces off of these ideas, move to help students craft more concise thesis statements: thesis statements that will lead to clear, well-structured essays. So really, in the thesis work, you will be setting up all the rest of the essay work, since the thesis is, as we say of any initial writing idea, the seed that contains hidden within it the whole of the fully developed essay.

You'll want to give your students a vision of a couple of different ways that one-text essays might go; this may help them to find a thesis statement. Once they see the possible templates, it's more likely that they can figure out a way to craft a thesis that will snap into place inside one of these structures.

Some possible bare-bones structures for a thesis-driven essay drawing on one text, and examples of how that might go (note that these need elaboration in the body paragraphs) are:

An idea <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Support from one text• Another support from that text• A third support from the same text	Two-part idea (beginning and ending of the story): <p>"At first, it seemed that 'Carrots' was just another story about how unfair adults are to children, but by the end of the story, we learn that, in fact, children can forgive almost anything if they are loved."</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• In the beginning, this story seems to be about how unfair adults are. The narrator is furious about his father's outburst.• By the end of the story, we learn that children can forgive almost anything if they are loved. The narrator forgives his father because the father shows love for his son. Character interpretation across a text: <p>Katniss, the heroine of <i>The Hunger Games</i>, values doing what's right more than her own well-being.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• When she steps in for her sister in the lottery• When she puts the flowers around Rue, clearly defying the Capitol, to show allegiance to Rue• When she is willing to eat the berries, to literally put an end to her own life to stop the Games Idea with examples across the text: <p><i>The Hunger Games</i>, by Suzanne Collins, teaches us that self-sacrifice has the power to right wrongs in the world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Katniss teaches us that self-sacrifice can right wrongs.• Peeta teaches us that self-sacrifice can right wrongs.• Gale teaches us that self-sacrifice can right wrongs.
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It will be important to not merely show examples like this of these already-formed outlines, but to demonstrate in front of the students how you have to tug at a thesis statement a bit to make it really work with the evidence you have in mind. Even if it was very easy (for you!) to list off a few parallel examples, know that this is exactly what trips up our students. Making it feel like magic won't have the traction of modeling getting into trouble and then out of it again. Because of this, you will not be able to cover all these structures in a single lesson: save the angle on character interpretation, for example, for a small group.

You might also introduce, perhaps in a mid-workshop, or in a share at the end of the first thesis day, the powerful structure of a thesis statement that advances a theme, then supports it with one paragraph of text evidence and one paragraph that shows how the writer too has experienced this theme. This gives an opportunity to remind students why we read: to be pricked by the experiences of the characters and affected by the issues and ideas to such a degree that we carry those thoughts over into our own lives. For some lovely examples of essays that take up this call (though not all using the same structure we will recommend here), see the contest winners from the "Library of Congress Letters about Literature" project at www.lettersaboutliterature.org.

Possible structure for an idea that cuts across one text and the writer's experience is:

<p>Idea about one text</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A moment from the text that evokes this idea • A moment from the essayist's life that also evokes this same idea 	<p>"Carrots" by Adam Bagdasarian teaches us that children have a hard time understanding adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The narrator in "Carrots" can't understand why his father explodes at the dinner table. • I remember the time when my mother stormed out because of an argument about the dishes. It didn't make any sense to me.
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For a day or perhaps two, then, you will support the students in developing thesis statements along with a set of bullet points that will grow into topic sentences. You will want to teach into selecting a strong thesis, one that the writer cares about and that is accountable to text evidence that reaches across the story. If some or all of your students are writing about a short story, you may need to coach into two-part thesis statements: a beginning of the book/ending of the book thesis, as described above ("At first I thought . . . but at the end I realized" or "In the beginning of the story . . . but by the end of the story . . .") or a problem/solution thesis that also covers the start and end of the story: "At first, the narrator in 'Carrots' can't see past his own anger, but by the end he realizes that his father's love makes up for the occasional betrayals." With these kinds of thesis statements, you may have to work with kids to make sure they are not simply retelling what *happened* at the beginning and the end; that they are in fact making an interpretation, either about a character or about the theme of the story.

Developing Body Paragraphs: Using Topic Sentences and Mining the Text for Relevant Evidence to Build Quick First Drafts

This will begin the most critical work of this unit. You will want to tighten your whole-class teaching as much as possible during these next days, since the most important instruction will be the more personalized, targeted work of conferences and small groups. Your students will have very different kinds of thesis statements and will likely be drawing from different texts to find support. The big goal now is to support them in bringing evidence from the text, in the form of angled retellings of select scenes, paraphrased sections, and direct citations from the text.

You will teach them that writers try out different pieces of textual evidence, asking themselves, “Does this *really* get at the idea that I’m writing about?” If it takes too much defending, if it doesn’t pop out as truly connected, it’s best not to use it. Partner work can take a bigger role here, as partners can try out their ideas and evidence on each other, whether they are writing about the same text or whether they’ve even read the same text. In some ways, a partner new to a text is a perfect audience for this, because you will want students imagining such a person reading their essays and still understanding their argument. Teach partners to not be afraid to say, “I’m not sure I see how this fits. Can you say more about why this scene shows how Katniss puts her own needs aside?” The key will be to move from talk quickly back to writing, as partners jot down the words they used to justify their evidence, or go back to the drawing board to find a more fitting example.

If your students are writing about novels, especially longer ones, a likely small-group lesson will be prioritization: there will be hundreds of pages of text to choose from, and it will be easy to get bogged down looking for appropriate quotes or passages, and to either choose way too many examples or to give up and pick at random. Teach them that writers go back to places they marked with Post-it notes, to places their book club lingered on: those are the scenes that are going to yield the richest material.

By this point, students will have cobbled together body paragraphs that begin with a topic sentence that is really a placeholder to make sure that the thesis is carrying through. “Katniss values doing the right thing over her own well-being when she takes Prim’s place at the reaping.” This exact repetition of the thesis in the topic sentence will be revised later, but for now it helps the writer remember what to make of the evidence. When this essayist retells this pivotal scene, she can then analyze this evidence and connect it back to the topic sentence, thereby connecting it to the thesis. You will want to chart some productive ways to analyze or elaborate on evidence, moving beyond “This shows that . . .” Other possible transitions include: “This demonstrates . . .” “From this scene, we can infer that . . .” “The reader of this scene understands that . . .”

This work is then repeated: you will expect and require students to develop at least two supporting body paragraphs, which may incorporate one extended text example in the form of an angled retelling or a citation with explanation, or which may include several examples in a listed, paraphrased format. You will want students to try for a

variety of kinds of evidence to practice the different methods. If you notice students lagging, having written just one text example on a half-sheet of paper and now feeling “done,” quickly intervene: “I know that as seventh graders you’re capable of writing a whole page in five or six minutes. Check your work and set a goal for how many half-pages of evidence you’re going to have in the last fifteen minutes of writing workshop time.”

Since some students may be working on essays that point to the text and their own lives, you will want to model how that structure plays out. The search for evidence in this case is one that crosses the text and the essayist’s own experience. This actually previews the compare-contrast work of the next part, since the writer must find parallel evidence from two separate sources. Which story from this character’s life best demonstrates this idea? And which moment from my own life also shows this? The writer will then devote one paragraph to an anecdote from the story or book, and one paragraph to an anecdote from his or her life.

In each case, you will remind them of all they know about narrative writing to write the small stories in these paragraphs in a zoomed-in way, bringing out details that go with the controlling idea of the essay. “My mother slammed the dishes down, jarring me out of my TV haze. What was she so mad about? A minute later, I heard the front door slam. She had walked out, without a word. What could possibly have made her so angry?” Dialogue, inner thinking, small actions: all of these should be at your students’ fingertips and should return here to stretch the moment: in this case emphasizing my childish surprise at grown-up rage. In retelling the moment from “Carrots,” I can decide to either quote the passage directly or rewrite it myself, playing up the confusion on the part of the narrator.

You could choose to spend longer in this part, moving now to deeper revision lessons that are written up after the compare-contrast essay. But it might prove helpful to move ahead now so that you are sure to get to this next structure. Then students will have at least two essay drafts to work from during revision.

Part Two: Writing across Texts to Explore the Different Treatment of Similar Themes

Looking for Themes That Cut across Texts and Quickly Making Plans for Essays

In reading workshop by now, your students have moved to talking across texts: taking the issues and themes that they noticed in their first book-club books and migrating them over into conversations about new texts. You have been teaching them to analyze differences in texts and to explore how those differences affect possible meanings.

In writing workshop, then, it makes sense to introduce the comparative essay—an essay in which writers will take on a theme that emerges from more than one text—but to explore in writing how that theme is treated differently by different authors, or in different stories. Some likely kinds of differences might be: differences in tone (one

is darker than another), differences in implications (one advocates for change, while another seems resigned to things as they are), difference in intended audience (one might seem geared to a younger age group).

You're aiming for students to say more than "These books are both about growing up," since practically every instance of young adult literature will incorporate that theme; instead, you'll be pushing for students to say: "*The Hunger Games* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* offer different interpretations of what it means to grow up. Suzanne Collins, in *The Hunger Games*, suggests that to grow up, we must learn to sometimes sacrifice our own wishes. Jay Asher, in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, leaves us with the idea that growing up means realizing how much our actions affect others."

You may decide at this point in the unit to introduce cross-medium work as well. The CCSS expect students to be able to discuss the differences in the presentation of a text: the print version versus the film version or the print version versus the stage version. This means paying attention as a reader and an audience member and noticing not just where editing decisions have been made (although which scenes are stretched and which are shrunk or even cut does matter), but also how the different possibilities of, say, film, change the tone or impact of a scene. When there's a soundtrack, for example, we get a lot more emotional direction than when we're reading a silent page. Because you have so little time with students, we recommend that for the purpose of trying out this work, you might choose a scene or two from a story or novel, and pair that with the film version of those same scenes. So you might work with a chapter from *Harry Potter*, and then show just that same scene as it plays out in the film. An essay built around this could follow any of the structures listed below, but using the film or stage version of a same scene as a second "text" to compare and contrast to the print version.

Because many of these ideas will be rehearsed and developed in reading workshop, and because writers have already developed thematic thinking in the earlier part of this unit, you will not need to spend much time on generating ideas. You will instead move quickly to helping students plan for essays that compare and contrast, introducing some new structures.

Some possible bare-bones structures for a thesis-driven essay drawing on more than one text, and examples of how that might go (note that these need elaboration in the body paragraphs!):

<p>An idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How one text approaches this idea • How a different text approaches this idea in a different way 	<p>"Carrots" and "My Side of the Story" by Adam Bagdasarian both teach us that children have a hard time understanding adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Carrots" teaches us . . . by . . . • But "My Side of the Story" teaches us . . . by . . .
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<p>An idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How two texts treat this idea in similar ways • How the same two texts treat this idea in different ways 	<p>“Carrots” and “My Side of the Story” by Adam Bagdasarian both teach us that children have a hard time understanding adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These two stories teach a similar lesson. • But these two stories differ in important ways.
<p>An idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support from more than one text • How the writer’s experience supports this same idea, in similar and/or different ways 	<p>“Carrots” and “My Side of the Story” by Adam Bagdasarian both teach us that children have a hard time understanding adults.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adam Bagdasarian’s stories teach us that it’s hard for children to understand adults. • I can remember having a hard time understanding the adults in my life.

Mining Evidence from More Than One Text: Developing Coherent Body Paragraphs in Comparative Essays

Here you will revisit the work of development from the first part: reminding students to search for those parts in the story that best reflect the theme or lesson that is the focus of the essay. But here there will be new teaching: how to line up evidence from more than one text in interesting ways.

