



COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

# A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE  
**3**



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM  
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT





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**The Writing Workshop**

**Grade 3**

Common Core Reading and Writing Workshop

Lucy Calkins

*and Colleagues from*

*The Reading and Writing Project*



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# Overview of the Year for Third-Grade Writers

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## A Quick Guide to Changes from Last Year

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Assessment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Grammar and Conventions

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



## UNIT ONE

# Launching the Writing Workshop

## SEPTEMBER

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**A**t the very start of the year, before you do any teaching, you'll definitely want to devote a day to an on-demand assessment of what your children can already do as narrative writers. Generally, this means you'll say to your children, "I'm really eager to understand what you can do as writers, so before you do anything else, please spend today writing the very best personal narrative, the best Small Moment story, of one particular time in your life. You'll have fifty minutes to write this true story of one small moment. Write in a way that shows me all that you know about how to do this kind of writing." You'll want to avoid offering little tips—don't remind children to focus or to write with detail—as the goal will be to see what your children can do independently. After the upcoming unit (or certainly after the upcoming two units), you'll give the same instructions and collect a second on-demand piece of writing from each child, and you should see evidence of progress. This particular on-demand piece can be an artifact to discuss in parent-teacher conferences as a way to show what the student was able to do at the start of the year and to illustrate the growth from that point.

Of course, more important, your assessments will help you angle your teaching. As you look over the narrative continuum (it is on [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)), notice the level at which most of your children write, and notice what lies just beyond that level. This should give you content to add to the unit of study as described below. For example, if your children's narratives cluster around level 5 on the continuum, then look at the difference between levels 5 and 6 and plan your instruction so that you help as many children as possible make that step forward! To make sure your students' work is at the level suggested by the Common Core State

Standards, you'll want to work toward all writers being able to produce texts that, by the end of third grade, are comparable to those at level 6 in the RWP Narrative Writing Continuum.

## Unit Goals

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You'll notice that for third graders, the first two units of the year focus on personal narrative writing. You may wonder why there are two units on this genre. The answer is that this first unit also introduces third graders to writer's notebooks and the far more advanced writing process that is typically reserved for grades 3–8; the second narrative unit is therefore needed to teach the qualities of effective narrative writing. Also, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) emphasize narrative writing as one of the three genres that students are expected to practice and improve in and include benchmark narratives that set the bar at a high level. Then, too, narrative writing is foundational for many other kinds of writing. Both argument and informational writing often includes anecdotes—and anecdotes are small narratives.

September in a third-grade writing workshop is a challenging time, because you'll be establishing a well-managed, productive writing workshop; luring children to invest once again in what will seem a familiar genre; and introducing these young writers to a version of the writing process that is quite different from the one they knew during kindergarten, first grade, and second grade. Many of your children will have written their drafts directly into booklets prior to now, with each booklet containing about five pages and each page containing a space for drawing as well as for writing. Most second-grade writers write a draft and revise right on that draft rather than ever attempting an entirely new second draft. For those children, writer's notebooks will be new, and revisions that involve a sequence of drafts will also be new. In any case, you'll be helping writers become accustomed to producing approximately a page of writing, composed on notebook paper, each day and helping them become accustomed to collecting entries in a writer's notebook, selecting a seed idea, and then developing that seed idea.

## Anticipate the Trajectory of Your Writers' Work across the Whole Unit

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### *Plan for Rigor*

Before you launch any unit, you will want to know what work you expect your children to produce throughout the unit. Keep in mind that in second grade, children wrote half a dozen stories each month. Your youngsters will not yet have the planning or revision skills to invest an entire month in writing one single piece of writing! If you launch the September writing workshop with the expectation that children will

stretch their work out so they spend the entire month working to produce just one piece of writing, chances are they will spend their time recopying the same piece or tweaking the ending. Such a plan would mean that the volume of writing they produced would bottom out, resulting in third grade becoming *less* rigorous than second grade! Don't let this happen. Volume of writing and stamina for writing are enormously important. You do not want to end up with children fiddling with the same story for days. Instead, we strongly suggest you plan from the start to help children generate ten to fifteen entries (which will probably all be personal narratives) and then select first one and later a second to take through a partial writing cycle, creating leads and making significant revisions on the existing draft, then generating an entirely new second draft of one of those texts and editing it.

