



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

# A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE **1**



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM  
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT





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**The Writing Workshop**  
**Grade 1**

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Lucy Calkins  
*and Colleagues from*  
*The Reading and Writing Project*



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# Overview of the Year for First-Grade Writers

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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

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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](http://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](http://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

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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

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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](http://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](http://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](http://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 ONE

# Launching with Small Moments

## SEPTEMBER

**A**lthough the TCRWP has many reasons for starting the year with an emphasis on personal narrative, one strong motivation for doing so is that this move is strongly supported by the Common Core State Standards, now adopted by forty-eight states. The Common Core State Standards require that students develop some proficiency at writing three kinds of texts: opinion writing, informational writing, and narrative texts. Specifically, for narrative writing, the Common Core State Standards expect first graders to become proficient at writing narratives in which they recount a sequence of events, include some details regarding what happened, as well as temporal words to signify event order, and provide some sense of closure. Achieving this level of proficiency will require lots of time and opportunities to practice—this unit, then, is followed by additional narrative units.

Of course, teachers who have found that it is important to start the year by inviting students to write narratives do so for many reasons. Language research specialist Shirley Brice Heath suggests that sharing stories is the most important precondition to rich literacy. Heath says, for example, that parents need not only to talk with sons and daughters about the here and now (“Here is a book,” “Stand there,” “Move over”), but that parents also help children use language to re-create other times and places, because this symbolic use of language is the essence of school literacy. This is a compelling argument to us: Human beings come to know each other through their sharing of stories, and this is how communities are forged. Then, too, narrative writing is an essential component of most other kinds of writing—even within a persuasive letter, for example, children will tend to include anecdotes (which are simply Small Moment stories). More than this, writing narratives can help learners read narratives. When a reader understands how a particular kind of text is made, this schema helps the reader

construct an understanding as he or she reads that kind of text. The data are clear that when children write narratives, this gives them an insider's understanding of inference, synthesis, prediction, and interpretation.

## A Word of Advice as You Launch the Year with Stamina and Independence

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You will notice this curricular calendar suggests that first-grade teachers launch the writing workshop with a unit that draws on some of the minilessons from the book *Launching the Writing Workshop* but is centered on the second book in that series, *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*. This recommendation assumes that most of your first graders have already participated in a writing workshop during kindergarten and have already experienced a launch of the writing workshop. If that is not the case for your students—if most of them are experiencing a writing workshop for the first time—then you'll want to rely more heavily on the first book in Heinemann's Units of Study in Primary Writing series (2003), *Launching the Writing Workshop*.

Assuming you decide to launch the year with a unit on narrative writing, and that your children already learned this kind of writing last year, you will essentially want to convey to your children, "Remember what you did last year when you wrote Small Moment stories? Well, now is the time to do that again." Of course, you'll also want to create a bit of a drum roll about how the upcoming writing workshop will be even more challenging, more grown-up, and more important than the writing that children did in the preceding year. You might, for example, tell children that this year, they'll tell and write Small Moment stories that are both small (focused) and yet also important.

You will find that first graders have absolutely no trouble generating ideas for stories they can tell and write. If you simply say, "Think about things that you have done that have given you strong feelings—times that made you really happy, for example, or really sad," you will find that kids are soon dying to tell each other true stories—and as one child tells about "one time when . . .," another child will think of a related vignette, and the stories will grow in abundance. Although you will not need ways to generate stories, you might nevertheless decide that you can build excitement around the writing workshop by helping children grow story ideas. One way to do this is to invite children to bring in objects from home that hold meaning and to then tell the stories of those items to their partners. You might think of this as show-and-tell, and it is not altogether different—just imagine twenty-five children all showing and telling simultaneously, each to his or her partner! Some teachers have found it helpful to have separate storytelling time. Maybe there will be five minutes at the end of your morning meeting in which children can do some oral storytelling. Or maybe you'll put this into those first ten minutes after lunch and recess. If children storytell at the start of the day or after recess, they become accustomed to spinning the events of their lives into sequential tales, using words to signal events in the appropriate order that they took place. Then during writing workshop it will be especially easy for them to think of stories they can capture on the page. On some days, you will probably

want to encourage children to storytell to a partner at the start of writing time, using this as an early form of rehearsal for narrative writing. This oral work will assist students as they begin to write in ways that do this, aligning to the Common Core State Standards, which requires first graders to write narratives in such an organized way, using such language.

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. After a day for assessing writing (see overview for directions and details about an on-demand narrative writing assessment at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)), 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: choosing topics and writing stories across the pages in 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. Then they'll need to write, write, write, moving across pages, fast and furious. When they're done writing, they'll need to reread their writing and decide if it is done or if they have more work to do on it. If they are done, they will begin another piece of writing.

There are a few things that are absolutely essential for this year. Stamina is certainly among those essentials. 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—and those booklets can each contain three pages. For most of your children, each page can contain a box for the picture and plenty of lines—perhaps four—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. Within this one unit, you should expect that first graders will write approximately three or four booklets a week, each with three or four sentences on a page. Those are very rough estimates, and certainly many children can do a great deal more than this, so expect your first graders to write *pages* a day, not a page a day. Expect your first graders to write *sentences* on each page, not just a sentence.

Another goal of the unit is to help children to be brave and resourceful as word solvers. You'll guide them to further develop and represent the sounds inside words, stretching out unknown words to isolate and then represent as many sounds as they can with the appropriate letters. You'll teach children that they can listen to the sound, think, "What letter makes that sound?" and try out different letters, relying on what they know about letter names and sounds to make a match. They can then reread what they have written—the initial sound—and try to hear another sound, continuing in that fashion across the word. Your expectation at the beginning of first grade will be that many of the children will write using initial and final consonant sounds, including some of the internal parts of words, and word endings.

Know, too, that your first-grade writers come to you with a clutch of sight words and a sense of ease with writing these words (especially if writing workshop was part of their kindergarten life), so you may want to teach, right from the launch, that they

can use the words they know to “build” and spell new words. You might say, “If you know the word *bike*, then you can probably already spell *hike* and *like* and so on. If you know the word *told*, then you have a whole bunch of other words you know how to spell like a pro—*hold*, *fold*, *mold*.” This strategy works wonders with helping writers become independent and brave spellers.

A third goal in this unit is for youngsters to learn to generate and record cohesive, sequenced narratives. If you teach writers to stretch out a story, drawing the start on one page, then the next part on the next page, and whatever happened next on each following page, these drawings will help children stretch out and elaborate their written texts. Some children will write the entire story on the first page, and others will turn each page into a different story. You can teach these children to revise their drawings, stretching those across pages, as a way to learn to stretch their writing. Then you can teach youngsters to stretch the text out, as they will have done with the pictures.

As you teach this unit, keep in mind that you will want your writers to be at level 4 on the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* ([www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)) by the end of first grade to align with the expectations that the Common Core State Standards set forth. Of course this is the beginning of the year, but using this tool to assess what your students are already able to do will help you to plan what you need to teach.

## Establishing a Workshop That Supports Independence

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*Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing* will serve as a resource to help you set your children up to generate topics and write true stories. In the book, this unit begins with the teacher reading a snippet of a narrative to students, asking them to listen to the small moments embedded inside the text. The teacher in the published minilesson reads a passage from *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera Williams, but you could select another text if you prefer. *Kitchen Dance* by Maurie J. Manning is another narrative that would be good a reference. Whatever text you select, you will want to use it to explicitly teach your students that authors of Small Moment stories use specific details and small actions to capture the beginning, middle, and end of a little snatch of time. You might read a passage from *Kitchen Dance*, noting how the author starts right in the moment, “I wake up and listen,” and then writes with small actions that stretch out the moment, “Tito listens. He rubs the sleep from his eyes, and we climb down the ladder.” Then you will teach your writers to do the same thing. A minilesson such as this will position your youngsters so that they can leave the meeting area ready to write their own Small Moment stories. This work will not only allow your writers to include some details in their narratives, as noted in the Common Core State Standards for first grade, but by zooming in on a small moment, it will also push them toward the second-grade standard that asks students to recount a well-elaborated event in their writing.

On the first day of this unit, then, children will write a Small Moment story—the whole thing—in a booklet. Some booklets will contain enough space for the child to write two or three lines underneath the picture, and others will have more lines for longer writing. Either way, children will benefit from having several pages of paper

stapled together into a booklet. Especially if you've engaged the class in some storytelling prior to the first day of the writing workshop and if your students have participated in a writing workshop during previous years, you will not need to provide children with help generating ideas for writing. "Writers, you already know that when writers want to write true stories, we think about things we do." Later, during the active involvement section of the minilesson, you can invite children to try generating ideas for writing. You could say, "We can think, for example, of things we did yesterday after school, or last weekend, or last summer. Try that right now and give me a thumbs-up when you remember one thing you did." You will see a lot of thumbs going up! In a small group, you might try to channel some of your more proficient writers toward writing on especially challenging topics. One way to do this is to suggest they might try writing about moments that have been really sad or really scary or really exciting and so on. You may tell them that writers sometimes think about particular, small moments, when we were the hero, a particular time when we helped or taught someone or accomplished or learned something. No matter what strategy you teach, just be sure that you leave the choice up to children—that is, you certainly would not want to assign every child the task of writing, on any one day, about "something that happened that was really sad." After just a few minilessons, children should be drawing from a few optional strategies. They won't need more than that—which is why we suggest that after two days of demonstrating strategies for generating story ideas, you shift toward teaching children how to write the stories they come up with as best as they can.

You will want to show writers that once they have an idea for a story, they can touch the pages of a booklet to say what they plan to write—and soon you will show them that they can do this same work when they meet with a partner (Session IV in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*). You may teach writers that it can help to close one's eyes and to remember doing an activity. Then the writer can record what he or she did first and then next, next, next, and then finally. For example, a child might write, "I walked onto the playground. I said, 'Let's play on the dirt pile.' We climbed up to the top of the dirt pile. I shouted, 'I am king of the mountain!' Then we rolled down the side. We stuck a stick in the dirt. It was fun." You could also teach students that writers often tell a story again and again to one another or to oneself, each time putting in more details. If children aren't sure what you mean by "putting in more details," you can explain that details include dialogue, actions, and thinking.

If children spend more than a few minutes planning a story, you may want to emphasize the importance of a *sketch*, not a detailed drawing (see Session VI). Sketches are quick drawings that let writers put mental pictures onto the page quickly. You will probably want to model how to sketch the important parts of a story quickly so as to then move to the next page and the next. Once writers have sketched their stories across the pages, they can go back and fill in the pages of their books with writing.

As students are pouring their stories onto paper, it will be important for you to establish and maintain routines for writing workshop. If your writers are coming from kindergarten writing workshops, they may already know about the expected procedures and routines. You may decide to tuck in reminders and reteaching to remind

them, for example, of how they can convene in the meeting area and how they can disperse from the meeting area to their work spaces. Act this out yourself, physically showing kids how to push in chairs, come swiftly to the meeting area, sit cross-legged on top of their writing folder in their assigned rug spot, and reread the charts that hang near the meeting area. If your students didn't have these experiences in the prior year, you will want to invest time instituting rituals and traditions. Be prepared to tuck these procedural lessons into your teaching!

Similarly, you'll want to explicitly teach children what you want them to do when you pause in the midst of a minilesson to say, "Turn and talk" or "Stop and jot." Early in this unit, you will probably want to practice the ritual of interrupting the minilesson to say, "Turn and talk." Your goal is for children to be able to turn on a dime to talk with a partner (and to know what to do if a partner is absent), and to attend to your signal suggesting that time for talking or jotting is over and that you need children's eyes and attention on you again. And you'll want to teach them how to go from the meeting area to their work spaces and get themselves started on their writing for the day.

Of course, your workshop will run more smoothly if you also teach children to work well with their partners. In kindergarten, your children will probably have worked with writing partners. They will know how to sit next to a partner, holding the paper in the middle. Don't wait to set those partners up—by the second or third day of school you will want each writer to be sitting beside someone in the meeting area, and during mid-workshop teaching points and share sessions, as well as the minilessons themselves. Encourage children to storytell to their partners, literally saying the same words they will soon write. Your teaching on partnerships during this first unit will be mostly around teaching the importance of partners and strategies to help them work well together and support each other within your writing workshop, so they are less reliant on you. This partnership work aligns with the Common Core State Standard that asks first-grade writers to "respond to questions and suggestions from peers in order to add details to strengthen their writing as needed." Therefore, setting up strong partnership routines in this first unit will allow for deeper and continued work with peers across the year.

Still, even if you provide youngsters with partners and use partnerships to support a more ambitious writing process, remember, this is just the very start of the year. So some students will gesture toward more extensive rehearsal and revision, while for many children, their work will probably still whirl 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.

A word of caution: It is also important that you resist the temptation to give each child an individualized jump-start at the beginning of each workshop. If children tend to sit and wait for you to come around and get them started, then teach a minilesson on strategies writers use to get started on writing. Similarly, if students seem to come to you whenever they are stuck, teach a minilesson on ways writers can help themselves when they are stuck. If children seem to expect you to micromanage them, asking things like, "Can I be done with this story 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 about this again. You are the writer!”

## Writers Write and Revise a Lot Right from the Start

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By the end of the first week in this unit, your writers will have created at least three or four Small Moment booklets with plans for writing even more. This upcoming part of the unit, then, aims to teach writers strategies to lift the readability of their Small Moment narratives.

While focusing on content and trying above all to be sure your children are writing up a storm, you’ll also need 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, and others obsess about every spelling, wanting your seal of approval for every decision. You need to be sure that you differentiate your instruction, helping the free-flowers to take that extra second to remember to write in lowercase letters unless uppercase is called for and pausing for a second to spell word wall words correctly, and meanwhile helping the children who see writing as little more than an exercise on spelling and penmanship to focus much more on writing quickly, fluently, and with a focus on content. For all children, remember that rough draft writing is not supposed to be perfect, but that meanwhile, as children grow older and more experienced as writers, more and more writing skills will become automatic and effortless for them.

Children will be rallied to revisit the books they write, turning the pages from front to back, reading them from left to right, top to bottom. You will also want to remind your writers of the tools they have available for revision to cultivate the ongoing process of revision across the unit. *The Craft of Revision* is an excellent resource for teaching about some of these tools, especially in Part One and Part Two. For example, in Session II, you will introduce tools a writer uses to insert new text into the midst of his or her draft. And when writers have single sheets of paper for inserting new content into the middle of a draft, they’re more apt to do it. If children have purple revision pens, right there in a jar at the center of the table, and they know those pens are reserved for revision—they’ll revise! Remind children that after they finish writing a story they need to reread it. Your writers learned a lot about revision when they were in kindergarten. Children should already know that they can try out different ways to start or end a story, attaching flaps onto their paper, with each flap containing another draft of a lead or an ending. They know it helps to make characters talk—to include the exact words they said. They know that they can reread for sense, adding missing information, and that they can return to especially important parts of the story, adding onto these sections of the story. Of course, children will have forgotten to do all these things. But you needn’t take four months to remind them of what they have already learned—don’t waste time before rallying them to do all they can do as writers.

Students will continue to improve their writing by working with their partners. Teach children how to read their pieces to each other in two ways: telling the story using rich, oral storytelling language, and then reading the print, touching the words as they read them. They can sit hip-to-hip, hold the booklet between them, turn pages, and tell the story as they study the pictures and read the writing. You can also show them how to share the page and use their pencils or fingers to point under words. You'll teach partners to find the most important part of each other's writing and to say why they think that part is important. Finally, teach partners the sorts of compliments they might give each other. Teach them to celebrate detailed topics, actions in the pictures, writers who make people talk, and so on.

Students will make their writing even stronger if you encourage them to be brave and inventive spellers. You'll teach writers to be resourceful with spelling and to rely on the tools to help them spell certain words quickly and correctly. Within this spelling work, you can teach students to write words they know (like high-frequency words) quickly—"in a snap." Session X of the *Small Moments* book will serve as a guide for this work. You can also teach students to be resourceful and to use the word wall (among other things) for support. The Common Core State Standards call for children to recognize, read, and write high-frequency words with automaticity. It helps to make word walls interactive, with extra copies of word wall words written on slips that children can pluck from the word wall pocket and take it back to their seats to call upon as they write.

## Lifting the Level of Student Work

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By this point in the unit, students will have accumulated a pile of stories and will have revised some of them somewhat. You will want to build on their instinct to reread and revise. The easiest revisions will be those that children make, with encouragement, to zoom in on a particular small event. Although you will have talked up the importance of writing about just a tiny snatch of time, chances are good that half the class will have generated stories about an entire afternoon at the beach, the store, the relatives' house. You'll want to teach them that writers reread and ask, "Of all that I have said, what is the most important part?" And then writers zoom in on just that part of a story. This often means that the writer decides that just one page of his or her booklet is actually big enough to become a whole story, told across several pages. Of course, revisions end up influencing upcoming writing, and you will also want to demonstrate for students that you often think first about telling about a great, big, long event but then you choose just one small thing that happened. For example, if your story is about a day spent at the beach, you might tell children that you could write about the whole day there but that instead, you chose one thing that happened—like a time when you were walking in the rain.

Revision will not all revolve around focus, You can also teach your children that writers need to become readers, reading their own writing as if they had never read it

before, asking especially, “Does this make sense? Is this clear?” Then, writers revise to make sure the text is clear and sensible.

Children’s revision work will slow down the pace at which children crank out little stories. They’ll spend time revising, and those revisions will also expand their sense of possibilities. For example, if a child at first wrote a minimal story like this: “I played in the sand. I made a castle. Then I went home,” you can help that child make a movie in her mind and write the story with more details, “I picked up a pail and a shovel and walked onto the beach.” You will definitely want to encourage them to write with more detail, telling more about each step in the story progression. You can prompt for exact quotes, too. “I said to Jill, ‘Let’s make a castle.’” More beginning writers may add speech bubbles, which include what people say or think. All these strategies will help writers have more sentences on each page, develop fluency, and learn to elaborate their stories so that they are more story-like and read less like a summary.

The crucial thing to realize is that to storytell well, a writer needs to do essentially what a reader does when reading a story. The writer needs to put himself or herself into the shoes of the main character and re-create, in his or her mind, the evolving drama of that time and place. So if I am going to write about taking my son to college and helping him fix up his room, and I stand outside that event and talk about it, I end up summarizing, not storytelling. I’ll be summarizing if I say, “I remember when John and I took Evan to college. It was really hard. I wanted to set up his room perfectly.” Instead, I need to begin by saying, “Okay, what will be the starting point of the story? If the starting point is the moment when we stopped the car, I need to go back in my mind to just before that moment and start reliving it. “‘There’s a space right by the door,’ I said, pointing. John pulled the car to a stop alongside Evan’s dorm. I opened the door and got out, turning back to collect an armload of suitcases.”

Students can also reconsider and revise the beginning and ending of their stories. It is a challenge to help six-year-olds ask themselves, “When in the sequence of events will my story start?” (realizing the story need not start hours in advance of the main event!) and for them to reimagine (or relive) the experience, capturing it bit-by-bit onto the page. There are a number of potential hard parts. One, certainly, is for the writer to realize that a story about catching a fish need not begin with waking up, or with catching the fish. Instead, it can begin with threading the worm onto the hook or with casting or with arriving at the stream.

A challenge students will frequently encounter is reliving and re-creating the event precisely. When a child says, “I can’t remember what I did!,” it is important to respond, “Imagine what you *probably* did and said.” Of course, children can imagine in sweeping steps—“I made a basket”—or in great detail—“I held the basketball out in front of me, looked up at the basket, and then pushed the ball into the air as hard as I could.” What can we say or do to help children write more like the latter than the former example? That’s a mystery for all teachers of writing—but chances are that one important step is to listen to children in ways that help them know that the details of their lives matter.

You will not be the only person with whom your young writers will be sharing their stories. Help children understand that writing partners meet every day to share their writing and give responses. Partnerships provide young writers with a sense of audience. Common things we can teach young writers to say to each other include “Let me show you what I did in my writing” or “This is what I did today” and “Listen to my story” or “This is what I’m working on.” Partners can respond by saying, “I like the part . . .” or “I like how you . . .” or “It makes me feel . . .” or “It reminds me of. . .”

## Writers Celebrate Their Piece and Themselves

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As you near the end of this unit, teach children that writers return to their best work to further revise and elaborate that work, aiming to put life onto the page in ways that match reality and make sense. Students will probably choose one story to revise once again. You’ll need to revise your own writing to demonstrate and to build enthusiasm for this more serious revision work. Children will commit to revision when they see your piece get better. This revision process can last for a few days, and it can, 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 it as hands-on as possible. Students can learn that narratives become better as writers add details about people, about the setting or the place, about their feelings. Writers can again consider how their story starts and ends. Some writers may be able to “re-envision” the moment as it occurred in life, adding details to the written account to make that record more vibrant. Some can search for more sparkling words, the kinds of words they see in the books they are reading.

One of the best, most exciting ways for children to revise narratives is for them to use drama as a way to see what they have said and what they might say next. A writer and his or her partner could read a bit of the writer’s text aloud, then act out what that bit says (not what the author wishes it said!) and then read the next bit, acting out that bit as well. The actors will quickly realize things that have been left out. “You need to add that!” they’ll say. “Say that in the story!” This work will change how writers read their own writing, helping them to think of their narratives as almost the basis for a little play.

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. Teach them that writers reread, checking to be sure they use words they “almost” know correctly. Having taught this, from now on, throughout the whole year, you will want to remind children that they know to spell word wall words correctly and they can do this without explicit instructions from you. From this point on, 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.

Be sure you don’t get invested in making September’s published pieces perfect. That is—if you or someone else types up the pieces, correct the spellings. But don’t feel that the pieces themselves need to be more focused, more detailed, more compelling

than they are. These are little kids at the start of the year, and their work will not be perfect. If you intervene to 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. You may also find yourself still trying to get these pieces published in October. Remember, your children are growing writers, not working to create one perfect piece. This is September, and much of this unit has been consumed with management and so forth. So relax. Invite no one to your author celebration, and hang the finished work within the safe confines of your own classroom if you need to do so to let the children's own work stand.

We recommend the simplest possible publishing party so that you get onto the next unit by the start of your second month of school. Perhaps you'll gather writers into small circles and give each writer a turn to read aloud. Then gather the kids alongside the bulletin board, allow each writer to post his or her work in the appropriate square, perhaps saying, as he or she does, "I'm proud of the way I . . ." You could, alternatively, be the one to say what it is that you want to celebrate in each author. No matter what your celebration, make sure that it is, although simple, a moment for students to reflect on the hard work they did to launch their year of writing.

## Additional Resources

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Launching your writing workshop with Small Moment narratives sets your children up to become the rigorous, fearless, resourceful writers they'll need to be from this point forward. Conduct an on-demand workshop, asking children to write their best version of a Small Moment story. Provide paper, revision tools, and pens and send them off to create. Sit among your students to observe and note what happens during the workshop. Check to see who is sketching across pages, getting more pages, rereading. Whose hand flies down the page or makes additional lines to hold all their story? Collect the pieces and use the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* to understand where your children are in their understanding of narrative writing, and tailor your teaching to meet them at that point.

The first part of the unit is about establishing a workshop and all that entails—procedures, routines, and, above all, independence and confidence that their personal experiences can become the stories they write and share with others. Expect your first graders to be able to come up with story ideas effortlessly, saying what they'll write on each page, sketching quick pictures and quickly adding a sentence or two onto each page. If you have students who approach workshop with a "one story and I'm done" attitude, refer back to the work they did as kindergarten Small Moment writers and teach that a writer's work is never done; once we feel finished, we go back to reread, add on, and then write more.

Before you move into Part Two, look to your children's work to see that multiple booklets have been crafted (expect three to five pieces the first week of the unit). If you find that volume is low, spend more time teaching into rigor and volume. If each

new booklet looks like a carbon copy of the one preceding, shift your teaching to lifting the level of narratives. Check for focus: Does a piece span across an entire day, or is it focused on a sliver of time (about twenty minutes)? Be sure your teaching aligns with the needs of your writers. Of course, rely on the teaching points listed in the second part of the unit below, but, only if you feel your children's writing is following the path laid out in the unit. If your children are writing listed, one-event, one-page pieces, then teach them to focus on a one-time moment. If you notice writers are writing a few pages of a focused narrative, but the ending is "and then I went home" or "and then I went to sleep," then show those writers how to close their pieces in the moment, perhaps by ending with a big feeling.

Expect to teach your writers to tackle tricky words with fearlessness, to stretch and record all the sounds they hear. Remind them that they left kindergarten with their pockets packed full of words they could read and spell in a snap. Expect to teach into the use of the word wall and how to rely on it to use and spell those words exactly right. Writers who hurry to record the initial sounds will need you to teach them to stretch, say, record, then stretch again, listen again, and record even more sounds. Students who over-stretch words, including words like *is*, *the*, and *my* will need your teaching to include how to use the word wall and to remember words "in a snap."

Look first to see what your children are doing as they pen additional stories and make sure they are including the work of previous teaching so that each booklet is stronger and more focused than those before. The teaching you'll do will be based on your findings inside their writing folders and you will teach into the crafting of small moments to further flesh out focus and voice. What's more, you'll teach into readability of pieces, expecting children to reread using their reading finger, add missing words, write more to further storytell, and edit for end punctuation and sense. Look to see if there is evidence of end punctuation, and if there is, encourage rereading to make certain the punctuation both matches what we want to say as well as makes sense.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### Part One: Establishing a Workshop That Supports Independence

- "Today I want to teach you that every one of us in this classroom can be an author, and we can all write true stories. To write a true story, one thing that we can do is to think of something that we do, get a picture in our mind, and draw the story of what we did on our paper. Then, we write that story! That is—we think, we draw, we write" (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).
- "Writers have a saying: 'When you're done, you've just begun.' When we finish one story, we get to work. Sometimes we add more to the picture or to the words—and sometimes we get a new piece of paper and start a new story. Our job, as writers, is to keep working on our writing for the whole time during writing workshop" (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).

- “Today I want to teach you that writers, like carpenters and doctors, have special tools and special places to keep our tools. We always keep our tools in the same place so that when we get a good idea for a story, we don’t have to waste time looking for a pen or paper or our writing folder” (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).
- “Today I want to teach you that writers begin with an idea for a story, and then we put that idea on the paper. Specifically, I want to teach you that writers picture in our heads something that happened, remembering all the parts of the story, and then we put it into our pictures.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “After we have put the story of what we did onto the paper, we put our pens under what we have on the page and we tell the story that goes with our paper. As we do that, we often think of more stuff to add” (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers have an ‘uh-oh’ feeling because we aren’t sure how to draw something, we can close our eyes and think about what the thing we want to draw looks like, and that helps us draw as best we can. We don’t just give up! No way! We say, ‘I’m going to just draw the best I can’” (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).
- “Today I want to teach you that writers use both pictures *and* words when we write. Some writers write words and labels beside the picture, and some write sentences at the bottom of the page. But every writer writes with pictures *and* words” (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers want to write a word, we stretch that word out like a rubber band, saying it really slowly. We say it again and again, listening for the first sound. When we hear that sound, we put the letter that makes the sound onto the paper. If we don’t know that letter, we put a little mark on the paper. Then we say the word again and listen for the next sound that we hear, and we put another letter on the paper for that sound” (*Launching the Writing Workshop*).

## **Part Two: Writers Write and Revise a Lot Right from the Start**

- “As writing partners, we can plan our stories out loud to each another, listening to make sure our stories make sense. As we practice telling our stories to our partners, we listen closely to every word we say, so that when we write the words, we write the *exact* words we say.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “After we’ve practiced telling our story out loud and written it down, we can reread our writing to make sure what we’ve written matches what we’ve said.”