Depending on the structure of the essay, students may gather all the relevant evidence from one text into one paragraph, then the evidence from a second text into another paragraph. Or the writers may try grouping similar elements from both texts into one paragraph, and contrasting elements into a second paragraph. You will want to prompt your writers to try out both of these structures, either with the same thesis or with different thesis statements.

Then you will get to work, again reserving much workshop time for coaching on a small scale or individual basis. You will want to teach writers that it’s important, just as they were considering how relevant the evidence was in their one-text essay, to now consider just how well the evidence they’re finding fits, not just with the overarching thesis, but with the evidence from the other text. In your demonstration teaching, be sure to model finding examples from two texts that don’t really pop out the same theme, or that are similar in just the most tangential, plot-oriented kind of way; then show how to roll up your sleeves and dig back into the texts, trusting there will be a better match-up somewhere. You’ll also want to demonstrate the flip side of this: searching for scenes that show how two texts have a different take on the same theme, but don’t just have a completely different plotline with no connection whatsoever.

Elaboration will be even more important here, if that’s possible, because writers will be navigating more than one text, possibly, in a single paragraph. Simple strategies for

clear citation, transitions between texts, and reminders of how to elaborate on evidence will be key.

As your writers sift through evidence, you may want to teach them that their thesis statements may shift. The process of finding evidence should be a reflective one, and upon closer analysis of two texts, an essayist's understanding of how those texts connect and differ will likely change. So if a first-draft thesis statement was simply: "*Feed* by M. T. Anderson and *Mockingjay* by Suzanne Collins both teach us that it's hard to be yourself in a world of media." Upon digging into these books more carefully, an essayist might decide that one or the other of these books has a more hopeful tone, and add that to the thesis.

Revising for Coherence, Flow, and Effect

The lessons here will be ones that you return to in future parts: they are revision lessons that aim to support students in crafting essays that make sense, that read smoothly, and that make an impact on the reader.

You will want to teach students that once they have a first draft—something that is probably something of a Frankenstein, a bare-bones thesis introduction followed by body paragraphs that are still mostly stitched-together examples and explanations—they know their work has just begun. Now is the time to reread and to ask: "What's missing? Where is there a hole in my argument? Where is there a piece of evidence that just doesn't fit?" And then they rewrite to fill the holes and to get rid of the irrelevant passages.

Remind them that essayists pace for suspense in retelling a scene (from the text or from their lives), that we can say what the character didn't do as a way to pop out what she did do:

When Katniss heard Prim's name called out at the reaping, she didn't think, "Thank goodness it's not me." She didn't say, "Oh, Prim, I'm so sorry for you." She didn't start to plan how life would be without her sister. Other people would have had these reactions; but Katniss, without a moment's hesitation, instead said, "I volunteer."

For seventh and eighth graders, and advanced sixth graders, you will explain how essayists comment not just on the story itself, but on how the author has told the story. This lifts the level of cognitive work significantly, and moves it to grade-level reading and writing standards according to the Common Core. Angled retelling can still remain the focus of a body paragraph, but instead of merely pointing back to the thesis statement with "This shows that Katniss does what's right even when it means sacrificing herself," the writer might take another sentence to discuss the author's craft in this same scene. Some craft considerations include: the author's use of a narrator's point of view to draw the reader in; the author's pacing of a scene to build suspense; the word choice of an author to pack a punch. So after an angled retelling, such as the one above, the essayist might add:

Suzanne Collins stretches out this scene, which takes no more than a few seconds, by letting us see Prim through Katniss's eyes. As Collins describes Prim "walking with stiff, small steps up toward the stage," we feel the pain of a sister. And Katniss's bold, self-sacrificing move makes sense.

Teach students that writers, instead of using the singular first-person pronoun "I" in academic writing, might instead use the more inclusive "we" to refer to any reader of the text. You might also do small-group work around the use of tense in essays: present tense is often a good choice, since it can then remain consistent across discussion of author's moves and the claims of the essayist: "Suzanne Collins **stretches** out this scene . . . Katniss's move **makes** sense." Moving between original writing and citations, however, becomes tricky—students will not master this in middle school! But you can at least teach them to try to be consistent, and not get dragged into the tense of a citation, as in the following example:

In *Feed*, by M. T. Anderson, the first line sets up a sarcastic tone that will continue throughout the novel. "We went to the moon to have fun, but the moon turned out to completely suck." This was the first sign that the narrator was going to have an edge.

Essayists consider counter-arguments, and you will certainly want to offer this structure to your students. This will be more successful with some claims than others, so it may be that you wait for this lesson until students have a couple of different essays going and can choose one where this strategy will make sense. We can try a paragraph in which we give some thought to the possibility that our claim is not, in fact, a justified interpretation. Some sentence starters for this are: "Others might claim that . . ." or . . . "Some people might argue that . . ." or . . . "Another possible interpretation is . . ." Writers play out this alternate argument in a paragraph, but in a last sentence, turn back to their driving interpretation.

Introductions and conclusions serve similar purposes: reaching out to the reader and having an impact. Remind students of hooks or lead strategies that they already know from narrative and expository writing: here they will have the choice of whether to dive right into an idea or theme that is compelling, or to start with a particularly vivid retelling from the story to set the scene. In conclusions, writers reflect on why the theme of this story or book is important and the ways in which people could live differently because of it.

For seventh and especially eighth graders, we recommend that you spend some time during revision teaching your writers how to incorporate discussions of literary elements into their essays. The books that they are reading, if they are reading near or at grade-level texts, are definitely featuring literary elements such as symbolism, foreshadowing, repetition, and multiple perspectives. It's important that, as commentators on this literature, we are noting these moves and describing how they contribute to the themes and character development that make the books so powerful. The key point for essayists, as with all work with evidence, will be in "unpacking" the author's language and making meaning out of the technique.

It's not enough to say, in a body paragraph, "Suzanne Collins uses the mockingjay as a symbol of rebellion. This shows that *The Hunger Games* is a story of rebellion." This does none of the important work of connecting the image of a mockingjay to a concept like rebellion. This is an excellent time to remind students that the readers of their essays may or may not know the texts at hand: someone new to *The Hunger Games* will have no idea what a mockingjay even is without help from the essayist. Students can spend time practicing retelling just enough to explain the context of an important symbol or motif, then writing to explain how it connects back to a theme.

The rhetorical question is another revision technique that you may introduce. To begin an explanation of a particular passage or literary device, the writer might ask and answer a question:

Why does Langston Hughes repeat the word *large* in the opening sentence to the story "Thank You, Ma'am"? Why not use a different word? Hughes does this to make sure the reader doesn't miss this about Mrs. Luella Bates Washington Jones.

A Final Possible Part for Seventh and Eighth Grade, or Advanced Readers and Writers: Using Outside Sources within a Literary Essay

For this final part, you might wish to teach your students how to incorporate outside information into their essays. Common Core descriptions of argument writing at late middle school and high school levels call for an increased authority to a writer's argument. Increasingly, as students get older and enter more academic and professional environments, they will need to base their arguments not merely on their own authority, but with reference to other, established authorities on the subject; they will also need to demonstrate that they understand that their argument does not take place in a vacuum, but is situated among other, related opinions on the same subject. In literary essays, this can take a couple of forms: a writer can refer to other literary critics by citing those writers and either agreeing with or talking back to their claims; or a writer might bring in historical context or a nonfiction text on a similar theme or time period to be able to show how a literary work either fits or doesn't fit with what others know and have said about a topic or time period.

Possible structures for an essay like this are:

<p>Idea</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Context (nonfiction text or literary criticism) • Evidence from the literary text • Implications or conclusions 	<p>In <i>The Hunger Games</i> President Snow evolves as a Quaddafi-like figure. Both leaders are ruthless, long-lasting, and hard to displace.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History of Quaddafi's dictatorship, especially the qualities of being ruthless, long-lasting, and hard to displace • Evidence of Snow being like Quaddafi • Implications that Snow is not implausible, but that there are dictators now whose people suffer daily.
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Whatever the source material that is brought in, you will want to revisit revision strategies for analyzing this evidence and connecting it back to the controlling thesis statement, whether the literary criticism or historical context supports or contradicts that thesis. If it is contradictory, the writer will have work to do to justify the thesis in light of this.

Editing and Publishing Essays

You will want to remind students of editing work they have done in past units of study. Bring out old editing checklists so that students can use these with partners to make appropriate changes.

Citation will present ongoing difficulties: as you teach more sophisticated ways of bringing in text evidence, students will have trouble incorporating the text gracefully. You will want to have plenty of examples up in the room, and perhaps even a citation cheat sheet that has several models that students can keep in their folders. Some rules for citation that are important are: how to indent a longer passage to set it off from the rest of the text (if students are writing by hand, they can still get used to practicing this); how to embed a citation within a sentence, using ellipses to indicate text that has been left out; preserving the tense of a passage; reminders that punctuation comes inside the quotation marks. . . . Of course there are others as well.

If you are teaching students to incorporate outside sources, or even if you know they will only be citing the literary texts that are under discussion in their work, you may want to take this opportunity to teach them how to create a bibliography, or a works-cited page. If students are drafting and revising on the computer and you have Internet access for your class, talk to your school librarian or technology teacher to see if your school subscribes to NoodleTools. This is an easy online way to create accurate MLA or Chicago-style bibliographies. You may of course also teach students these conventions the old-school way, through your own modeling and with the help of the *Chicago Manual of Style* or other guidebook that students can access. Either way, the important thing will be to show kids where *you're* finding the information about these conventions, so that they can return to these resources when *you're* not with them in the future.

Students should decide which essay they want to take to publication. For celebration of these works, you may decide to have students present in small groups: essayists may present their work to other readers, perhaps their own book club or perhaps other book clubs. Either way, discussion of the thesis statement and the evidence presented should be a natural outgrowth of both the interpretation unit and this unit of study in writing.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

As you get ready for this unit, it will make a lot of sense to collaborate with colleagues across grades to decide which parts and options you might teach in which grades. For instance, you may reserve the option of teaching students to include literary criticism or historical context, or cultural comparisons, for your older students, and you may

decide that only your sixth graders need the first option of learning to write a “boxes and bullets” literary essay on a single text. Another way to think about differentiation, though, is also to think about individual readers and writers’ progression along a learning pathway.

If your students have written coherent personal and persuasive essays in sixth grade, you should find that simple essay structure is not an issue, and that you can focus here on how to come up with ideas about literature, and how to find supporting evidence for these ideas, in the books they are reading. The reading unit on interpretation, which matches this unit in sixth grade, should help those skills. Keep an eye on writing volume during this unit. The essential thinking about their books, and quick jotting of ideas, should be happening in reading workshop. That means in writing workshop kids should be writing long—they should be writing at least a page in each period, and sometimes two pages. If you notice students staring into space, or tinkering with a few lines of an essay, or making complicated Venn diagrams instead of writing paragraphs, investigate whether they have a thesis they can actually prove. They may need help devising theses that are provable across texts. Some students may also benefit from drafting more than one idea, so that they’ll always have plenty to write about. Or, you may suggest that they try more than one structure, trying out an essay that compares an idea in their lives to one they see in literature, and an essay that moves across two fiction texts, and/or perhaps an essay that moves across fiction and nonfiction. In any case, make sure kids are writing a lot! They need repeated practice, and lots of pages flowing from their pen, to develop fluency.