If your students leave this month with a repertoire of skills for rehearsing and revising writing, then October will allow you to lift the level of your children's narrative writing by teaching them to use those skills to sustain work on a single piece for longer stretches of time, even perhaps working to take just one narrative through the entire writing process. But by then, your students will be ready to write two or three drafts of a single piece, drafts that are significantly different, one from the next. They are probably not ready to do this now, so it is unlikely at this point that they can sustain work on a single piece for the entire month. At the start of the year in September, then, focus on supporting young writers as they progress at a brisk, productive pace through the process, as they work with ingenuity and independence—even if this means that children publish pieces that are nothing to write home about! Imagine that these pieces, alongside the first on-demand narrative, will function as great “before” pieces when you want to show parents and the writers how much growth they have made over the year!

We therefore recommend you support your third graders as they write a bunch of page-long entries (at least a dozen); choose one of these entries to rewrite outside the notebook; rework that draft with add-on flaps, new leads, new endings, and new versions of key passages (most students will not work through a *sequence* of drafts); and then return to their writer's notebook to choose another entry and repeat the process, until drafts of two pieces have been written and revised lightly. Then writers will select the best piece for deeper revision, including writing an entirely new second draft of that piece (as well as flaps and inserts and so on). Then writers will edit, recopy, and publish this one piece. Some teachers suggest that it works well if the first of those two drafts is written in a booklet that looks a bit like a grown-up version of the booklets children used in second grade, with the second narrative written instead on single sheets of notebook paper. All of this is detailed below and in a series of minilessons in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* that support this progression.

You will probably have some (perhaps many) writers who will not seem able to work at the pace and level described here. You should know from the start that these students will need extra attention. It is likely that some of these children will seem inexperienced as writers, ill at ease with pen in hand, and slow to get started, to produce anything. These writers may carve out microscopic letters, writing in a way that seems to signal,

*Don't look.* You'll probably want to develop a plan for turning these reluctant and inexperienced writers around. Chances are good that these writers will benefit from your starting the year by focusing intently on whatever they have to say, responding with great appreciation, finding beauty in whatever they write. Katherine Bomer's book *Hidden Gems* could help you position yourself so that you respond with deep appreciation to whatever is lovely about these students' work or their spoken words. Say back what these students say to you, cherishing the particular turn of a phrase that a child has used. "That is so lovely. You've got to write that—just like you said it," you can say, and then dictate what the child has said as he pens the words. "Write it really fast, we don't want to forget it," you can say, encouraging the child to write fast and furiously, without worrying about spelling just yet. You can set these reluctant writers up to do almost anything you want to extol in the class; then, when you convene the group, you can say to the class, "Listen to what [name] has done. I'm wondering if any of the rest of you would be willing to try to do something similar." If you begin the year by intentionally nurturing these writers' confidence and engagement, you will also be able to look these writers in the eye and say, "It looks to me like you didn't get a lot of practice writing last year. The thing is, you've got a *lot* of hidden skills in writing—you just need to bring them out. Let's work together to make this an amazing year for you and writing, okay?" With your reluctant writers, your goal should be engagement and effort, which will in turn yield the accelerated progress that is also essential.

You will be teaching into many skill sets during this unit: showing kids how to look back and reflect on their work; decide which piece to bring to publication; and use what they've learned in class, teacher conferences, and partner talk to revise. All of this demands the kind of high-level cognitive complexity that the Common Core State Standards call for. From the outset, you want to plan a unit in which children are consciously outpacing themselves day-to-day. Using the RWP Narrative Writing Continuum will help you plan teaching that takes into account where children are but moves them quickly into better writing practices.

### *Encourage Speed and Stamina*

One of your goals will be to teach children to do a lot of writing, with stamina and speed. Teachers in some schools have become accustomed to children writing at a snail's pace, and there has probably not been enough emphasis that writers need to learn to write quickly. Increasingly, writing is going to need to become a tool for thinking not just in the writing workshop but also across the day. The nation will be returning to performance assessments; this means that in the years ahead, kids' understandings of books and history and science will be increasingly apt to be assessed by their ability to write (and to write quickly).