- “Today I want to teach you that we can use what we know from working with our reading partners during reading workshop to help us with our writing partners in writing workshop. We can share our booklets just like we share our books. We can read in two ways: first *telling* the story, using big and beautiful language, and then *reading* all that we have written, touching the words as we read them.”
- “Partners, you can sit hip-to-hip, hold the booklet between you, turn the pages and tell the story as you study the pictures and read the writing.”
- “Today I want to teach you that we can add dialogue to our stories. We can reread our pieces, and think back to the moment we are writing about. As best we can, we can think of the actual words that someone said (or might have said). Then, we can go back into our stories and add in these exact words” (*The Craft of Revision*).
- “You know how there are some words you guys, as readers, just know? Well, when we write, we also need a handful of words we just know in a snap. That makes writing go faster. I put words up here on our word wall that are words I think you know in a snap, or *almost* know in a snap. Today I want to teach you that if there’s a word you are writing in your story that is on the word wall, but you can’t spell it, you can just look for it there. Then you can say the letters to remind yourself. Once it is in your brain, write it down on your page—snap, snap, snap” (*Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*).

### **Part Three: Lifting the Level of Student Work**

- “Today I want to teach you that we need to read our writing as though we have never read it before. That is, we need to read our writing asking ourselves questions like, ‘Does this make sense?’ ‘Is this clear?’ And if it doesn’t, or it’s not, we revise our writing to make sure it *does* make sense and that it *is* clear.”
- “Writers, today I want to teach you that we want to write our stories with more detail, telling more about each and every step as the story moves forward. We want to put ourselves back in the shoes of the character and think, ‘What is the very next thing that happened?’ Then we write it! We do this again and again as we write our stories from the beginning through to the end.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when you are writing endings to your stories, you don’t have to stray far from what’s actually happening in your story. Writers know that we will usually get a better ending if we stay *close-in to the moment*. One way to do this is to remember back to the very next thing that happened; we

could also say what you thought or felt (inside the story) during that moment” (*Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*).

- “Today I want to teach you that when we meet with our writing partners, part of our job is to have an actual conversation about our work. We can say things to each other like, ‘Let me show you what I did in my writing.’ Or, ‘This is what I did today.’ and ‘Listen to my story.’ or ‘This is what I’m working on.’ Partners can respond by saying, ‘I like the part . . .’ or ‘I like how you . . .’ or ‘It makes me feel . . .’ or ‘It reminds me of. . . .’”

#### **Part Four: Writers Celebrate Their Piece and Themselves**

- “What a special day for us, writers! Today is the day that we get to choose one story that we want to revise by adding details about people, places, and objects, giving details about the setting, fixing up any confusing parts, and writing more in the parts of our story that are extra important. Today is the day we pick one piece to celebrate and to add in any feelings and emotions that we may have left out.”
- “Writers, today I want to teach you that another way we can work with our partners is to have our partners read aloud a bit of our stories, then act out what that bit says (not what we wish it said!), and then read the next bit, acting out that bit as well. As we listen and watch, we will quickly realize things that have been left out. ‘No, you need to do this!’ we might say, and then, as a writing partner we can say back, ‘You should say that in the story.’”
- “Today I want to teach you that we can rewrite the most important page in our story. We can take smaller and smaller steps through the events and thoughts on that one page.”
- “Remember, writers, that we have actual readers for our stories—people out there who are dying to know about our lives! For them to learn about our lives, they have to read our stories. And for them to read our stories, we have to make sure our stories are readable. Today I want to teach you that when we reread our stories to get them ready for publishing, we can check to be sure we are using word wall words correctly.”



## UNIT TWO

# Writing-for-Readers

## OCTOBER

**W**e've dedicated the second unit of this year's curricular calendar to focusing on writing-for-readers. We know that during the first unit of the year, you stole moments of time to help students use as many sounds as possible when spelling a word and to help them draw on their sight word repertoire as they wrote. Still, for the most part, up until now you have probably acted as if your children's approximated spellings are fine and dandy. You have probably hidden your struggles to translate their spindly letters into meaning. You've reveled in their best efforts and made every child feel as if he or she is a professional writer.

This unit, then, is a bit of a wake-up call because you confess to your children that you sometimes have a hard time reading their writing. It's as if you let the cat out of the bag. "I took your wonderful stories home last night," you say, "and I sat down to read them. But do you know what—I read a bit and then—I got stuck. I couldn't figure out what the story was supposed to say! Has that ever happened to any of you?" Of course your children will all commiserate, and many will confess that they can't even read their own writing, let alone a friend's. This, then, sets the stage for a unit in which you aim to teach students to push themselves to write more conventionally. The unit draws heavily on *Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies*, a unit by Calkins and Louis from the Units of Study series, which was originally taught in an inclusive first-grade classroom at P.S. 163, a bilingual school in Manhattan.

Of course, now that the Common Core State Standards have been released and adopted by forty-eight states, this unit—published almost a decade ago—becomes all the more essential. The Common Core State Standards require that by the end of first grade, children be able to write narrative texts with a surprisingly high level of proficiency. The standards also set expectations for what first graders should be

able to do, suggesting that first graders should be able to demonstrate a command of end punctuation, spell common patterned words, and be resourceful and phonetic in spelling unknown words. Remember, though, those goals are *by the end of first grade*. This unit, in October, is the starting point, not the finish line. In this unit, you challenge students to write in such a way that readers can read their writing. We believe that it is important that as soon as a child has a hope of writing in ways that a reader could conceivably read, you let that child in on the truth. Sometimes you can't read the child's writing—writing that, until now, you accepted with such open arms. If you convey this message, it is crucial that you do this in ways which don't cause your children to despair.

This unit, then, aims to walk a delicate balance—and to teach critical skills. The unit spotlights the importance of spelling and punctuation by highlighting reading–writing connections and by turning word walls, blends, and capital letters into the talk of the town.

In this unit, your first graders will be writing true stories from their lives. You will be reminding them of all that they know about how to make those narratives more interesting by referring to the chart from the last unit and perhaps by also referring to all that they learned in kindergarten. So, while your children are writing narratives, you will be turning your teaching to strategies that will make their writing more readable. The first week will invite your children to take on the concept of more readable writing by trying to transfer what they know from word work to writing workshop. In the second week, you will be teaching your students rereading strategies and strategies to help them increase readability and fluency using high-frequency words. Finally, in week three, you will be teaching your writers strategies for using a partner to help make their writing easier to read.

## Getting Started: Looking at Features of Our Own Writing and Incorporating Word Work Concepts

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In *Writing for Readers*, the teacher launches this unit by inviting children to sort through their writing folders, creating two piles—one of readable and one of virtually unreadable writing. Then the teacher teaches youngsters to think about what makes some of the writing readable, and some, unreadable. “What can be done to move writing from this pile to that one?” she asks. Of course, there is no one answer—but this question ignites this unit for both the children and for you. Your answer to this question as the teacher will help you decide which strategies you need to teach so that your students write in more readable ways. The list of strategies will probably differ from class to class and from year to year.

A natural extension, then, involves teaching children to use the resources available to them to stretch out a word, saying it slowly to hear all the sounds. Some teachers even demonstrate by holding a rubber band in their fingers and stretching it little-by-little as they say the word slowly, to physically “stretch” the word. You might also teach your writers how to get more letters that represent more sounds into your words

by linking oral and written language. Your writers could learn how to say the word, listen to the sound, and write a letter(s) for the sound. Once they have a letter or two written on their page, you can teach them how to put their finger under the letter on the page, read it, and then say the rest of the word. Again, they need to listen for the next sound that they can hear, and write a letter for that sound, putting it next to the first letter. They should then put their finger under all letters and read what they have and then say the still unwritten rest of the word. This process repeats until they can hear no more sounds in a word. More sophisticated spellers can follow a similar protocol to writing the multisyllabic words, only they hear and record chunks of words.

You will want to coach children in strategies for writing “tricky words” so that readers can read those words. The writer can say the word slowly and write what the writer hears. Many teachers use some of the following prompts in conferences and small-group strategy lessons:

- “Say the word. Listen to what you hear at the beginning/end. Do you know another word that has that same sound at the beginning/end.”
- “Say the word. Do you know another word that sounds like that word? Use that word to write the new word.”
- “Say the word. You know how to spell that. It is on our word wall! Write it quickly.”

If you use these prompts to help children write tricky words during the writing workshop, you can use similar prompts to help them read tricky words during the reading workshop. For example, you can say to a reader, “Remember that when you are writing and you come to a word you don’t know how to spell, you stretch it out and listen for beginning and ending sounds? We can do something similar in reading. When we come to a tricky word, we can think about what’s happening in the story and use the beginning and ending of the word to figure it out.” Or when children are reading and come to a word wall word and seem stuck, we can say, “That’s a word you write *in a snap*. You can do the same thing in reading. You have seen it before. Just look it over for a second and think whether you already know the word.”

Of course, as you help children with tricky words, you’ll want to choose words that are ones your children tend to use and confuse. At this time of the year, this probably means the words will be ones that contain short vowel sounds and a CVC spelling pattern. The words may also contain initial and final blends and digraphs.

In *Writing for Readers*, the teacher gives each student his or her own copy of the class word wall, allowing children to bring their own copies of this tool home to use as they write outside school as well as inside the classroom. That tool—a portable word wall—becomes the rallying cry for a second part of this unit. If you decide to build this part of the unit around your word wall, you’ll want to first make sure that your word wall has not only high-frequency words children know *in a snap*, but also words that help them spell and read other words. This is where you will pick words that highlight

features of phonics that you are working on during word study—blends, digraphs, word endings, short vowels, or CVC words.

In any case, as you teach writers about the use of word walls, you will want to help them understand that there are some words that are used repeatedly, and it's great for readers and writers to *just know* those words. In time, writers should be able to look at a text and notice the high-frequency words. To many youngsters, these are known as “word wall words,” and that's fine. The important thing is for writers to know these words *by heart*. Of course, even after a writer comes to a word that he doesn't know and says, “I should know that; it is on my word wall,” and then looks to the word wall, one can't count on the deal being completed. Some writers look at the word wall—perhaps even copying the correct information from it—but they do this as the minimal thing. You will want to teach your students that the word wall not only helps you spell the word correctly right now. It also can teach them in the long run.

Meanwhile, because this unit is another personal narrative unit, you will want to remind children to make sure their books are tightly focused, chronological stories that incorporate story language and structure. The *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* will be a great help to you—informing both your whole-class and individualized instruction. For instance, if children's writing seems to look like the level 3 samples on the *Continuum*, then support students to try some of the focus and elaboration techniques highlighted in the level 4 samples. Teach students that they can make a whole story out of one page in their booklets, zooming in on the most important part of the story and making sure it all makes sense. You might make one day of your unit all about growing a new, more focused story from one page of an old story. You can physically rip out one page from your own booklet and show your writers how to make another booklet, just from that one page! It will be helpful to incorporate planning strategies into this: Show children how you can tell the story of this one page across your fingers. Alternatively, show them how you can orally tell the story or sketch it quickly across the pages of your new booklet. It really is true that when first graders learn how to get a little bit more focused in their writing, their stories are infinitely better. You could do this work by ending one day's workshop with the children marking the most important page from a story with a Post-it. You could then photocopy that page for each child and put two more blank pieces of writing paper with it. The booklet could be held together with a paper clip, and then your teaching on that day could be all about how writers know that more meaningful stories can be grown from a first try at telling a story. This kind of everyone-try-it approach to revision is not a common way you'd teach revision, but sometimes you may feel like you want your writers to learn that how they revise is a choice, but revising is not a choice!

## The Power of Rereading and High-Frequency Words

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Once you have inspired your writers to begin to keep their readers in mind as they write, you will probably be faced with the issue of quantity versus quality. In other words, when you invite your writers to make their writing more readable, you will

need to teach them to slow down and work harder at the recording of words on the page. You will want to keep a keen eye on volume, however, making sure that they do not begin to write far less for extended periods of time because of this added attention to word creation. In this second part of the unit, therefore, you'll almost certainly need to teach your Small Moment-writing writers how to balance writing with care and writing with volume.

You may be wondering then, "How much should my students be writing? What is a realistic expectation for volume? How much is a lot?" We all know volume is important to help children develop as strong writers. The more they write, the more they are practicing and the stronger they become. A realistic expectation for volume for your first graders is set by keeping in mind the reading levels of your students; this is especially true for readers in levels C-F. You can look at how much text is in their just-right books, and in general this can be a good indicator for how much text your students at those levels should be writing. For example, even some of your students reading levels C and D could be expected to write one to four lines of print per page in their books. If your students are not writing that many lines of print per page, you could show them one of their just-right books and say, "Do you see how the books you are reading have three or four lines on a page? So should the books you are writing!" Have students use some of their leveled stories during writing workshop. Your students who read levels E and F and above will have stories that they too can read and reflect on and think, "What is this writer doing to make his story more readable than I can do too? How much writing is in this book? I can do that, too!"

Volume of writing is also affected by paper choice. If your students are writing to the bottom of the page, they have outgrown their paper choice and are ready for paper with more lines. If they are not writing to the bottom of the page, you might consider giving students that specific, concrete goal. You might say something like, "When you are writing, try and push yourself to write to the bottom of the page." Or you could say, "Whenever there is white empty space on our paper, we push ourselves to fill that space with words that will fill our reader with a better understanding of our story." Of course, if students don't have enough elaboration strategies, this push for volume may result in students repeating themselves, or spacing their words far apart, or writing very large. If you see this, don't fret! Use this as an opportunity to teach into elaboration techniques that are about quality and not just quantity, pulling out your charts from the Small Moment units and adding new, fresh strategies to the list as well.

At the same time that you are cheering your writers to write as much as they can every day, you will also need to be teaching them how to slow down. In this unit, rereading needs to become a bigger focus than ever before. Beginning writers need to reread their writing much more often, and you need to demonstrate in all of your teaching how to do this. These demonstrations will certainly happen in your writing workshop minilessons, and it is equally imperative that they happen during interactive and shared writing sessions. You will need to explicitly model how writers reread within a word as they write it, how they reread after they write a word, and how they reread parts of sentences as they add more and more words to that sentence. Finally,

you will want to teach your writers how to reread whole sentences to make sure that what they have written both makes sense and, in this unit especially, is easy for other people to read. You might say something like, “Writers, if we want our readers to love our stories as much as we do, it is so important that we reread our pieces to make sure they make sense. If our readers are confused, they will not want to keep reading our precious stories! After we write a new word, we have to go back and reread it to make sure it matches what we are trying to say.” Or “Writers, I was going back to do some more writing in my story and, after I added some more words, I realized that I was so confused and that my story didn’t make any sense. I know that if I’m confused as the writer, my readers will be confused too. It is so very important that before we do any work, we reread. It is important that as we continue to write, we continue to reread. Watch me as I try. . . .”

You can also encourage your children to do more rereading by using mid-workshop teaching points. Perhaps you’ll stop them once or twice during independent writing to have them reread what they have written so far, reminding them of the kinds of things they should be looking for as they reread their stories. In this unit, you might also institute a new routine for ending each writing workshop. You could have the five-minute bell. When the bell rings, it is a signal that for the last five minutes of writing workshop, children should be reading their writing and thinking to themselves, “Would my teacher be able to read this? Would my writing partner?” Or you might teach children how to circle parts that seem unreadable and then use the next day’s writing workshop to teach a small group of children who found hard-to-read spots in the work they did the day before. The focus for some of your small groups, then, would be to help children find strategies to fix hard-to-read places in their writing.

You may also use some of the following prompts in conferences or small-group strategy lessons and highlight for children the similarities between what we do as writers and what we do as readers:

- “Think about what you were trying to say; what would make sense and look right/sound right?”
- “Look at the picture and think about what is happening in your story. Now check the beginning and ending of your word to help you remember.”
- “Something didn’t sound right. Go back and fix it up so it makes sense and sounds right.”

To support teaching for transfer, you can use these same prompts during your interactive writing sessions and highlight this connection to students, saying, “Just like in writing workshop . . .” or “So when you are writing in writing workshop remember to. . . .”

Also during this part, you will want to give children their own personal versions of your whole-class word wall and teach them how to speed up their writing by knowing and using high-frequency words. You will probably want to show the children

how you reread your word wall to get ready to write with those “just know in a snap” words fresh in their minds. Once children have pointed to each word on their word wall and read them, they then need to be shown how those words go down on the page fast, in a burst of letter making. You’ll find it particularly effective to coach tables of children as they write, ensuring that they are remembering to shift gears when they use a high-frequency word they know and to write across lines and pages with both automaticity and while stretching for the sounds. When your children are doing both kinds of word writing, they are doing Common Core Language Standard work. The Common Core State Standards say first graders should be able to “use conventional spelling for words with common spelling patterns and for frequently occurring irregular words” and “spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.”

## Partnerships as a Way to Get Children Writing-for-Readers

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The Common Core State Standards call upon first graders, with support from adults, to respond to comments, questions, and suggestions from peers to strengthen their writing. The partnership work you do in your classrooms will help your students meet this standard. Over the next couple of months you will want to teach students how to talk about their writing and how to use the accountable talk moves they are learning in reading in their writing. Feel free to pull down your accountable talk charts to help children have meaningful conversations about their writing and let children know, “You are getting really good at talking about books. Guess what? You can do some of the same work when you are talking about your writing! This kind of talk will help our writing become easier to read.”

You can use the goal of “writing so our partners can read our stories” as the rallying cry around which you rev kids up to write differently, including end punctuation as they write, for example. When you teach this, remind writers that usually we think of a whole sentence, a whole thought, and then we write without stopping until we get to the end of that thought and put a period down. Then we have another whole thought, and, starting with a capital letter, we write and write until that thought is down, again without stopping, and we put a period there. The children won’t do this perfectly, and that is okay. Your goal, though, is for children to begin to write in sentences of thought, punctuating on the run. Punctuation should not be an afterthought that writers insert once a text is completed, although of course once a text is completed, writers can reread, using punctuation as road signs, finding places where the punctuation may need to be altered.

You will probably suggest that children exchange papers and read their partners’ writing aloud. You might say, “I’ve been noticing that when you get together with partners, the writer is the one to read his or her writing aloud, and partners listen. But in life, we are writing our stories so other people can read them and can read them really well. So for the next little while, when partners get together, writers, please pass your story over to your partners, and partners, it is *your* job to read the writers’ stories

aloud, and to read them really smoothly and well so that they sound like stories. If there are places in the text that are hard to read, partners and writers, you'll need to work together on those parts so they are easy to read. After a bit, we'll be sharing our stories with kids who are not even our partners and hoping those kids can read our stories really smoothly and well."

This big step will require you to teach children how to be good writing partners. Remind children to give friendly tips and compliments and to ask questions as they share and revise their work together. Teach children how to carefully listen to or read their partners' work to make sure there aren't any words missing. Teach them to help each other with tricky words (without just spelling these for their partners) by stretching out sounds with a partner and then handing the paper over to the writer to make changes. Children learn to be "word wall detectives" together, searching for word wall words in one partner's writing to circle and to help that child find the correct spelling. Partners can work together rereading and cross checking their work to make it more readable. To do this you can teach partners how to reread while asking themselves, and each other, "Does that look right? Does that sound right? Does that make sense?"

You will probably also want to teach a little bit into using partners to improve the other qualities of their writing. Mostly in this unit, kids will be using partners to strengthen the conventions in their writing, but you could teach partners to help each other with elaboration or with focus or with meaning. Your writers might learn to ask questions of their partners like, "Could you say more in this part?" Or "Where is the most important part?" Or "What are you trying to show?"

## Celebration

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Once partners have finished reading each other's pieces aloud, they will come together and think about which passages should be read in which way (based on meaning) and then work together to provide punctuation road signs and to vary sentences. This way, other readers will read the text with feeling. "This is the sad part," the writer might say to a partner. "Read this like you are really sad." Then two partnerships can exchange papers and listen to how others read their texts, diving back into those texts to alter them. As part of this, you can help writers reach for techniques such as alliteration, parallelism, repetition, and onomatopoeia, which can all make a text sound better.

Finally, you'll celebrate all the hard work your children have done by teaching them to sort their work once again into harder-to-read and easier-to-read piles. Then, each writer will choose one easy-to-read piece to celebrate. They will also choose their hardest-to-read piece. Some teachers set up a celebration where the children take turns talking between their two selected pieces. They try to explain what they do now that they did not do before that makes their writing easier for people to read. And, since they have the hard-to-read piece sitting next to the easy-to-read piece, they can actually point to the changes for their partner to see. This sort of celebration gives children the opportunity to observe changes in one another's writing since the beginning of the unit and to offer congratulations on how far each classmate has come.



## UNIT THREE

# Realistic Fiction

## NOVEMBER

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**T**he urge to tell stories begins when children are very young. They love to tell you imagined stories and the real small moments of their lives—and it’s amazing to hear the tension and drama they create as storytellers, as they tell the mostly but not entirely real story of their first try on a bike, or the mostly imagined story of why they left the bike out in the rain. Children are dying to “make things up” and have their stories still sound believable. Allowing children to satisfy this urge taps an energy source, and the result is something to behold. In this unit, you’ll be teaching your students two exciting skills: how to move from being accomplished tellers of stories to being accomplished writers of stories, and how to use everything they know so far about writing, including ideas they have from being readers of stories, as they do this work. One thing is certain—you will be telling your writers essentially this: Use everything you learned during the previous unit of study to write fiction! That is, you will want to make it clear to your children that while they are embarking on a new unit, this unit is another narrative unit. Therefore, they will want to draw on all the craft moves they learned from Small Moments. The goal for this unit will be to write well-elaborated realistic fiction stories, aligning to the Common Core State Standards, which place great emphasis on writing sequenced and detailed narratives. You will want to help your writers think about the pace and language of their stories, about the passage of time, and about the need for a conclusion that brings the story together.

Teachers, as you begin this unit, it is important for you to develop a big picture for how the month will unfold. You will help children storytell and plan stories, perhaps by telling stories first “across their fingers” or in accompaniment with turning the pages of a four- to six-page blank booklet. Help students internalize the rhythm and structure of stories and anticipate how stories tend to go by reading several brief

realistic fiction books, including perhaps *Peter's Chair* (Keats) or other favorite authors. Students will learn now to focus on how characters in stories face problems, overcome these (with help from others or on their own), and develop solutions. Your students will eventually be able to create their own realistic fiction stories that follow this archetype. They'll also use everything they learned in the prior units to write their stories with readers in mind.

Providing paper choices and teaching children how to choose their paper wisely will be important in this unit. Up to now, children have tended to write in three-page booklets with four or five lines on a page; you'll probably want to be sure that at least some of their pages contain even more lines, perhaps six or seven—they'll be learning to elaborate parts of their stories. This unit gives you opportunities to lift the level of volume expectations in your classroom. They may not always need a picture box for every part of their story once they start drafting—that is, if they elaborate the problem, they may sometimes be able to keep writing. You'll want to help your students match their paper choices to their expectations of writing more.

As you head into the unit, be clear that children will write lots of stories during this month, and they will progress through those stories, working at their own unique paces. Your launching day will make all the difference in the world. On this day, you will want to demonstrate that writers select a planning strategy from a repertoire of possible ways to plan, and then plan for five or ten minutes by thinking of a character who has a problem and an eventual solution, and then writers write the start of a story onto paper. We strongly suggest that at the start of this unit, after writers think of one possible story and write the first page of it (and that entire process will take less than one day's writing workshop), they then think of another possible story and write the start of that story as well. Some can do this for a third and a fourth story, taking just a day or two to do this. The advantage of this is that it means that all children will be primed to work on one story, another, and another, progressing at their own paces. Your classroom will not be a writing workshop if you essentially say in one day's mini-lesson, "Today we will develop our characters," and then everyone does that, and if then, on the next day, you say, "Today we will write page one," and everyone does that! We've sometimes seen some well-intended teachers misunderstand this unit and teach in such a fashion—please don't! Remember that if you teach children ways to generate ideas for stories and ways to write the leads to their stories and so forth, then children will be able to draw not only on their pile of story ideas but also on their experiences planning and starting stories, so that whenever the time comes for them to start a new story, to write a first page, they'll have no hesitation doing so.

As you prepare for the unit, plan not only for children to cycle through lots of story writing, working with independence, but also plan on reminding them of skills they already know how to use and teaching them new skills. You can concretely represent your skill instruction by thinking about the role that charts will play in your unit. You will absolutely want to bring anchor charts from previous units into this one—and you will also create a new chart to keep track of the important writing skills with some compelling visual charts and demonstration writing that your young writers can turn to, to recall the lessons you've been teaching during the unit. It will be useful for you to

develop at least one class character and a class story during storytelling time, aligning with what the Common Core State Standards suggest in the speaking and listening section, through the use of shared writing. This shared work can serve as a model, helping kids understand how to create fictional characters and stories. This character can also provide a vehicle for the active engagement sections of your minilessons. Students can practice on the shared story you are creating in class—and you may want to draft several stories, as your students will, so they can see how in your second one, you use some of what the class was learning as you wrote the first one.

In addition to emphasizing repertoire and independence, you will also want to use this unit as an occasion for building volume. You can support children to write longer stories in part by shrinking the size of the planning pictures children make or by encouraging some children to jot a quick phrase in each of those planning boxes rather than relying on drawing, which is a more time-consuming vehicle for planning. Then too, think about the paper choice that children will have during this unit. If children have tended to write in five-page booklets with five or six lines on a page, some of their pages will now contain more lines. Of course, every table needs extra pages so that students can expand their booklets, and also every table requires flaps and tape so that writers are encouraged to revise without waiting for encouragement to do so. Don't underestimate the expectations that can be conveyed just through your materials! The unit ends with an invitation for writers to look back on all the work they have generated—which for some students will be an armload of stories—selecting one or two of those stories to revise deeply and extensively.

## Writers Draw on Everything We Know to Write Realistic Fiction Stories

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The main work of the first part of the unit aims toward teaching your students to write stories with problems *and* solutions. This work is more important than it sounds—it's a move toward rehearsal, which is a big step. They'll dream and think about their story ideas, they'll tell them to their partners in a storytelling voice, they'll act out parts, and they'll draft stories that have a clear problem–solution structure. You will teach your students that fiction writers often begin by creating a character that is like them. Writers often write best when they write about what they know. This means that their main character may have a younger brother, as the writer does, or a dog, or may like to read under the covers at night, or wake up early on Saturdays to be alone in the house. This way, you'll teach your writers how to access familiar emotions and activities to give intense realism to their stories—it's very beautiful to see a young writer create a fictional character that mirrors some of his or her own experiences. In essence they may take stories from their own lives, changing the names of the characters and fictionalizing parts of the story. Or they may base a character on someone they know. For example, Cynthia Rylant based the character Henry in *Henry and Mudge* on her son Nathaniel. They may, of course, decide to make some changes to that character, by giving it a different gender, of course giving it a different name, and perhaps giving it some traits that they wish they had or have already outgrown—traits that make that character interesting. One way first

graders can capture these ideas for characters and possibly story lines is by writing a few first pages to books. As soon as children have ideas for a story, they can begin to write the story, trying their hand at a starting page. It may be that a writer generates five or six story ideas, selects three as good possibilities, and then writes a couple different first pages to each of these stories. That is, encourage writers to get started, to dive in, and to do this with a bunch of different story ideas. If you can help writers to generate a bunch of different possibilities, you help the writer to realize that writing is a process of trying something out, then reviewing it critically and thinking, "Wait, I have a better idea!"