A note! There are more teaching points in each part than you would probably teach. Some of these might be right for mid-workshop teaching points, or for small-group work. As you observe your students, looking over their shoulders, collecting their notebooks, and listening to partner conversations, you’ll have a sense of which lessons are crucial for your writers, which might be extra scaffolds, and which might be extensions. You’ll also find multiple suggestions for small-group work in the write-up above.

Part One: Writing Literary Essays That Explore a Theme or a Character in a Single Text

- “We know that we’ll do our best writing about stories that have meant a lot to us. So we often begin by sorting through favorite novels, picture books, and short stories, talking, thinking, and writing about which stories we’ve enjoyed the most, and what we’ve loved about these stories. We may return to childhood favorites, and other times we are eager to explore a newer, harder text, and use writing to make sense of our thinking about it.”
- “As we construct possible ideas we want to explore in essays, we should remember that literary essayists often write about characters—about the lessons they learn, about how they change, about what they teach us. We also sometimes

write about important ideas, issues, or lessons we learn from stories, and the parts of the story that suggested that lesson. As we come up with ideas, if a community of writers charts those ideas, we'll often see that some ideas are true in different stories—they are themes—and writers can adapt and appropriate ideas from each other."

- "As we rehearse ideas about characters, lessons, issues, or themes, we may also write about moments in our lives when we have learned a similar lesson or about incidents that illustrate the same idea, issue, or theme. We may use these moments later in our essay."
- "We know that stories have more than one meaning. We use our notebooks to explore ideas we have about the stories we love. We jot down an idea, we look back over our Post-its or notebook pages, we flip through the text, and we gather moments in the story that support our idea. Often we retell those moments in our notebooks, doing an angled retelling, or quoting an important part and then summarizing the part of the story we excerpted it from."
- "As writers, we often sort through the moments we have gathered, and we think about which moments from the story most make our idea visible. Sometimes we refine or change our idea as we look at these moments. Sometimes we discard some moments from the story. Sometimes we go back to the text to seek new evidence. All this work we can do by talking to a partner as well—we use our partner to rehearse ideas. Sometimes it helps if partners decide to write about a text both partners have read, so we can help each other gather evidence."
- "As we try out our ideas, there are some prompts that may help us write more about our ideas, such as:
 - ▶ This makes me realize . . .
 - ▶ I still wonder . . .
 - ▶ On the other hand . . .
 - ▶ Another way to say this might be . . .
 - ▶ This reminds me of, in my life, a moment when . . ."
- "We may often try rehearsing a few ideas, either about the same stories, or different ideas about different stories—and we do this by jotting our ideas and then listing, retelling, and analyzing the pivotal moments in the story that support our idea. As we look at our ideas and evidence, we keep asking ourselves: 'What does this moment really teach the character, or the reader?' We also may ask: 'What does this book have to say about . . . ?'"

- “Sometimes, if we find ourselves stuck in supporting our idea, we may have an idea that was only true at the end of the story, and we may need to revise our idea if we are to find multiple moments in a story as evidence. We may modify our idea to ‘at first it seems like . . . but then . . .’”

- “As we go to draft our essays, we use what we know about essay structure, often following the simple structure of
 - ▮ Claim or idea
 - *Support from one place in the text*
 - *Support from another place in the text*
 - *Support from a third place in the text*
 - ▮ Reflection/Insight/Realization”

- “Another structure that we might enjoy writing in is the literary essay structure in which we compare a moment in a story to a moment in our life, to support an idea that feels true in the story and our life. To do that, we may draft in this structure:
 - ▮ Claim or idea
 - *A moment from the text that evokes this idea*
 - *A moment from our life that evokes this idea*
 - ▮ Reflection/Insight/Realization”

- “Once we have a draft in hand, we do some revision. One revision strategy literary essayists employ is to reconsider the evidence, asking “Does this *really* get to the idea I’m writing about?”

- “Other revision strategies include:
 - ▮ Repeating our thesis statement as part of the topic sentence for our body paragraphs, to make sure our idea carries through our essay. Sometimes we find ourselves shifting to a variant of our idea, or a slightly different idea, so reinserting the thesis holds us to the original idea. We can always shift the language of the topic sentence, but using the same phrase for the thesis part can be helpful.
 - ▮ Using what we know about narrative writing to retell parts of the story with vivid detail.
 - ▮ Describing the story in such a way that it makes the reader want to read that story. We are passionate about the significance of the story.
 - ▮ We may use our conclusion to return to our life, and suggest the implications for the lessons or ideas from the story in making changes in our own lives.

- We may consider some grammar moves, such as checking our verb tenses. Usually in literary essays we state ideas in present tense and quote the text in past tense. We also make sure we have quoted accurately, and we check the punctuation of our quotes. When we cite, short stories are usually in quotes, and book titles are usually underlined or italicized. We usually give the page number in parentheses after a quote or reference."

Part Two: Writing across Texts to Explore the Different Treatment of Similar Themes

- "Sometimes we compare texts. Often we begin by recalling and talking about texts we have most loved, and thinking about similarities in these texts. The characters may be similar, or the texts make certain issues visible, or they may suggest similar themes. It's often helpful for a community of writers to chart the texts they have in common, and some of their themes and important characters. These tools help us to recall favorite and important literature. We then write long about themes, issues, and ideas that matter to us across a couple of texts."
- "As soon as we have an idea that is true in more than one text, we begin to explore how different authors interpret that idea. For instance, rather than saying '*The Hunger Games* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* are both about growing up,' we might say, '*The Hunger Games* and *Thirteen Reasons Why* offer different interpretations of what it means to grow up. Suzanne Collins, in *The Hunger Games*, suggests that to grow up, we must learn to sometimes sacrifice our own wishes. Jay Asher, in *Thirteen Reasons Why*, leaves us with the idea that growing up means realizing how much our actions affect others.'"
- "As we link texts thematically, we focus on analyzing their differences. Often that means returning to the texts and really thinking about what's different about them, including differences in time and place, in characters' traits and changes, and in the way that characters encounter similar issues or make a theme visible. Each of these differences affects our understanding of the text. Literary essayists, therefore, are nuanced readers and writers, and once we have an overarching similarity that unites two texts, we spend a lot of time as writers analyzing what's different about the stories, and how those differences matter to the stories' meanings."
- "Literary essayists know that it's often helpful to know something about how we may structure our essay, so that we know whether we're collecting and rehearsing all the potential parts. We may, therefore, want to consider these structures:
 - Idea/Thesis
 - *How one text evokes this idea*
 - *How a different text evokes this idea in a different way*

▮ Reflection/Realization/Insight

or

▮ Idea/Thesis

- *How two texts are similar in their treatment of this idea*
- *How the texts are different in their treatment*

▮ Reflection/Realization/Insight

or

▮ Idea/Thesis

- *Support from more than one text*
- *How the writer's experience supports this idea in similar and different ways*

▮ Reflection/Realization/Insight"

■ "As we rehearse and then begin drafting our essays, we know to use our full repertoire, or toolkit of strategies, including:

- ▮ drafting in essay structure
- ▮ really returning to texts to mine them for the best evidence
- ▮ quoting and paraphrasing and incorporating vivid details
- ▮ making sure to analyze the text evidence we include
- ▮ using transitions to move our reader along coherently
- ▮ using citation to reference texts accurately"

■ "As we look over our essays, sometimes we realize that we need to reconsider our structure. Perhaps we have more support for a different structure. Or, we may need to reconsider our thesis—and revise it to match our evidence more closely. We may need to return to the text, for more or sharper evidence."

■ "We often study our essays with a partner, especially one who has read the same texts, asking: 'Where are there holes in my argument?' and 'What other evidence might I include?' and 'Where could I say more about why and how my evidence is compelling—am I analyzing my evidence enough?'"

■ "We may also revise for compelling craft. We may, for instance:

- ▮ pace for suspense in retelling a scene.
- ▮ say what a character didn't do, as a comparison, and highlight the significance of what he or she did do.
- ▮ comment not just on what happens in the story, but on *how* the author has told the story. We might discuss the narrator's point of view, or contrasting points

of view, or the pacing to build suspense, or indelible images, or symbolism, or repetition, or embedded discourse.

- revise to use the more inclusive ‘we’ instead of ‘I’ in an essay, or to include ‘the reader’ instead of ‘I.’”
- “We may try to include a counter-argument, such as ‘others might think . . . but . . .’ or ‘before reading these stories, one might think . . . but afterwards, a conclusion we may draw is . . .’”

Part Three: Using Outside Sources within a Literary Essay

- “Literary essayists sometimes expand their topics by studying literary criticism on a text. We might look up what others have said or written about a text, and then either fit our idea into a tradition of thought or show how our idea is different from what is traditionally said and written about a text. To find literary criticism, we might search online, we might peruse curricular supports such as Spark notes, or we might research the author.”
- “Another way to incorporate literary criticism is to discuss a critical lens, or school of thought. We might, for instance, offer a feminist interpretation of a text. Sometimes we may want to quote a particular critic, and use that quote as a critical lens. Some interpretive lenses from literary and critical theories include looking at:
 - representation—who is included, who is invisible, what representations are stereotypical or partial
 - power—who has it, how it shifts
 - narrative trajectory—how the story fits common-sense or traditional storylines
 - discourse”
- “It’s also interesting to research historical context for a text. Is the text a commentary on a certain historical era or social or political movement, for instance? Essayists often compare a historical era that is described in a text. Or sometimes a text feels like it is relevant to, or even a commentary on, contemporary events, and we want to do some nonfiction research. We might, for instance, research ‘bystander apathy’ in relation to *The Lottery* or *The Hunger Games*. Or we might research ‘stoning,’ or ‘reality television.’ We might compare a contemporary character, movement, event, or discourse to that depicted in a text or texts.”
- “We may research the author as a way to have more insight into a text. Sometimes the author’s biography feels relevant to our ideas about a text and we may explore that biography in our essay, making comparisons to the text.”

- “When we compare how a text reflects a historical or contemporary or biographical event, we compare differences as well.”
- “Essayists know that as we decide to research and discuss the historical, biographical, critical, or cultural context for a text, or if we bring in nonfiction comparisons, we still need to make sure our essay is exploring an idea we feel is significant about a text, and that we turn to the context as one means of establishing authority, demonstrating our expertise, giving the reader more insight into the background of the text, or suggesting possible implications of the text. That is, we still need to write an analysis of the text, and we allude to our research throughout our analysis or as part of our introduction or conclusion.”
- “As always, it’s helpful to think about structure as we collect and draft. A possible structure for essays like this include:
 - ▮ Idea/thesis
 - *Context—historical, critical, biographical*
 - *Evidence from the literary text, with analysis*
 - ▮ Implications and conclusions we may draw”



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Overview of the Year for Eighth-Grade Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT 1: Building a Writer's Life: <i>Collecting Toward Essays</i>
OCTOBER	UNIT 2: Writing "The Application Essay" for High School, College, and Careers
NOVEMBER	UNIT 3: Multi-Modal Information Writing: <i>Harnessing Technology to Teach Ideas</i>
DECEMBER	UNIT 4: Journalism
JANUARY	UNIT 5: Fantasy Writing
FEBRUARY/MARCH	UNIT 6: Literary Essays: <i>Analyzing Texts for Meaning, Craft, and Tone</i>
MARCH/APRIL	UNIT 7: Writing Prompted Essays for the NYS ELA Exam
MAY/JUNE	UNIT 8: Poetry

The calendar starts with this overview of essential structures and assessment tools. Following in the calendar is a complete description of each unit of study that we hope will prepare you to teach these units with grace and expertise. We have differentiated units across grades in middle school, so that while sixth grade, for instance, launches with Raising the Level of Personal Narrative, seventh grade moves to memoir, and eighth grade begins collecting toward application essays. The eighth grade course of study particularly aims to prepare adolescents for high school coursework and increased levels of independence. Of course, as you assess and get to know

your readers, you might decide that you and your grade level colleagues want to incorporate a writing unit from an alternate grade. You'll notice the influence of the Common Core State Standards on these units of study—kids will need repeated practice and expert instruction to reach these standards, so we've thought carefully about the sequence of lessons and of units. Nevertheless, you'll need to base your curricular decisions on your assessment of your students, and we encourage you to adapt and modify. We do encourage you to make these decisions as a grade, so that the grade above you can depend on the instruction and writing growth generated through your choices. And you may, of course, invent your own units. We'd love to hear your suggestions for variations! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to us at contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The narrative for each unit should give you enough information for you to plan ahead. It will recommend some touchstone texts, for instance, and it will help you foresee and have a deep understanding of the probable arcs of your teaching. At the end of the unit, you'll also find a new toolkit of teaching points for the unit. The teaching points fit within an overarching path, within which are some "bends in the road," which are basically the smaller parts of the unit. The teaching points sometimes refer to lessons in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. These lessons may be helpful to you in your planning. Of course, you'll want to adapt the stories you tell and your discourse to your adolescent audience. We also think you may find Katherine Bomer's *Writing a Life*, Roy Peter Clark's *50 Tools for Writers*, and Tom Romano's *Crafting Authentic Voice* useful as you teach middle school writers. This year we revised the teaching points to be sure they address a middle school audience, and we have several new units as well.