It is critical that you help writers understand they can grab a pen and write, fast and furiously, filling a page in ten minutes, moving on to the next page. If you question whether this is a realistic expectation for your young writers right now, ask children to

remain in the meeting area after the minilesson and write alongside each other for a bit. Don't tell them that your goal will be to notice the length of writing they produce in ten minutes, but *do* rally them to work productively. "Let's not waste a second," you can say. "Let's really get a lot of writing done." After ten minutes of straight writing, ask children to mark where they both began and stopped their writing and to count the number of lines they produced, then triple that number. This new number is a rough index of the amount of text that child can do in one day's writing workshop and/or in one evening's writing time. That is, if the writer produced a particular amount in ten minutes, certainly the child should be able to produce *three times* that amount of writing each day and again each evening. This will help you see that most children in your class can be held to standards for production that are considerably higher than those to which you've become accustomed. It can also help you see that some children need small-group instruction and lots of praise geared toward helping them write more quickly (a star for half a page, encouragement to keep going, prompts to keep the hand moving, and so on).

### *Solicit Student Investment*

At the start of the year, you will want to move heaven and earth to get your young writers invested in the writing workshop. The best way to do this is to convey to children that this year the writing workshop will be *theirs*. Tell them that you need their input to know how to make the workshop powerful. As part of this, you may want to ask children to let you know when writing has really worked for them. What could the class put in place this year to make it likely that writing is as good as it can possibly be? You can engage the children in thinking more specifically about aspects of the writing workshop. When have they gotten help from a writing partner that made a big difference? For some of these questions, you may want to ask children to talk in foursomes before convening a whole-class conversation. If you do this, let children know their ideas are helping you plan how writing will go in your classroom (even if you'd already planned to do some of what they suggest). "Are you saying it really helped you to talk about your writing with a partner? Thanks for giving me the idea that we should have writing partners! This year, let's follow John's suggestion and work with partners." In this fashion, children can join together to think about the question, "What kind of writing community do we want to form together?"

One way to engage children in conversations about writing is to read excerpts from books that celebrate the writing process and/or in which writers describe their writing lives. We recommend, for example, Reynolds' *Ish*; Fletcher's *A Writer's Notebook*; Janeczko's *Seeing the Blue Between*; *Speaking of Journals*, edited by Paula Graham; Eileen Spinelli's *The Best Story*; Baylor's *The Other Way to Listen*; and so forth. Use these excerpts to invite children's comments and reactions.

Of course, one of the most important ways in which you can support investment in writing is to show your students that you are enthralled with the chance to work

on your own writing in the same ways that they'll be doing. We can't emphasize enough how powerful it is if you look ahead at the minilessons provided in the first unit of *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*, and give yourself little versions of each minilesson. You needn't take long at this—skim the minilesson, noticing the teaching points especially and the examples of writing. Then do your own brief versions of personal narrative writing, perhaps patterning your writing after the examples created by the teacher in the book. Use topics from your life that really matter to you—that make you speak from the heart because they are that important to you. If you choose a topic that is particularly saturated with a groundswell of feelings and is evocative to youngsters, you channel them to write about moments that bristle with meaning and their writing turns out to be much more intense and powerful simply because the feelings they bring to the page are more intense, the memories more vivid. Because your hope is that your writing will speak to kids, you may want to recall a moment when you were roughly the age of your students. Was there a time you experienced peer pressure—the same peer pressure you know your kids feel—the harsh judgments, the longing to be included, or the loneliness?

You will find that children really respond to pieces written by peers, so you may want to find personal narratives from previous years to share. The CD connected to *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* has lots of student work—look at pieces children wrote during the personal narrative unit as well—and there is also student writing on the Reading and Writing Project website. You will probably also want to find a published text or two that you can share, returning to it periodically to illuminate aspects of narrative craft. It is important to choose a text that is new to your young writers. It need not be a personal narrative—some short fiction works well, too. We recommend an excerpt from Ralph Fletcher's memoir *Marshfield Dreams* or from *Junebug*, by Alice Mead, or *We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past*, by Jacqueline Woodson, or *Subway Sparrow*, by Leyla Torres. Queen Rania's *Sandwich Swap* and Jacqueline Woodson's *Pecan Pie Baby* are two Small Moment personal narratives that would work well, too.