Once they do this they are ready to start planning their stories. One way they might do this is by creating mini-booklets where they quickly sketch each part of the story. These mini-booklets need to be very informal and feel like a little book—no photocopied storyboards please! You can simply show children how to take a sheet of paper and fold it into half, then fold that half into half. There will now be four squares on this page, and you can suggest that each child takes half a minute to sketch—very quickly—how the story might go, with each page representing one part of the story. So the story about the boy winning a soccer goal could start on page one, with a stick-figure boy kicking the ball into the goal—no words are necessary. The writer would then need to figure out what occupies the next three pages. Is the boy treated like a hero by his teammates—and if so, how, exactly? Then what happens on page three? Does he teach a little kid how to play soccer and watch while that kid makes a goal? Or does the story end differently—with the boy becoming arrogant and being kicked off the team?

The point of this mini-booklet is that they take all of three minutes to sketch a story, from start to finish, so this means a child can sketch a couple of versions for how the story might go, storytelling each (touching the page and saying aloud the exact words the writer might write). Imagine this work as the first five to ten minutes of your writing workshop. The important thing is that writers benefit from trying a story one way and then another way, deciding how the story should go. In essence they are revising before they are even writing a single word. While kids are planning, they can also imagine the problems or trouble that their characters get into—and those problems may be very familiar to the writer! Starting with familiar problems, and fictionalizing possible solutions, makes for terrific writing. It lets young writers use what they know effectively and imagine how to solve the everyday troubles that they face. Students will also recognize from their experience reading realistic fiction stories that the character always faces a problem. Once the writer has a plan for the story, he or she can shift to sketching pictures across the pages of a full-sized booklet, or if writers want to do so, into immediately writing his or her story. Writers who have chosen this mini-booklet option, may choose to elaborate their sketches further in their full-sized booklets by including speech bubbles, thought bubbles, labels, and setting details in their booklets to help them have more to say when they sit down to write. Some students may feel that the sketches they have done were substantial enough and they are ready to start writing their story right away.

You can show students how a character's likes and dislikes can lead to trouble. For example, the character Penelope loves baseball more than anything in the world,

but she can never catch the baseball in her baseball glove. Or, on the other hand, she hates wearing dresses, but then her family receives a wedding invitation asking that Penelope be the flower girl. This sets the children up to have many stories to tell, and they can begin to imagine ways in which their characters might find solutions to their problems. You can teach students that getting ideas for problems from familiar situations or challenges in their own lives will help them write realistically, just like it did when they were coming up with character ideas. Or you can teach children to look to the whole-class read-alouds and possibly their own just-right fiction books for inspiration—especially since they are studying characters. During writing workshop you could have students think about the books they’ve been reading to ask themselves, “What kinds of trouble have my characters been getting into? Could my character get into similar trouble? How might my character solve the problem differently?”

There are other ways for children to rehearse and elevate their stories—as in, they can imagine how their story may go by dreaming about it, seeing the actual scenes and imagining what the characters (sometimes ourselves!) will say and do. Or, writers can tell stories to their partners, using a dramatic storytelling voice to highlight the problem moments, or they may act out the solution, to try out a few endings. The point is not to take days for planning a story—we want children to get writing and learn by writing. It is, however, helpful to understand that you can be thinking about your story before you write, sometimes not even during writing workshop. A lot of writers think about their stories as they do other things, and your young writers will enjoy rehearsing their stories with siblings, in the bath, and so on. When they do storytell, encourage children to tell the story across their fingers or to say it aloud dramatically as they turn the pages of a blank booklet, and to do this multiple times across one day’s writing workshop. You may want to emphasize the importance of telling a story multiple times—and of telling the story multiple ways, too, before writing it.

The other big—no, enormous—challenge, is that children will come up with a story line and they’ll want to summarize rather than storytell the story. The writer will decide, “This is a story about a girl who is afraid to swim in the deep end of the pool but then she jumps into the pool and isn’t afraid anymore.” End of story. To teach children to storytell rather than summarize, it is crucial for you to teach them that they need to think, “What, exactly, will be happening at the start of my story? If the girl wants to swim in the deep end of the pool, what exactly is she doing to show this? If this was a play, what would she be doing on stage?” Perhaps the child decides that the main character is standing in the shallow end of the pool talking to her friend.

One of the best ways to help children really imagine a story is to encourage the writer to act out the story and then record what he or she does. You may, then, want to use partnership time as a time for children to reenact key scenes in the stories they are writing. In this way, a writer chooses a scene to reenact, bit by bit, to bring her story to life and give words to action and dialogue, aligning to the Common Core Speaking and Listening Standard that asks first graders to incorporate ideas and feelings into their descriptions of people, places, things, or events. While one partner acts out such ideas, her partner can help put words to paper as the movement grows into a story. The partnership can revisit this same scene to elaborate, or they can share different

scenes to get to know characters and their motivations. This partnership can be an ongoing structure throughout the unit through drafting and revision.

Of course, once students have written a story, they'll proceed to write another—not waiting for you to march them along to this in sync! As children cycle through the process, writing more and more stories, you'll continue to teach in ways that lift the level of stories that have yet to be written, and in ways that prompt writers to reread and reconsider stories that they once thought were done. It could be, for example, that your children write their first stories without you having had much of a chance yet to teach them that once a writer has a story line, it helps to take some time to develop the main character. That's okay. You could teach this to children when most of them are in the midst of their second stories. But at some point, you will want to let children know that writers often take time to flesh out characters before writing the story. We don't recommend asking young children to fill out ditto sheet graphic organizers in which they list a character's internal and external characteristics (although we once did!). But we do think a writer can think and talk about what the character is like and then act out that character, showing how the character goes about doing things. Is she shy? Timid? Frantic? Once a child has a character well in mind, the child's writing can be much more colorful.

As children do this work, you can do just a little bit to help them create a shapely story. That is, if the story is about a boy who in the end makes the basketball team, you will need to teach children that generally something happens to make this goal hard to achieve. Generally the character wants something and then gets into trouble on the way to achieving the goal. Children may remember familiar tales where characters run into trouble on the way to achieving a goal. For example, the goat in *Three Billy Goats Gruff* wants to eat the green grass but needs to cross the bridge under which lurks a troll. The pigs in *Three Little Pigs* want to live happily in their house, but a wolf is outside the door, huffing and puffing. In reading workshop children have been studying characters and using this structure to help them retell their books. For example, a child reading *Biscuit* might retell, saying "In this story, the little girl wants Biscuit to go to bed, but instead of going to bed, Biscuit keeps asking for all sorts of things. He wants to play and then he wants water and then food and a special toy. Finally he goes to sleep." You could remind children that they can tell their own stories in the same way they retell their just-right books about characters. They can start with saying what the character wants and then say what might get in the character's way. The boy wants to play on the basketball team, but—what? Is the boy scared of the older kids on the team? Does the boy think he's too short to play? Is his family unable to buy him basketball shoes?

## Lifting the Qualities of Effective Fiction Writing

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As your children begin to write lots of stories, you'll be doing some newer work that is really important. The first is to teach them to recall and use earlier strategies for writing-for-readers—that is, you're not teaching new strategies, you are instead demonstrating

how writers recall and use what they know about writing to write with increased independence and power. Your students can recall with a partner what they learned about writing-for-readers, including making effective punctuation choices so their reader's voice will change with the story, making their writing and spelling legible and as accurate as possible, and rehearsing their writing aloud with a partner to make sure all the words are there, as well as all the parts of the story! They can make quick individual goals as writers about which of these strategies, which they already know, they want to be especially working on in their next story. You see then how you are teaching students to accumulate your teaching and start to understand that they have significant knowledge about writing. You will also want to remind children that they need to use all that they know about narrative writing to write their stories as well as possible. For example, if during the Small Moment unit of study, you taught children that narrative writers sometimes begin a story by conveying the weather, or by showing the main character doing or saying something very specific, then during this unit of study, you'll remind children of what they learned about ways to begin a story. The only difference is that instead of saying, "I took off my sneakers and ran barefoot across the beach to the edge of the water," they will now write, "Waldo took off his sneakers and ran barefoot to the edge of the water." Likewise, you'll remind children that when they revise fiction, they can draw on the exact same techniques they used for revision of personal narratives. That is, they can stretch out the important parts, adding in dialogue and small actions. They can describe the setting. Now, they can also add in emotions of other characters, which they may not have done in personal narratives. "Waldo was so excited to go into the waves. Lila was not so excited. She was scared."

## **Stretching out the Problem and Imagining Creative Solutions to Stories**

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The second part of this unit will be to teach your young writers that they can elaborate the problems in their stories. They can do that by showing how the problem sometimes gets worse before it gets better, for instance. They could show how the character reacts to the problem—what they say, think, and do. They could contrast how different characters react. You could remind children that they have been noticing this in their work as readers while they have been studying their characters' actions. For example, when one child was reading *Mushrooms for Dinner*, from the Rigby PM series, he noticed how Father Bear and Mother Bear got very upset when there was no fish for dinner, but Baby Bear reacted differently. Instead of getting upset, he went out to try to solve the problem by going to find some mushrooms for dinner. They can do the same thing in their own writing. They can write how their character reacts to the problem and then add in how other characters in their story react differently. For example, a first grader may be writing a fiction story where a vase breaks in a living room. This student might decide to try this strategy and show different characters' actions and dialogue. One character might see the broken vase and say, "Let's hide it under the couch," and another might say, "Let's tell Dad," and another might quip, "Let's say Bonnie broke it!" Because students are writing fiction and not personal narratives, they can introduce some characters just

to expand their wings as writers and try new work. You can also show them how to elaborate the inside story as well as the outside story, and this may be the most valuable writing skill they'll develop—it's one that makes for beautiful writing. For instance, John might say, "Let's hide it," and he might think, "I wish I weren't so afraid of getting caught. I hate lying." Or you could do it on a simpler level and show John's actions and feelings. John knocked the vase off the table with his ninja sword. "It broke! Oh no, Dad will be angry. John felt so scared." Or, "John's legs trembled and his hands shook."

Children will, across their stories, do a lot of work on developing trouble and adding tension to their stories by thinking about different ways the character might try to solve the problem. You will teach your students to develop strong endings in which characters solve their troubles. Because they are writing realistic fiction stories, this unit also helps them imagine how to solve the problems they actually experience, which makes for lively partner talk. Set them up to confer with their writing partners to be sure their writing sounds realistic and that their solutions could really happen. Sometimes their endings will be abrupt or will seem as if the solution flies in from outer space, separated from the rest of the story. You will want children to ask themselves and each other, "Would that really happen? What would a character have to think or do to make that happen?" Teaching students to write fiction stories with solutions at the end will also help the students meet the Common Core State Standard of writing a story with a sense of closure.

## Choosing Our Best Work to Revise and Publish

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Perhaps above all, remember to encourage revision. Writing is a powerful tool for thinking precisely because when we write, we can take fleeting and intangible memories, insights, and images, and make them concrete. When we talk, our thoughts float away. When we write, we put our thoughts onto paper. We can reread our first thoughts and see gaps in them. We can look again and see connections between two different sets of ideas. Through rereading and revision, writing becomes a tool for thinking. A commitment to revision is part and parcel of a commitment to teach writing as a process. You may decide that after children devote three weeks to rehearsing, drafting, and revising several stories, you'll ask them to choose their very, very best with which to work. Then, surprise them with the news that once a writer has selected his or her best, what that writer does is to take the best—and make it better, or make it into a picture book. Revision is a complement to good writing.

You will want to take this time to pull out the charts from this unit, and prior units, posting them around the room for children to reference. Your writers can study the charts and think, "What will I work on today? How will I make my piece the very, very best it can be?" Then, with their plans in mind, they can go to the writing center in the room and gather the necessary materials before diving into their work. Of course, to facilitate this work, you will need to ensure that children have access to the necessary materials. You will likely want to provide them with a revision folder and a colored pen, swatches of paper on which they can add paragraphs into their drafts, and flaps

of paper that can be taped over parts of their story they decide to revise. Teach them to use staple removers, if they don't already use these regularly, so they can make their books longer or shorter.

Of course all of these tools and materials support the physical aspect of revision, and it will also be important for you to teach children reasons to revise. One of the most important reasons for first graders to revise is that this allows them to elaborate. If a child wrote, "For Ella's birthday, she got a puppy," teach this child that he can cross out that summary of the event, and instead storytell what happened, step by step. Injunctions to "add more information" or "add details" have too often led to pages that contain a lot of summary—pages like this: "For Ella's birthday, she got a puppy. It was white and fluffy with a pink nose. She liked it. She was happy. They played together." Help children revise instead by storytelling. To show children how to do this, help them create little scenes in their mind, using dialogue and small actions to let the story unfold on the page. "On Ella's birthday, Mom said, 'Cover your eyes and hold out your arms.' Then she felt something soft and warm squirming in her arms. 'Open your eyes!' Mom called. Ella opened them, and her new puppy jumped up and licked her on the face."

In addition to revising for elaboration, writers also revise to draw forth the meaning of the story, thinking about why this story matters and then writing it in a way to highlight that meaning. So you might teach these writers to think, "Which page is the most important? Where in my story does the main character have the biggest feelings?" Once the child has identified the most important or most emotionally laden page of the story, help the child rewrite that page from top to bottom, this time reliving the moment and depicting it with details. For example, a student rereading a story he wrote about his character, Adam, cooking *arroz con pollo* with his Grandma on Saturday, might decide that the most important part was when Adam and his grandmother smelled something burning. He might cross out his first version of this page, rewriting the page on two long pages that he inserts into the book. This new version might include dialogue and small actions that show Adam's feelings.

Another revision strategy you may decide to teach your children is to create more literary beginnings or endings to their stories. It is useful to show kids that they can try writing a few different versions of a lead or an ending (or any part of their story) and then think about which version works best. Children may want to study mentor texts the class has read or their own just-right fiction books, trying to name what the writer did in his or her beginning or ending. They could look at their just-right books and ask themselves, "What are ways this writer stretched out the problem? What are ways this writer developed the character?" and then think about which of those things they could try in their own writing. For example, the child reading *Mushrooms for Dinner* could notice how the problem doesn't get solved right away. Baby Bear doesn't find the mushrooms right away. At first he looks and can't find any. But then he climbs up a tree and he notices the mushrooms from up above. Then the writer could look at his own writing and ask himself, "Did I stretch out my problem? Could I get my character to try something to solve the problem but make the first attempt at solving the problem not work, just like with Baby Bear?"

For publication they can illustrate the stories, make covers, and even write back cover blurbs. You can celebrate by having your students read their books to their upper-grade book buddies, to parents, or to members of the local senior center. You may even want to place these books in your classroom library for everyone to read and share.

## Additional Resources

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While first-grade students may not have previous experience with realistic fiction, they certainly are not new to narrative writing, and so can draw from all they have previously learned to now write fiction. Many teachers decide to administer an on-demand writing assessment prior to the launch of this unit to determine students' strengths and needs, tailoring teaching to address areas where students struggle. You will want to reference previous charts and lessons to help kids transfer skills from *Small Moments* and *writing-for-readers* into this new unit of study. This need not be a time for reteaching, but instead for reminding students of strategies they already know that they should carry with them as writers.

Please don't lose sight of how important it is that these units belong to you, and make sure you are studying your students' work and thinking about new, exciting minilessons and conferences to best meet the needs of your writers. It is important to encourage students to continue to draw from their growing repertoire of skills and strategies as they draft new pieces.

Remember that in the first few weeks, kids are drafting two to four stories in a week. Help them keep their volume high, both within a piece of writing as well as across the pieces in their folders. Don't feel the need to teach multiple strategies for generating ideas or planning, devoting days to a process students know well. Students should cycle through this process fairly quickly, jumping right into the work of drafting and revising.

Many teachers have their students write in the third person, the voice of the narrator. Encourage your students to choose topics that will present a problem for the character, and then teach ways to build tension, making the problem hard to solve. Students can work with writing partners to ensure that these problems and solutions remain realistic.

In this last part, we lay out some ideas for minilessons that support revision and editing. This doesn't mean this should be the only time when writers are practicing these strategies this month. As you have noticed, the work of revision has been threaded throughout the unit, because this should be a part of the ongoing process of a writer. There are more than enough revision strategies that should help your kids move their pieces toward publishing. We also included more ideas than are probably possible to implement to give you ideas for teaching shares and mid-workshop teaching points—but truly these also could be turned into conferences.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### Part One: Writers Draw on Everything We Know to Write Realistic Fiction Stories

- “Today I want to teach you that writers get ready to write stories by dreaming. We dream about the possible stories we might one day write. And then, when we get to our writer’s desk—like during writing time—we often write just the first page to the books we might someday want to write. After we have written a bunch of first pages, we choose one—and get started!”
- “Today I want to teach you that we can also dream up the characters we want to include in our stories. Our characters might be just like us, or they can be like other people we know. We might fashion the character’s family life, school life, hobbies, and quirks after our own (or after those of someone we know), and then change some things to fictionalize the character.”
- “Writers, today I want to teach you that once we have come up with a character we love—someone we know inside and out—we imagine different kinds of problems our character might face and put our character into moments of trouble. Then, we write lots of first pages to different story ideas that we’ll later turn into books.”
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Sometimes writers get ideas for our stories by thinking of the books we love and how we might change them around to make them our own. Like we could think of (add class example) and how (the character) really wanted (whatever), but something new gets in the way and then. . . .”
- “Today I want to teach you that once realistic fiction writers have lots of ideas for a story, we can imagine a few different ways it may go and then decide on the one we like best. One way we can do this is with a planning booklet—we can take a sheet of paper and fold it in half and in half again and use the little booklet to storytell the different ways the story could go. Once we have an idea that we want to stick with, we sketch a very quick picture without words on each part of our book to hold our idea and begin to write that story.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writing partners can get together and share the stories we have written. We can talk about other possible ways the stories could go. We can get together and act out different versions of our stories and then ask our partners to help us decide which one is best. Writing partners give each other good tips and advice. Each time we act out we can try to make our stories more suspenseful, leaving our partners with goose bumps.”



- ▮ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers, when we write stories, we picture, step by step, what the main character is doing. Sometimes we actually move our bodies a little to help us think about small things the character might do. For example, ‘Julissa looked at her book in the mud. She knelt down to pick it up. She scraped the big pieces of mud off of the book. She held it away from her dress as she walked toward school.’” (As you read, demonstrate doing these actions.)

### **Part Three: Stretching out the Problem and Imagining Creative Solutions to Stories**

- “Today I want to teach you that another way realistic fiction writers make stories stronger is to stretch out the problem and not give the solution away too quickly. We can think about what trouble will get in our character’s way to make the problem hard to solve.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “To make these important parts stand out for the reader, we can use words like *all of a sudden*, *suddenly*, *well*, *just then*, *before long*, *all at once*, *before he/she knew it*, and *If . . . wasn’t enough*. These phrases let the reader know that something is going to happen.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that another way we can stretch out the problem in our stories is to show how the main character reacts to the problem, including what he or she says, thinks, and does. As we do this, we’ll think about how *who* the character is will influence how he or she reacts.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “Our main character isn’t the only one who reacts to the problem. We can *also* show how other characters in our stories react in different ways to the problem.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that realistic fiction writers write powerful endings. We can write a few different endings to our story and try each one on to see which fits best.”
  - ▮ *Tip:* “We can write one ending that will solve the problem to satisfy the reader. We may try another ending with a twist that will leave the reader wondering. We might even try a third ending where the problem doesn’t get solved, but instead, the character changes and decides that the problem no longer matters to him or her.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that realistic fiction writers need to make sure our endings make sense. We can get together with our partners and ask, ‘Would that really happen?’ or ‘What would a character have to think or do to make that happen?’ Then, we can revise the way the problem gets solved to make sure our stories are realistic.”

## Part Four: Choosing Our Best Work to Revise and Publish

- “Today I want to remind you that writers always revise. We can go back to the pieces in our folders, adding or taking away parts to push ourselves to make our stories even better! We have many revision tools in our writing center to do this important work. One way we can add or remove parts to our stories is to use paper flaps or strips. Another way is to take apart our booklets with staple removers and then add or remove pages to make our books longer or shorter in certain places.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers work with partners to think of what to add in and what to take out of our stories. Writing partners help us figure out what is missing and which parts need more information.”
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers, you might be wondering how to revise your story and make it even better. One thing that writers do is think about how our characters are feeling. Remember, that is on our chart, ‘Ways to Make Our Stories Better.’ We can show how our characters feel when we write the details that describe what those feelings might look like, either on a character’s face or in the way the character moves his or her body.”
- “Writers, another way writers revise is to make mind movies of our exact story and imagine we are the main character, living through each part. We try to write down, bit by bit, exactly what we are imagining so our readers can picture it, too. We know the tiniest details help our readers out a lot.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way we can revise our stories. We can think, ‘Which page is the most important? Where in my story does the main character have the biggest feelings?’ Then, we can rewrite that page from top to bottom, using a flap or a new blank page, this time stretching out the moment even more, including details that show feelings and slow down the actions.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way writers revise is to reread the parts of our stories, like the beginning or ending, and think about what we want our readers to picture in their minds. Then we can ask, ‘Did I do a good job here?’ and ‘Does this help the reader get a clear picture?’ If not, we rewrite it a few different ways using setting, action, or dialogue, and then choose the best version.”
  - *Tip:* “If we need help with this, we can look at mentor texts to see how they begin. We can also imagine the picture in our mind.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way we can use our favorite realistic fiction books as mentors to help make our best stories even better. We can look at our just-right books and ask, ‘What are ways this writer stretched out the problem?’

What are ways this writer developed the character?' and then think about which of those things we could try in our own writing."

- "Today I want to teach you that writers know it's important that our stories make sense to our readers. Often, we go back and make sure our writing sounds like we want it to. We reread, adding in anything that we forgot or fixing something that we think is not quite right. We can use extra pieces of paper or strips to add in what's missing. If we aren't sure how to fix something we can ask our partners."
- "Today I want to remind you that writers reread to make sure that what we have written is clear and easy to follow. We know how to add in words that we forgot and punctuation we haven't used."
  - ▶ *Tip:* "We also want to make sure that we are helping our readers know who is doing and saying what, or where a character is. Sometimes it gets confusing in our books. We can reread our books to be sure we use the characters' names when we write about what they say or what they do."
  - ▶ *Tip:* "Writers work with our end punctuation by trying sentences that end with question marks, periods, and exclamation marks. For example, 'That dog is huge (period)' is different from, 'That dog is huge!' and 'That dog is huge?' We're aware that readers will be guided by our punctuation choices."
- "Today I want to remind you that writers make sure our stories are easy to read. One way to help our readers is to do our very best when spelling new words. We make sure word wall words are spelled correctly and sometimes if longer words are tricky to spell, we spend extra time thinking about them. We can try to write the word different ways, listening for the sounds and thinking about possible ways to write those sounds, or we can even close our eyes and imagine what the word might look like. Then, we look across the ways we've spelled the word and pick the best one."



## UNIT FOUR

# Procedural Writing

## *How-To Books*

### DECEMBER

Students come to your class knowing so much. Their daily lives are rich with activities and experiences, from making sandwiches, to playing games, to being really good friends. As the leader of your class, you have the opportunity to show them that they are all experts on something. They know how to do so many things and, further, they have the power to pass that knowledge on to others. This unit on writing how-to books will frame students as experts, exciting them to teach their areas of expertise through writing.

To begin a unit on how-to books, tell children that writers not only use their writing to tell the rich stories of their lives, or to create characters with problems, but also to teach others. When teaching others, writers can teach “all about” a topic, in which case the writing is informational, or they can teach people “how to do” something, in which case the writing is procedural. This unit focuses on the latter. Procedural writing requires explicitness, clarity, and sequence. Furthermore, in this genre, writers must anticipate what their readers will need to know. This type of writing aligns with the emphasis on informational writing noted in the Common Core State Standards.

Procedural writing is important because it will help students navigate informational texts. First, most informational texts contain chapters, sections, and/or text boxes that are procedural. That is, a book on horses may contain a page titled “How to Groom a Horse” and another titled “From Barn to Show Ring.” Such a book is apt to be a procedural text. This unit supports children with the challenge of reading and writing those portions of informational texts. Then too, procedural writing is critically important in content-area literacy. Science texts are filled with instructions for experiments and with reports on investigations. To read these texts or to write lab reports, children will do well to rely on knowledge of procedural writing.

The unit described in this document leans heavily on a portion of the book *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports in Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Heinemann, 2003). For more step-by-step support for your teaching than this write-up provides, you may turn to that book. The book supports all-about writing as well as how-to, so refer to the portion focused on procedural writing and expand those eight sessions into a full unit. You may decide to look at the “If Children Need More Time” sections in each session, because there are additional ideas and strategies to help extend the unit.

## Before the Unit Begins

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The world is filled with procedural writing—cookbooks, instructions for new toys and games, craft projects to make, and so on—so you will have plenty of materials from which to draw. You’ll want to gather examples of how-to writing so that even before the unit begins, you can immerse children in the sounds of these texts. Choose a few to read aloud and to study, examining how writers use their words and pictures to teach readers. There are lots of great procedural books—if you want a few to look at for starts, you could look at the page “How to Carve a Pumpkin” in *The Pumpkin Book* by Gail Gibbons, the book *How to Make a Bird Feeder* by Liyala Tuckfield (Rigby Literacy), *How to Make Salsa* by Jamie Lucero, *Make a Valentine* by Dale Gordon, or *How to Make a Hot Dog* by Joy Cowley. *Walk On!* by Marla Frazee is a more sophisticated mentor text for children who are writing several how-tos with ease and want to notch up their writing. Although you will gather many of these texts, you’ll also be looking for one or two that can function as mentor texts for the unit. You’ll return to those one or two texts often throughout the unit.

This unit will be all the richer if you use not just written texts, but also hands-on experiences. To help children grasp what it means to write a how-to text, you might create an opportunity outside the writing workshop to immerse children in this genre by building, cooking, or otherwise making something with your children. As you proceed to do that thing together, you can jointly construct a how-to text through shared or interactive writing, capturing the steps of that process. For instance, if your school has had a fire drill, you might want to create a how-to chart listing the steps that are involved in that fire drill.

Another important support you may provide is paper choice. Before you invite kids to write how-to texts, you will want to prepare paper that can scaffold their writing so that it follows the conventions of this genre. That is, you will want to give children paper that looks like the paper used in the “How to Carve a Pumpkin” page of Gibbons’ *The Pumpkin Book*. This paper will probably have a sequence of small boxes, each numbered, in which the writer will draw what is entailed in a step of the procedure, with space for written text beside each box. Be sure the paper you use provides enough room for students to instruct. Specifically, if the paper that you put out has four boxes on a single page, make sure there are six or seven lines beside each box and that most of the children who select this paper are encouraged to use two sheets of it

to capture the steps in a procedure. Then, too, you can also give children room to grow by encouraging them to go from writing one how-to text to writing another. Become accustomed to asking questions such as, “So is this your first book for today’s writing workshop or your second?” and “How many how-to books have you written today?” What you will not want to see is a child who thinks that recording a quick, underdeveloped four-step how-to text constitutes the child’s full work for a day!

Of course, you will have to decide how to best support each child toward rigor. For some children, the best way to support rigor will be for them to write more than one how-to text in a day. For others, they will benefit most from your support in channeling them toward writing more elaborated texts. It will be important for you to talk up the choice of longer booklets containing five to six pages, with more single pages available to encourage writers to add yet more pages as they add more and more detail. In instances when procedural texts span many pages, usually each page represents a single step, explained in further detail.