There are a couple of units that may be helpful to content area teachers. The information writing unit is easily taught in science and social studies as well as language arts. In addition, in seventh grade, there is a new unit on research-based argument essays, which is also easily adapted to science and social studies.

This curricular calendar suggests one possible way of imagining the writing curriculum for middle school classrooms across a school. You will see that we suggest month-long units of study and that the design of this suggested curriculum places a premium on supporting adolescents' growing abilities to write narrative and expository pieces. This curricular calendar takes into account the New York State ELA exam and the state's standards; if you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments. Remember that we present this calendar as one optional and suggested progression. We are aware that you and your colleagues may well make choices that are different than those we present here, and we welcome those choices.

This yearlong course of study is part of a K–8 spiraling curriculum in which students receive instruction in narrative, expository, informational, poetic, and procedural writing across their school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write "Small Moment stories" by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders do similar

work at a more advanced level when they make and revise timelines asking, “What is the heart of my story?” and elongate that section of the story. Fourth and fifth graders, however, may plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a “story mountain,” with the goal of including two small moments (or scenes), and they revise the pieces so that beginnings and ends relate to what the story is *really* about. Stories by middle school students expand more globally, making statements about what matters in the world. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable of writing expository texts, until they can write college essays with grace and power.

While the suggested curriculum varies according to grade level, supporting increasing sophistication and independence, it is also true that the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven years old, seventeen, or seventy for that matter. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, reimagining, and editing.

There is nothing haphazard in this sequence of units of study for writing. On the other hand, nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. Modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with colleagues in your grade level so that your teaching can benefit from the group’s cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade level meetings can be useful occasions for swapping minilessons, lesson planning in ways that inform your teaching, assessing students’ work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

Writer’s Notebooks and Independent Writing Lives

One of the crucial elements of the writing workshops described here is the writer’s notebook. It’s in the notebook that students will collect moments and experiment with writing craft. They’ll rehearse stories, gather research, reflect, and make plans. You’ll want to make sure that all your writers have notebooks that suit them as writers—some prefer plain, some like to decorate, some like narrow lines, some prefer wide, some prefer a digital form. You can provide composition books, which are around fifty cents when purchased in bulk at most supply stores, or students can choose, find, or make the notebook that most makes them want to write. We just want them to write—they should get to choose the surface/medium.

Your writers will really develop in stamina, fluency, and skill when they conceive of the notebook as the place where they write a lot, they write often, and they use their newest skills. In October, tell your students that their notebooks should look profoundly different than they did in September. All the writing craft we work on in drafting and revising in September, we incorporate on-the-run in our notebook entries in October and from then on. So the notebook is the place where we are changing as a writer. It’s also where we get the most volume of writing. Just as runners get

better by running, and piano players by practicing, writing becomes easier the more we do it. Every professional writer says that it takes discipline, not just natural gifts, to write. So you'll want to decide how much you want your students to write, outside of school, and then help students to meet these goals. If students have to write even ten or fifteen minutes a night, that's between one and two pages of writing. If they do that five days a week, that's ten to twenty pages a week, which is hundreds of pages across the school year. The student who has been held to this standard will be a profoundly different writer than one who only writes in class.

You'll also want to decide what students write in the notebook. In class, they'll often be collecting toward a genre study, such as memoir or realistic fiction or essay. Sometimes they'll want to continue this work at home. Sometimes they'll want to experiment with craft lessons you've taught, for homework. All this continuation work is good. It's also important, though, that students conceive of themselves as independent writers and decide what kind of writing they want to do in their notebooks—and then they do a lot of it. Encourage your students to continue writing anecdotes, vignettes from their lives, all year, so that they keep learning how to use writing to make sense of their lives, and they get lots of practice in telling their own stories with purpose, craft, and power. You may find that some of your writers really want to experiment with fiction as well. You'll have secret graphic novelists, fantasy writers, gossip girls, narrative poets, and so on. Others will want to write nonfiction, including articles and books. If you do decide to open up their genre choices for their independent writing homework, you'll often get lots of writing volume. Here's the thing though—you also have to make some time in the curriculum for kids to come out of their notebooks and publish some of this independent writing. When writers know that they'll be able to publish some pages of their graphic novels (or the whole novel across the year) or scenes from their fantasy stories or a series of small books that are ghost stories, they write more, and they hold themselves to higher levels of craft.

We do recommend, therefore, that you find some time to help students work on independent writing for homework. Teach some lessons on “going on” as a writer and on “pursuing the writing you're passionate about.” Show them how to collaborate if they wish and how to find mentor texts to raise their craft up. Give some time in class toward growing as an independent writer, and you'll find that your students have reasons to incorporate the craft and structure lessons they're learning in their genre studies. Then make some publishing opportunities, a few times a year. You can either publish all at the same time, or you can have a rotating schedule and a publishing wall that students are in charge of. Hold your kids to high standards. Have your poets create anthologies, themed chapbooks, or poetic novels. Have your graphic novelists make versions of books that already exist and originals. Have your fiction writers create series. Encourage them to write a lot, and instill a sense that their independent writing lives matter.

You may find Colleen Cruz's *Independent Writing* helpful as you plan independent writing as a strand of the curriculum. You may also want to meet with colleagues and decide on how much time you can protect for independent writing, how many pub-

lishing cycles you might offer, and what publishing celebrations you can organize. You'll get volume, engagement, independence, and trust from your adolescents.

Assessment

Who was it who said, "We inspect what we respect"? It will be important for you to assess your students' growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. As part of this, we encourage you to start the year off by giving students Donald Bear's spelling inventory, and we describe this in the section below on conventions of written language. We also recommend you use the assessment tool that TCRWP has developed and piloted to track student growth in narrative writing, argument writing, and informational writing. These tools continue to be a work-in-progress. The newest versions are available on the TCRWP website, www.readingandwritingproject.com. We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter the instrument to fit your purposes. We especially recognize that it would be helpful to add more levels so that growth in writing can become more apparent, and you are invited to work with your colleagues to do so—and to share what you create with our organization! Whether you add your own levels or not, though, the tool will help you be accountable for supporting growth in writing, and it especially clarifies the pathways along which developing writers travel as they become proficient. It allows you to identify where a student is in a sequence of writing development and to imagine realistic, do-able next steps for each student. This will make your conferring much more valuable and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

That said, be aware that there are instances where we have seen the assessment tool make teaching *less* responsive to writers' intentions. If when using the tool, you approach a student in the midst of writing and bypass listening and responding to the student, looking only at the draft, and using only the narrative continuum as your resource, then the continuum will have made your teaching worse, not better. Confering always needs to begin with a teacher pulling alongside a writer and asking, "What are you working on as a writer?" and "What are you trying to do?" and "What are you planning to do next?" Always, the teacher needs to help the writer reach toward his or her intentions. When we draw on all we know, not only about good writing, but also about how narrative or non-narrative writers tend to develop, the assessment tool can be a resource.

It is absolutely crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of your year or even arrive already drafted in the spring of the prior year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers, especially from their grade school experience. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture and compare the data representing what students can do at the very start of the year with what emerges after a few months working with you, you will be in a good position to show parents and others all the ways in which students have grown as writers over the course of the year. In autumn

parent-teacher conferences, you'll want to bring the writing a student did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing the student did just before the conference. To do this, of course, it is crucial that you capture the "before" picture for comparison to the "after." Adolescents strongly benefit from this type of reflection and self-evaluation of growth.

Your students may bring a portfolio with them to the grade, or you may want to give a quick on-demand task in narrative writing so that you can see their independent writing levels. When you look over students' work, take note of whether they have been taught and are using rudimentary concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that students are writing *focused* narratives. You will want to see if they are writing structured pieces (for now this will usually mean chronological). Can these pieces be described as stories? That is, does the main character (the writer, in this instance) proceed through a plotline of actions and reactions? Are students *storytelling* rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue and details? Writing with consistent end punctuation? Developing their characters? Angling the story to highlight their focal point? Do they seem to care not only about *what* they write, but also about *how* they write it?

From the beginning of the year, a system that will be helpful to set up is a folder for each student containing their on-demand pieces, published pieces, and other samples of their writing from each unit of study. This is important not only for ongoing assessment, developing a system where adolescents can reflect on their growth, and reporting to families at report card time, but this is also important because some units of study (e.g., the revision study in June) will require students to draw from their previous work.

Spelling, Mechanics, and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

We recommend that you consider having teachers take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically throughout the year, to assess students' growing control of spelling and language features. We recommend you do so by giving your whole class what amounts to a spelling inventory, asking them to spell each of twenty-five words. You may want to use the spelling inventory devised by Donald Bear and available on the TCRWP website. After giving the students the spelling inventory, you will need to count not the *words* correct but the *features* correct—this can take a few minutes for each student, but the result will be that you can channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that your teaching is aligned to the main needs that you see across most of your class, and it will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.

Meanwhile, you will also want to understand which conventions of written language your students use with automaticity when they write, and the easiest way to do this is to look at the on-demand piece of writing. For middle school students, ask yourself:

- Which students do and do not generally control ending punctuation and lower/uppercase letters and capitalization conventions?
- Which students do and do not tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which students do and do not include direct dialogue and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which students do and do not generally control their verb tenses?
- Which students do and do not generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?
- Which students do and do not control complex sentences and their internal punctuation?

If you have students who do not use end punctuation in a roughly correct manner, do not write in paragraphs, or seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout their writing, or who don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, then you will want to embed instruction in all of these things into your first two units of study.

If your students do all these things and are using but confusing tenses and subject-verb agreement, then teach this more advanced work, and expect students' command of it to progress more slowly. In either case, you will want to be sure that your students are not boxed into simple sentence structures when they write. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: *A subject did something* (perhaps to *someone* or with *something*). "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These students may feel in their bones that their writing lacks something, and they might try to solve the problem by linking the simple sentences with conjunctions, but that won't necessarily solve the problem. For example, "I went to the park and I rode my bike and I got an ice cream" Teach these students that it helps to tell when, under what conditions, or with what thoughts in mind the *subject* did *something*. Then, sentences might now look like this: "One sunny Saturday morning I went to the park. Because I wanted to have some fun, I rode my bike. After that, I got an ice cream. Then I came home." It can also help to tell *how* one did *something* and to tell about the receiver of the activity. "I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double scoop of chocolate that melted all over me."