### *Establish a Productive Environment*

At the start of the unit, you will need to lure kids to write and you'll need to establish a productive environment in which a lot of writing work happens. You can expect that children already know the routines of a writing workshop; all you need to do is to ramp up their expectations with lots of rhetoric about how, this year, now that they are in third grade, expectations are higher. If the kids already know how to gather for a minilesson, now you can teach them to use those first moments while others are convening to reread old charts (or to open their writer's notebook to a clean page if you want them taking notes, which is advisable only on rare occasions). You will teach writers that after the minilesson, they can get themselves started on their writing without waiting for an individual jump-start from you, and that during writing time,

they can help themselves if they are stuck. Of course, children can help themselves best when they are stuck if the class has talked about some of the solutions to predictable problems.

For example, the class may develop a system for what to do if a pencil breaks or if someone can't think of an idea to write about or needs advice in order to revise. Of course, children will experience these start-of-the-year challenges regardless of the unit, but there are others that are part and parcel of this particular unit of study.

## Part One: Writers Draw on What They Know about Themselves as Writers

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At the start of any writing workshop, you will always want to help your children know their lives are brimming with stories. If your third graders have been in a writing workshop the previous year, remind them that they already know a repertoire of strategies writers use to collect ideas for personal narrative stories. Ask them to share strategies they already know and compile these on a chart headed "Strategies for Generating Narrative Writing." A word of caution: any strategy, by definition, involves a step-by-step procedure. Therefore, the items on your chart can't be topics (people, places, and so on), but instead need to be procedures (which can be found in *Launching the Writing Workshop*, the first book in the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*).

The first minilessons in *Launching the Writing Workshop* suggest that when we do not know what to write about when we want to write a story, we sometimes jot down the name of a person about whom we care deeply, brainstorm several times things we did with that person, select one of these times, make a movie in our mind of that time, and then storytell it on the page. This process needs to be quick—writers take only five minutes to *quickly* jot down the name, list a few small moments we've spent with that person, select one of these moments, and begin writing the "long" story of it down the page. This process of brainstorming does not encompass one day's writing workshop.

Remember that for any minilesson you might teach your students, you'll want to have a pocketful of coaching tips in mind that you might share during your conferences and small-group coaching. For example, on the day when you teach this strategy or one like it, you might convene a small group of children and point out to them that when they list small moments they have spent with a person, it generally works best to describe each of those moments in a sentence (or a long phrase) and not in a single word.

If a child decides to generate small moments he spent with his brother and records the name *Joe* in his notebook and writes *baseball* under that name, he may not have set himself up to produce a focused narrative. He might be ready to write all about baseball (and Joe). But if under *Joe* the child writes, "One time Joe taught me how to catch a baseball," then he is off to a good start toward writing a narrative. You can also anticipate needing to help students progress quickly through the work of jotting a

short list and then selecting one item on it and getting a page written—some students think listing possible topics will take a whole day!

Then, too, you will want to be ready to help small groups know that between the time they choose a small moment to write about and the time they start writing, there is one crucial thing they need to do. They need to dream the dream of the story. That is, they need to relive the moment, bit by bit, re-creating exactly what they did and said and thought. This takes some fictionalizing, as we can't generally remember all those details, so you'll want to help children know they need to think, "Okay, where was I exactly? What was I doing exactly?" A child may say, "I was going to the airport to get my grandma," and you'll need to help her know that what a writer does is to zoom in on the exact details: "I jumped into the revolving door and let it push me into the airport. For a moment, I stood in the big hallway, my eyes darting this way and that, trying to figure out where I needed to go. Then I saw \_\_\_\_\_."

In this way, children create a sequence of smaller events, sequencing being a key element of narrative writing and one the Common Core State Standards emphasized at this grade level. This tip is one that you can teach during the first few days of the unit, as writers use strategies to generate ideas for writing and then draft those ideas into entries, and it will be something that you continue teaching throughout the unit.

You will not only teach strategies for generating narrative writing, you will also celebrate the new consciousness that comes from being people who write the moments of our lives onto the page. You might, in a share session, read a little bit of Byrd Baylor's picture book *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* and help children realize that they are doing what Byrd Baylor talks about in that book. They are honoring and celebrating and noticing the small moments of their lives. They are going through life saying, "This matters," and recording small moments that merit celebration. (See Solicit Student Investment, on page 13, for additional suggestions for inspirational texts.)