Finally, you will want to plan the general progression of the unit. This write-up was created with the idea that the unit will fall into four main parts. First, you’ll launch kids into this new kind of writing and set them up to write with great energy, producing lots of procedural texts. Not surprisingly, you’ll then teach in ways that aim to lift the level of student work. This write-up suggests that your second part of the unit emphasizes the importance of writing in such a way that lifts the level of procedural writing by writing so that readers can easily follow the directions. This will involve thinking about clarity of directions as well as writing mechanics—which means leaving spaces between words, relying on sight words, constructing longer sentences with prepositional phrases when possible, and so forth. The write-up then suggests a part devoted to lifting the level of students’ writing, and of course this includes work on revision, as well as work designed to help writers write more elaborated and clear texts from the start. Finally, we suggest you help writers select one or two of their books to revise more extensively, this time with more reading–writing connections and a deeper use of mentor texts, and this deeply revised work is what is published at the culmination of the unit.

## Getting Started: Thinking of Topics, Rehearsing, and Writing Tons of Books

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At the start of the unit, you’ll want to rally children around the idea that they are, in fact, experts. Tell children that during *this* unit, they’ll be teachers, using writing to teach others. And part of this will be teaching others how to do stuff that they know how to do. In the first session on how-to writing in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*, Calkins opens this unit by saying to writers, “Today is an important day. We start a new unit of study. . . . Congratulations, you are ready to move on to the next level. It will be hard work, but it is important work. Starting today, you will be not just writers—you will also be teachers.” You will want your students to realize that they have power as writers, not just to tell beautiful stories, but also to teach the many things that they know.

Of course, right away you will want to help children think of things they might teach others aligning with the Common Core State Standards. The most important lesson we have learned from doing this unit over the years is that topic choice is vital. If children choose topics they are not interested in, their writing tends to be mediocre, and they are not excited about it. If you tap into things that they know how to do and that they love to do, and are proud that they can do, you will find that the unit goes much better. Be open-minded in what they can teach others how to do. Their everyday lives are full of things that children know how to do and could teach others. Kids will come up with simple topics like “How to Get Ready for School” or “How to Jump Rope” or “How to Make a Good Pancake.” You can also teach them about topic choice by thinking about audience. “Think of a friend or someone in your family. What could you teach them to do?” Some children might come up with topics in which the steps involved in doing something aren’t already established and clear—for example, a topic such as “How to Make a Best Friend” is one many of us, as adults, wonder about! If you have the chance, you might steer your more novice writers away from the more abstract topics and from those for which they don’t have a lot of experience. To help children mine lots of aspects of their lives for potential ideas, it helps if you draw your topics from a variety of sources. Instead of suggesting that you might write “How to Make Chocolate Chip Cookies” and “How to Cook a Grilled Cheese,” you might shift from a cooking topic to a pet-related one (“How to Give Your Cat Medicine”) and then to a school-related topic (“How to Choose a Book”).

To build the drumroll of excitement for this unit, you might want to help students understand that this kind of writing relates to all they do across the day. Of course, given their busy days at school, you will find a plethora of possible inspirations for students’ how-to books. For example, children can write books for what to do in school by thinking about what new classmates need to know. The resulting book might be “How to Get Ready for Writing Workshop.” The children may have a particular interest, such as the environment, and they could write a piece about how best to sort your recycling. You might invite children to join you in a tour of the classroom, with each student carrying a small basket (like an Easter basket)! You may invite students to fill their baskets with a few objects they enjoy using. They may collect blocks, interlocking cubes, counting bears, and scissors. After the walk (which would take just a few minutes), writers could sit at their writing places and do something with what they have collected. Then, call out, “Freeze!” and ask them to think, “What did I do first?” Suddenly, they have the first portion of their how-to books! Then writers can think, “What did I do next?” and record that step as well. Before long, writers will be shifting from doing something to recording what they do. Of course, there are lots of ways to build off from this.

For homework, you could ask children to do the exact same thing. Home is a place that brims with real-world things that children can do! You may, too, ask children to tour their homes, recording on their Tiny Topics notepads all the things they know how to do in each room. In the kitchen, a child might record that she knows how to wash the dishes and to feed the cat and to take out the trash. You may also suggest

that children bring in photographs that show them doing all sorts of wonderful things. Those pictures could serve as basis for how-to titles.

Now we have suggested an abundance of ideas for generating how-to topics, but don't let this make you think that children devote a whole sequence of days to choosing a topic. Instead, think of this process of choosing a topic as something that lasts for just a portion of one day's workshop, but that resurfaces periodically throughout the unit. This means that for a portion of the first day of your writing workshop, you'll help kids generate ideas for the how-to books they might write. But within ten or fifteen minutes, your children will all have topics in mind and can begin rehearsing for the writing they'll do in this unit.

Just as your children storytold their texts before writing them during the narrative units of study, so, too, you will probably want to give your children opportunities to act out and talk through their activities with their peers. In Session II of the book *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*, Calkins says to children, "The best way to check whether your directions work is to read them to a partner who will try to do the thing you are teaching (for real or pretend) and if the directions don't *quite* work, you can revise them!" After this minilesson, children can sit in your meeting area and pretend to go through the steps that they plan to teach readers with their partners. One child, for example, might pantomime the process of brushing her teeth, for example, naming the steps that she takes. Over time, you can coach writers to be more specific even when they talk about their procedures so that instead of saying, "Put toothpaste on your toothbrush," they say, "Squirt a line of toothpaste onto the toothbrush." In this way, you can help children make their oral procedural texts more carefully sequenced and explicit, which will mean, of course, that their written procedural texts are as well. You can coach into their oral procedural texts, encouraging them to use words like *first*, *then*, *next*, *afterward*, *before*, *finally*, and *at last* as a way to convey timing and order. The Common Core State Standards do require first graders to provide some sense of closure when writing informational pieces, so you will want to be sure to highlight how they choose to wrap up their piece. You will also want children to think about the precise words they use to convey actions throughout. If a child writes, "Then you put the chocolate in the milk," you might suggest that the child actually demonstrate the action, trying to come up with more exact words for each action. Chances are that the word *pour* will come to mind.

## Write in Such a Way That Readers Can Read the Text and Follow the Directions

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Early on in this unit you might ask in conferences, "For whom are you writing this?" If children seem unsure, you can suggest possible audiences and show them how they can do the same. It might be someone specific like a sibling, or it might be for a broader audience, like friends or first graders. Children can think "Who might need this book?" or "Who do I want to read this book?" Maybe a child will write "How to Get Ready for

School” for a younger sibling who will soon be coming to school. Once writers have an audience in mind, it is easier to have them envision that person or those people trying to do each of the steps in their procedure. You can have your students make a quick sketch of the person they are writing it for and keep it next to them as they write to help them envision. For example, if their audience is a younger brother, you might help them clarify their writing by saying, “What will your younger brother have to do next? Pretend you are telling him. Give him the next direction.”

To further help your students lift the level of their procedural pieces, you’ll look at how-to texts as a class and use these as guides for revising and adding features of nonfiction to your children’s own pieces. These books are valuable models of the possible components of a how-to. Some how-to books and manuals include a materials page. Others include *cautions* or *warnings* for the reader. Some how-to books have an introduction enticing the reader to read on. Other books are persuasive, trying to get you to try doing something new: “Haven’t you always wanted to. . . ?” Others have an ending that brings everything to a conclusion like, “Then you eat it up. Yum-yum!” Children can learn about these kinds of additions by studying a text, and they can then add the features they like to their own books. A possible chart you could have in this unit might mirror the one that you will use in the *Authors as Mentors* unit, which would name and explain the uses of features found in mentor texts. They can then try these things out in their own writing. You can look to page 78 of *Authors as Mentors in Units of Study for Primary Writing* for an example of this type of chart.

As mentor texts will serve as models of how to write successful how-to books, trip-ups in student work will serve as pieces off of which you can model revision. If you take a child’s directions in hand, and read them aloud while the class watches, trying to follow exactly what the writer has said, you are almost sure to be met with confusion. In the Heinemann book, the teacher reads a child’s directions for doing a somersault. Sitting on the chair at the front of the meeting area, the teacher reads, “Put your head down” and tucks her chin down, as she sits primly on the chair. Then she reads, “Now turn over.” *Huh?* Turn over?! The children will break into peals of laughter at such a predicament, of course, and you will have made your point. It is nowhere near as easy to give directions as one might think. Time and again, the directions assume the reader knows things the reader doesn’t know, the directions bypass crucial steps, or the directions neglect to mention crucial tips and bits of information. By dramatizing how hard it is to actually follow the directions children have written, you can invite kids to step up to the challenges of this genre.

You’ll probably want every writer in the room to be able to read his or her text aloud to a listener who does (or pantomimes doing) as told, to discover the missing steps. First, have students envision, or make movies in their minds of their procedures. When they feel they have written their steps as thoroughly and precisely as they can, have the students give those directions to their partners. The writer is bound to find places where he or she assumed the reader would already know what to do. For example, a child who is pantomiming making cookies and reads, “Put the cookies into the oven,”

might pause and ask herself, “How? How should I put the cookies in the oven?” Seeing in their own writing where a reader might get lost will help them make their writing more precise and detailed.

Another challenge young children sometimes encounter is not writing from the first person while maintaining voice. You can tell children that when they write how-to books, they have to be “bossy.” You might say, “Writers, I know that your mom and dad tell you not to be bossy, and in school we talk about not being bossy with other children on the playground, but when you write your how-to books, you have to be bossy. You want to use your bossy voice and tell the reader of your how-to book, ‘*You* have to do this, or *you* have to do that.’”

To ensure clarity in their writing, you will want students to be thinking not just about the craft of their piece, but also about the mechanics of their writing. This could be the time when you teach your writers a little more about punctuation. That is, you can show them how different end punctuation can help the readers understand which sentences are most important. You may also teach them to reread their sentences to make sure they are putting periods in to keep their writing clear and explicit. You will also think about the sentence construction your writers are doing as they write their procedural books. Most likely, they are writing direct, simple sentences such as “Get the lipstick. Put it on your lips.” You will want to teach your writers how authors of how-tos make sure to give explicit instructions that teach their readers how to do something precisely. You can model how when you write a direction, you could start with imperative language, such as “Get into the car,” but what you want to do as a teacher is teach explicitly by telling *how* or *where* or *why* to get into the car, so you will write, “Get into the car *on the passenger side*.” Showing writers how to rehearse and use explicit directions will lead them to begin to include prepositional phrases and conjunctions, as well as helps them to develop compound sentences, all of which first graders need to know, as stated by the Common Core State Standards. This same type of work can be done as you teach writers to sequence with ordinal numbers and offer tips and advice (“*Carefully* pour the cereal into the bowl so you don’t make a mess”). You may, with your more sophisticated writers, show them how to take out a period in a simple sentence and how to add conjunctions and play around with putting two directions together to make complex sentences. This work helps young writers to read critically and think, “Does this make sense?” which is so important when writing for others.

Children should be motivated to take on this big work as long as you create lots of opportunities for them to put their writing into the hands of another child and to watch while that child tries to read their writing—and to follow their directions. This latter challenge—writing so that readers can actually use procedural texts to learn to do things—raises the issue of helping students lift the quality of their writing. This can lead you and your class into the third bend in the road of this unit—a bend in which the focus of work is on lifting the level of procedural writing.

## With Feedback, Writers Can Revise Their How-To Texts and Make New Texts Worlds Better

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As students continue writing their how-to texts, you will want to remind them that they have many resources—mentor texts, their writing partners, and you, their teacher—to help boost the level of their writing. One strategy you may teach them is to continue thinking about features they have noticed in others' writing. They can continue incorporating even more features of the how-to genre. You might teach your writers how to eliminate extraneous details in their pictures, zooming in close on the part of the picture that teaches, and using labels and arrows in their pictures. You might also teach children to put on a "teaching voice" and give a direction: "First, you open the jar. Next you put a spoon in it. Then you scoop up some peanut butter."

Different students, of course, will reach different levels of proficiency in this genre. You will decide how to use small groups and conferences to guide your stronger writers and your strugglers. One strategy you may decide to teach some of your writers is elaborating by adding speech bubbles to include directions for how, where, and why to do the steps they are doing. It may be that a few readers go back and reread their writing to add speech bubbles, as one writer did who reread "How to Make Cereal," and into each step, added speech bubbles in which the narrator tells the "maker" of the cereal what he is doing and why he is doing it. A piece that originally read, "First, get a bowl. Next open the cereal box. Then pour the cereal into the bowl. Last add milk," may now read, "First get a bowl," and the speech bubble from the picture may include, "I'll ask Mom to reach a bowl for me." "Next, open the cereal box," with a speech bubble that says, "I'll make sure to roll the baggie back down so it stays fresh," and so on across pages. This strategy engages students in expanding to include additional directions and clarify steps, and can be used to teach kids to enlarge on their topics, using tips, warnings, and further information.

Writers who have a difficult time naming precise words may need more practice in small groups to develop their oral language. Doing small-group language rehearsal and practicing using the ordinal words will support them. Give children specific words to use and have them act out different how-to instructions. Suggest words to describe actions of the children. Partners then could practice naming the actions as well. You might say, "Let's act it out together. Do it again. Hmmm . . . How could we say that?" Partners can turn and talk, practicing naming the actions as the teacher makes additional language suggestions. You could also grow a chart of words that children are learning with pictures or photographs to support them, for example, a picture of a child pouring water paired with the word *pour*.

Although you will have been working on some mechanics of writing throughout this unit as needed, toward the end, you will want to explicitly turn your attention toward editing. Remind your children that writers of how-to books use punctuation to help the reader better understand the process they are explaining. This may be a good time to introduce some punctuation marks you have not taught in previous units. You may decide to highlight parentheses, showing your class how writers use

them to pause for a moment and add a point or say one more thing. You may also teach your class about using colons, explaining that authors use them before a list. You will also want to remind your students to use all that they have learned about editing in prior units, drawing on the strategies they use to improve their spelling. Students should know that these edits are not without purpose. Editing their pieces will help them achieve that teacher voice, expressing every step of their procedures with clarity and power.

## **Publishing at the End of the Unit**

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Children will come to the end of this unit with a strong sense of accomplishment because they have shown that they are experts, capable of sharing their knowledge with others. You can celebrate children's hard work by creating centers where children can teach small groups of people how to perform their tasks. Then too, you might visit younger children and become their "Teacher for a Day," demonstrating the task they wrote about and reading their texts to others. Or you might hang their how-to books in the hallway with a stapled example of actual materials used or a finished product beside it. Since the Common Core State Standards do ask that students use a variety of digital tools to publish writing, it might be fun to add a digital twist on this unit and let your writers create a how-to video that can be posted to a public forum, like YouTube or TeacherTube—just be sure to get permission first!

## **Additional Resources**

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Children are natural teachers of many things, so the how-to unit of study is a perfect fit. From the first day, expect your children to generate many how-to topics and to move quickly into choosing topics, planning, and drafting how-to pieces right away. If children falter in generating multiple topics, then teach them how the things we do every day, the things we do for fun, and even the things we loathe doing could make great topics for how-to books. Also, refer back to the strategies they used in kindergarten and the first time they wrote how-to books. By the end of the first part, look for your writers to have many how-to pieces (five or more). If the volume is low, you may want to spend additional time teaching into volume; if they are drafting without trouble, you might move into Part Two to lift the level of their how-tos. Expect to utilize partnerships from the start so that your children who struggle to write with a procedural voice have the opportunity to teach their steps to their partners while their partners act out and engage in each step.

Once your writers have folders that are bulging with how-to pieces, you will want to teach into using mentor how-to books to lift the level of your writers' pieces. If you have writers who write how-tos in a narrative voice, then teach them to sound bossy and to teach using specialized words: "Pour the sugar into the pitcher. Hold the bag

with both hands. Use a long spoon to stir the lemonade.” As you look at your children’s pieces, think, too, of the features of procedural texts that they can use to lift the level of their writing. If children are writing simple directions, then teach them to add specific measurements, examples, and directions inside pictures. For the students who churn out how-to after how-to, expect to teach the strategies of introductions and conclusions that lift the level even more. Expect writers to reread often and add steps that clarify and elaborate their procedural writing. Think about offering children tools to do this work—Post-its, flaps, and extra step boxes in the writing center—so that children do this work with purpose and independence.

Your final part with editing work should be focused on making the writing readable. Emphasize clear end punctuation so that your children’s writing is clear and sequenced. As children choose one of their many how-to pieces to publish, guide them to think about who they are writing for and to include all of the smart how-to strategies they’ve learned throughout the unit.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Getting Started: Thinking of Topics, Rehearsing, and Writing Tons of Books**

- “Writers, today we are starting a new adventure together. We will make books to teach others to do things that we know how to do. Writers start these books just like we start other kinds of writing projects—we dream of topics for our writing.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers want to write how-to books, we first think of something we know how to do (maybe something we do in school, or out of school), then we get paper, sketch out the steps to our book—and presto! We’re teaching people how to do that.” (See Session I in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports in Units of Study for Primary Writing*.)
  - ▶ *Possible teaching share:* “Writers, we will write these how-to books to share with others. Let’s take a few minutes at the end of today’s workshop to think of the people we might teach. Maybe it is the pre-K class down the hall or our younger brothers and sisters, cousins, or friends. Talk with partners about who might read your books or who your audience might be. You and your partner can even get a Post-it note and sketch your audience or readers. This will help you write more for them this month.”
- “Writers, we want to make sure our readers really understand what we want to teach them step by step in our how-to books. Today I want to teach you that we can plan out how-to books, touching the box for each step and rehearsing our teaching words out loud, perhaps changing them a little each time we rehearse, so we are sure to teach our readers exactly how to do this thing we want them to do.”

- “Writers, if we want to make sure our readers really understand what we want them to do, we can check whether or not our directions will work. Today I want to teach you that writers can read our how-to books aloud to a partner and add more to make each step easier to understand. Our partner can pretend to do each step we lay out, and if the directions don’t quite work, we can revise them, adding more words. When you are a partner pretending to follow each step think, ‘Would I be able to do this thing if I follow the directions the writer is giving?’ If you are not sure what to do, ask the writer to add more words to that step.” (See Session II in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
  - *Possible share or mid-workshop teaching point:* “I see some of you adding on to your directions and am noticing that sometimes you need more space to add all of those words. Writers, remember that you can use revision strips, glue, and tape if you need to add more lines to your paper.”
  - *Possible share or mid-workshop teaching point:* “If you notice that you left out a step in your how-to book, you can always use a staple remover to take the staple out of your book and add a new page where you want to add that new step. Remember that we have lots of tools in the writing center to help you.”
  
- “Writers, today I want to teach you that we can add clear and precise pictures and words to each step of our how-to books to help our readers understand our directions. Our pictures may zoom in to show a specific action, and we can choose specific action words or describing words so our readers know exactly what to do.” (See Session III in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)

## **Part Two: Write in Such a Way That Readers Can Read the Text and Follow the Directions**

- “Writers, we have been admiring authors all year together, and now we can take a close look at how-to book authors we admire. We can notice how they have added some special features or supports to help readers. Then, we can add some of these same supports to our how-to books to help readers. We might add a title to teach, a list of things a reader will need, numbers for each step, and pictures that teach.” (See Session IV in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
  
- “How-to writers use specific words to help their readers follow steps and understand not just what to do but when and how to do things. We can look closely at the words that other authors use, words that help to tell the steps in order (*first, next, last, finally*) or ones they use to give cautions or warnings (*always, be careful to, don’t, or never*). Then we can add specific words to our books, too, so that the steps are clearer to our reader.” (See Session V in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)

- “Writers, we’ve been noticing that our mentor authors include features and language in their books to help the reader understand how to do something. Some of you have noticed that how-to authors *also* divide their books into different kinds of sections—an introduction, steps, a part that describes the materials, sometimes an ending. Today I want to teach you that an introduction page for a how-to book introduces your topic *and* it tells people why they might care about doing this thing. When we create an introduction page, our goal is to ‘talk up’ the thing we are hoping to teach. One thing we can do is use words that invite or persuade readers to try something new. We might say something like, ‘Have you ever wanted to try . . .?’”
  - ▶ *Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers, some how-to books have an ending page that sounds a little bit like a send-off to the readers, wishing them well. You may also want to add an ending page that encourages your readers with words like, ‘Now you can . . .’ or ‘Have fun doing . . .,’ just like our mentors.” (See Session V in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
  
- “Writers, I want to teach you that you can use all you know from other mentor authors—not just the ones you’re reading now, but ones you’ve read in other units, or even when you were in kindergarten. We have lots of charts that show the things they do to help readers. You know that writers can use speech bubbles to show dialogue in pictures, labels to add important details in the setting, and bold letters to emphasize something to your reader. You can use all of those things in your how-to books to help your readers.”

### **Part Three: Revising and Editing Our How-To Books**

- “Writers, it is almost time for our publishing party, and I know how excited you are to share your how-to books. In just a few days, people will be stopping by to visit our room or read our bulletin board. Over the next few days, let’s do whatever we can to make our writing the very best that it can be before we share it. Today I want to teach you that when we are getting ready to share a how-to book, we can reread our books and ask ourselves or our partners, ‘Have I taught my reader everything I need to in each step? Does each step make sense?’ Then we can look at our ‘How-To Helpers’ chart and ask, ‘Have I used all the how-to helpers that will help my audience?’ We might use revision strips, extra paper, glue, tape, and scissors to help make revisions.” (See Session XI in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
  
- “Writers can reread our how-to books, making sure we have tried our best to spell those hard-to-spell words. Today I want to teach you that we can reread our books, word by word, searching for some of those words that don’t quite look right. Then, once we find one of those words, we can look at each part of it, say it again slowly, and write the parts or spelling patterns we know.”

- ▮ *Tip: “Of course, we will also want to check to see if we have used any of those quick and easy words on our word wall. We’ll want to make sure those words are spelled correctly.” (See *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)*
  
- “Writers know that adding end punctuation to how-to books can help our readers move more smoothly through as they read. Today I want to teach you that we can reread each step in our how-to books and listen for the places where our sentences end. We can put periods at the ends of sentences that sound like telling, and we can put exclamation marks at the ends of sentences that sound exciting or like urgent warnings.” (See *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
  
- “Writers, I know you are busy today putting the finishing touches on your how-to books. Some of you may continue revising and editing today, using all the charts we have been looking at in the last few days and at all the mentor texts from this month. Today I want to teach you a couple more things how-to book writers can do—they use parentheses when they want to pause for one second and add one little point or say one more thing. And they use a colon just before they list a bunch of things, maybe ingredients in a recipe or things a person needs to accomplish something. Today, while you are adding your finishing touches you can try out some of these punctuation marks too.” (See Session XI in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)



## UNIT FIVE

# Opinion Writing

## *Persuasive Letters and Speeches*

### JANUARY

**T**he 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](http://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

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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

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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**

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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**

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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

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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

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### **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.



## 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.”



## UNIT SIX

# Authors as Mentors

## *Craftsmanship and Revision*

### FEBRUARY

**B**y this time in first grade, you'll no doubt be able to stand back while your children are writing, scan the room, and breathe a proud sigh. Your children will almost certainly have surpassed all expectations. So yes, teachers, you could easily coast from here on out and still know that you taught writing well. But there is another way to go, and we want to challenge you to try this other way. Here is the thing: Your children are right now poised to soar as writers. As you well know, momentum from good work builds on itself. At this intersection of your year, if you resolve to "go for it," then you will see that your kids' progress as writers literally begins to take off exponentially.

One of the most important messages we give to children during a writing workshop is this: "You are writers, like writers the world over." It makes sense, then, that we invite children to look closely at the work of one published writer and learn to let that writer function as a mentor. By inviting youngsters to adopt an author as a mentor, apprenticing themselves to that author, you are also teaching writers to invest in the craft of their writing, to make deliberate choices, not only over *what* they will write, but also over *how* they will write it, and to be willing to try their writing one way, another way, and another way, en route to making it just right. That is, a unit on authors as mentors quickly becomes a unit on qualities of good writing and revision as well as one on reading–writing connections. It is important to say that the unit uses reading–writing connections and author study to lift expectations for all aspects of students' work. So before the unit begins, run your eyes over students' products and watch students as they work, and think, "What's the next huge, important, challenging, but reachable step for these students?"

Research on achievement has shown that students learn in leaps and bounds if we give them feedback that instructs—pointing out specifically what they are already

doing that is new and important—and if we give them crystal clear challenges that are ambitious yet within reach. So think about your students’ revisions, for example. How many of them shift between writing and rereading their writing to assess it, and then start into revising the work, without you nudging them to do so? At this point in the year, your writers should have the habits and skills necessary to reread their writing and think, “Oh my goodness. I could make this *so* much better!” Of course, laying a piece of writing beside published work that resembles whatever the writer had tried to do is one way to show kids a horizon that they can reach for, but your conferences and mid-workshop teaching points and small-group work can also show kids the next steps.

Of course, you can do similar work with any aspect of your writing workshop. Think, for example, about your children’s partnership work. You no doubt know from your own teaching experience how incredible it can be to have a colleague with whom you can plan your work, mull over your work, and imagine new possibilities. Are your first graders using partners in true and authentic ways? Are kids really taking seriously the role of being someone’s writing friend and writing coach? How could you help kids reinvest in this social structure that has such potential?

For you to give students the feedback and goals that will accelerate their development, you need a clear sense of where they are (as a class and also individually) on a trajectory of writing development. You will probably want to preface the unit with another on-demand narrative writing assessment. Lay the work that your students do alongside the benchmark pieces on the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* ([www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)) and note what the next steps are for your writers, and note, too, what holds them back. You will want to be sure to teach with a clear sense of that which is a level or two beyond what your students are already producing, so that you are clear what the next steps for your writers are and so that you harness the work of the mentor author to teach toward those next steps (as well as perhaps toward future next steps). That is, if your children are writing stories in which they tell a sequence of events that they experienced, but they rarely show how they responded to those events, rarely convey their feelings or thoughts, then you will want to explicitly teach them how to do this, using the author’s work to make the point. This teaching (and most teaching you do within this unit) will be aligned to the Common Core State Standards in important ways. The Common Core State Standards claim that whether children write about one single micro-event or link together a few micro-events, either way, they should be able to not only write about the events in sequential order, telling not only what the main character, the writer, did and said, but to also tell what the main character (the writer) felt and thought in response to what he or she did. The student work included in the appendix of the Common Core State Standards suggests that standards for narrative writing are especially high, so this descriptor alone doesn’t do justice to the ambitious levels that you’ll want to aim toward in your teaching.

This unit stands on the shoulders of lots of professional books, but above others, we suggest you rely upon two books from the Units of Study for Primary Writing series (Heinemann, 2003), written by Lucy Calkins, Amanda Hartman, and PS 199 first-

grade teacher Pat Bleichman: *Authors as Mentors* and *The Craft of Revision*. You will also want to learn from Katie Ray's work (*About the Authors* and *Wondrous Words*), as well as Georgia Heard's work on revision (*The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques That Work*), and Lester Laminack's work (*Cracking Open the Author's Craft: Teaching the Art of Writing*). We encourage you to read these books and to find ways to draw on them, because your teaching should always be incorporating more and more richness, and that richness will come from your ongoing learning life.

The big picture of the unit is that writers can learn first from an author by thinking about the writerly life that this author seems to have lived, and then writers can try to do likewise. You'll first suggest that the class join together in learning from a mentor author. This will set your children up to collect ideas for their own stories and to begin writing them—straight-away, at the start of the unit. Then you'll teach your students that writers can notice craft moves in texts they admire and see if they can incorporate those same craft moves into their writing, and they can set about doing so, first by revising the collection of stories they wrote at the start of the unit. During this part of the unit, you'll say to your children, "Did you see what Kevin Henkes did?" Then you will add, "You can do that too!" You will show your students that they can study an author or a book to learn "cool things" that they can do in their own writing. When children study an author's craft, then, they first incorporate that craft into texts they have already written, making this a unit on revision as well as on author study. Then students write new texts, incorporating all they have learned into the first drafts of those texts—and again revising, based on whatever they notice from reading critically and imagining possibilities, supported by the presence of mentor texts. The unit ends with students selecting their own mentor author and writing texts under the spell of that author.