For those of you wanting to understand syntactical complexity more, you may find it interesting to measure your students' syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) in the grammatical sentences that your students construct. Hunt calls these the "T-units" (Hunt 1965). For instance, if a student writes, "I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa," these are three independent T-units (or simple sentences), and each one is short, with just a few words. This is simple syntax. This would still be written in T-units of four or five words if the sentences were linked with the word *and*, because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, the number of T-units would increase if the sentence went like this: "When I went to the

store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa.” Nowhere in that sentence is there a place where a period could have been added, so this is all one T-unit comprised of fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, the same sentence could contain yet more words per T-unit (and still be more complex): “Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, who was glad to see me.” Some writers who struggle with punctuation show some complicated syntax. It is important for teachers to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer’s growing ability to write complex sentences (with many words per T-unit) should also be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who may use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences. For fourth graders, the average length of a T-unit is eight words. Be pleased if your students are writing most of their sentences with this many or more T-units.

Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after students have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—then you need to hold students accountable for using that skill as they draft, or at least see that they are attempting to use it. For example, during the editing portion of Unit One, you will probably need to teach all students to write in paragraph structure, teaching them some of the cues for narrative paragraphs such as when a new character enters, the time changes, or the setting changes. So then at the start of Unit Two, when students are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one student hasn’t remembered that now he is the sort of writer who writes using paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach students that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time.

Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Writers who include lots of description will be more ready for clauses set off by commas. That is, students benefit most from instruction when it helps them to be more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation.

One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only “fix” students’ writing, or tell them to be “correct,” then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and they may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense, or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they’re not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include *unfamiliarity*, *familiarity and experimentation*, *using and confusing*, and *mastery and control*.

In the third unit, teach students to recall these conventions as they turn to non-narrative writing. You may want to reteach ending punctuation, showing how it affects the tone of non-narrative writing. You will want to reteach paragraph structure in

non-narrative writing as well. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always be teaching students to use all the conventions they have learned till now so they may be effective editors of their own and others' writing and write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions.

When students are writing stories, this might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. They will benefit if they have opportunities to pay attention to punctuation in reading, read-aloud, and shared reading. This fluency work, done in the guise of pursuing prosody, can help readers see more meaning in the text just because of the way it is read. If needed, you will want to form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns or between apostrophes for possessives and contractions.



UNIT THREE

Multi-Modal Information Writing

Harnessing Technology to Teach Ideas

NOVEMBER

Middle school students are actually thrilled to sit down and say, “I just can write everything I know about. . . .” Consider how much of their lives, their conversations, are about having expertise. How some students wear the ins and outs of the fashion world on their sleeves, how knowing to the most minute stats of every football player makes for a better fantasy league than their friends. Equally, we know our classrooms are filled with students who may slog through English Language Arts but suddenly spring to life when they enter Social Studies or Science. If we come at informational writing with the expectation that our students *want* to know a lot about topics, and *do* know a lot about topics, our unit of study can take on a tremendous new life.

So, too, is technology not just something to use when you go to the “computer room,” but an everyday part of our students’ lives. This unit suggests some ways you can support your students in using technology to gather ideas and publish beyond simply writing essays. We feel as if we are only scratching the surface of the potential of technology to support a unit of study like this and look forward to studying more with you in the year ahead. As you work through the unit, if you have ideas to share or would like to get in on the conversation, please write us: contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of informational, sometimes called “explanatory,” writing. They describe it as writing that is designed to “examine a topic and convey information and ideas clearly.” The Common Core State Standards differentiate between informational and opinion writing, suggesting that if the overall purpose of a text is to teach important information, then one idea will probably not dominate the entire text, nor will the driving structure of the writing be

claim/evidence. Informational writing is often marked by topics and subtopics that are signaled with headings and subheadings and with accompanying portals for information, including glossaries and text boxes or sidebars, and diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visuals. In the world of professional writing, however, information writing and persuasive writing sometimes appear to blend in some ways. That is, many award-winning informational texts teach information while also aiming to subtly or not so subtly persuade readers to think certain ideas. These distinctions are important to keep in mind while designing your teaching for this unit.

The fundamental thing to remember about informational writing is that the writer aims to teach readers about a topic. Just as we help students to think about information reading as a way of engaging in a course in which they are learning all about a topic, we need to help them think about information writing as engaging in a course in which they teach all about a topic. An informational writer's purpose, then, is to help readers become informed on a topic that feels very important to the writer. That's the kind of writing your students will tackle in this unit. It's the kind of writing that kids will encounter in much of their nonfiction reading, current event articles in published newspapers, and their social studies and science texts. It's also the kind of writing for which it is easy to find lots of accessible mentor texts.

Because informational texts are usually composites of smaller texts/chapters, often written in different text structures and genres, any unit on informational writing is bound to stand on the shoulders of units in narrative, opinion, and procedural writing as well as on units in nonfiction reading. This unit aims to help students harness all they know about all of these kinds of writing, using all of this in the service of creating texts that teach readers. The unit has the specific, added goal of teaching youngsters about qualities of good writing as these pertain to information texts. Students learn that focus is as important in information writing as it is in narrative writing. Students progress, with experience and instruction, from writing rather cursorily about very broad, generic topics toward being able to zoom in on more specific topics and therefore write with a greater density of relevant information.

Eventually, experienced writers learn that they can focus not just on a smaller subject, but on a particular angle on (or aspect of) that subject. That is, for students writing a six- to seven-page-long book, usually those writing on the topic of tigers will be working with less sophistication than those writing on the topic of the hunting patterns of the Bengal tiger. Students also learn to group their information into categories and, in time, into subcategories. With experience and instruction, students progress from grouping information into categories that appear to have been developed on-the-fly, based on the writer simply thinking, "Hmmm, what else do I have to say?" and then producing another chapter title, toward categories that are planned from the start and previewed early in the text, with the categories of information mirroring the logic of the text. That is, if the writer's goal is to compare the hunting habits of the Bengal tiger at different times of day, the text might be organized by time. Then, too, the unit supports writers' growing ability to substantiate claims with information and to elaborate on and analyze that information. Students come to learn that when information writing is explanatory, the information that is included tends to be facts that

explain a process, and the informational text is anecdotal, the information is apt to include examples that are sometimes in the form of anecdote or vignette.

In addition to teaching students to progress along these continua, the unit channels students to work toward creating lively, voice-filled, engaging information books about topics of expertise. One of the rules of thumb in writing is that writers can only make readers engage in a topic if the writer is engaged in that topic. The unit, then, assumes that students are writing about self-chosen topics of great individual interest. As an alternative way to teach this unit, you might call on a previous content area study. In classrooms that have brought to life units such as “Early American Leaders Teach Lessons in Leadership: The Making of a Nation” it might well be that students care and know about subtopics they’ve studied within that unit, and they can write with engagement and authority on a subtopic that falls under the purview of their social studies curriculum. However, if students are just embarking on a social studies unit and know only the barest outline about that topic, they would not be apt to write well on that topic. It is likely, then, that during this first nonfiction writing experience of the year, many students will write on topics of individual expertise.

Consider as well the possibility of students publishing their work digitally or in a multi-modal format. This means, in addition to (or even in lieu of) a physical publication of an information book, students might publish using a digital format. Hold onto this idea as you read on, because it may influence your decisions on the types of mentor texts you use or the lessons on structure or revision you teach. Whether you publish physically or digitally, the whole of the writing work and instruction will remain the same.

Teachers wanting to learn more about the information source for this unit should refer to the Common Core State Standards and the samples collected within their appendix, to the TCRWP’s Continuum for Assessing Information Writing, and to the rich tradition of work in nonfiction writing done by leaders in the field of writing such as Don Murray, E. B. White, Roy Peter Clark, and William Zinsser.

Getting Ready: Imagining the Texts That Writers Will Create and Choosing Touchstone Texts That Align with Nonfiction Reading

It is crucial that you select captivating, well-written mentor texts to support your students in this work. Choose just a small number of texts that resemble those you hope your students will write in this unit, making the choice not by the topic of the texts, but rather with an eye to the structures within which you hope they will write. For example, a book about “great battles of WWII” with clear sections and varying formats and writing that eighth graders could potentially see themselves in, would be more supportive than one about “the economic causes of the great depression” that is very complex and far different from the kinds of writing your students will do. You will want to consider whether to choose several mentor texts that are structured differently so as to expand students’ sense of options or whether you want to channel students toward a particular structure so that you can provide more scaffolding by

holding the class more closely together and ensuring that the text you write as an exemplar matches the ones they write. When selecting texts, you will likely find that some texts are narrative nonfiction—ones that take readers through a timeline within the life of someone or something (people, animals, plants, rivers, wars, events)—whereas some will be expository informational texts organized in a variety of ways: ones that teach all about a topic, some that are procedural, others that are a composite of all of these and other kinds of structures. You'll also keep an eye out for exemplar digital texts that students might use as teachers down the line: user-generated PowerPoint publications found on a search engine site like YouTube or perhaps an interactive teaching tool that describes the process of the Dust Bowl on an education website like PBS or the History Channel.

You'll need to decide which features you'll want to highlight in your minilessons, and make sure the touchstone texts you select illustrate those features. For example, given that you'll probably emphasize the importance of categorizing information, you'll probably want to find model texts that have clear subcategories. You may want to emphasize that informational writers write in sections or chapters, and you may want to use the very concrete example of writing that begins with a table of contents and is divided into chapters to illustrate this concept—in which case you will need books that contain a table of contents. Whether that is important to you or not, you will almost certainly want to show writers that information pertaining to one subtopic falls under one heading, and information pertaining to another subtopic falls under a second heading, and so you will select mentor texts that have headings and subheadings, if not chapters and a table of contents. The Common Core State Standards remind us that eighth graders' information writing should not only convey information but should also offer some insights about and some analysis of that information. You'll likely want to highlight right away that writers integrate facts with opinions and ideas, in which case you'll select mentor texts that illustrate this clearly. You may also search for exemplar texts that blend clear, straightforward informational writing with voice. If so, you'll look for books that engage the reader and sound as if the author is speaking straight to the reader, with sentences embedded among the factual information in which the author relates that information to something more personal.

Once you've chosen an exemplar text or two, you're ready to begin. You'll want to provide a unit overview for your eighth graders. This will be easy to do because in the reading workshop, they will also be reading texts in which writers become teachers, laying out a course of study for readers. You might, therefore, say, "The authors that you are reading are functioning like your teachers. Well, you, too, can become a teacher, writing in such a way that you teach other people about the topics on which you are an expert."

Use Performance Assessments to Make Decisions about Your Teaching

You will probably decide to launch the unit with an on-demand informational writing assessment. This means that on the day before the assessment, you could say to your

students, “Think of a topic that you’ve studied or know. Tomorrow, you will have an hour to write an informational (or all-about) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you’ll have an hour to complete this.” Then, the following day, provide them with one writing workshop’s time to show what they know about information writing.

Many teachers find that after students do this informational writing, it can be helpful to give students a fast course on information writing and then allow them to spend a single day rewriting what they have written, from top to bottom, because this can allow you to assess what they know how to do without any instruction and what is easily within their grasp with just a brief amount of reminders.