By the second day of your workshop, you will want to help children realize the strategies they are learning are cumulative. For example, on the first day of your workshop, you may have taught children that writers sometimes think of a *person* who matters to them and then brainstorm small moments they spent with that person, moments they remember with crystal clarity. On the next day, you may want to teach them that writers sometimes can think of a *place* we remember well, brainstorm small moments we spent in that place, and then choose one to write in detail. At the end of that second minilesson, it will be important to remind children they can draw on *either* of those strategies in order to generate that day's writing.

Each day's teaching point needs to build on the teaching points from prior days. If every day, day after day, your minilesson becomes a time to teach a new strategy for generating writing, you will end up using these strategies just as some teachers use story starters. The message you will convey will be "Wait until I can get you started on today's piece of writing." It is crucial that children can use and reuse their small repertoire of strategies and do so independently. Take a count. How many of the kids are using the strategy you taught today? It should be fewer than half! How many are drawing on strategies they learned on previous days or ones they have invented? If

most of your class routinely does only whatever you talk about in that day's minilesson, you'll want to lend your full weight toward reminding writers to draw on a full repertoire of strategies.

Keep in mind, too, that children do not need (nor do they profit from) more than three or four strategies for generating personal narratives, because any of these strategies can be used over and over. Remember, too, that in only one day you can lay out several possible strategies for generating writing. You'll demonstrate one in the minilesson, another in your mid-workshop teaching point, still another when students share. You'll also see that a few children begin to rely less and less on strategies for generating writing as they come to regard life itself as one big source of stories! As soon as your children are living as writers, they'll find that true stories come to mind without having to rely on a strategy at all. Everything that we see, do, think, and feel can remind us of the stories we have to tell.

Of course, selecting a strategy to use is not all that is required for a young writer to get something onto the page. Writers also write, and as mentioned earlier, you will want to encourage students to write quickly. Later students will have time to rethink an entry and make it into a really great story. For now, an entry is meant to be something that a writer can write fairly quickly. It is okay if these pieces do not in the end turn out to be all that terrific.

Writers need to write a lot, to let the water run, as it were, until it runs clear. For many third graders, this will be the first time they plan narratives without sketching the scenes across pages of a booklet, so they may have a bit of trouble continuing to write. Sometimes this trouble comes because they tend to sum up the whole event in a few sentences and then feel "done"—how can they write more when they told what happened already? These writers will need help thinking of the story as a sequence of micro-events. If that is a challenge, writers can sometimes benefit from making a quick sketch that captures the start of their story, the middle of the story, the next thing that happens in the story, and then the end of the story, and only then start to write the parts—the beginning, middle, and end—they've just sketched out. These sketches must be one-minute sketches, and you'd only support children doing this for a week or two at the very start of the year.

If you'd like to encourage writers to make these sketches on paper that has been folded to make little booklets, you can ask writers to try different ways to unravel the story. You might say, "The story of your visit to your grandma's house *could* start when you left home, but then again, what if it started when you arrived?" If writers sketch the various progressions of a story on a series of little folded-paper books, they can try telling the story aloud one way, then another way, eventually settling on a great way to tell the story. Alternatively, some writers can borrow the strategy from second grade to "tell the story across their fingers."

It is impossible to emphasize enough the importance of teaching writers that to write a story, a writer first needs to make a movie in the mind. If a child talks "all about" an event—summarizes it with sentences like "It was a good baseball game. We won 6 to 2. I got a lot of hits. It was exciting"—then the child is *commenting on* the

game rather than *telling the story* of it. The child has not yet grasped the idea of writing in a storyteller's voice. If, on the other hand, his piece begins, "I grabbed a bat and walked up to the plate. I looked at the pitcher and nodded. 'I'm ready,' I said," then the child is writing a story. Most children need to be reminded to make movies in their mind and to write so readers can picture exactly what is happening.

As you teach *strategies* for generating writing, you will also teach *qualities* of effective writing. The examples you model, the stories you read, will implicitly teach these qualities. Above all, teach children to write with focus, a storytelling voice, and detail. It is likely that your students have had experience doing this in second grade, but you will want to reteach these concepts. Detail, especially, cannot be overemphasized. In the Common Core State Standards, the third-grade standards for narrative writing call for using dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings—these details will bring your children's writing to life on the page and will help them stretch the parts of their stories that are most important.