Imagine that during the first part in this unit, your children will be writing four or five booklets, each with five or more pages, and approximately one paragraph per page. As the unit progresses, they will revise these pieces, using all the craft moves they have learned to add on new sections, rewrite endings and beginnings, stretch out the important parts, and so forth. Then they will also write and revise new texts, incorporating all they have learned. Eventually writers will select a second mentor author and write a few texts under the tutelage of that author.

## **The Important Decisions You Need to Make Prior to the Start of the Unit: What Sort of Work Will Students Do? What Author Will They Study?**

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*Authors as Mentors*, the book in the Heinemann series that underlies this unit, builds upon the assumption that students are writing Small Moment stories. Because narrative writing is foundational to children's success as readers and to their ability to write in many genres, a great many teachers use this unit as a time to bring children back into another unit on narrative writing. They know that by this time in the year, children are

ready to work not just on telling what they did in an event, but on writing the story in a vivid and compelling way, and using reading–writing connections to lift the level of their work. This unit write-up, like the *Author as Mentors* book, spotlights the study of an author who has written a narrative text, assuming students are writing narrative texts. But the final bend in the road of the unit opens up new possibilities, inviting students to adopt a mentor author of the students’ own choice, and the assumption is that at this time, some students will adopt mentor authors who write nonfiction, how-to writing, poetry, or another kind of writing entirely.

When deciding upon the whole-class mentor author, you will want to select an author who writes at least two or three texts that are rather like the Small Moment stories the children have been writing. Be careful to talk to your colleagues in kindergarten, as well as second grade, to be sure that children will not be studying the same author they studied last year or will the following year. We want to expand our students’ repertoire of literature and to help them learn from lots of different authors and pieces of writing. You will also want to consider the amount of writing your students are now producing. You will certainly want to choose authors who are writing about as much if not a little more than what your students can produce at this point in the year. We strongly recommend that you consider the books by Kevin Henkes’ such as: *Sheila Rae, The Brave*, *Wemberly Worried*, and *Kitten’s First Full Moon* or Mo Willems’ *Knuffle Bunny*, *I Broke My Trunk*, and other books. A few of our other favorites for this unit are *Shortcut* (Crews), *A Chair for My Mother* (Williams), and *Those Shoes* (Boelts), although of course they are more expansive than anything a first grader could write, so you might want to zoom-in on parts of the story and abridge it a little. Some other texts that might inspire and guide children include *Joshua’s Night Whispers* (Johnson), *My Best Friend* (Rodman), *How to Heal a Broken Wing* (Graham), *Peter’s Chair* (Keats), *At Night* (Bean), *Shhhh* (Henkes), and *Roller Coaster* (Frazee). These are fiction stories, not personal narratives, but they are strong examples of narrative craft, and studying them will pay off.

## Starting the Unit: Learning to Live Like an Author

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Once a mentor author has been selected and children have fastened their eyes onto a mentor text, you’ll need to do a bit of fancy footwork because their instincts will most likely be to learn from a mentor author by writing *about the same content* rather than by borrowing craft moves. You do not want a study of Donald Crews’ *Shortcut* to lead to a whole raft of walking-on-the-train-track stories. To make it less likely that children look at a published text and then produce one in which the content matches, we suggest that you start the author study off by talking up the idea that when we learn from a writer, we start by thinking, “How did this writer probably get the idea to write this story?” This can lead to some work encouraging writers to live writerly lives, and it can allow writers to produce a draft of a story (or two) that you can then help them to revise, borrowing craft moves from the mentor author. Then, too, you could talk to children about the fact that *this* time when they are writing Small Moment stories, they are a *ton* older than they

were long, long ago in September when they wrote these stories. You might take your children into second-grade classrooms in your school to watch how those second graders write up a storm and to see that they revise all on their own, using flaps to add parts that are missing, trying a new start to a story, and expanding the exciting parts of a story. Then you can turn to your first graders and say, “Is there any chance you guys would be brave enough and powerful enough to try writing like *second graders*?”

You want your students to see that their own lives are full of these small moments, so you might ask them to begin to carry small notepads (look to Session I in the *Authors as Mentors* book) to record the moments that happen throughout each day. You’ll carry your own Tiny Topics notepad, too, and make a rather public show out of taking it out to record the small moments that happen in the classroom. “Oh my goodness!” you might say. “Marion just helped Louis pick up his spilled crayons. That would make a great story! Let me jot just the words ‘Marion Helping’ in my Tiny Topics notepad to hold onto that idea.”

We’ve sometimes found that children try to record the whole story in their Tiny Topics notepads, which ends up making it a very short (and underdeveloped) story, so you’ll want to show them how to take brief notes (like “fell down”), and then later, at the desk, they can return to that brief note and use it to jog memories. A tiny note can remind the writer of the whole story, which the writer can tell (and eventually sketch and write). You’ll want children to go from jotting a bunch of seed ideas in this Tiny Topics notepad (something the writer will presumably do at home) to, in school, selecting one of these, and then telling an expanded version of a story to themselves or to a partner, perhaps stretching it out over their five fingers or across a blank booklet with half a dozen pages: “I was sliding down the monster slide when Mrs. Martinez yelled, ‘Time to come in! Line up!’ I started to run to get in the line but I slipped on a rock. I fell on the dirt. When I got up, everyone was in line and I was late.” The writer can then sketch the story across the pages, and set to work writing it—quickly. All of this process—living like a writer, collecting seed ideas, writing one as a story—will consume perhaps two days of the unit (not a week!). Then writers can get started writing another story.

However you launch the unit, don’t let the fact that the children will be studying an author lead you into imagining that this unit is all about writing perfect books—slowly, across many days. It is critical for young children to be given opportunities for repeated practice at any skill you want them to develop. So this month, imagine they’ll be generating three to four stories a week, each five or more pages and each containing the number of lines that is just beyond the amount of writing your children produce without nudging. Chances are good that most of your children will be writing on paper with seven lines or more. Your children should have no problem generating ideas for writing, and writing focused, chronological narratives with details.

If you use the message, “You’re going to try to write just like real, published authors,” to support children’s participation in the writing process, you will then find yourself encouraging them to walk through life a bit differently, aware of the rich moments that happen each day that could be “seeds” for writing. As you read

and reread your mentor author's books with students, you will muse about (and in many cases, invent) ways your mentor author may have gotten the idea for the text. Exclaim, "Ezra Jack Keats must have gotten this great idea for his story, *Snowy Day*, by watching kids play in the snow and jotting down notes." Or you might say, "I bet Kevin Henkes got the idea for his story, *Wemberly's Ice-Cream Star*, from one hot day when he ate ice cream and it began to melt. He must have thought to himself, 'I need to remember this moment,' so he jotted a note to himself." Be sure that you remind children that it takes about five seconds to jot a note about a great story idea—and then writers can write! Jotting a note or two about a possible story idea does not constitute the work for a day.

Either on that first day, as you introduce the mentor author and get children generating story ideas and writing stories, or a day or two later when children will be generating ideas for another story, you will probably want to use your mentor author to help teach children to focus the piece of writing they're doing, or about to do, and all the other writing they do after that. For example, if the mentor author is Kevin Henkes, you might say, "Do you see how in *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick*, Kevin Henkes doesn't tell you *all about* Sheila Rae and Louise's day? He doesn't tell you *all about* the games they played or the meals they ate or what they did at school. No way! He just focuses on that tiny moment when Louise asked for some of Sheila Rae's peppermint stick, doesn't he?" When using finished writing to teach, the problem is that you do not have the author's process to draw upon, so you may find yourself telling stories about how the author *probably* went about writing the story. For example, you could highlight Henkes' focus by saying, "You know what? I bet when Kevin Henkes might have first written his story it went on and on and on and on—and then he probably reread it and said to himself, 'What?? This story doesn't have any details. I go so fast through things that no one can picture it!' And then I bet he wrote it again, trying to zoom in on a smaller moment so he could add in the true details. Maybe one of his drafts went like this: 'Sheila Rae and Louise played checkers and then they played trucks. They played with dolls and they also jumped rope. Sheila Rae would not share her peppermint stick with Louise.'" Then you could tell the class, "You know what he did? I bet he reread the draft that went on and on and on and then said to himself, 'Of all the moments I could tell, which moment is the moment that other people just have got to hear?' That's a question writers ask a lot." Don't persevere too long over the job of planning a perfect story because, as in any unit of study, you want writers cycling through the process at a good clip, writing as best they can, and if your youngsters really have not yet grasped what it means to zoom in on a small moment to write with enough detail that readers can experience the story as they read it, you are more apt to help them do this during revision than during planning.

Within about four days of starting the unit, your children will have lived like authors, and they will have written at least two or three stories. Now your unit begins in earnest. Until children have drafts of a story (or two or three), it is hard to teach them how to study an author's craftsmanship and to try to emulate that craftsmanship.

## Writing Stronger and Longer Drafts under the Influence of an Author: Writers Study Authors We Admire and Try the Published Author's Craft in Our Own Writing

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After children have written a few stories in their five-page booklets, you will probably want to remind them that another way that writers are often influenced by a mentor author is that we study the work of a mentor author to see *how* the author makes his or her story as good as possible. This gives us ideas for ways we can make our stories even better as we write.

It is really important that you not push onto kids all the craft moves you notice! The last thing you want to do is to produce a finished chart listing the techniques that you have seen an author using that you want your young writers to try. Instead, the important thing is to teach writers a process for learning from other texts. When teaching children to make reading–writing connections, it is important that they have already read and appreciated the text under study. After reading a text simply to appreciate it, readers can reread that text, looking for places in it that “got to us.” Portions of a story that make a reader say, “Ugghhh,” or “Ahh” are portions that we want to study, asking “What did the writer do to get this response?” Show children that after you’ve appreciated a text, you return to it, thinking especially about the places that made you feel something intense, the places that made you gasp. Then writers go to one of those parts and think, “What has this author done in this part of his writing that I could try as well?” Teachers, if you can pull this off, instead of *you* asking, “What did Kevin Henkes do that you could do?” you can try to teach children to ask that same question. The difference makes all the difference! It helps to also ask, “Why *might* he have done that?” Of course, the last question, and most important, might be, “Are there places in one of *my* stories in which I’m trying to do the same sort of thing, where I might try that same technique?”

You will want children not only to notice these poignant moments in text, but also take the craft moves they are seeing and try them in their own writing. To do this, you will want to teach children that writers analyze the text. You might ask students, “What, exactly, did Kevin Henkes do that worked so well? What did he do to make this part stand out?” For example, Kevin Henkes chose a dialogue tag (“sniffed”) that captured a feeling, so students too could try dialogue tags that communicate a feeling. Then too, you could ask children, “What did this author do to make me feel so sad? What did this author do to make me laugh?” and so on.

Teach fearless revision. Young children revise block castles to add protected hiding spots for archers, and they revise pictures of spaceships to add explosions. They revise clay rabbits to make one ear droop. Young children can revise their writing with equal ease and enthusiasm—as long as we don’t expect their revisions to look like those a grown-up would make. First graders can revise—as long as we expect their six-year-old best! The beauty of this unit comes when our students see how their writing gets stronger because of the many ways they learn to revise.

Consider the tools your writers have to help them as they learn to “re-see” their writing, making changes that affect their writing’s meaning. The more you make the act of revision visible, tangible for your children, the more mileage they’ll get from these few days. After physically cutting and moving or deleting sections of their booklets, children will begin to have an understanding of revision that will carry them through many years of writing workshops.

While studying an author’s text, you and your children might also notice, for instance, that your mentor author uses punctuation to grow suspense (ellipses, dash marks, or commas), making the sentences sound more and more exciting, or for emphasis, as Molly Bang does in *When Sophie Gets Angry—Really, Really, Really Angry*. . . . Point out to kids that even the title includes a dash and an ellipsis. Or point out that the author inserts detailed lists as Joanne Ryder does in *My Father’s Hands* to give readers a clear picture in their minds. Or they use short sentences, as Kevin Henkes does in *Sheila Rae, the Brave* to convey fast actions. He writes, “Sheila Rae walked and walked. She turned corners. She crossed streets. It suddenly occurred to Sheila Rae that nothing looked familiar.”

You can teach your children that writers write with readers in mind, making sure their texts include things like end punctuation. When you teach this, remind writers that usually a person thinks of a whole sentence, a whole thought, and then we write without stopping until we get to the end of that thought and put a period down. Then we have another whole thought, and starting with a capital letter we write and write until that thought is down, again without stopping, and we put a period there. The kids won’t do this perfectly, and that is okay. Your goal, though, is for kids to begin to write in sentences of thought, punctuating on the run. Punctuation should not be an after thought that writers insert once a text is completed, although of course once a text is completed writers can reread, using punctuation as road signs, finding places where the punctuation may need to be altered.

As children work on writing with voice and using punctuation and sentence structure to bring out their stories, you can suggest they look at mentor texts again, noting the sparkling and unusual words mentor authors use, the ways they use short sentences, and even sentence fragments, to increase the pace and excitement. Or how they alternate long and short sentences or have repeated sequences of long or short. You might teach children to look at how the punctuation affects the tone, and the unusual punctuation, such as ellipses and dashes. Then, too, you might teach your children that they can look at how the mentor opens up his subjects—the things he chooses to illuminate in his stories.

Remember, as children move through this part, they should be attempting each of these things as they compose as well as when they practice ongoing revision. As you move through these next few weeks, you will want to ensure that children are writing stories that incorporate all you have taught as they write, not just as an afterthought when they are done.

Once children have noticed that an author uses a technique (such as weaving narrative with rich, precise language to bring something to life), you will probably want to return to a text that you worked on publicly earlier in the year—your own story or a

whole-class story—and invite children to think about places you could have used this technique for good purpose, and then you and the class can rewrite those sections so as to incorporate that technique. You can invite children to reread their own writing in a similar way, and more importantly, to think of another technique that the mentor author used, and then the child can search for places where he or she could use that same technique to good effect in his or her writing.

Craft techniques will be collected onto a chart that the students can use to remind them of all you have taught. These could include the above—building suspense, using sensory images, using comparisons—as well as others, such as using repetition, sound words, and small actions to slow down the story. The chart might contain an example or two of a “craft move,” then the name that the class has given to that craft move, followed by an effort to talk about the effect this device has had on the children as readers. For example, the chart might contain a couple of Henkes’ precise dialogue tags, and then it might name what Henkes has done, saying, “Uses exact action words instead of *said*.” Finally the chart might say, “Helps the reader picture exactly how the character talked.” At first, children will summarize a craft move with just a word or a phrase: “He wrote his feelings.” You will want to help children talk with much more specificity about what, exactly, made this particular technique so effective. You might point out the decisions the author made, the path he could have—but didn’t—take. “He *could* have just said, ‘I felt sad,’ but he didn’t. Instead he wrote. . . . What, exactly, do you think he did here that makes this part convey feelings in such a powerful way?” And then discuss what makes this particular detail, description, or bit of dialogue so effective.

Partners can meet and show each other parts they revised. They can help each other plan possible additional revision strategies and read and reread their stories together, thinking more deeply about them. Children can talk to each other about what real-world author they are trying to write in the style of, and why. Children can get ideas for revising their pieces by asking each other “Did you say everything about the most important part?” or “What did you do like Ezra Jack Keats/Kevin Henkes to make your writing better?” Partners will be delighted to be asked to act out stories together to find places to add more actions, dialogue, feeling, or thinking. They can reread their stories and use a revision checklist the class has created to name what revision strategy they might try today. Partners can also read their stories and try to picture what is happening—if they can’t picture it, writers can add details.

## Deeper, More Powerful, and Thoughtful Revision

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After children have spent several weeks composing new pieces, each one getting a little stronger than the one before, quickly revising each on the run, you might choose to stop writing new pieces and take a week to linger over all the powerful revision writers can do. You might spend this week having children take out all the pieces they have written so far and “have a go” at the deeper work of revision. Taking time to focus on revision will help it to become an effortless part of writing for these kids, and not just what a

writer does in preparation for publication. During this unit, writers can never get enough of their revising pens, strips and swatches of paper, scissors and tape, and staplers and staple removers for adding several pages inside of their booklets. These tools should remain in your writing center from the previous unit of study, so be sure to replenish your supplies. Create a drumroll around this with your writers: “Writers, I am refilling our writing center with lots and lots of revision tools because I know you will be revising so much as you learn how to write from other writing teachers!”

As children try out one and then another technique, be sure to nudge them to be independent. That is, don’t set up an atmosphere in which all children try out the same technique at one time; the idea is not for children to be working in sync. Rather, you’ll want kids to generate their own ideas and to use those ideas in their own writing. The goal is that children try techniques that resonate for them—ones they admire—and that they use the influence of an author mentor’s craft moves to influence their own craft moves. What works for one child’s writing won’t necessarily work for another’s.

Now that your students have studied a mentor author with your guidance and have spent quite a bit of time revising all of their favorite pieces, they are ready to begin going out on their own to find their very own mentor authors. Encourage your children to reread some of their favorite texts and notice the craft moves their favorite authors use and then try them out! They may even realize that the authors they choose to study use many of the same techniques as the mentor author you just studied all together. Imagine your classroom: books out and open on the tables, Post-its where students are jotting craft techniques they want to try, and revision tools (like flaps and tape) readily accessible, so that they can do this work independently. Also realize that as your students look to mentor authors, they may rely on authors of nonfiction texts or poetry to influence their craft. You want to be sure that you open up this possibility for your students, so that they understand that authors, no matter what genre they have written can be seen as mentors. You may want to reference how your writing has been influenced by a text outside of the narrative realm, to model this as a possibility.

As students select their own texts and authors as mentors, partner time will be essential so that students can talk about the authors they are using to mentor them and the craft moves they are trying out. When two partners come together to talk about their writing, rather than the partnership conference starting with one writer simply reading aloud his or her draft, there needs to first be discussion so that the listening partner has some sense of what he or she is listening for. Partners, then, might begin a conference by asking (as teachers, too, are apt to ask), “What are you working on today as a writer? How’s it going? How else could you have written that? What are you planning to do next?” Once the listening partner has an idea of what the reading partner is working on, the reading partner can read aloud her draft—or a section of her draft—and as she does so, she can Post-it the parts that affect the listening partner (pages that make that person laugh or say, “Oh my goodness,” or lean in close, and so on).

## Wrapping Up the Unit

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As the month draws to a close, you will again ask children to select a story they especially like to further revise and to publish. Just before publishing, you have a wonderful window to ramp up the level of what students can do with their control of conventions. You may talk about this as fixing up and fancying up writing. Certainly you will want to make sure that all your writers are writing with end punctuation. You may also begin to teach toward varied sentence structure, which you could tuck into instruction on making the story into one that is easy to read aloud with expression, and into making sure that writers include the punctuation that helps readers read a story well.

You may want to celebrate your students' growth as writers by having them publish their books as picture books, just like their mentor authors. They can study how these authors create titles for their books, who they write dedications to, and what information they choose to include in an "About the Author" section. Authors also have publication parties where they share snippets of their books with an audience. You may choose to celebrate by having children sit around and read the one line that they feel is most like the author they've emulated. Or, perhaps, you'll decide to pull out all the stops for this unit's celebration. Maybe you'll celebrate by having your class do a book reading (and of course book signing) in your school library. You may decide to suggest that your writers set up a table and lay out little copies of their books (these could be made or they could be copied from the school copier—not hundreds, just a few for each writer) and invite other classrooms and grade levels (older kids love to do this!) to the celebration. Let your authors first read their pieces (of course, using their best read-aloud voices and acting), and then, let them sign and hand out a few copies of their books to their readers (just like they do at Barnes and Noble when Mo Willems releases his latest page-turner). This celebration could be as little or as enormous as you'd like, so long as you remember, above all else, that we are celebrating the process and the creator of these pieces, not necessarily the piece itself.



## UNIT SEVEN

# Informational Books

## MARCH

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Children are experts at the best sorts of things: be it the future sportscaster who knows all the teams in the NBA and which players are famous for which moves, or the aspiring engineer who can tell you not only about each Lego set, piece, and creation, but can explain, as well, the different uses for a single rectangular prism. Let's face it, your class is teeming with youngsters full of passions and areas of expertise. There's the child who knows everything about dolphins, the child who can tell you twelve million facts about makeup, the snake enthusiast—the list goes on and on. One of the wonderful things about working with first graders is the delight they take in their own knowledge. This unit channels that energy into writing. First graders will love being asked to teach you what they know, and then to teach everyone else, and the world. This means, of course, that we need to let children in on the fact that a beloved bicycle, an action figure collection, or any of their favorite topics—horses, insects, dinosaurs—are book worthy! During this unit of study, each child will write lots of informational books about lots of different topics. As they do this, the work children will be doing aligns to the Common Core State Standards for first grade, which call for students to be able to choose topics on which they have information and to use writing to teach others that information.

This unit is designed to have children write several all-about books on topics of their choice. Then they will select one to publish toward the end of the unit. Rather than have children research new topics, you can help children develop new, important non-narrative writing muscles by choosing topics about which they are *already knowledgeable*. This is bound to be a time of excitement as children reveal and explore their hobbies and passions, from playing soccer to raising a parakeet. There are topics on which your first graders will know more than *you* do, more than their *peers* do, topics on which they might already be pros and experts. Instead of pushing children

into researching and drafting formal-sounding reports on distant topics, you want your young writers to recognize that their own lives are full of so much that they might teach others. This is an excellent opportunity to tap into children's own funds of knowledge, to empower them to speak with authority and ownership about some aspect of their own lives that is unique. One student may decide to write all about a sibling who has Down's syndrome, another may write all about life in a new country, and a third might write a children's guide to his or her neighborhood. Early on in their writing lives, you'll want children to develop their own confident voice within the non-fiction genre. Children will learn a lot from each other during this unit, too! You may want to refer to *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports in Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Heinemann, 2003) to help you plan this unit.

## Planning for the Unit

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To understand what your children can do as informational writers, you will want to take a day, right at the start of this unit to engage your children in a performance assessment (available at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)). Say to writers, "What do you know a lot about? You can make a book that teaches others a lot about that." Your writers will then have fifty to sixty minutes to do the best informational writing they can do. You may be hesitant about testing your kids on writing that you haven't yet taught for even a moment, but please trust that when we ask first-grade writers to do informational writing—which they did in kindergarten—the work they produce floors us. Some children, of course, have a clumsy relationship with the genre, but others seem ready for second grade! In any case, the real point is that if you do this work at the start of your unit, then you can adjust your teaching plans accordingly, and you also have a baseline against which to compare the work students are able to do in a few short weeks, at the conclusion of the unit.

Expect that your children will all learn informational writing in leaps and bounds. The Common Core State Standards suggest that by the end of first grade, your children should be doing at least the work that is represented by level 4 of the *RWP Information Writing Continuum*, and we have found this goal to be well within grasp for first graders. That is, before long, your students will know that when writing a book on a topic such as, say, kittens, a writer should expect to divide the book into some sort of categories, with each section of the book containing information that pertains to a different aspect of kittens. The topics and subtopics that children address will tend to be those that they know about from personal experience, but of course they'll also write some about topics they study in school and by poring over books.

An important resource you will use for this work will be *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*. However, although you may use the minilessons from this source, read this write-up, too, and notice some of the ways in which it departs from the book because these departures are important ones. One difference is that the first-grade curricular calendar for 2011–2012 suggests that instead of combining how-to

and all-about writing into a single unit, you teach each of these genres as self-standing units. Furthermore, this write-up suggests that instead of walking students through the process of writing one, fairly elaborate all-about book, you launch students into a process of writing lots and lots of these books on many topics. Your teaching will lead students to make a small folder full of all-about books, returning to these to revise as they learn new strategies. The books written toward the end of the month should, from the start, include things that might have been revisions to other, earlier books. That is, the books at the start of the unit might contain a hodgepodge of facts, in no particular order, and might therefore be scissored apart into categories. The books written later in the unit will probably have a table of contents, with different pages allocated for different subtopics. You could, of course, decide against this plan and instead follow more closely the plan that is laid out in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*. These are decisions you'll need to make—obviously there is no right answer, although for now, we are casting our vote toward encouraging children to create an abundance of all-about books.

Then, too, you will want to prepare for the unit by acquiring (or making) paper that can support your students' writing during the unit. Analyzing your students' on-demand assessments can help you make decisions about the kind of work you can expect your children to do in the unit, and those decisions will have implications related to paper choice. Again, you'll need to decide whether you want to follow the plan laid out in *Nonfiction Writing* or depart a bit from it. In that book, you will see that as Laurie Pessah and I walk students through a sequence of work that leads them to each write a single all-about book, we channel them to make sure that one page is for a how-to section, one page is for a "Kinds of . . ." section, one page is for a Small Moment story related to the topic, and so on. In that book, we help the whole class understand that whether an individual is writing about soccer or about computers or about dogs, that person can write a how-to page related to the topic. But our sense is that if you were to become invested in matching their paper choice with the genre of each chapter of their all-about writing, this one decision would end up meaning that the entire class of writers moved in unison from writing a how-to-page of an all-about book to writing a Small Moment page of that same all-about book, and so on. There are many downsides to trying to yoke the whole class together, and the most important might be a lack of productivity. Many children can write lots of pages of their all-about books in a day's writing workshop, but if every child must write an all-about page on Monday, beginning and finishing that page that day while others wait patiently, this is bound to slow half the class down. Whether the person is writing about dance or computers, the writer can also write about the different kinds of a thing, related to the topic, and a different parts of a thing chapter, and so forth. We'd rather encourage writers to do the work they want and, in a sense, need to do.

You may decide to have five-page booklets available, that resemble (or actually are!) the paper choice your writers used for narrative writing, with a box for a quick sketch and plenty of lines for filling with information (seven lines or more per page). You may want to have booklets available, but also plenty of stacked loose paper so that, from the start, your writers know that pages and parts will be added because of all

they know and need to teach. For first grade, then, we're suggesting that once a child has selected a topic, you let the child go to it, writing an informational book. As you read through this unit, you will find that we do say more about types of paper choice and offer suggestions for how to use the paper choices to support writers.

Finally, you will want to select mentor texts for this unit. You'll rally and renew your first-grade writers' excitement around all-about writing by offering some spectacular new, deeper mentor texts than they might have used as kindergartners. Choose texts that represent complex grade level texts, as well as mentors that are just a notch up from those that you expect your children will write. Read this write-up and make sure that the mentor texts you select will provide you with examples that you need to teach the content of this unit. For example, you will want mentor texts with tables of contents, chapter titles, and diagrams. Some questions to consider when picking a text are Will this text support the volume of writing that I expect my children to produce? Will this text use elaboration strategies that I want my children to strive for? Will the text structure teach my children about ways to organize their writing? Some children may benefit from a list-like structure (similar to the books that they are reading), while other children would benefit from mentors with sophisticated text structures and elaboration strategies. You may turn to the nonfiction books in the Rigby PM Pets series, such as *Goldfish*, *Mice*, or *Cats*, because these are nice examples of all-about texts and will be accessible for your first graders to read. You may also want to refer back to the texts that the students likely looked to in kindergarten when writing all-about books, such as *My Baseball Book* or *My Soccer Book* by Gail Gibbons.