In any case, this on-demand writing will help you know where your students fall in a trajectory of writing development and help you set your sights on very clear next steps. You might refer to the Continuum of Information Writing on our website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) for support in this analysis. It will also help students realize that informational writing is well within their grasp, and not something that requires days and weeks of preparation. Most classrooms of students who have done the on-demand assessment have been pleasantly surprised by how much students bring into this unit of study and by the volume of writing students are able to produce in just one day’s writing workshop. The work that students produce in the on-demand situation becomes the baseline, and you can increase expectations as the unit progresses.

Part One: Launching the Unit: Information Writers Try On Topics, Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye Toward Greater Focus

Your first goal will be to inspire your writers to regard information books as inspiring and compelling. You want to enter the unit with a class of adolescents who are dying to do this work. Show students some of your favorite published nonfiction books, including those you have selected as mentors, and tell them what you love about those books—or let students browse and mark and talk about favorite pages and parts. Sometimes, kids will turn first to the illustrations or interesting text features. Let them browse the electronic pages of a digital book you’ve pulled up on the Smart Board. If so, you can explain that there is an art to writing books that entice a reader into learning a lot. Writers do sometimes include illustrations or text boxes or grabber-leads that are intended as ways to collar the reader and bring that reader’s attention to the rest of the page. You can help your students, too, to go from those initially appealing sections to the rest of the page—to the compelling anecdotes and descriptions that are as interesting, if not as eye-catching as the passages. The Ology series and the Seymour Simon books in particular include a lot of vivid writing.

One way to recruit young writers to write with intensity is to share a vision with them right from the start of what will happen to their published pieces. Are you mak-

ing a library of books about the solar system, which will grace the shelves of the science classroom, be available for all young scientists, and be read to a younger grade or to the students the following year? Are you adding to the nonfiction books you have available for independent reading in your classroom, so that students can find expert books on training for soccer, the history of the woolly mammoth, and how coyotes are beginning to live in cities? Are they embarking on a dual publication—one book for the classroom library and one digital version for the school library’s webpage? One thing is for sure—students knowing that their books will be handled and read by other readers (not just read aloud to other readers, but that individual, interested readers will turn the pages themselves, lingering over the words and images) really increases the intensity and thus their stamina and zeal for doing high-level work. You may have on hand a few terrific informational books that kids have made in prior years. If so, combine these with colleagues and share them with students to inspire them.

After teaching your writers that information books can be compelling, your next goal will be to teach them that one of the first things that an informational writer does is to select a topic and to focus, narrowing it to the most interesting aspects of the topic. Your goal will not be to help writers come up with a topic for their writing—remember, always, that if you catch someone a fish, they eat for a day; if you teach them to fish, they eat for a lifetime. Your goal, then, at the very start of the unit is to equip your students with a small repertoire of strategies that they can use again and again in life whenever they want to select a topic for informational writing. You’ll probably want students to explore several possible topics (this makes it more likely that they will settle upon a topic on which they have information, and it gives you some time to cycle through the classroom, conferring with individuals to edge them toward topics in which they seem especially knowledgeable and invested). Most teachers encourage writers to use their notebooks as a place for recording ideas for informational writing. Some teachers suggest it helps to think, “If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what might I teach?” That question, for some children, can be a more supportive one than the more generic: “What am I an expert in?” Thinking, “What would I teach this class?” leads a writer to consider not only his or her expertise but also the interests of a likely audience.

You could teach your students that some nonfiction writers try on ideas by writing potential back-of-the-book blurbs as a way to imagine how their books might go and why those books would interest readers. As writers collect ideas in their writer’s notebooks, you’ll want to make sure that rehearsal does not mean just writing a few words onto the page and calling it a day. You could suggest that writers record not just possible topics, but possible subtopics within each topic. Writers could go farther and think about subtopics within whatever subtopic interests them especially. Students will need conferences and small-group help to shift from writing about “sharks” to writing about “great white sharks” and then possibly to writing about “great white sharks and their interactions with humans,” and they might balk a bit at the idea of revising their topics. Keep in mind, however, that front-end revision during these early days will prove much more acceptable to students than later revisions that re-

quire them to discard many pages of work. Of course, some less proficient writers may have more success with broader topics—great white sharks, not more focused than that—and some more proficient writers may be able to handle a topic that is an idea, not just a subject (sharks’ eyes are very different than ours).

Some teachers suggest writers engage in a bit of research to try on possible topics, and there may be some value in ascertaining whether there are any readily available and accessible texts on a topic. But remind your eighth graders that, in general, writers don’t generally start from scratch. It would be much more of a challenge for someone to write a book about training for basketball if he or she doesn’t play basketball or even watch it. For someone else, it would be a snap to get started with that—he or she could imagine the whole book and could thus focus on learning to organize information and write well.

You might be tempted to encourage your students to choose topics from the non-fiction books they are reading. One note of caution—you will be just starting the nonfiction reading unit of study. The goal of this first part of the nonfiction reading unit is to support fluency and reading with stamina. It is not until later that the unit will support the reflection and note-taking work that students might use to support information writing. We strongly suggest that you steer your students toward topics of personal expertise so that they have a large body of knowledge on which to draw right away. These topics do not have to be personal in that they carry special meaning for your students. They just need to be topics that your students know a lot about. For example, students could write about a place they visit frequently on vacation. Or they could write about their neighborhood in Brooklyn. Your students can do as much or as little research on topics as you are willing and able to support, but we do recommend that they have at least some information they can bring right away to the writing workshop.

Once your writers have spent a session or two trying on topics, you can teach your writers to think about a focus, or perspective, for the piece. Perspective does not necessarily mean that children will be writing opinions. For example, the topic “cheetahs are endangered” suggests that the writer has a perspective or an angle on the topic and presumably the writer will forward this. Such a topic may seem at first to readers to be an opinion, making the text into opinion writing, but actually this is just the aspect of the topic that the writer has decided to highlight. To help your students make similar choices, each with his or her own individual topic, you’ll probably want to help writers ask questions such as, “What do I want to say to my readers?” and “What do I feel is important for someone to know and feel after reading my piece?”

Probably by the share session at the end of the fourth day, you’ll want each student to have chosen his or her topic and to have revised the topic right away if needed to make it more focused. The subject of “soccer goalie” or better yet, “famous soccer goalies of the 20th century” will make for better writing than “soccer.” The less experienced writer, on the other hand, will have more success with broader, more general topics. Keep in mind that because the focus of this unit is on good writing, not on research, you’ll want to encourage students to choose subtopics or perspectives (as well as topics) on which they have “expertise.” Some of these topics emerge from nonfic-

tion reading students have done, and sometimes students will want to choose different topics. In general, the more specific and focused your writers' topics are, the more sophisticated their writing will be. Just as choosing a focused, zoomed-in small moment enables a personal narrative writer to write with greater specificity and elaboration, choosing a focused topic enables an information writer to do the same.

Once writers have chosen a topic, you can move them toward planning the parts or categories for their topic. Teach your writers some of the different ways that writers plan for how their information texts will go. One way writers plan is to think of a table of contents for their work, determining the chapters that they could put in their book. Writers also might use boxes and bullets to plan, with their boxes containing topics and subtopics rather than claims (as in essay writing). The design for the most complicated websites many times begins from scratch with paper and pencil-written plans. This is a crucial conceptual component of planning informational writing. If you have opportunities to do some small-group work to support this, writers will certainly profit from some close-in feedback. You can help writers understand that when breaking a topic into parts, the parts need to cover the entire topic. One can't write a book on the United States and write just about four randomly selected states—but one could write about Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central U.S. It would be odd if that list of component parts of the U.S. included New York City because usually component parts need to be of equal weight and parallel. It is helpful to teach students ways that information pieces are typically divided. For example, information writers often use parts, kinds, or times. If some of your students struggle to think of categories or subtopics, you could teach them in a small group that writers can always go back and revise their topics, perhaps making them broader. That is to say, perhaps their original topic choice is really a subtopic under a broader category about which they have more to say. Additionally, you'll want to coach writers into creating categories that feel parallel in weight.

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

Just as your writers gathered a variety of information in their notebooks to support their essay claims, they will gather a variety of information to support their information books. After a few days of collecting ideas in notebooks, you will want to shift your writers into gathering the information that will fill up the pages of their books. First, you will need to teach that writers gather information for their books and make decisions about how much and what kind of research they will need to conduct.

You will want to remind your young writers of the importance of gathering a variety of information and information that comes from more than one source. This is a good time to teach them to bring forward all they know from the nonfiction reading units about growing ideas through writing about a topic. You can teach your students different ways to collect in their notebooks: Sometimes they might make bullet points of facts, sometimes they might write long, growing some ideas about the facts they are

collecting, and they also might keep a running list of difficult vocabulary words for a glossary. They might make summaries of what they are reading and organize those summaries in different ways depending on what they are reading. If you have been following the content area units of study, your students will have a repertoire of strategies on which they can draw to use note-taking as a way to grow their thinking about a topic.

Because the information will need to be sorted into categories and subcategories, you may want the research to be collected in folders, with one folder for each subtopic. In this case, encourage children to collect notes on single sheets of paper, stored in the appropriate folder. Help children avoid collecting hodgepodes of disparate information stuck together into gigantic blobs.

You will need to decide whether you want part of this unit to include students doing short, focused, on-the-run research in which they locate and use print and on-line sources to supplement the information they already have. This probably should not become a unit where research overwhelms everything else, with students spending the majority of their time collecting rather than *writing*. Still, you will no doubt encourage writers to use sources to verify and extend their known information. For example, a writer creating an information book on great artists of the Harlem Renaissance might not know the exact years in which some artists were born and might feel that information would be useful. She could conduct an Internet search looking for this specific information. Encourage your students to use more than one source to support their writing. The amount of research your writers do will of course be dependent on the amount you feel able to support. Use the collaborate partner and group structures in your classroom and encourage tech-savvy students to compile electronic sources together using a program like VoiceThread. VoiceThread enables students to upload a variety of files and have virtual conversations about the files. For instance, students might upload a poem or painting from the Harlem Renaissance. Using VoiceThread, students can record their thoughts about the artifact using the built-in microphones on their computers or using the text feature and have a written conversation. Students are essentially having a virtual club conversation about multiple digital resources, allowing them to research together beyond the walls of the classroom. A note here on tracking and citing sources: It is of course imperative that middle school students credit sources and avoid plagiarism. Teach your students right away that information writers keep a list of books and other sources they use as they research so they can later incorporate these sources into their draft.

Part Three: Information Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Knowledgeable About

At this point in the unit, your students will have a sense of the categories, or subtopics, they'll be covering in their information book, and along the way they will have been gathering information in their notebooks. You can teach your writers that one way to rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a part-

ner, taking care to teach the information in subsections. Your writers will be accustomed to teaching each other information from the nonfiction reading units. In this session, a possible mid-workshop teaching point is to teach that information writing is intended for a specific purpose and audience, as the Common Core State Standards for informational writing suggest, and that the purpose of this kind of writing is often to teach others about a topic. Teach your writers to note areas where their information seems weak and to make a plan to shore up weak areas by finding out more about that particular subtopic. Focus your coaching during this session on students having adequate information for each subtopic, because this will be key when you are later teaching your students to elaborate well. Remind your students, perhaps in a mid-workshop teaching point or a share, that writers revise during all stages of the writing process, and as they collect information in categories they might also revise their subtopics. If they find they have too much information for one subtopic, they might consider breaking it into two. Conversely, if they don't have enough information for a subtopic, they will need to either collect more information or perhaps eliminate the subtopic altogether.