As children write, take a second to check that they are using ending punctuation and capital letters and are spelling high-frequency words correctly. If you are questioning why we emphasize conventions—"Shouldn't editing wait until the end of the process?"—this suggests you are well schooled in writing workshop methodologies. And it is true that this isn't a time to worry that students' use of punctuation is perfect or spelling is perfect. But that doesn't mean that writers should place zero attention on conventions; certainly one would expect that the first-draft writing that third graders produce is a lot more conventional than the first-draft writing that first graders produce!

For example, the Common Core State Standards list command of ending punctuation as a first-grade standard. Of course, not all third graders will come to you demonstrating command of this convention, but if some of your students are not working at the levels expected for third graders, you will need to feel some sense of urgency in bringing them up to more grade-level-appropriate usage. If writers have been told, during previous years, that editing comes only at the very end of the process, you may need to shift the balance a bit so that your students learn, for example, that writers actually write with punctuation. Periods aren't an add-on, inserted just prior to publication! If some students do not have the instinct to punctuate, they need to be taught that writers have a thought, then write write write that thought without pausing (not writing word by word) and then put a period at the end of the thought. Then, the writer generates the next thought, writes that thought down all in a rush, and punctuates that thought.

Students should sense when they are misspelling a word, and if they aren't sure of the correct spelling, they should be encouraged to mark the word and take a second to try spelling it another way. Perhaps they can try the word on a Post-it, writing it a few different ways and then selecting the best spelling. Granted, now is probably not a time to use dictionaries. Once a writer has taken an extra few seconds to work on a spelling, it is best to move on, knowing there will be time soon to look up the correct spelling. This is not the time to make a big deal out of spelling absolutely perfectly,

bringing rough-draft writing to a halt for ten minutes while students check each word. This is the time to emphasize fluency, drafting quickly, taking a second to spell correctly the words that one practically knows, using the word wall as a quick reference, and moving on, rereading to edit *as best you can*. There will be time prior to publication to return to words that may not be spelled correctly.

Most teachers feel it is best not to mark up the children's work with our own corrections—if kids learn that despite their best efforts, an adult will find all the mistakes for them, this does not help their willingness to give editing their best try on their own.

By third grade, children are old enough to be doing some writing homework each night. By the fourth or fifth day of the first unit, you may worry that children are not yet attached to their writer's notebook, are not accustomed enough to carrying texts between home and school for them to do this reliably. Therefore, we encourage you to make or buy small, portable "writerly life notepads," the pages of which can be disassembled at the end of a week and taped into a writer's notebook. If this helps children write at home as well as at school, they will double the volume of writing they do. Help children remember to bring these notepads between home and school so they are inducted into the very important habit of carrying writer's notebooks back and forth between these two locations.

## Part Two: Rehearsing and Drafting in Ways That Set Children Up to Write Effective Narratives

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Anticipate that by approximately the end of the fourth day of writing, your children will be ready, presumably during a share session, to reread all their entries and select one that will be the seed idea for the first of the two narratives they'll write this month. Then they'll spend a day (and a page of their notebook) getting ready to write. As part of this, they will storytell their story to each other several times, each time working toward new goals. "Try to storytell in a way that gives your partner goose bumps." "Try this time to stretch out the good parts, really making them into a big deal." "Think about how you want your listener to feel at the start, and tell it to get your listener feeling that way. Then think how you want your listener to feel later in the story, and tell that part in a way that gets your listener feeling that way."

When children are writing narratives, another way to plan is by making a timeline. As young writers create timelines, which will likely be new to them, you will want to demonstrate how to tell the story a few times, orally; how to jot down the key words for each part of the story above a dot on the timeline; and then how to retell the story using the timeline to make sure it matches what you said. You will also teach them that they can try different timelines after telling their stories in different ways. "Maybe my story will go like this," you can say. "Or maybe like this." You'll see minilessons that help children use timelines to write well-structured narratives in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.

You can also invite children to rehearse for writing by drafting several different leads. You may want to teach children a few typical ways writers often start a story, such as with dialogue or with a small action or by conveying the setting. The purpose of this instruction is not just to produce a more dramatic lead but also to dislodge young writers from summarizing events and move them toward making movies in their minds and reliving events on the page. This will make it more likely that children storytell rather than summarize, and that they write with detail. Again, this minilesson is detailed in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.