## Launching the Unit

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Don Graves, one of the leaders in the field of children's writing, once asked a group of teachers to list their children's names. Then he asked the teachers to list, beside each name, four or five things on which that child is an expert. His point was that none of us can teach writing unless we recognize that each child in our class is an expert on many things. A child may know all about a specific church, about a game, about a tradition, about a sport, about a television show, about a kind of weather, about a place, about a job, about an animal, or about a language. These topics and a trillion others all merit attention, and the important thing is that you find these areas of expertise and respect them. In classrooms where informational writing will flourish, one will hear the teacher saying to one child, then another, "You know so much about. . . . I'd love to learn all about it from you. You've got to teach me. . . ." In these classrooms, children will push back their shoulders and stand tall, proud to be recognized as the class expert on one subject or another. It will not be hard, then, for children to choose topics on which to write all-about books. There will be instances when a child is unsure, however, and needing help. When you have the opportunity to steer a child toward a topic, we recommend that at least at the start of the unit, you channel children toward topics of personal expertise—and ideally, topics that will give the writer power as well. That is, a book on gym class may not give the young writer any social cache, but a book on magic tricks

or slugs or on skateboard wheelies might—which will tend to make the young writer all the more willing to invest in writing in the future. Also, finding strong topics for these all-about books will be part of what makes them compelling to write, and since your children will have written all-about books in the past, you will want to renew their excitement for teaching others what they know so well. We want children, as they think about their topics to teach others, to consider their audiences and to think about what people need to know and learn about in the world.

To help children choose topics that they will be able to write about with breadth and depth, you might have them brainstorm places, people, things, and topics that they know well and could teach others about (karate class, the grocery store, The Knicks, a Barbie collection, stuffed animals, helicopters). You could devote a portion of the first day to group discussions and partner work that aims to stir up topic ideas, and later, you might start the school day by asking children to suggest topic ideas to each other. As children wait in line, they could work with a friend to list five possible all-about ideas. As part of this, children will begin to recognize individual expertise. “Tonia should write about Littlest Pets toys. She has so many,” one child might say. You may find that your students will begin working on books like “All About Sponge Bob Squarepants,” “All About X-Box,” and “All About Older Sisters.” Don’t project onto children the writer’s block that you, as an adult, would experience if nudged to write an informational book. Six-year-olds believe they are experts on a world of topics, and they expect that, of course, people will want to learn about those topics. Within the first day of this unit, your children can all start writing all-about books.

You might suggest children bring out the Tiny Topics notepads from earlier units, using those to represent the fact that they need to walk through their lives as writers, noticing the places they go, the things they do, and the people they know, thinking, “Hmmm. Could *this* be the topic I decide upon?” and then jotting possible topics onto the notepad. Be sure that you guide children to decide upon topics on which the child has unique personal expertise and to decide, too, on topics that others would like to learn about. It will also be important for you to help children feel a sense of authority about topics they think are ordinary. If one child’s mother just had a baby, that child may need you to help him or her realize that the rest of us would love to know what it’s been like to have a baby in the family. If another child knows everything there is to know about the Dominican Republic, you may need to help that youngster understand that this expertise is precious indeed. Be prepared to be a student of your children, listening with responsiveness to any topic they throw out. There is nothing like a rapt listener to help any one of us realize that in fact we *do* have lessons to teach and information to share.

After children have started to record possible topics in their Tiny Topics notepads (remember, this time the topics need not be quite so tiny), they may also want to think of an audience to go with each topic and a reason why they are writing for this audience. For example, one first-grade writer insisted, “I want to write *All About Basketball* for the people in the after-school program because I think they want to know how to play better.” Another said, “I want to write *All About Cats* for my friend Baylie because she does not have a cat, and I want her to know about caring for cats like the one I

have at home.” When children both know their audience and have a reason to write for this audience, they will not only have an easier time thinking of information to put in their books but will also be much more likely to compose texts that matter to them and others.

As children jot and select and begin to write their first of many all-about books, it will be important for them to be given a few minutes to meet with their partners and discuss the topic. Just as they met with their partners to tell their stories and how-tos in previous units, children can meet with their partners to teach them about their topics of choice. This verbal rehearsal will provide children with the opportunity to see if they have enough information to write a book on the topic, as well as to plan what it is they will write in their books. You may want to subtly guide your stronger writers toward more focused topics and your less strong writers toward more general ones. It will be easier to devote a book to the topic *library* than to *story hour*, but that latter topic would probably yield better writing.

## Teach Students to Revise Books in Their Folders and to Make Their New Books Be Even More Ambitious: Revising and Writing to Support Categorization

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One of the most exciting and important lessons that you can teach your youngsters is the idea that informational writers sort stuff into categories so their readers can learn more easily. The simplest way to show them this is having them use their fingers to list what they know, what they would write, essentially writing sentences about each “finger” topic. This might sound something like “One thing that I know about recess is that kids get exercise during it. Another thing that I know is that a lot of kids play games like tag during recess. . . .” The children will be tapping their fingers as they ramble off information about their topics. Again, this rehearsal won’t take more than a few minutes, so children don’t need to wait to get started on writing chapter books. They can pick the topic they know the most about and start their books the same day! For this work, you can supply premade booklets with a table of contents page, and a line on which the child will write the chapter title at the top of each page (for now, assume one-page-long chapters). Chapters may be titled, for example, “How to Take Care of a Cat” or “Parts of a Cat” or “Things Cats Like to Do.” For each chapter, children will write what they know about that category.

One lesson you’ll teach is that writers don’t just throw everything we know about a topic on to the page in a giant hodgepodge. We divide our knowledge up into different categories, writing with some completeness about one subtopic before approaching another. You will want to alert your writers to note how information is organized on the pages of their mentor texts, showing them that authors have sorted information under various headings and that each heading is its own distinct area. It may help to give children an example of how one sorts washed laundry, grouping socks and underwear together to place in one basket and fancy shirts in another. Because this is especially foundational, you will probably want to make the lesson very concrete.

You might say to kids, “I want to teach you about baking.” Then you could proceed to go through a jumble of items, each of which sparks you to say a different fact (making sure that items 1, 3, and 6 relate to your baking treats, and items 2 and 5 relate to another subtopic—baking utensils—and yet other items relate to a third topic—baking apparel. This needs to be extremely brief, so just say one fact for each item. Picking up a whisk, you can say, “You need a whisk to stir.” Then picking up an apron, say, “My apron protects my clothes from spills and stains.” Returning to a food item, an empty measuring cup, say, “Measuring ingredients is important, so you’ll need a set of measuring cups.” Returning to apparel, you say, “You cannot pull baked goods from the oven without an oven mitt.” You could then point out that it might be hard for kids to remember all these things when everything is all snarled up together, and show them that people who are writing teaching books often sort things out and talk about things that go together, all at one time. You could then make three piles, and say, “I’m going to teach you about tools I use for baking, baking apparel I need, and treats I like to bake.” Then proceed through one category. You won’t need to go through all your items and categories to have made your point, but you will want to show children how this translates into a table of contents. Children won’t have a pile of stuff in front of them to sort, but they can take a new topic and think about what their chapters might be.

Once children have a table of contents, they will begin writing their “chapters.” You will need to teach students to assemble similar information together so that, for example, everything inside a chapter on “Training Your Dog” is, in fact, about training. To support different ways of organizing informational writing, chapter pages can be formatted in different styles. For example, if a child is writing “All About Dogs,” and one page is on “Training Your Dog to Heel,” that page will be formulated as a procedural text and will look much like the how-to paper did. So when children go to the writing center to choose paper, they might grab the same paper that they used in the how-to unit to make a how-to section for their all-about books.

Remember that in this unit, children are writing *many* all-about books. They will pick a topic, make a table of contents, and then write their chapters. They will continue to revise their books as they go, like they have in every other unit. Make sure you have plenty of flaps and strips of paper ready so children can add information anywhere and anytime. Then they will start another all-about book!

Because your children will be writing many chapters in each topic they try, you’ll want to look carefully for texts that can serve as mentors for this unit. Of course, as you teach children to plan all-about books that contain subheadings and to use tables of contents and subheads to help them sort information into categories, you will definitely want to make reading-writing connections, pointing out that the authors of published books do this as well. You can invite children to study *how* authors do this, gleaning more tips by looking closely. Some astute writers will notice that some books have a hierarchy of headings. Others may notice that some writers also have little boxes on their pages where they put information that doesn’t go in any of the chapters. Of course, there is a lot you can prompt writers to notice—including the fact that writers tend to write more than one sentence in a chapter (but more on that later).

If one child is writing “All about Pet Snakes,” ask him to explain his decision to include details regarding the snakes’ diet in a section where he has *also* talked about how to clean out the snake’s cage. Listen carefully. He might have some logic and method to the way he’s sorted this information. If not, prod your writer, “Might you group these two things separately? Do they feel like two separate things to you?” Model, in your own writing, how you continuously sort information to make new headings, and cut and paste, so that the organizational structure behind your writing is clear and easy to follow.

After you teach writers to plan their chapters, sorting information into subheads, you might suggest they go back and revise the book or two they wrote prior to receiving this instruction, sorting things out by scissoring the sentences apart and taping them into the appropriate chapter pages. The goal would not be to make those first books perfect so much as to give kids another manipulative way to experience the concept of categorization. As children do this work, they will of course mess up—don’t worry about this. The goal is not perfection. It is for children to begin to grasp an important concept.

Eventually, you may want to let children construct their own booklets and to at least expose them to paper written in different formats, because of course, diagram paper would be a good choice for a chapter on “Parts of a Cat,” and how-to paper might be a good choice for “How to Feed a Cat.” But of course, both of those topics could also be written on any sort of lined paper, and most children will be more intent on plunging forward, writing a lot, than on thinking how a chapter will go and choosing paper to match.

## Teach Students to Revise by Elaborating—and Then to Begin Writing Longer Books, Right from the Start

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Every genre of writing has predictable challenges, and when writing informational books, one of the most important challenges is to include information! This means that you will need to help young writers elaborate, or say more. There are lots of ways to teach students to say more. You might start by pointing out that now that your youngsters are writing books like real authors, they’ll want to study what real writers do and think about doing likewise. One thing writers do, of course, is they write a lot more than a sentence on a page. That is, they “say more.” That, alone, is great advice for your children. Part of this means that you need to be sure your expectations are appropriately high. If a child can write three sentences on a page, that same child can write six sentences. And frankly, a child can write six sentences on a page and four or five pages, and do that in a day. Try challenging your kids. “Can I give you a challenge?” you can say to three kids. “I read that kids your age can actually write a whole book—like five or six pages long—in *one day*. And this person said those books can have a bunch of lines on each page. I think that’s too hard for seven-year-olds. I read that and thought, ‘Really?’ But then I got this thought that maybe, just maybe, you actually *could* write a six-page book, with a bunch of lines on each page, in a day. Let’s have you try. Just to see.” The kids will be bursting

with excitement to show you and will rise to the occasion. And from that point on, your expectations for the whole class can leap ahead.

You can also lure kids to write more by teaching them that writers reread a page and think, “Can I add an example?” and then we get a giant colorful Post-it and add that Post-it onto the page, holding an example. Of course, there was no need for the Post-it. The example could almost certainly fit beneath the text just fine. But the Post-it will make the process of adding more feel like carpentry—and flaps off the sides work equally well. A writer who wrote, “Cats are easy pets,” may return to that page, reread, then ask herself, “What more can I teach about this part?” Then add on, “Cats can stay alone all day. They can hunt for mice and find food on their own. Cats do not have to use the bathroom outside because they can use a litter box. They like to relax more than they like to exercise, so you do not need to take them for walks either. If you give them toys and special furniture they will play all by themselves, keeping themselves busy.” Keep your expectations high as you teach your writers to say and write more, and use tools to nudge your writers to reread and add on—as long as you also teach them that actually, in the end, writers write longer chapters right from the start. In the end, if a child has written a chapter titled “The Parts of a Bicycle,” and written only, “Bicycles have handlebars,” before he goes on to the next chapter, “How to Take Care of Your Bicycle,” the child will hopefully be able to say, “Oops! How can I say more about the parts of the bicycle? Well, sometimes the handlebars have brakes on them and sometimes there are gear shifts on the handlebars.” You will want to be sure to make your exemplar pieces long, so that you are modeling the same volume you expect from your writers. You might also add paper that consists of only lines, inviting children to continue a chapter for another page or two.

Another important way for writers to elaborate is for them to consider readers’ questions. By this time, your students will probably each have a folder full of four to six all-about books. Teach children that they can read these to a partner, hear questions that the partner has, and try to write in ways that answer those questions. That is, if a child has said, “There are a lot of bad guys in *Star Wars*,” then another child might reread this and ask, “What are their names? Who are the bad guys?” The author, then, can insert this information. You may need to teach children that they can use carets and arrows to insert information into the right spot in a text. Of course, the bigger lesson is that writers reread, asking ourselves the questions that we anticipate readers will want to ask. We become our own partners.

## **Teach Students to Elaborate by Revising to Add Text Features— Then Writing More Developed Books That Incorporate Text Features from the Start**

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As children continue to write multiple all-about books, you will certainly want to teach them that they can include text features in their writing and again, you can use published all-about books as the source of inspiration, and encourage students to revise the books they have already made as well as to make new books that include text features from the

start. Children can add diagrams, charts, glossaries, and pictures with labels and captions to their own books. They could even add a “Fun Facts” or “Question & Answer” page. You may revisit some of your favorite mentor texts to allow your writers to read with a writer’s eye, noticing the features that the authors use to convey information. You want your writers to not only recognize what different features they might include in their books but also why they might choose a particular feature to include as they write. Therefore, if you teach a minilesson on how to say more by adding a diagram, you will want to be sure to model how you decide where a diagram might help you to say more. You would not want to demonstrate that every all-about book has a diagram page, making students think that it is okay to just add in a diagram to any book in any old place. Instead, you would want to teach your students several features they might add and how to go about deciding where to add what. Think about a child who is writing an all-about book on soccer, for example. If her first chapter is about practice, a diagram might not be the most useful feature to add. You want your young writers to begin to realize the types of decisions they need to make when they revise.

As you help children work on their writing, you’ll want to be sure they use the skills that nonfiction writers use. This will include incorporating technical vocabulary—the lingo of the topic—into their writing. Encourage a child who’s writing about ballet to include words such as *plie* and *tendu*, for instance. “Look!” you might say, “In *this* book the author has made each difficult word bold and underlined and then explained it in the sidebar so that the reader learns what it means.” Suggest that your writers do the same. “When we teach a reader all about our subject, this means *also* teaching the reader some *special words* about our subject.” In addition, you might urge readers to enlarge any subtopic by saying why a fact is important. When we teach our reader about something, it might help to add, “This is important because. . . .” Urge writers to reread their own writing with the eye of their readers and to think up the possible questions that a reader might have and answer them. Writing with descriptive details, adding number facts, and using comparisons to teach the reader more are also techniques that you might decide to teach your writers.

You also might teach your writers to not only add text features but to also say more by adding in their own voice to their all-about books. Again, thinking about the child who is writing all about bikes, you could teach writers like him to not only state a fact but to state a reaction as well: “Keep the chain on your bike clean. If a chain gets rusted, don’t throw it away! Go to the store with your mom or dad and buy rust remover. One time my bicycle chain got rusty and my pedals wouldn’t push. I thought I needed a new bike, but I didn’t! I told my mom and we went to the bike shop and bought a new chain. My brother put it on my bike and it was as good as new.”

You might work in small groups with especially proficient writers to help them know that when adding their thoughts about a subject, it can help to make comparisons: “Baby brothers are as fragile as an egg” or “Sometimes dogs bark as loud as a horn. Those dogs are called guard dogs.” Writers can also think about teaching through the use of contrasts, such as, “Big brothers can drink soda and eat solid food, but babies can only drink milk and eat soft foods.”

Children can add warnings and suggestions in their all-about books just like they did in their how-to books: “Don’t run up and pet a dog you see at the park!” or “Be sure to inspect all the parts of your bicycle chain closely for rust!” Again, it’s important to model and practice these strategies with writers through shared or interactive writing of whole-class books. You may decide to teach your writers how to use features of nonfiction to teach more. You can teach them how writing under our picture—a caption—gives “ooh” and “ahh” information for our readers to learn even more. Or you may teach how a label and arrow doesn’t just name the part, but more often, it points to and gives a quick definition or example of what it has labeled: “If I label my diagram of a Jedi fighter, I don’t simply write, ‘laser sword’ but I draw an arrow and write a label to teach, something like ‘a laser sword is attached to the belt.’” Other features you may teach writers to use to flesh out and teach more are the features of zoomed-in pictures and up-close details to both sketch and write. You can teach your writers how to add an introduction to their informational books as well as a conclusion. You can show your writers how an informational writer introduces her book to you by asking a question and promising to answer that question as you read her book. You can also teach how at the end of informational books, writers often write a big feeling or thought to leave their readers with so they will remember all they learned when they read her book.

## One Final Grand Revision Process as Part of the Work of Preparing to Publish

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When children have collected many little books, they are ready to choose their favorite to further revise. We are responsible for building excitement about revision in our classrooms. If we are excited to revise, our students will be too! We want to remind them about all the wonderful revision work that they did in the previous units and build on what was previously taught. We may want to revisit a chart on elaboration strategies in nonfiction writing that we created earlier in this unit and use it to revise their books. As children are rereading their all-about books, they could use the repertoire chart to suggest strategies for adding more chapters and adding more into each chapter. Children can also revise by thinking about what their audience would want to know more about or what their readers might be confused about or by responding to questions from a partner as suggested in the Common Core State Standards. They can also check each *chapter* (or page) for clarity by rereading their pages, stopping after each sentence to think, “Does this go with this chapter?” and if it does not, taking it out. Children can revise their pictures to teach their readers more by “zooming in” on specific details or adding labels. Children can also study nonfiction texts and find new ways to revise their pieces based on what “real authors” have done, such as adding “teaching words” (e.g., *also* and *one way* and *another*).

As your class gets ready to publish, keep in mind that children will be making decisions on how their all-about books go together and how they will look. Urge your writers to study the external features of mentor texts to devise an appropriate title and cover page design for their books, and perhaps create a back-cover blurb. In this

prepublication stage you might even have partners read each others' books and write back-cover blurbs for each other, much as real authors do. Then writers will become editors, paying close attention to conventions, such as ending punctuation, commas to separate single words in a list, and conventional spelling of word wall words. This will require careful rereading, with pencil in hand, and thinking about the readers who will soon be reading these all-about books.

Celebrating this unit should be fun and informative. Because this is a teaching genre, it's best if your celebration can match this purpose. This is a great opportunity to turn your classroom into an expert share fair, since these books were written with the express purpose of sharing knowledge! Children will be so proud of the books that they authored. First-grade writers might meet with the kindergarten children to teach them something new, or they might invite in another class or adults to tour the classroom as the children stay at "posts" around the room, ready to teach visitors about their topics. They might hang signs around their necks that say, "Ask me about cats," or "Ask me about bikes." This would be a nice way to not only celebrate the writing that your students have done but also to align this work to the Common Core Listening and Speaking Standards that ask first graders to ask and answer questions about key details in a text that has been read aloud or information that has been presented orally. No matter what you choose to do for your celebration, make sure that letting your children be the teachers is at the forefront of your plan!

## Additional Resources

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Take a day to do an on-demand assessment before you launch this month's Informational Books Unit of Study. The findings you collect from the on-demand assessment will help you decide how to launch this unit and will inform the teaching you do from the start. You will want to use the *RWP Information Writing Continuum*, which has been aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Many of your first graders will be working on moving toward a level 4 or 5. Of course, you will want to assess what it is that your first graders are working on in informational writing and begin to set goals with them to help them progress along the continuum. Then too, you will want to adjust your teaching so that it matches both your students' needs and the goals of writing informational books well and with independence.

You will support children to try on and write many informational books from the start. Expect by the end of the first part that most of your children will have two to four informational books inside their folders. If you have some students who do not feel like they have expertise in any areas, model how people become experts on topics by writing about people, jobs, places, or activities we know all about. Refer your children back to the books they wrote in kindergarten and remind them that they can make newer, more grown-up books even if these are on the same topics they've written about previously.

The mentor texts you use during this unit will support your writers in understanding and using text features to lift the level of their informational books. If your children are

writing right-to-the-point information, teach them to revise to include explanations, to tuck in examples and instances from their own personal experiences. If children are writing books with the same number of pages and the same amount of writing on each page, show them how to reread and ask themselves, “What *more* can I say about this part?” and then show them how to use more pages, flaps, Post-its, or other tools to make more space for their writing.

Once children have several informational books in the works, your teaching may need to support writers with organizing and categorizing information into chunks or chapters. Expect to teach writers how to do this quickly, adding a flap, scissoring and taping two parts of information together, writing a new page to go with an existing part. Then show how to do the revision work that helps your writers to do this when they begin yet another new informational book, so that their booklets are more sophisticated from the start. This will, of course, involve your writers in scissoring and taping and rearranging their writing as they revise page after page and booklet after booklet.

As you study your children’s pieces to decide what further revision and editing you’ll include in the final part of the unit, expect to guide children to reread for sense, making sure each sentence contains a beginning capital letter as well as end punctuation. If children are writing with random capital letters inside their words, then plan to teach how capitals go at the beginning of sentences and on the names of people. Expect to show many of your students how end punctuation makes informational writing even more interesting and how authors use question marks, exclamation points, and periods to teach and interest their readers. If children are adding random punctuation, then teach how to reread and see if where they put the end punctuation mark makes sense, and if not, to find the place where it does make sense. Also, teach into the careful rereading, and sometimes rewriting, of parts that were too squished together. Show how a quick revision flap can change squishy, hard-to-read writing into crystal clear, readable writing.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### Part One: Launching the Unit

- “Today I want to teach you that when informational book writers get started, we think about topics that we are experts at—things we know all about, so that we can teach others. We choose a topic, say everything we know across our fingers, grab a booklet, and write, write, write.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We think about people we know all about (people in our lives and famous people), places we go (restaurants, recreational spots, stores, public places), and things that we do (at home, at school, and outdoors).”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “We choose a topic and think about who our book is for. Thinking about who is going to read our books will help us choose the information that we want to include in our books.”

- “Writers, you already know that when you finish writing one book, you start another. Today I want to teach you that writers of informational books take a bit of time to choose our paper carefully so we have space to say all we want to say.”
- “Today I want to remind you that writers sometimes decide that instead of writing one more book, we will go back and revise *all* our books. One way to revise our books is to figure out if we’ve made our pictures into teaching pictures. Teaching pictures have labels and other stuff in them to help readers learn not just from the words of the book but also from the pictures.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Writers can zoom in on the important parts of our pictures so that the reader has a close view. We can use a picture inside a picture to show special parts up close. We can add diagrams with labels to show the parts, action lines and arrows to show direction, and captions to explain the picture.”

## **Part Two: Teach Students to Revise Books in Their Folders and to Make Their New Books Be Even More Ambitious: Revising and Writing to Support Categorization**

- “Today I want to teach you that writers of informational books study how informational books work and how they are organized. When we study how the books work, we can plan how we want our books to go.” (*Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*)
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Some things that we may notice are a big all-about title, a how-to page, chapters, headings, and/or a table of contents.”
- “Today I want to give you a big tip. When we want to teach people about something and we have a huge armload of things to teach, we don’t just throw it all down on the table in front of the reader like this—blech. Instead, we first sort it into piles or bins of stuff—and we say to the reader, ‘I want to teach you about turtles. Here’s the stuff I know about turtle babies’ (then we tell that stuff); ‘here is stuff I know about turtle poop’ (and we tell that stuff). So, to get ready to teach readers, it helps to sort our information into piles of stuff that goes together. That’s what a table of contents does. A table of contents can help us to tell the reader how our information is organized.”
- “Today I want to teach you that we can go back to all-about books that we made early in the unit and revise them to make sure that all of the information is grouped together in an organized way. As we reread to revise our writing, we can ask ourselves, ‘Which information goes together?’ ‘Could I open up the booklet and switch the order of pages?’ ‘Could I create a table of contents?’”

### **Part Three: Teach Students to Revise by Elaborating—and Then to Begin Writing Longer Books, Right from the Start**

- “Today I want to teach you that one way we can revise our informational books is to add to them. We can reread our writing and ask ourselves, ‘What else can I say here?’ Then, we add more to each page.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way to revise our books. We can think about what questions readers will ask us and then answer those questions. One way to figure out the questions readers might have is to ask our partners to be readers and to ask us questions about places in our books that are confusing.”
- “When informational book writers are writing or revising our books, we can look to published informational books for ideas of words we might add to our own pages. Today I want to teach you that we can read a sentence in our book and think, ‘What more can I say about that?’ If we aren’t sure, we can try starting a sentence with words that published informational book authors use, like *all*, *most*, *some*, *many*, and *few*, to get us thinking and writing more details.”
  - *Example:* If a child is writing a book on birthday parties, he may have a page that simply states “Birthday parties have cake.” We want to teach him how to expand on this, thinking what else he might say about the cake. Perhaps he’ll add the line, “You sing ‘Happy Birthday’ before you blow out the candles.” Using the aforementioned words, he could say more such as “All birthday cakes have candles.” “Most birthday cakes are round or rectangles.” “Some birthday cakes are Sponge Bob cakes.”
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers, I have noticed that many of you are writing as if your hands are on fire and you have so many more words than lines on a page. Don’t forget to use the flaps and strips in our writing center to help you add more space for writing. You don’t have to stop just because you’ve run out of line space!”

### **Part Four: Teach Students to Elaborate by Revising to Add Text Features—Then Writing More Developed Books That Incorporate Text Features from the Start**

- “Today I want to teach you that writers can study mentor texts to get ideas about which text features to include in our informational books. As we are studying mentor texts, we can ask ourselves, ‘What features is this writer using that I might use? How does this author say more about the information in her book?’ Then, we can reread and revise our books.”
  - *Example:* “We can add diagrams, charts, glossaries, pictures with labels, and captions just like the authors of the books we are reading.”



- “Today I want to teach you that it is important to reread and look at our writing in different ways. We can reread our writing and edit it. We can ask ourselves, ‘Are all my word wall words spelled correctly? Did I put finger spaces between words? Did I try to use periods at the ends of sentences?’ Then, we make any changes that we need to make our pieces easier to read.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writers reread our writing with our partners to revise and make sure what we wrote makes sense. We point under each word as we read. We ask, ‘Does it make sense and sound right?’ If not, we add words with a caret, cross out words that don’t belong, or use a revision strip to rewrite the sentence.”
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers can edit with partners by going on a word wall word hunt, a lowercase letter hunt, a punctuation hunt, or a sound hunt so that our writing is easy to read. Decide what kind of hunt you and your partner will go on first, and make whatever changes you find with your editing pens. Remember to use your strategies for stretching out and spelling words.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you how to fancy up your writing and how to get ready to publish. We want our books to look the best they can before we put them out into the world. As we get ready for our writing celebration, we can reread our book one more time, add color to our pages, and either add an ‘About the author’ page or a ‘back of the book blurb’ to your books.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Don’t forget to come up with a title that will entice others to read your important book! Make sure it is a title that will get people to care about your topic.”



## UNIT EIGHT

# Cross-Genre Writing Projects

APRIL

### Why This Unit?

By this time in the year, your students have become experts in crafting narrative pieces of writing. They have practiced making their writing readable to others and have dabbled in fiction. Your students have written to teach and have written to persuade. They have found writing teachers among their favorite authors and have done the work of revising. Perhaps, it is time for your young writers to use all that they know from previous units of study to carve their own paths as writers. Instead of adding new things to their repertoires, then, you might find that the time is right for children to orchestrate all that they know to write with independence.