After collecting information for a few days, your students will most likely be more than ready to put together the pieces of their essays and draft. You can teach your writers that as they begin planning for their drafts, it is important that they look carefully at the texts that serve as mentors for this unit. You may highlight the texts that include a table of contents that contains different chapters, each of which takes up a different aspect of the topic.

In one session, you could teach that information writers often start with the pages they are most fired up about. You could teach your students different ways to approach drafting these initial pages. Teach your eighth graders that when information writers draft, they keep in mind that they are writing in such a way to set readers up to be experts. Then, teach that information writers often draft one subsection at a time, keeping in mind everything they want to teach the reader about that particular subtopic. If you feel your writers have a solid understanding of nonfiction text structures, remind them to draw on all they know about different ways that nonfiction texts can be structured as they draft, choosing the structure that will best support the information they are trying to convey. In some cases, a compare/contrast structure may best support the information, in others, boxes and bullets, and in others, a narrative structure may work best. Nonfiction writers often use a variety of structures within subsections, especially as texts become more complicated.

As an alternative, you could teach your writers that one possible way students could draft is by starting with more visual texts (labeled diagrams with captions). In middle school, your students need to take a more sophisticated approach to text features. It isn't enough to just draft a page and think, "What are some pictures that might go with this text?" Middle school writers need to think, "What is the best way to teach this information?" A good digital teaching tool to illustrate this point is an interactive feature typically found in online newspaper publications, like the *New York Times Online*. Interactive maps, graphs, or timelines typically accompany a breaking or large news story. For example, during the rash of tornados last spring in the South and

Southeast, many online newspapers used interactive timelines where the user could scroll over certain parts of Alabama and see the time, size, and wind speeds of the storms. Or there were graphs displaying how many people were left homeless, injured, or even dead. These digital text features add another layer of comprehension to someone's reading experience—a great feature to teach students to try using in their own writing.

In the following session (or tucked into this one if your writers are more experienced), teach your writers that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. Often an effective way to organize information is to move from the general to the specific, giving first big ideas that the reader needs to know about the topic and then moving to the smaller details, like interesting facts. This is an excellent time to draw on partnerships. Partners can work together to share sections of text and to ask each other, “Did I answer all of your questions as a reader? Did I set you up to be an expert in this topic? Did I tell you enough in the beginning so that you could understand all of the parts at the end? Did you have any questions about specific ideas, parts, or even words after reading the whole section?” You may want to collect other questions or prompts partners can use to support each other and compile them on a chart with the questions listed here.

During this stage of the writing process, it is often tempting to teach your students to draft the entire book from start to finish, starting with the introduction. We encourage you to resist this temptation! One reason is that the introduction and concluding sections of an information piece have a different format and purpose than the body sections. Your students will need you to teach right away into the format of the body sections, the parts of the piece that have a common structure and that will make up the bulk of the writing. Also, drafting an introduction before writing the sections of a book can limit the writer to stick closely to the shores of what he or she originally imagined in the introduction, which can lead to few revisions and potentially formulaic writing. It is important to leave room for your writers to make huge revisions to their original plans as they draft.

If students are publishing in a multi-modal format, this planning and drafting stage is the time to make decisions on layout and how elements of the book will flow together. Students might make different mockups of pages to see how they will fit together in a PowerPoint or Keynote format. Students then might begin to make decisions on what other forms of information they will include, such as visual images or photographs, a map or chronological timeline, or even song or voice files that will overlap on an existing page of writing. Multi-modal publication allows the creator to utilize multiple senses, such as sight and sound, to create an effect on the reader. These authorial choices are important to experiment with during this planning stage.

As they draft, you might pull some small groups and teach your writers to make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions. You'll want to keep an eye on volume during this session, reminding your writers to continue drafting body text along with planning text features and to incorporate all they know about quality expository writing into their

drafts. You'll want to refer to any of the charts you used during the essay unit that might support qualities of good information writing, for example, charts that support elaboration prompts, transition words, or kinds of evidence to include in essays.

The Common Core State Standards remind us that, by eighth grade, students should be able to use multiple sources in their writing and "quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources." It is likely that your eighth graders have had some experience paraphrasing information to use in their own writing, but you'll want to assess for this as they draft, deciding whether to teach this skill in a whole-class mini-lesson or possibly in small groups. If your class struggles with paraphrasing, you can teach them to practice this skill in partnerships, first rereading their notes, then closing the notebook and saying the information in a few different ways. You can also teach simple ways to cite sources during this drafting session. You can introduce to your students stems to use to connect pieces of information with sources, such as: "According to . . .," "In the book . . . by . . . it says . . .," and "The author . . . teaches us that"

Part Four: Information Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

Plan to devote ample time to the revision portion of this unit. As in any unit of study, some, if not all, of your students will still be drafting as you begin your revision lessons. Writers can incorporate the revision strategies you teach right away into their drafts, remembering that writers continually revise; they don't wait until "revision week" to use all they are learning about information writing to re-see and re-work what they have already written. There are many powerful revision moves that information writers can make that fall into predictable categories. Most of the powerful revision strategies for information writing fall into the categories of structure, elaboration, and craft. We encourage you to study the *Continuum for Assessing Information Writing*, because expectations for each of these categories are clearly outlined.

Remind your students that good writing does not happen in isolation. We highly recommend that you and your students call once again on your study of mentor texts. The use of mentor texts will be particularly helpful when your writers are thinking of ways to elaborate each section with a variety of evidence and ways to support each section with text features, such as charts and diagrams. For a list of leveled information books to use as mentor texts, visit our website, www.readingandwritingproject.com, and click on the Resources tab at the top of the page. We also recommend that you use a demonstration text of your own information writing that you revise in mini-lessons and use when conferring with your writers. You can also use other students' information writing as mentor texts. You and your students can study the information writing included in the *Continuum for Assessing Information Writing* as well as the information pieces written by students that are posted on our website.

You might begin your revision work by teaching into *elaboration* strategies for information writing. It can be helpful during this time to angle your teaching and coaching

toward teaching them the muscles that information writers need to develop—explanatory writing, descriptive writing, idea-based writing, and anecdote writing. In one session, you might teach your writers to study mentor texts, taking note of the variety of information that information writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Teach your writers to include explanations of important ideas, using an explaining language and giving examples. Your writers can also include direct quotations from books or from people regarded as experts. You could create a chart with your students, highlighting types of details spotlighted in the Common Core State Standards such as facts, definitions, concrete details, quotes, or examples related to the topic. In another session, you might teach your writers that information writers think about stories or anecdotes that help to explain or teach about a subtopic. For example, a student with the topic of great artists of the Harlem Renaissance might decide to include a story about Langston Hughes’s childhood as part of a subcategory on the poet. During these sessions, you can focus your conferring on helping writers to synthesize and integrate information from a variety of sources (an easier task if your writers collected adequate information earlier in the unit).

In another session, you could teach your writers to include not only information but some of their thinking about the information. The Common Core State Standards specify that information writers should not only select and organize content, but also *analyze* it. Writers can say more about their topic by including their own observations and ideas about what they are teaching. Writers could return to their notebooks to grow ideas, once again drawing on thought prompts such as “This is important because . . .” and “This is connected to . . .” and then could think about where to add this thinking to their drafts. For example, after writing a fact about cheetahs such as, “Cheetahs are endangered for several main reasons: they are losing their food sources, they are being hunted too much, they are losing their habitat, and their babies die easily,” the writer could then go on to offer some opinions or commentary about this, such as, “Two of those reasons are caused by humans, hunting and losing their habitat. People should stop hunting cheetahs and we should be careful to protect their habitats so they can survive.”

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of using domain-specific language, in other words, vocabulary and terms specific to the topic. Teach writers to be on the lookout for places to use and define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. The Common Core State Standards state that by grade four and beyond, information writers should use “precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.” There are several different ways that information writers teach vocabulary to their readers. The most supportive way to teach a vocabulary word (and often information writers choose this method for very difficult, technical words) is to write the word in bold and to state its definition outside of the text. Often this is done in the margin of the page on which the word appears. Another way information writers can teach vocabulary is to include the word and its definition as part of the text. For example, a writer might say, “The body of an octopus, called the mantle, helps it to breathe and swim.” A less supportive way to teach vocabulary is to include words in the text

without definitions, leading readers to use context clues. For example, “The mantle of the octopus is connected to all eight of its legs and helps it to breathe and swim.” Digital tools, like hyperlinks (the underlined blue “links” that connect pages on the Internet), might encourage students to tackle these more complicated terms. When reading online, many domain-specific words are in blue and underlined, and once clicked, the reader is taken to the definition, example, or history of the word. This act of hyper-linking is engrained in many of our young adolescents’ reading practices and can be used to contextualize this vocabulary work.

Information writers are well-served to keep in mind the old adage, a picture is worth a thousand words. The Common Core State Standards remind us that writers don’t just teach information with text. They also teach information through “formatting (e.g., headings), illustrations, and multimedia.” These tools help readers to understand even more powerfully the information that the writer is teaching. Teach your writers that the text features in sophisticated information books like the ones they are creating need to work hard. They teach us additional information about the subtopic. They are not just illustrations. You can support your students in this work by studying mentor texts with them to analyze how text features help us to teach additional information to our audience, such as how we teach important vocabulary through text boxes or glossaries, how we use annotated diagrams to clarify explanations, and how we may think across the headings and subheadings or other text features on our pages to refine the journey we are taking our reader on. The Ology books will be particularly useful in supporting this work. You may offer the opportunity for students to include interactive elements, such as “lift the flap” features or fold-out maps and diagrams or exploded details and charts. These often add compelling visual features to informational texts—and our kids need to improve their ability to synthesize and interpret these visual elements. Creating them as writers will only help them as readers. Remind your writers to also cite sources for visual elements they include, right on the text, when information from a particular text or author helped them to create a text feature.

You can also teach your information writers to revise with the lens of *structure*. In one session, you could teach that information writers make sure that they have grouped information into categories, thinking about whether the information included in each section fits with the subtopic. You might also tuck into this session the reminder that information writers also think about the order of information within each category, thinking through whether they have organized the information in a way that best teaches the information to the reader. Even though you most likely taught this concept during the drafting stage, you most likely will want to support your writers in the organization of their information within each section during your one-on-one coaching.

As part of this session, you could teach your writers that each section of an information text tends to have an introduction that previews for the reader what they are going to learn about in that section. The Common Core State Standards refer to this work as “orienting the reader.” For example, a section titled “The Cheetah’s Habitat” might start by saying, “There are many factors that are causing the cheetah’s habitat to

become smaller.” This introduction to the section tells the reader that they will be learning about not just the cheetah’s habitat but also ways that it is being destroyed.

The Common Core State Standards lay out the importance of including introductory and concluding sections that are connected to the main topic, that reflect the most important information and ideas from the piece. Teach your writers to revise the introductory sections to their books, asking questions such as, “What do I want to teach readers at the beginning of my book? How can I draw in the reader right from the start? How can I give the reader an overview, an introduction, to my topic? Does my beginning set the reader up to become an expert in this topic?”

Teach your writers strategies for revising their conclusions as well. A conclusion should not only sum up the important information, but it should also leave readers with some big ideas. Your eighth graders will have had plenty of experience using information to persuade. You could teach your students to use those same muscles here to compose a concluding section that is meant to convince the world of something the writer strongly believes about the topic. Teach your writers that a powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples. For example, a student writing about monarch butterflies might write a concluding section with a thesis-like statement such as, “Monarch butterflies are very important to plants.” Then, the writer could go on to give examples of different types of plants that monarch butterflies help to pollinate. Another writer, writing about great white sharks, might begin with a thesis that is a call to action to readers, such as, “Many kinds of sharks are endangered, and none more so than the great white. It is our responsibility to protect this amazing animal.”