Once children have planned the story, we strongly suggest you teach them to write the whole draft, quickly, nonstop, in a day or two. Kids need to draft outside the notebook on one-sided paper. We have found that stories are vastly more coherent and powerful when they are written quickly, under pressure and in one sitting (two at the most). Children will have time later to revise and finish any bits, but don't let them stretch the writing of their first draft out over several days! Because this is the first time third graders have drafted in this way, some kids' drafts will be shorter than you'd expect, but during revision you can teach more specific strategies for elaboration.

### Part Three: Revising Writing

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You'll want to decide whether you can lure your young writers to engage in significant large-scale revisions—in multiple drafts—or not. No matter what, writers will have written an entry, selected that entry as the one most deserving of further work, and then rethought the topic and the audience enough to write several new leads and a whole new draft. The “new” draft will look to you and to the children as if it is the writer's first draft, as it will be the first draft outside the notebook, but in fact it is really draft two. It is likely that during this first unit, your students will only “fix up” and rework this draft, then write another and take it through the same process, and finally select one of the two drafts to revise further in yet one more draft.

It will be important that your students have positive experiences with revision, because one of the most important ways to make sure that writing improves across the year is to make sure students are deeply and independently engaged in massive revisions—frankly, this is something we have seen far too little of during recent years. Before you can help a student revise his or her writing, you need to do some analysis. If the piece is a summary, if the writer has told what he or she did but made no effort to relive the event, then you may want to consider helping the writer get started on a whole new draft (despite your reworked-drafts-rather-than-new-ones expectation). There is not a lot a writer can insert that will help a draft that goes like this: “Last Saturday I played baseball. My team won. We were really excited. The score was 78–56. I love baseball.” Help that writer start a new draft by thinking, “Where in the timeline of events will I start my story?” If the writer decides to start it when he got off the team bus, he can recall that moment and write about it: “The Hamburg Bulldogs

Baseball Team bus pulled to a stop. 'We're here,' I said, and grabbed my sports bag and headed down the aisle of the bus."

If writers have storytold, then one revision strategy will be especially successful. You'll read about this strategy in *Launching the Writing Workshop*. This strategy involves rereading one's story and asking, "What is the heart of my story?" Writers then circle the section of the draft that conveys the heart of the story and scissor that section out, replacing it with a large sheet of blank lined paper. Writers then take that key part—a paragraph or two—and rewrite that one central moment of the story, telling this episode in smaller steps, revealing not just what the narrator (the writer) did, but also what the narrator thought, felt, remembered.

For example, I might decide that although my entire story about getting a new kitten is significant, the heart of my story is the moment when the kitten first entered my apartment and I said, "Welcome home." I could then show young writers how I stretch out the moment when the kitten first entered his new home.

Writers can learn to write exactly what happened and to shift between telling what they did, said, or thought. There are lots of other revision strategies you can teach as well, not only through minilessons but also in small groups and one-to-one conferences. *Launching the Writing Workshop* details many suggestions, and you can also read any other resource on teaching writing.

Of course, as you teach revision strategies, you will also be teaching qualities of good writing. If you look over the Common Core State Standards for narrative writing, you should be able to check off that yes, you are teaching students to introduce a narrator (the children will be showing themselves doing and acting in ways that reveal who they are). Yes, children will be organizing an event sequence that unfolds naturally. Yes, they will use dialogue and descriptions of actions—and probably they will need lots of instruction and practice in doing this well. Chances are good that some of your children will find it hard to include dialogue selectively, weave it within a sequence of actions instead of letting it overwhelm everything else. You'll probably lead small groups of children who are writing the sound track of the story but not showing the actions. Your children will naturally use time markers to show the sequence of events, including words and phrases such as *later* or *after that*. You'll probably teach them that as time passes, it helps to paragraph. You may also want to show a few of your more advanced writers some of the sophisticated ways in which authors show the passage of time. "The sky was growing dark by the time our team bus pulled into the parking lot," or "I glanced at my cell phone and quickly calculated that the trip had taken almost an hour. We were late."