This unit comes on the heels of all the past writing work your students have done—not just during this first-grade year, but as kindergartners, too. Imagine a classroom of writers who cannot stop writing, even after you call them to the rug for your teaching share. Imagine hearing cries of “No, not yet! I still want to write more!” as you ask kids to pack up their folders and join you in the meeting area. Engagement, choice, and independence are the cornerstones of writing workshop, and this unit helps ratchet up the level of all three, not to mention stamina and volume. Over the years, we have heard from many teachers that, as the weather gets warmer, it is harder to rally children around the idea of writing for extended periods of time. This unit, then, comes at the perfect time of year. Not only will this unit breathe new life into your writing workshop but it will also infuse genre studies with greater purpose and meaning throughout the remainder of the year and even across the summer. Once your first graders are writing their way through the process, inside a genre, using mentors and

past teaching to make quality writing in class, then it is a small leap to help those same children do that kind of writing *outside* of class. This unit will help set your children up for their “at home writing life” just before they are ready to venture into the summer months. A cross-genre unit is also important because the Common Core State Standards expect that children will have many opportunities to write three types of writing: opinion, informational, and narrative. This unit gives children just that, a chance to choose from and practice writing in a variety of forms.

## Getting Started with Cross-Genre Writing Projects: Generating Ideas, Planning, and Drafting

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All year long, you will have convened children around writing projects that you and other teachers have invented. Now is the time to gather your youngsters together and tell them that, for the whole next month, they’ll have a chance to invent their own writing projects. “You know how earlier in the year, I suggested that we could all write Small Moment stories? And then I suggested we could all study an author and try to write like that author? Well, now it is your turn to invent your own wonderful ideas for the sort of writing you’d like to do,” you might begin. You’ll want to explain to children that, as they decide on the kind of writing they want to make, they will join to form *publishing houses*. In their publishing houses, children will be working side by side with others to make high-quality writing in the genre of their choice, sitting at the same table, sharing mentor texts, and giving each other tips to make their writing stronger.

Before you issue this invitation, think a bit about the choices you hope children make because, of course, it is very easy to steer children. Do you hope children reflect on all the kinds of writing you have studied together and select one of those kinds of writing to work on with independence? Or do you hope children pore over texts that they find in their world, thinking, “I could write just like that!” It is possible for them to write adaptations of the types of texts they find most fascinating—some of your students might be fans of *Star Wars*, for example. Other children love to hear spooky, scary stories late at night—they could write those, too! Do you hope children take on a cause—say, convincing the school to spruce up the playground—and that they write to make a real-world difference? You will be able to channel children toward whatever it is you imagine. Therefore, take some time to think through your priorities and imagine all the possibilities.

After rallying children around this idea of self-selected writing, remind writers of what they already know how to do. This might sound something like, “Writers, you already know so much about writing from kindergarten and from all we’ve done this year. You know how to come up with ideas for your stories and choose paper. You know how to plan and that you don’t have to wait until we get close to publishing to start the important work of revising. And you know how to make writing easy to read by editing for spelling and punctuation. You will use all of this to be the kind of writer who makes all of his or her own decisions—from topic choice to paper choice.

You will be the kind of writer who decides how your writing will look, what your writing will sound like, and where in the library your writing will go.” Keep in mind that this unit is all about the writing process and helping children move through the process with independence and resolve. You will want to bring out the writing process chart and put it in a central location or create individual process charts to go into student folders. Then show children how they can keep track of their movement through each step of the process by putting their name on a clothespin or name tag that can be moved back and forth as needed.

On the same day that you deliver your keynote address to your writers, you will want to launch your children into the actual work of independent writing. This means that you will teach children how to generate a topic, choose or create their own paper, plan out how their stories will go, and get started writing. You might want to say, “Writers, think to yourselves, ‘What do I like to hear? What do I like to read? What do I read that keeps me on the edge of my seat?’ Get an idea in your mind. Now, make a plan for yourself. Ask yourself, ‘What do I want my writing to *look like*? Do I want it to be a chapter book? A comic strip? A picture book? An informational book?’ And, writers, think about how you want your writing to *sound*. Imagine how your project will go across pages. If you’re writing a spooky story, will it sound like ‘On a dark and stormy night. . . ?’ Or are you planning on writing a magic story that sounds like ‘In a land far, far away. . . ?’ Turn and tell your partner how your project will sound.”

As with all of your units this year, children will not all progress at the same time through a synchronized writing process. This means that children will need to be their own writing teachers, giving themselves assignments. Their first step will be to choose (or design) the kind of paper that makes sense for the writing projects they each have in mind. Children who wish to write graphic novels might choose blank paper, folding it several times to create boxes for each scene. If you have writers who are passionate about picture books, show them how to staple several pieces of white paper together, drawing a picture box at the top (or bottom) and leaving room for lots of writing. Children who want to create a chapter book could take a handful of paper and fold it in half, so it looks like a series book. Remind all your kids that writers always take time to plan for writing, to write rough drafts, to revise our writing, and then to edit our writing. Remind them, also, that writers take on different types of projects. Sometimes writers take on one very long and involved writing project, which requires days and days of work, and that other times writers collect folders full of writing, and then select their best pieces and revise those. You’ll find that Colleen Cruz’s book *Independent Writing* (Heinemann, 2004) is an important resource.

## Lifting the Quality of Writing

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You may find that children are so excited about this new kind of writing that their volume goes up drastically, but that meanwhile there is, at first, a dip in the quality. You need not worry. As Carl Anderson wrote in *Assessing Writers* (Heinemann,

2005), when children “lose control” of their writing, it is often a sign that they are trying out more sophisticated techniques. This is where your teaching becomes the lifeline of this unit. Clearly, since all children will be working inside of a different genre, the work of this unit becomes teaching—and often times, reinforcing—the habits, processes, and qualities of good writing that your students work on each and every day in the writing workshop.

Then, too, you’ll want to remind children that the characteristics of good writing are fairly stable across genres. Whether a child is writing directions or songs, it is equally important to write with precise, exact words, to reread to make sure the meaning is clear, and to answer readers’ questions as one writes. You might pull out old charts and exemplar texts to remind children to “show, not tell”—in other words, to write in ways that provide their readers with a crystal clear picture of what is happening.

This unit opens up the opportunity for children to choose their own writing partners. The Common Core State Standards say that first graders need to learn to “respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details to strengthen writing as needed.” Writing partners give children the opportunity to do this kind of work. You will want to remind them of all they know about what makes a good partnership, ways partners help each other during different stages of the writing process, and how partners encourage each other to stay focused on their goals. Project partners might decide when and where to meet and how often. At this point in the year, you will expect children to be adept at talking about their pieces with one another, and giving each other compliments and feedback. You’ll want to teach them to be specific—pointing out and naming a specific strategy the writer used well and proposing a next step. As you assess the partner work that will be critical to their projects, teach them how to read each other’s writing as *readers*. Perhaps children who are writing in the same genre could have a “writing club” similar to the book clubs they are working in during your reading workshop. Writers could gather together, Post-its in hand, and read their pieces.

Show children how their experiences in the reading workshop can help them strengthen their writing pieces. For example, they could examine the work they are doing in their character clubs and build bridges between that work and their independent writing work. They could mark parts of these independent writing texts that make an impression—parts that make them wonder, parts that they love, and parts that are important, for example. When they meet with their writing clubs, then, they could discuss these parts and make some choices for revision in their own writing.

You’ll want to coach children to use the revision strategy charts in your classroom, which you have probably been adding to all year, to help each other revise their writing. Teach them to ask questions as they sit side by side, using the charts as a reference. For instance, one partner might say, “You used setting details in the lead of your story. Are there any other places where you could try the same thing?” Also, when it comes to improving the quality of writing, you will probably be reminding your first graders to get out their revision tools. Flaps and strips, thin markers, Post-its, extra pages, carets, and asterisks are all signals that your kids are going back into

their writing to try and make their writing better. In this unit, we think you will find it especially helpful to lean on these very concrete symbols of revision to help make sure your children are working on quality, as well as quantity, in their writing.

One of the great joys of this unit will be the fact that children will emerge as different writers, because no two writers will be working on the same exact thing. They will be both independent and unique. You will definitely want to capitalize on these emerging writing identities. If one child writes a gigantic book of jokes and another writes a screenplay, let each child become famous for what he or she has done, developing an identity as a particular and unique kind of writer.

## Using Mentor Texts as Our Personal Writing Teachers

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By this time in the year, your children will have already had experience using mentor texts. It's time to let them have a go at this work on their own! Teach children to draw from all that they learned in the *Authors as Mentors* unit. That is, children will look to their favorite authors to find—and then try—craft moves that inspire them. Add to their repertoire by teaching children that when writers want to write in a specific genre, they find books to support this work, pick an author that inspires them, and have a go. You will want to remind your writers that when using mentor texts to teach writing, they need to first notice a part they like. Once they have that part, they then need to ask themselves why they like the work of the author, seeking to name the specific craft move the writer used. Finally, your writers can try this same kind of work by trying to find a part in their own writing where they need to do the same work as the author. Students need not wait for you to teach them all about different genres then—if they know which genre they want to try out (a graphic novel, for example), make these mentors available and allow them to examine them as they write. To prepare for this, you might consider creating some new baskets in your library for the books you anticipate children will want to write. Teachers have found it particularly helpful to include the following basket categories in their libraries: high-interest nonfiction, spooky/ghost stories, graphic novels, superhero stories, fantasy, folktales and fairy tales, science fiction, and talking-animal stories.

You might say, “Writers, you already know how writing teachers live all around us—I am one of your writing teachers, your partner is one of your writing teachers, and the authors that we studied in February are your writing teachers, too. In this unit, you will continue that relationship—choose any author who inspires you to write this new kind of book. If you are the kind of writer who wants to write a spooky, scary story that just scares the pants off of someone, check out *There's a Nightmare in My Closet* by Mercer Mayer. If you're the kind of writer who wants to tell your story with pictures *and* words, you could study *Silly Lilly and the Four Seasons* by Agnes Rosenstiehl. Or, perhaps you want to write talking-animal stories like Mo Willems does in his *Piggy and Elephant* books. Writers, the possibilities, like your ideas for books and stories, are endless.” At this point, you will gear your teaching toward the habits, processes, and qualities of good writing that independent

writers possess. Now, more than ever, is the time for you to teach your students to mine their repertoires, find authors that inspire them, and put those pieces together to create the kinds of writing projects that inspire others.

Some children will choose genres you have not taught previously, and you'll find it helpful to gather these students together and teach them a few, key strategies for writing in that genre. These tips might be collected together, two or three of them, and displayed on a personal chart for those writing in that genre. For instance, if children want to write greeting cards, your tips might be something like: decide what kind of card you want to make (what occasion, for whom), create a message that matches the purpose of the card, and make sure your message is for the person who will get the card. As children do their own writing and study mentors in this genre, you'll want to encourage them to add to the list of tips you've begun for them.

## Preparing for Publication

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As the unit winds down, children will choose one of their projects to publish. In units past, you might have said to your students, "Today, when you revise, you could change your lead to begin with a description of the weather or with an action," and then, predictably, all of your children may have changed their leads to include just that. Since this unit is about true independence, we suggest that, instead of teaching kids which way you want them to revise their pieces, you teach them to think about what their pieces need to make them the best they can be. Refer them to your shared classroom charts on ways to elaborate, or to craft charts the class created when you studied mentor texts. You might also encourage children to picture their readers reading their pieces when they are all finished. Do they envision the reader laughing? Feeling scared? Likely, children will find places they need to revise to achieve that effect. Again, children might want to draw on the mentor text they have been using to see how that writer makes the piece scary or funny, for example, and use what they notice to add to their own writing. They could also read their pieces aloud to partners to see what kind of reactions they get.

Children will then edit their pieces by themselves and with a partner, aligning with the Common Core State Standards where they are expected to respond to questions and suggestions from their peers. You'll want to remind them that whenever they write for readers, they need to make sure they write with punctuation, spell words as correctly as they can, and reread their writing often, making sure it looks right, makes sense, and sounds right. When it comes time to making finishing touches, children can think about all the ways they have polished their writing so far this year, and decide which ways will work best for this new project. Do they want to add a dedication and an "About the Author" page? Do they want to create a blurb on the back of the book? Do they want to use different materials from the art center to make the cover of their book? Mentor texts will also serve as a great source of inspiration.

As the unit winds down, you'll want to make choices about the kind of class celebration you and your children will hold. The kinds of texts they create will certainly play a role in this decision, and a "museum" of writing is often a great way to display a variety of writing genres. In this instance, children will display drafts, mentor texts, and published pieces for visitors. As these visitors tour the museum, children can discuss the reasons for their choices in both genre and publication. After the museum, once the guests have bid farewell, the children might take a quiet moment to reflect on what they learned about themselves as writers in this unit and make a goal for their work in the next unit on content-area writing. Or, after visiting a neighborhood bookstore, the children might set up the classroom to resemble a bookstore with separate sections for each genre, posters advertising "Meet the Author" events, and an area for author readings. You can record these readings and put them up on a class website. Some schools have scanned the children's books and then displayed them on a virtual bookshelf.



## UNIT NINE

# Informational Writing about Science

MAY

**W**e have several goals for the upcoming unit of study in writing workshop. First, we want children to use writing to explore an aspect of science that is essential. Last year, we wrote this unit as if children were studying Animal Diversity or Weather and the Seasons. This year we are writing it as if they are studying Properties of Matter, such as liquids, solids, and gases. The reason we're channeling you toward Properties of Matter, rather than Animal Diversity or Weather and the Seasons, is that we also hope this unit provides children with opportunities to use writing to engage in the work that scientists do—developing and testing hypotheses, gathering data, and studying information for patterns. To observe weather, seasons, or life cycles of animals takes time, whereas we can observe changes in matter in a matter of minutes, so the topic of Properties of Matter seemed more conducive to fruitful, expeditious experimentation. The truth is, however, that the topic that you and your children study together is your choice, and you can easily use the basic outline of this unit to support studies of any topic that you believe will be engaging for your kids and will bring them toward an understanding of one of the concepts that is essential to science.

This unit builds on the energy and enthusiasm children carry about the world around them. You have probably noticed that the children in your classroom are eager to learn about their world. They gather leaves as they change colors from summer to fall, collect rocks and seashells, and come to school excited to talk, draw, and write about the things that surround them. Prior to now, your first graders will presumably have been engaged in workshops, some science study, and they will probably have learned to observe closely, to ask big questions, and to follow procedures to pursue those questions. You will now channel their burgeoning interest in

science into the writing workshop, showing learners that writing need not be an end in and of itself, but that it can also be a tool for learning.

You will want to approach this unit with a grand plan for the overall design of it. As in many other K–2 units, children will cycle through repeated tries at doing the work of the unit, but this time the work is not rehearsing, drafting, revising, and editing writing so much as it is writing to record, to question, to hypothesize and observe, and finally, writing to teach others. As children engage in this work over and over, you'll teach in ways that lift the level of what they are doing, so that over time they will use more sophisticated moves as they record, question, experiment, and teach.

Obviously, the unit breaks with tradition in that it is a hybrid—that is, it is science and writing rolled into one. Whereas usually your writing workshops will have been at least a period long (fifty to sixty minutes) and will have begun with a minilesson, then included a big chunk of time for kids to write and ended with time for children to share their writing with partners, in this hybrid science-writing workshop, we hope that at least twice a week you'll be able to extend writing workshop so that it is ninety minutes for the hybrid of science and writing. You will most likely want to break this science-writing workshop into two parts. You might start with the science portion of the workshop with children conducting their experiments. When children go off to their work spots and get started working, they might well be pouring water into different containers to determine if the shape of the container affects how much water it holds, melting ice to produce steam, or working with different solids to change their shape. The FOSS Solids and Liquids module can be a resource for activities, experiments, and materials to support this unit. Depending on the experiment, you may want to give children clipboards and paper to record their observations and thoughts. Close the science portion of the workshop with a quick share, and then teach your writing workshop minilesson. The second part of the workshop will be devoted to writing.

Of course, this is still a writing workshop, as well as a science workshop. Imagine the hybridity by thinking that on the one hand, kids will at some points be engaged in scientific processes of hypothesizing, and on the other hand, they will be engaged in the writing processes of recording observations and drawing conclusions. Imagine your two hands, folded together, with fingers interlocked. In just that way, youngsters will shift from doing the work of being a scientist to doing the work of being a writer. In the first part of the unit, children will study a whole-class topic during a daily science-writing workshop and will write, sketch, and jot questions to record and grow their thinking. They'll conduct experiments, first as a class and then on their own, and learn to write their own experiments. They'll write observations, musings, and their own predictions about what might happen and why it might be happening in alignment with the Common Core State Standards. They'll also write how-to texts detailing the experiments that they've done as a class and on their own. This unit, then, provides children with a clear purpose for writing for an audience so that others can follow their experiments. Children will draw on much of what they

know about different kinds of (and purposes for) writing in this unit, using aspects of what they have learned from writing how-to texts and nonfiction books. Don't be too concerned if your children's initial writing feels sparse. Like you, they will need a bit of time to find their footing in this hybrid unit and learn to balance scientific inquiry with the writing process.

In the second part of the unit, children will launch into their own experiments, trying them out and writing them up. You'll build on what children learned to do in Part One, teaching them new ways to record information, to write more detailed how-to texts, and to explore questions in writing as suggested in the Common Core State Standards.

In the third and final part, children will compile all of the information that they learned about their topics and make informational books that teach others how to conduct similar experiments, that give information about the topic, that describe the procedure that talks about their daily journeys, and that discuss their observations.

## Preparing for the Unit

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The very first preparation you will probably want to do for this unit is to decide on a whole-class topic, preferably one that aligns to your science standards. This is a critical choice. Remember that your whole class will be living like scientists around and inside this topic for the whole month. We're suggesting Properties of Matter because it aligns with first-grade science standards and offers many component parts for students to study. You will, of course, want to consult your library when making a topic choice, because you'll need nonfiction books on the topic to serve as writing mentors and sources of information. You'll also want to consider choosing a topic about which your children have some prior knowledge or that they can study simultaneously in science workshop. Regardless, you'll want to ask yourself, "Does this topic have *breadth*?" In other words, will you be able to divide the topic up into plenty of component parts for children to study in greater detail over the course of the month? Can this topic accommodate a multitude of in-class experiments? For example, a topic like The Life Cycle of a Butterfly might be too narrow a topic for a whole-class inquiry because it is hard to imagine a whole class writing about nothing but this for the length of an entire month and even more difficult to imagine the kinds of experiments they'd create to explore their burgeoning questions and hypotheses.

A second thing to keep your eye on while choosing a whole-class topic is whether it is localized to students' real environments or accessible to bring into the classroom. Keep in mind that you want children living the real life of scientists this month, and so the topic ought to provide actual chances for them to make observations, conduct experiments, and note and describe findings. Much as you would like for kids to read up on their topics, in this month, you're aiming for kids to *live out* the scientific

method and not just summarize what they find already written in reference books. In the end, you want your scientists to climb inside their topics and live with them, channeling their natural sense of play into the act of being a scientist.

You'll want to plan to teach science in your own classroom or collaborate with the science teacher and chalk out several possible inquiries and experiments that children might pursue this month on the chosen topic. You'll also need books: ones that can serve as mentor texts for the kind of writing you hope children will produce—books to serve as reference—and books with diagrams and illustrations for children to pore over and study. You'll line these books up around the children's work area, read aloud excerpts from these, and reference them as touchstones during conferring and during the demonstration portion of your minilessons. If you have the books to support it, you may want to have some of your reading clubs studying the whole-class topic during reading workshop. You won't want to underestimate the power read-aloud will have in propelling this unit forward, exposing your young scientists to a wide variety of nonfiction texts on Properties of Matter; narrative nonfiction that takes readers through the process of the water cycle; expository nonfiction that teaches all about solids, liquids, and gases; nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish a scientific experiment; and question and answer books that invite the reader to wonder along with the author and answer questions. The work done in read-aloud and reading workshop will not only support a growing content knowledge but also the skills of scientific writing. The Common Core State Standards invite children to synthesize information by describing the connection between pieces of information in a text. You'll help children do this through read-aloud and in their reading, naming out big ideas and then showing them how these big ideas can serve to propel their experiments. For instance, after reading *Solids, Liquids, and Gases* by Ginger Garrett, you might model some big ideas like "Water isn't created, it's used again and again. Water is important for life. We need to conserve water so that we can live." After growing some big ideas about water in read-aloud, children then share what these ideas are making them wonder about. You'll hear children say things like "I wonder where the water goes?" Then together you can design an experiment to figure it out, such as heating water in a covered container so children can see how water vapor turns to droplets. As they develop conclusions off their experiments, children can use what they've learned from reading about solids, liquids, and gases to add evidence to bolster their own ideas like "The water doesn't disappear, it just changes into something else."

Lastly, you'll want to decide *where* your students will do all this writing. You may decide to have students keep booklets where they can record their observations, sketches, questions, and musings. These booklets are a place to write with volume and stamina as they study the world around them. You may also want to add in varied paper choices, such as paper with Venn diagrams, before-and-after diagrams, how-to, and so on.

## Scientists Write to Learn about the World around Us, Experiment to Answer Lingering Questions, and Use What We Know about Nonfiction Writing to Teach Others What We Have Learned

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As the unit begins, you'll want to immerse your children in a topic for scientific study. We're recommending that you expose them to one area of Properties of Matter in the first part, narrowing their study to only liquids, for instance. You'll expose them to far more in Part Two—once they've learned to observe, research, and write like scientists. So, on Day One, you'll want to spread materials around the room relating to liquids (or whatever topic you've chosen) and invite kids to experiment with different containers, combine liquids with solids to make things like ice cream, investigate how fast other liquids flow, and so forth. Give your children this first day to immerse themselves in the study of these objects, to play, experiment, and play some more. You'll equip them with booklets and other scientific tools, such as magnifying glasses, and show them how to record observations and questions about the objects they're studying, knowing that throughout the unit you'll probably want to teach children more and more ways scientists use their booklets.

One form of writing you might teach first is sketching with labels and captions, where scientists draw the set-up from an experiment and then label it using precise vocabulary and adding in captions that explain the process in greater detail. You might want to set up a vocabulary wall where you can add new vocabulary words (with pictures). It is conceivable that some students, feeling full of the energy and enthusiasm of discovery, will add a few words to one sketch, then move onto another and another. Therefore, it is important to teach them that scientists (and writers) linger. This means teaching them to add all that they can add to their sketches, in both words and images. For example, if a child has drawn a simple sketch of a bottle and water, then you will teach him to not just draw the bottle with water inside, but to draw the amount of water in the bottle, the size and shape of the bottle, and how the water looks inside the bottle. You will teach this child to label all the parts using the language scientists use (referencing books and read-aloud texts for this information when necessary) and then to elaborate on those labels by writing captions to accompany them.

As early as Day Two of this unit, you'll be ready to channel all your scientists toward one teacher-led experiment. You'll remind students of all they've learned about the scientific process. You might say, "Remember how in science you learned to ask questions, come up with a hypothesis, make observations, and then make a conclusion at the end? Well, today we're going to do an experiment using liquids such as milk and vanilla, and solids such as sugar and ice cubes and use everything we know about the scientific process together." You'll want to give students the essential question that drives the experiment on this day, rallying them toward a common inquiry: "Scientists, today we're going to do an experiment where we investigate what happens when certain liquids and solids are combined. Let's all be thinking about the question, 'How can liquids and solids combine to make ice

cream?’ as we do the experiment.” Students will jot down lingering questions, discuss their hypotheses, try out the experiment you’ve created for them, and then jot a bit about their big ideas or conclusions. You might even teach children that even after drawing conclusions, we can be led to new questions, aligning with the Common Core State Standards. For instance, if my conclusion is “The ice melted, it cooled the milk and sugar, and it changed into a liquid. When we shook the baggie it changed the liquid into a solid,” we can also wonder, “What if we used more milk or more sugar? Would it still work?” You might also consider giving your students special paper, or a template for creating their own paper, on which to record the various stages of the scientific process: questions, hypothesis, observations, and conclusion.

After students have conducted this experiment they will be ready, on the following day, to teach others how to do the same by writing a how-to text. You’ll want to have the experiment materials around, because many students will need to reenact the steps of the experiment and remember each step, before writing their how-to text. “Wouldn’t it be fun to teach the kindergartners how to do this experiment?” you might begin. “Let’s use everything we know about nonfiction writing and how-to texts to write up this experiment.” Finally, in the next days, you’ll teach children to design their own experiments from their unanswered and lingering questions. For instance, if you have a group of students who wondered if the ice cream experiment would still work if the amount of milk or sugar changed, perhaps you would design an experiment together as a class to test this question. Then some children might try out this experiment, record their observations, and then write procedural how-to texts to teach others how to conduct the same experiment.

## **Collaborating with Partners and Recording Our Experiments, All the While Raising the Level of Our Non-Narrative Writing**

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You’ll begin this part by setting up tables, much like you did at the beginning of Part One, but this time with a far greater quantity of materials. In Part One you focused your children on one area of Properties of Matter such as solids, liquids, gases, and other materials, but will now give them free reign to explore the many areas of this field. You’ll want to pull out all that you have related to this area and borrow from your science teacher and science kits, as well. Different-sized bottles and containers, water, food coloring, ice cubes, play dough, and other solids—chances are, once it’s all out, children will find more uses for much of this than we ever imagined!

Children enter this week with new questions and ideas to test out and experiment. As they move from teacher-initiated experiments to child-initiated experiments, you might consider allowing children to collaborate with partners or science clubs to discuss which experiments would be best to administer in the classroom, pitching their hypotheses and working together in choosing a project to pursue. As children are deciding which experiments to pursue, you’ll want to help them consider some of the following questions: “Do we have all of the materials that we need?” “How long will this experiment take?” “Do we have enough time?” “Which experiment

will we want to start with?" Toward the end of this part, you might consider inviting children to design their own experiments, either alone or with a partner. You'll teach children to think about what materials they might need, what steps they would take, and what they think will happen—their hypotheses. Then they'll sketch a plan of what they will do to carry out the experiment. Once children try it out, they'll write a how-to describing step by step what they did and the outcome—their findings. For example, if as a class you did an experiment to investigate if water evaporates faster from cotton or paper, some children might wonder what happens when other materials or fabrics are used, so perhaps they will design an experiment in which they test out putting droplets of water on different kinds of fabric, such as linen, felt, and canvas, or any other fabric you can find in the classroom.

Their booklets are beginning to fill with the fruits of their scientific labor, and you will want to take this opportunity to help students fine-tune and build upon what they're already doing. In this part, one of your roles will likely be to help children understand that writing plays a vital role in science, helping us to question, analyze, record, and teach others. In Part One you taught students to sketch and label, and you will probably want to begin by teaching them yet another form of observational writing. You'll want to show them how scientists record, in as much detail as possible, all that they observe while exploring Properties of Matter such as solids, liquids, and gases and other materials. They then return to their sketches and this time write in words, phrases, and sentences what they have seen and sketched. Teach them to use prompts like "I notice . . .," "I see . . .," and "This reminds me of . . ." to elaborate on their observations. One way to ensure that your children are doing this writing in as much detail as possible is to teach them to observe using categories like color, texture, shape, and size in mind. A word of caution: Some children may write assumptions rather than observations. That is, upon noticing that, say, play dough changes its shape easily, a student might write, "It is easy to change the shape of a solid." You will want to teach students to write the observation "Solids can change shape. Some solids, like play dough can change shape without a lot of force. But other solids need more force to change their shape." Teaching this reinforces that scientists observe without inferring.

Another way that scientists use their booklets is to keep track of data. So, you might teach kids to measure and record their findings or to sort and classify and record that data. This writing might take the form of a T-chart, picture diagrams with close-ups, or before-and-after diagrams. Children might create a T-chart to compare different kinds of paper. You will want to teach children that when recording data, being exact matters. Teach them to transfer what they are learning in science to the writing workshop, specifically, things like attaching units of measurement to numbers. Then too, you'll want to teach them more ways to expand upon the information they observe and to formulate possible theories or hypotheses. You'll find it helpful to chart out several prompts and teach children to use them to develop and elaborate on their ideas. Among others, you'll certainly want to teach prompts like "I noticed . . .," "I think . . .," "I used to think . . ., but now I know . . .," and "I wonder. . . ."