Plan to teach your students craft moves that information writers make. Teach them to use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic. The Common Core State Standards suggest particular transition words at each grade level that will be excellent additions to your transition words strategy charts. Teach students to use transition words such as *another*, *for example*, *also*, and *because*; and as they become more sophisticated in their writing, teach them to use transitions such as *in contrast*, *especially*, *furthermore*, and *moreover*. Additionally, depending on the skill level of your students, you can teach them some strategies to write with greater description and verve. You can teach them to embed imagery, anecdotes, and/or small scenes to paint a picture in the reader’s mind.

You’ll want to make sure you have strong writing partnerships going as students draft and revise. In addition to holding each other accountable to the strategies you’ll be teaching, partners can support each other by playing the parts of students and teachers, taking turns teaching each other about their topic section by section, and asking questions when the information isn’t clear or fully developed. Particularly because the topics will be ones of personal expertise, writers may tend to gloss over important background information. Partners can help each other to identify places that need more support and clarification. These places might include discussions of important concepts or places where difficult vocabulary is used. You’ll certainly want to create a strategy chart to support this partner work.

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

In teaching editing, tell children that their texts are going to teach important information to their readers and thus need to be clear and accurate. How can the reader learn about the topic if the writer's words are misspelled? In editing nonfiction books, teach children that the resources from which they got their information are great sources for correcting spelling of content-specific vocabulary. Teach students to be on the lookout for an *underuse* or *overuse* of adjectives, because they sometimes are underused and contribute to dry writing or overused and cloud the writing with unnecessary or inaccurate information. Remind them to bring forward all they know about conventions to this genre. In addition, you might also teach children another use of commas that shows up a lot in nonfiction—offsetting definitions of words that are defined in context. Informational writing also provides a perfect opportunity to remind your writers about when and where to use paragraphs.

Then get ready to publish! You and your students should be tremendously proud of the independence and effort they have shown, and of the breadth of their expertise and their prowess as writers. Celebrate these achievements by giving your writers a chance to teach others what they have learned. You might do this in a grade-wide celebration or by sharing with another grade or with parents. You might encourage your writers to present their work orally. You might teach them to make presentation boards and captions and to practice presenting their work. Or you might encourage them to share visually. You could create a gallery of the finished books and invite others to come for a visit.

This unit aligns with the Common Core State Standards recommendation of using technology tools as part of the publishing process. There are multiple ways to follow this recommendation. You might suggest that writers publish using programs like PowerPoint or Keynote. This option does not require a live Internet connection and could be accomplished on classroom computers, a school computer lab, or at home. You might offer the option for students to publish using computer software, like Bookemon. This program allows writers to upload text from a Word, PDF, or PowerPoint document and convert it to a high-quality hard- or softcover picture book. Students can also start from a range of blank or predesigned templates.

For those of you who have access to live Internet connections in the classroom, you might suggest students publish a rendition of the information book in a blog or wiki. Whereas the structure of the book might change, students open up their readership to their online community. Sites such as blogspot.com and pbworks.com are free hosting platforms that will also serve to teach your students some online formatting skills. You can set your students' permissions on these sites to private to protect their privacy. Lastly, you might prefer to use technology for just a small part of the publishing process. For instance, you might suggest students make a soundtrack for their information book. So if students were writing about the great artists of the Harlem Renaissance, they might research the time period and add musical selections that fit the time and region. Or you might suggest students create a digital slideshow that accompanies their information books, where students create a visual slideshow of art, images,

advertisements, or photographs from the time or topic they have studied. Using a program like Photo Story allows students to create a moving slideshow of digital images and weave in music, text, and narration. These multi-modal publishing options are an exciting way to diversify the types of writing celebrations students experience in their workshop.

Information Writing: Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books

Teachers, before embarking on this unit and deciding on the trajectory you will follow, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to better understand your students' level of competency with information writing. Of course, your assessment will be ongoing, not just at the start of this unit, but at many points along the way, and you will use what you learn through studying your students' work to inform how you progress through the work outlined in the unit. The teaching points offered here are but one suggested way that the unit could go. The ultimate pathway will be based on observations you make of your students and assessments of their work. Here are some further insights about expectations about each part of this unit and how to plan to meet the needs of your individual learners.

In Part One of the unit, the goal is for students to generate a great deal of notebook entries, first trying out topics of individual expertise and then eventually choosing a seed idea and rehearsing for a draft. Study your students' writing for evidence of strategy use and for volume. The goal is that students write productively and move from entry to entry with independence, and that they use a variety of strategies, such as writing possible back-of-the-book blurbs or making lists of possible chapters for their books. You may have some writers who are reluctant to generate more than one or two possible topics. Support these students in reaching further for possible topic choices. If your students are slow to generate ideas, you may want to spend more time teaching strategies for choosing topics of expertise either in small-group or whole-class sessions. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voice-overs such as, "By now, your hand should be flying down the page." "By now, you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to sheepdog them into writing more quickly and do some diagnostic work to understand what is slowing them down. Then, you will turn your teaching toward helping your writers to choose a seed idea for their books. It is important that they have a variety of topics from which to choose. If students struggle to choose a topic, they may need one-on-one coaching during this time.

In the second part of the unit, you will be supporting students as they collect research and information to support their information books. In addition to choosing and possibly further focusing a topic, it is crucial at this point that your students have a strong sense of the subcategories that will fill the pages of their books. Toward the end of this part, your students should have not only a high volume of information but

also a variety of information such as quotes, anecdotes, statistics, and the like to support each subcategory. If your students' information seems weak, you may need to spend more time in this part teaching into note-taking and research before moving on to drafting. Keep an eye on ways that your students are tracking sources that they use as they research. You may need to help some of your writers to come up with organizational strategies to use as they take notes. Help them to paraphrase and avoid plagiarism while also holding on to main ideas and details.

In the third part of the unit, your students will be drafting their information books and may need a different level of support than what is outlined in this unit, depending on their competence with expository writing. If your students have more or less an internalized sense of how expository writing "goes," your progression through the unit will likely closely parallel what is outlined in the teaching points below. It is likely that your eighth graders will feel comfortable drafting fairly quickly and cycling back and forth between drafting and revising. Some of your students may benefit from additional support in small groups. Keep a particular eye during this part on which students need further support with paraphrasing and citing sources.

The way you progress through the fourth part of this unit will very much depend on what you observe in your students' drafts. We recommend that you once again call on the Continuum for Information Writing as a tool with which to study drafts. Study the work with the lenses of structure, elaboration, and craft, deciding what are the most crucial lessons within each of those categories to teach right away. During all parts of the unit, and particularly this one, you will want to ensure that your teaching supports students' independence. Your teaching will support revision, but your writers may move from drafting sections to revision and back to drafting. Study your students as they work for evidence that they are using a repertoire of strategies and that they are making choices about what to work on next.

As you head into the final part of this unit, take note of how you can support your students in being effective editors for themselves. Your students will likely be using high-level vocabulary, and some may need additional spelling support, perhaps in small groups. Notice common punctuation errors and teach into these, possibly through mid-workshop teaching points or minilessons as needed.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

As you approach this unit, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points below, because ultimately kids learn through the work they do, not the words out of your mouth. So the really important thing in a unit of study is that you have created opportunities for kids to engage in work that matters. The unit write-up can help you issue the wide generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but to also engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at specific skills that the unit aims to highlight. But in the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of your teaching relies on you assess-

ing your students often—not in big fancy ways, but by watching the work they do—and you seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to do that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they *can* do and can't do, but it is also showing you what you can do. From this attentiveness to student work and from your own persistence to reach students, one way or another, and your inventiveness in response to what they do, you'll find that your teaching itself becomes a course of study for you as well as for your students.

Part One: Launching the Unit: Information Writers Try On Topics, Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye Toward Greater Focus

Session I: "Today I want to teach you that writers of information books study published writing, imagining the books they will create and paying close attention to ways that published authors entice readers to learn about a topic."

Session II: "Today I want to teach you that information writers grow potential topic ideas in their notebooks, thinking, 'If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what would I teach?'"

Session III: "Today I want to teach you that some information writers write potential back-of-the-book blurbs, imagining how their books might go and why those books would interest readers."

Session IV: "Today I want to teach you that information writers try on possible topics, choosing one that they feel they could teach really well. They revise these topics right away, deciding whether to focus a topic further to write with greater specificity."

Session V: "Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for how their books could go. One way they do this is by creating a table of contents for their work, determining the chapters that could go in their books."

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

Session VI: "Today I want to teach you that information writers gather the information that will fill up the pages of their books. Along the way, they make decisions about how much and what kind of research to conduct. They collect these ideas in notebooks, taking care to collect a variety of information and information from more than one source."

Session VII: "Today I want to teach you that information writers record not just facts, but ideas. They can use thought prompts to say more about pieces of information that they collect."

Part Three: Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

Session VIII: “Today I want to teach you that one way information writers rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner. They take note of places where they need to collect more information and make a plan to find out more about that particular subtopic.”

Session IX: “Today I want to teach you that information writers often start by drafting the pages they are most fired up to write. As they draft, they keep in mind that they are setting up their readers to be experts.”

Session X: “Today I want to teach you that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. One way writers do this is by saying big or general ideas that the reader needs to know about the subtopic first, before getting to the smaller details.”

Session XI: “Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions.”

Session XII: “Today I want to teach you that information writers support their writing with other sources, putting information into their own words, and citing carefully to let readers know where the information came from.”

Part Four: Information Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

Session XIII: “Information writers study mentor texts, taking note of all of the different kinds of information that writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Information writers often include explanations of important ideas, quotes from experts, facts, definitions, and other examples related to the subtopic.”

Session XIV: “Today I want to teach you that information writers include not only information but some of their own thinking about the information. Information writers might return to their notebooks to grow ideas, drawing on thought prompts such as ‘This is important because . . .’ and ‘This is connected to . . .’ to say more.”

Session XV: “Today I want to teach you that information writers stay on the lookout for places where they might need to define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. Writers keep in mind common ways that information writers teach important words and decide which way will be best for each word.”

Session XVI: “Today I want to teach you that information writers don’t just teach information with words. They teach information with illustrations, charts, diagrams, and other tools that might help the reader to understand. They make sure these text features work hard. They are there to teach more information, not just to be pretty illustrations. Writers can study mentor texts to get tips on how to create and revise these text features.”

Session XVII: “Today I want to teach you that information writers zoom in to study the structure of each subsection. They make sure that the information is in the right section, that is, that each detail fits with the subtopic. Writers also zoom in on paragraphs within each subsection, thinking about whether the information in each paragraph fits together. Another way that writers study the structure of each subsection is to make sure they start with a sentence or two that tells the reader what they will be learning about.”

Session XVIII: “Today I want to teach you that writers revise the introduction of their information books, thinking about how they can set their readers up to be experts in the topic and how they can draw readers in right from the start.”

Session XIX: “Today I want to teach you that information writers revise their concluding section, taking care to sum up the important information and also leave readers with some big ideas. A powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples.”

Session XX: “Today I want to teach you that information writers use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic.”

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

Session XXI: “Today I want to teach you that information writers edit carefully, taking care to make sure spelling and punctuation are accurate so that readers can best learn the information. Writers might use published resources to make sure vocabulary words are spelled correctly.”

Session XXII: “Today I want to teach you that information writers celebrate all of the hard work they have done by getting ready to share the books they have created with others.”