It will be important to help children negotiate time spent “experimenting” and time spent writing. You’ll want to remind students that writing is a powerful tool for thinking, and teach them new ways to record, analyze, and write about information. Draw attention to child-created record systems and encourage your young scientists to draw on all they know as they branch into this work. You might find yourself saying, “Scientists, writers, I want to show you all what Kevin created. He made a graph that shows the temperature of the ice water and the time it took to change all of the ice into a liquid. It’s really helping him organize his data. Kevin has agreed to let us make some copies of his graph paper and add it to our writing center so we all can use it to record our data.” Or “Can I stop you all? Sam just came up with a great idea. He realized that the prompts we use to have ideas about our books—‘I noticed . . .,’ ‘This makes me think . . .,’ ‘I wonder . . .,’ ‘The idea I’m having about this is . . .’—can also help us to have ideas about what we’re seeing in our experiments!”

Then too, you’ll want to teach children to question and wonder about the materials they are exploring with pencil in hand. Because it is important that children continue to write with volume and stamina, you will want to teach them to try and hypothesize answers to their musings. You could imagine kids saying things like “I wonder why . . .” or “How come. . . ?” Teach children to catch these thoughts by quickly jotting them in their booklets. Then, teach them to think through possible answers (hypotheses) by using prompts such as “Maybe . . .,” “Could it be . . . ?” “But what about. . . ?” For example, assuming that your topic this month is Properties of Matter, you might show children a few “observations” you’ve made when outside of school. “We’ve discovered that if we freeze water (a liquid) it can become ice (a solid). We can melt the ice to become liquid again. This weekend I was making scrambled eggs. Once the eggs were cooked and became a solid, I couldn’t make it go back to a liquid again.” At this point, you might lean in and share with the children how this led you to develop a hypothesis. “Writers, I’ve been thinking about this and I came up with a few explanations for why this happens, a few *hypotheses*.” You might then begin writing these out on a chart or document camera. “My first hypothesis is that sometimes, when we change a state of matter the process can’t be reversed.” Continue on, developing a second conceivable explanation. “My second hypothesis is that it depends on the type of liquid we use. We can reverse the process with water, but not with a material like an egg.”

Children will learn to write or draw in these various ways throughout the unit, sometimes through minilessons, other times through teaching shares, mid-workshop teaching points, or while stopping and sketching during read-alouds. As mentioned earlier, you’ll want to see this unit as cyclical. That is, you’ll encourage children to move through the scientific process again and again across this month, each time teaching them new ways to write, record, and finesse.

Throughout this part of the unit, children will develop questions and then harness those musings into plans for their own experiments. Children will write about any of the things they noticed during the experiment, the steps of how to conduct the experiment, their findings, or design new experiments. All of this will later (in the next part of the unit) become part of a final published product. As students move

through this process, you'll want to remind them that science is about experimentation and that, just like writers, scientists often go back to revise and try again. Encourage partnerships to raise questions, conduct an experiment, note what worked and what didn't, and then design another new experiment. Once they have discovered a powerful experiment, they'll move to documenting it in a how-to text so others can replicate it.

Just as you used storytelling to help writers develop language that more closely matches the language of good storytellers, you'll want to coach students to tell and retell class activities in ways that teach others, thus honing their ability to document experiments with accuracy and detail. For example, they might teach each other how to go across the monkey bars without falling or how to make flowers out of tissue paper. As students practice retelling class activities, you can teach them how to use sequence words (e.g., *first*, *then*, *next*, *finally*) to organize their thinking and convey timing. You will also want to teach them how to use very specific language to clarify their thinking and instructions. If a student explains or writes, "Put the milk and vanilla in the bag," encourage her to verbalize how to do this. If you help her to think about how she does it or actually demonstrate the action, she may decide instead on "Pour 1 cup of milk and 1 teaspoon of vanilla into a small plastic bag, then seal it up."

It can be helpful for students to act out their experiments with partners as a way to uncover precise actions and language needed for readers to effectively complete a task. You will want to teach children that to write procedural texts, they need to envision the steps they go through when they perform a given task. They should see it "like a movie in their minds" and then write each step they see in their "movie." Often, children will leave out big steps or assume their readers know more than they do. This is a great way to use writing partners. One partner can read her writing aloud, while the other partner acts it out. Perhaps you decide to start the writing portion of your workshop each day with partner time. Partners can get together and rehearse the steps for the experiment that they are planning to write that day. You will want to teach children how to listen to each other's writing to follow the steps laid out and to see if they work. This way, writers can see the effect of their words and steps on a reader and get input that will help them revise their pieces for clarity.

In addition to teaching into the quality of the writing children are doing both in their booklets and their procedural texts, you'll want to make sure children are making use of the wealth of knowledge they're getting from their reading about Properties of Matter, through read-aloud. You'll probably want to show children how to supplement their conclusions with factual information. For instance, students writing about the conclusion that we can't see gas might want to add in information they got from reading, about how sometimes we actually can see gas, like when we see steam coming from hot soup. Then too, students will use the information they get from reading to design and imagine their own experiments. You'll want students, after reading about particular information in a text, to question it and say, "That doesn't seem true. Let's make an experiment and test it."

You'll want partners to support this work as well, pushing each other to be stronger scientists and writers. You'll want to teach them how to compare observations and discuss what we can learn from one another. ("I see that you have all these little details in your picture. Maybe I could make my picture more detailed" or "When you did that experiment you found that water evaporated faster from paper, and I found that it evaporated faster from cotton fabric. Maybe we should try again.")

## Putting All of Our Learning Together and Publishing Our Informational Books

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In this final part, the children will compile all of the information that they learned about their topics and make informational books that teach others. These books could include chapters about solids, liquids, and gases: for example, before-and-after pages, compare-and-contrast pages, and how-to pages that detail the experiments they did. Children may also select to include pages with questions they had and "how-tos" to detail the experiments they created to help answer these questions.

You'll probably want to begin by explaining to the children that part of being a scientist is deciding how you'll teach the world about what you've discovered. Remind them of all they know from prior units, perhaps pulling out old charts and mentor texts. You'll want to study these texts with your students, as well as the texts that served as mentors through this unit, helping your young scientists to imagine the final product their research will take.

You'll especially want to refer students back to Unit Seven, Informational Books, and perhaps flip back to that unit plan yourself. Just like in March, you'll show how it helps to sort information out by subtopics, and so you can help children approach their books by creating a web or a picture/word map in which they make plans to divide content so the appropriate information goes onto each page of the book. For example, one part of the book might have information about solids, another part could detail how to do an experiment with water, and yet another part could include the results from one experiment with evaporation. For instance, one child might write a book titled "All about Solids, Liquids, and Gases," where one page says, "Water can be a solid, like when it's ice. Water can also be a liquid or a gas, like when it's steam." Other pages might say, "Some solids are easy to change the shape of, like play dough. Other solids are harder to change the shape of, like a crayon." There may also be pages in this book that detail an experiment, "How to Blow Up a Balloon without Blowing Air into It," and list the steps from this experiment. Other pages might have a graph that shows the temperature you have to heat water to make it change into a gas. There might also be additional chapters in the book about solids, liquids, or gases, or students might decide to author another book just about solids and yet another just about liquids.

Some of the revision work students engage in will come from elaborating on the information they've already written. For example, adding what they notice about size, color, or texture, adding what their observations makes them think, or even

what they wonder. Other revision work will involve the experiments they choose to include in their pieces. As students perform new experiments, they can include pages that detail how to do this experiment, what the results were, or even new questions they have. You'll want to assess as your students are writing these texts and use your findings to inform your whole-class and small-group instruction.

You'll also want to revisit nonfiction how-to texts as a class and use these as guides for revising and adding features of nonfiction to your children's own pieces. These books are valuable models for the possible components of a how-to. Some how-to books and manuals include a materials page. Others include *cautions* or *warnings* for the reader. Other books are persuasive, trying to get you to try doing something new: "Haven't you always wanted to . . . ?" or "Did you ever wonder why . . . ?" You will again want them to examine their texts for clarity, perhaps thinking more about *how* readers might perform certain steps. For example, a child who writes, "Put baking soda in the balloon," might ask herself, "How? Attach a funnel to the opening of the balloon and hold it in place. Carefully pour one spoonful of baking soda into the funnel. Shake it gently so all the baking soda goes from the funnel into the balloon." As they revise, young writers can also begin incorporating further conventions of the how-to genre, such as making their pictures teach more by eliminating extraneous details, zooming in close on the part of the picture that teaches, and using labels and arrows in their pictures. They might add warnings or advice that steers readers out of trouble: "Make sure not to rip a hole into the balloon when you stretch it over the bottle." During revision, partners can also ask each other clarifying questions like "What do you mean?" or "How do you do that?" or suggest possible tips or warnings such as "You should write, 'Do this experiment outdoors,' because if the egg breaks it will make a big mess!" You could also invite students to try an ending that brings everything to a conclusion just like a lot of the books they are reading. For example, "We need water to live and grow." Children can learn about these kinds of additions by studying a text, and they can then add the features they like to their own books.

Additionally, you'll want to encourage your writers to use some of the craft moves that they have been working on all year. This might include adding speech bubbles or dialogue, including the setting, and using descriptive details to paint a picture in a reader's mind. Children can also try using sound words and ellipses and playing with the size of their writing and capital letters to emphasize what they are saying. Be sure to refer to the charts that you have in your classroom already.

## Celebrating

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The Common Core State Standards emphasizes the importance of researching and presenting knowledge. In first grade children are invited to participate in shared research and writing projects. Essentially, that is the work your students have done this month. Your students have completed a shared research project around the

experiments they've been conducting and how-to texts they have been writing, where they have not only gone through the writing process but have simultaneously also been through the scientific method of research! You will want to celebrate their work in such a fashion that honors both. Many teachers in the past have held a science fair, where students set up booths with their experiments, "lab reports," and findings. Not only are they available to comment on their work to those attending the fair, but they can conduct live experiments and work on their oral presentation skills as well. You may have students set up a little table or desk and necessary materials to conduct their experiment alongside a presentation board. Whatever the device used to show how to conduct the experiments and present the findings, you will also want to coach kids in how to present and talk to a live audience. You will want to teach kids how to refer to their documents and materials as well as ask for and address questions from the audience.

## Additional Resources

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In this unit your students will live like scientists. They will observe, question, and research content together. They will be discovering things around them and writing to teach others what they are learning.

As you approach this unit, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points 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 generous 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 the work your students do not only shows you what they can or can't do but it also shows you what *you* can do.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Scientists Write to Learn about the World around Us, Experiment to Answer Lingering Questions, and Use What We Know about Nonfiction Writing to Teach Others What We Have Learned**

- “Today I want to teach you that scientists record as much information as we can while we are observing and studying our topics. We can draw detailed, precise illustrations, add labels, write step-by-step what we observe, and describe using our senses.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Scientists can use specific tools to help us write and collect information. We can use rulers to make and jot specific measurements, graph paper to draw true to scale, and hand lenses to see every little detail.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that as we are conducting our class experiment, we think about the essential question and use it to think about what to record. As we are recording, we jot our lingering questions, big ideas, or conclusions to our experiments.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “As we are writing about our experiments, we need to make sure that we have paper that helps us write as much as we can. As we choose paper from the writing center, we can ask ourselves, ‘Does this paper choice give me enough room to do my best writing?’ ‘Could I make a booklet to collect more information?’ ‘Do I need to make my own original paper choice for the writing that I plan to do?’”

### **Part Two: Collaborating with Partners and Recording Our Experiments, All the While Raising the Level Our Non-Narrative Writing**

- “Today I want to teach you that as you work with your partners, you need to decide whether or not an experiment is possible to test. Although your ideas might be good ones, you’ll have to decide whether or not they are possible in our classroom. Some questions to consider as you make these important decisions might be ‘Do we have all of the materials that we need?’ ‘How long will this experiment take?’ ‘Do we have enough time?’ ‘Which experiment will we want to start with?’ and so on.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that we can use everything that we remember from writing how-to books and our class experiments to support us when we are writing our own experiments. We can think about what we need and consider each step in the experiment and how we will add illustrations that teach in a way that someone could follow our directions.”



- “Today I want to teach you that writers can include an introduction and conclusion to our books. When we are writing our introductions and conclusions, we think about the important points in our books. We can highlight the important information and tell a little of that in these two sections.”
  - ▶ *Tip:* “It is helpful to glance back at our mentor texts to get ideas about introductions and conclusions. In some introductions, the authors ask their readers questions. In some conclusions, the authors recap the key ideas presented in the book.”
  
- “Today I want to remind you that you are writing for readers, and just like we have done in all of our pieces across the year, we want to make sure that our writing is as easy to read as possible. We have a toolkit full of strategies to help us edit our writing. As you edit your writing, remember to check your spelling, use capital letters at the beginning of sentences, and punctuation at the end of sentences.”
  
- “As we get ready to publish our books, we will want to think about ways that we might fancy them up. Today I want to teach you how we can include photographs, different fonts, and an eye-catching cover or an intriguing back blurb to make others want to pick up the books that we have worked so hard to write.”



## UNIT TEN

# Poetry

## *Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*

### JUNE

**A**ny time of year, poetry allows writers to let their hearts and minds soar. In this unit, young poets will find significance in the ordinary details of their lives, employ strategies of revision, and learn from mentor authors. Poetry will not be an esoteric unit of study; rather, it will be a culmination of a year's learning, and an opportunity to use language in extraordinary ways. It gives children the chance to practice all that they've learned thus far in the year. You'll help children generate ideas for writing many, many poems. You will teach them to experiment with powerful language, the use of line breaks, metaphor, and comparison to convey feeling. By the end of this study, your young poets will be able to create clear images with precise and extravagant language. Of course, you'll want to assess your students and tailor your unit accordingly. There are many ways this unit could go. Here is one suggestion based on the assumption that poetry and singing songs has been an ongoing part of your school day. As you read, you're sure to notice that this year's curricular calendar leans heavily upon the teaching inside the *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* book from the *Units of Study for Primary Workshop* series (Heinemann, 2003).

### Getting Started

In years past, we've suggested that the first few days of poetry be launched with centers, where you begin studying and thinking about poetry by teaching children to read poetry like a writer. One way of doing this is through poetry centers that provide kids with the opportunity to immerse themselves in the sights and sounds of poetry. You could invite children to join you in bringing in objects to use in a "Five Senses Center," where they could practice using descriptive sensory language. In another center, children could learn

to compare objects by using phrases including “like a . . .” or “reminds me of . . .” or “as a . . .” At a “Singing Voices Center,” children might sing songs and write new ones. In other centers, children could make shape poems, cut up poems to play with the line breaks, or read familiar poems with strong feeling, drama, and rhythm. At any center, when a poet feels inspired to write, he or she may start a poem!

You may decide to pull out the charts from past units. For example, a chart from the Small Moments unit that said, “Writers think about special people, places, big feelings, and things they love,” could also be applied to poetry. Another way you could teach children to generate ideas is to revive their “Tiny Topic notepads” from the *Authors as Mentors* unit and use these to find poems hiding in the details of their lives. Teach writers to take observations and notes from inside their Tiny Topics notebook, chose a few, and then turn them into poems (see Session IV in *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*). Teach, too, that poems can convey strong feelings and use precise words to create imagery (Session V). When returning to notepads, kids could reread their ideas for stories and work toward rewriting them as poems. You may decide to teach your children how to scavenge their Tiny Topics notebooks to find the “ingredients” for a poem, those notes or observations that held strong feelings and that deserve to be turned into poems! Children might write poems about events in their lives and the people that matter most to them. For example, one child rewrote her Small Moment story about the time her tooth fell out when she bit an apple at lunch time and turned it into a poem called “A Bloody Tooth.” Children could also write story poems like “Seventy-Fourth Street” by Myra Cohn Livingston.

## Writers Draft and Revise with Precise Words, Phrases, and Line Breaks to Create Images and Music in Our Poems

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Once children are writing poems, you will want to teach them to revise. You might teach them to experiment with line breaks to convey meaning or create tension. To illustrate the power of line breaks, you could put each word from a class poem created during shared writing on index cards, and then use a pocket chart to show the class that changing the placement of the words changes the feeling of the poem. You might also push them to think about language and word choice as a way to create clear images (Session VIII). They might explore the difference between *fry* and *sizzle*, *shine* and *sparkle*, *cry* and *bawl*—all in alignment with the Common Core State Standards around language.

To guide your young poets through this work, you may find it helpful to choose a few mentor poems or specific poets. These mentor poems provide your children with real and inspiring examples of how poets play with language and text placement to convey meaning. You could model your lessons on the lessons you taught during the *Authors as Mentors* unit. You could teach students how to create rhythm like Eloise Greenfield, line breaks like Bobbi Katz, or imagery like Valerie Worth.

Writing partnerships will lend support to children as they craft their poetry. As they’ve done in other units, partners will read together, offering each other suggestions about line breaks and white space. They might ask each other, “Why did you

choose to add a line break here?” Partners could ask each other questions such as “Where is the big feeling in this poem?” or “What are you trying to show us?” They will help each other think about their topics, the craft of their poems, and the feelings they convey. You could teach them to ask each other questions such as “What small moment are you trying to rewrite?” or “Which writer do you want to be like?” Partners might also make suggestions such as “Have you thought of using this word instead?” Together, poetry partners might play with language or line breaks to explore other ways a poem could sound or look to match the poet’s meaning.

## Writers Bring Together Poetic Language and Meaning

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As the unit continues, you’ll turn attention to the work of teaching writers to use poetic language and purpose. You might say, “Lately, you’ve been looking at the world with a poet’s eye. Yesterday, on our way to lunch, Alejandro pointed to a little pink pencil eraser he saw on the hallway floor and he said, ‘Ms. Mason, look, a tiny pink head that lost its body.’ By now, your poet’s eye is eagle-sharp! From this minute on, you’re ready to do the work of using not only your poet’s eye but also to dig deep and strengthen your poetic voice, like Alejandro did! You’re going to look at the poems you’ve created, as well as find ideas for poems that are still hiding in your Tiny Topics notebooks and your hearts, and as you write and revise these poems, I’ll teach you even *more* poetry moves. Let’s get started!”

Then, you’ll teach writers how to revise poems from their folders or, as they draft new poems to write using comparisons. You will model (both with mentor poems—try *Inside My Heart* by Zoe Ryder White—and your own examples, of course!) how to take an object or a topic and write poetry by thinking about what it is *like*. Allow lots of time for partner sharing and talk. Expect to get a range of comparisons, from literal (“My mom is as pretty as a girl”) to more sophisticated, such as Ethan’s marble poem:

*cracked marble  
shiny and smooth from far way  
but look close and  
it is a broken old man*

You will teach writers to develop poems further by showing how to contrast ordinary language with poetic language. In *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*, Session XI shows a chart you’ll use to lead your class in practicing this sophisticated strategy of changing ordinary language into poetic verse. Additionally, if your children need more time with this work, think about finding times for your children to look through picture books and poems to find comparisons that poets have used (try Robert McClosky’s “Time of Wonder” because it is chock-full of metaphor) or perhaps, with their Tiny Topics notepads, steal moments across the day to try the work together. Perhaps as you stop for an afternoon water fountain drink, whip out your notebook and let the class think about the comparisons. “The water bubbles a brook into my

mouth,” or “It cools me down, a mountain breeze through my body.” These don’t need to be the best of metaphors by any means! Just remember, you are teaching writers to try this brave and tricky work, so you need to be brave yourself.

You’ll want to take this work further by teaching writers to construct poems that sustain metaphor, as the authors do in Session XII, or like Keiko, a first grader from P.S. 7 in Queens tried with her poem, “Butterfly Sister”:

*My butterfly sister  
is gentle  
and colorful*

*Especially her lips  
like purple butterfly wings  
and her fingernails  
purple too*

Sustaining metaphor will, of course, feel a little clumsy to your writers, but look sharp that you are noticing and celebrating the approximations that your writers try and that you are offering examples of you, yourself as a poet, playing with and reinventing the poetry in your own folder.

## Optional Additional Week of Writing Songs

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If you have time, you might want to include some time on songs and songwriting. Remember that your students might have done this in kindergarten. Remind children that songs are literature, just like the stories and poems they write in the writing workshop. The tune, language, and rhythm in songs draw our children toward the world of literary language. How important it is to teach kids that they, too, can create beautiful and powerful lyrics, and that these lyrics reflect the truths of their own lives. Music creates an energy in your classroom that will have children clapping, humming, and singing the literary language from one another’s songs. If your children haven’t done much with songs, you might want to visit the kindergarten poetry unit, which has a section on songwriting.

## Writers Edit, Publish, and Celebrate Our Best Poems and Anthologies

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When it comes time to publish, children may choose two to five of their own poems to make public—or more. You might want to give your children a few options for publishing. For example, some of your students could sort all their poems by topic or theme and put those poems in an anthology, while others may prefer to pick just a few of their favorite poems. You might even decide to put together a class anthology. Since poetry is meant to be heard, as well as read, the class could present a *poetry cafe* where

the children perform poetry readings or “jams” of the poems they have written. The audience might include parents or another class. Refreshments and toasts all around for the poets’ performance will celebrate all that the children have accomplished during this unit.

## Additional Resources

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As you approach this unit, as you have with all of the units that have come before, it will be important for you to read the entire write-up, not just the teaching points below. Remember, in the end, kids learn through the work they do, and although 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, you need to look at what the students are able to produce as you teach into poetry. The unit write-up can help you issue the generous invitation that rallies kids not only to work with heart and soul, but also to engage in deliberate practice, trying to get better at the specific skills highlighted in the unit.

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 the work your students do not only shows you what they can or can’t do, but more importantly it informs your teaching moves. Therefore, be sure to think about what your students need as poets and as writers as you determine the teaching points you will use in this final writing unit in first grade.

Many of the sessions referenced below can be found in *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages in Units of Study for Primary Writing* (Heinemann, 2003).

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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### **Part One: Getting Started with Poetry Centers and Using All We Know about Writing**

- “Today, writers, I want to teach you that poets have lots of ways to get ideas for their poems. Just like we did when we wrote *Small Moments*, one thing poets do to get ideas for the topics of their poems is to think about special people and places, big feelings, and things they love. When we wrote *Small Moments* we turned these moments into stories, but now as poets, we can turn these moments into poems.”



## Part Two: Writers Draft and Revise with Precise Words, Phrases, and Line Breaks to Create Images and Music in Our Poems

- “Writers, yesterday I was listening to some of you reread your poems, and they sounded just like music. Today I want to teach you that writers try very hard to make their poems sound like music. One way they do this is by paying close attention to the words they choose where they put those words on the paper. One way to give our poems music is to divide our words into lines that go down the paper. Then we ask ourselves, ‘Does this way of laying my words on the page match what I’m trying to say?’” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
  - ▶ *Tip:* Teachers may choose to put a poem, word by word, on cut-up sentence strips in a pocket chart, allowing children to read and reread a poem they know carefully, and generating ideas about why the author chose specific words and specific places to break lines. “Goldfish” by Valerie Worth is an example many teachers use (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
  
- “Poets, earlier this year we learned that writers have a saying: ‘Show, not tell.’ Instead of telling her feelings, a writer can show her feeling(s). Today I want to teach you that poets, just like writers of stories, know that one way to convey strong feelings is to show, not tell. They do this by filling themselves up with that same big feeling, that same moment, and acting out what their bodies did. Then, they can write these tiny actions down, maybe even in a list going down the page” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
  
- “Poets spend a long time searching for the exact word to match what they want to say. They reread their poems and ask themselves, ‘Am I saying exactly what I want to say? What do I want you to know and feel when you read my poem? Is this the true thing I want to say?’ And sometimes they find words (or sections) that aren’t exactly true, so they write them again. They try to choose different words that they like better” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Writers, remember, you can always ask your partners for help if you can’t find the most honest and precise words you need. We can all help one another find the best words for our poems.”
  
- “When we studied our mentor author this year, we noticed many things that our mentor author did as a writer. Some of you noticed that one of our mentors repeated words or phrases that carry big feelings. Poets do this too in some poems! They think about the big feeling or thing they want you to know, and they decide if there are words they want to repeat to help you know and feel the same thing” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
  - ▶ *Tip:* “Writers, we can have lots of poet mentor authors too! Today I want to teach you that we can look to a poem we admire and ask ourselves, ‘What does this poet do that I could try?’”

- “Poets, we’ve learned that one way to convey feelings is by showing, not telling them, and another way is to repeat certain words or phrases. Today I want to teach you that still another way we can let readers know our feelings is by comparing our feelings to something else, something in the world that reminds us of that feeling” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
- ▮ *Tip:* “Today, poets, I want to teach you that when we write poems, we don’t just reach for ways to show our feelings. We also reach for ways to help readers picture what we are seeing and to feel what we are feeling. Poets compare whatever we’re writing about (not just our feelings) to something else” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
- “Today, poets, I want to remind you that you have a powerful tool to use when writing your poetry—your partners! Just as our partners helped us revise other kinds of writing this year, our partners can listen to our poems and help us revise them. We might ask each other, ‘Why did you choose to add a line break here?’ ‘Where is the big feeling in this poem?’ or ‘What are you trying to show us?’ or ‘Which writer do you want to be like?’ Partners might also make suggestions such as ‘Have you thought of using this word instead?’ Together, poetry partners can find more precise words or try different line breaks to explore other ways a poem could sound or look to match the poet’s meaning.”

### **Part Three: Writers Edit, Publish, and Celebrate Our Best Poems and Anthologies**

- “Today I want to teach you that sometimes as poets reread their poetry, they find that although the whole poem feels not very special, there is a line or a phrase or an image that deserves to be kept, and from this they write new poems” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
- “Sometimes poets realize that their poems sound more like stories than poems. Today I want to teach you that when poets have story-like drafts, one way they can make them more poem-like is by taking out extra words or taking out parts of the story that aren’t the main thing, and instead choosing precise words, words that show, not tell, or finding words that create an image in the reader’s mind, even playing around with line breaks or patterns on the page” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
- ▮ *Tip:* Remind students to use the charts that you created together throughout this unit that give tips for show, not tell and finding the ingredients for a poem.

- “Today, poets, I want to remind you that whenever a writer writes something, before we send it out into the world we think, ‘How can I fix this up? What else can I try?’ We can look back at the charts in our rooms about things poets do and see if these charts give us any ideas for fixing our writing up or new things we could try.”
  - *Tip:* Remind students that they can go back to favorite poems from mentor authors and try some of the things they noticed mentors doing, such as repeating lines.
  
- “We’re just about ready to celebrate our poems with the world, so I want to remind you that we need to think ‘Can people read my writing?’ We’ve learned lots of ways to do this this year, and we can look back at the charts in our rooms to help us remember to reread our poems, making sure each word is readable” (*Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages*).
  
- “Today I want to teach you that when poets get ready to celebrate their poems, they practice reading them and rereading them, asking themselves, ‘How do I want my voice to sound? Should I speed up here? Slow down here?’ This way they can make sure their voice matches the feelings and meaning behind their poems.”

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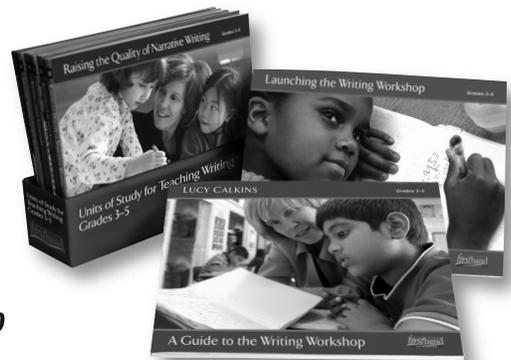
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