## **Part Four: When You're Done, You've Just Begun: Moving On to a New Piece**

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Remember that during this first unit, once children have written a draft and revised it, you'll remind them that when writers finish one piece, they don't just sit with hands

folded and announce, “I’m done!” No way. Instead, writers finish one piece and begin the next, right away. Your students will know this from second grade, but you need to let them know that those old norms are still in place. This expectation is an important one because it takes away any race to declare a draft finished. The writer who bypasses revision, who settles for less than his or her best, doesn’t get the reward of time to sit around drawing or play with his baseball cards. Instead, this writer is simply starting a new piece sooner than his or her classmates.

You’ll set a date by which all children need to be done—temporarily—with their first piece of writing and on to the second piece. As children go back to their writer’s notebook to collect more entries, choose a new seed idea, and write another draft, be sure you do not keep them on a tight leash, working in lockstep. Simply remind them of the work they’ll need to do over the next few days and then focus your teaching on helping them make that writing even better than the first piece. Do remind students that the draft needs to be written all in one day, with the writer writing fast and furiously, writing the whole long story during that one day.

As mentioned earlier, stories lack coherence and energy when they are created piecemeal, with the writer writing a portion of the story on each of five days—and then writers get wed to those stories and can’t imagine revising them. It is vastly better to write the draft quickly, and every writer can write most of a story (if not all of it) in a day.

Study their work to see what it is they need to do to improve their stories—and also study the narrative continuum, including the pieces that are just a bit beyond those your students are writing. Chances are good that you’ll still want to emphasize the importance of storytelling instead of summarizing, as well as limiting the focus (channeling them to write about an event that lasts twenty minutes or an hour, not three days) and including detail.

## Part Five: Revising for Publication

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Once they’ve written this next draft, you’ll want to encourage writers to look between their two pieces, asking “Which is the best? Which is good enough that it deserves to be revised and edited for publication?” This time, after your writers have selected the draft they will publish, you’ll probably be able to rally writers to tackle a whole new draft. They’ll need to rehearse for this just as they rehearsed for the first draft. Your main goal will be to continue to be sure that by the time writers write this second draft, they are envisioning their story, showing it as the story unfolds rather than relying on summarizing.

Again, study writers’ drafts to see what you may teach them and remember that revision is a time for major improvements—not for merely fixing punctuation or altering words. If children are not yet incorporating direct dialogue into their stories, teach them to make characters talk by inserting the exact words that a character (probably the writer) was apt to have said. Some children forget to include dialogue, so teach

them to make a movie in their mind and to remember (or imagine) what each person could be saying. Then teach children to add this dialogue to the draft. Sometimes, you will see that children's drafts are swamped with dialogue. Readers often can't discern even who is speaking or what is happening. When you see this sort of writing, keep in mind that the child is probably making movies in his mind, which is a great thing, and he simply hasn't mastered the mechanics yet.

Overreliance on writing dialogue represents an advance, yet it poses problems that need to be addressed. If a draft represents a sound track only, the writer can revise his writing to show the aspects of the story that were left out. After the second draft is written, again in one fast and furious day of writing, you will remind writers that they know ways to revise. This time the revisions will lead to flaps holding new leads or endings, to inserted sections, to parts being rewritten, and so forth.

## Part Six: Editing

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Eventually students will turn to editing—punctuating, paragraphing, spelling, and so on. The editing will probably include checking spelling words, especially high-frequency words. Check also to see whether your children spell polysyllabic words by stretching them out and representing every syllable and sound they hear. If they do, encourage them to remember that once they have voiced a syllable (for instance, *-tion*) they will want to think, "What other *-tion* words do I know? How can I use the word I know to help me spell this word that I don't know?" That is, children need to progress from relying on sound alone toward relying on analogy (and on their knowledge of spelling patterns). For the first published piece of September, look also to children's use of ending punctuation and capitalization. Do they capitalize names of people, places, and titles? Develop a class chart of conventions for which kids should be responsible in their writing. Once you've taught how to capitalize titles, for instance, this teaching must become an expectation for the writing kids do in their notebooks and drafts as well as in their published pieces. This way, your editing instruction can turn to a new goal during the next round of publication.

You will, of course, have a separate time in your day for word study, and during that time you will no doubt teach children some high-frequency words, especially ones that are commonly misspelled. To decide on the words to teach, get a list of high-frequency words for third graders (Pat Cunningham's book is one source, as is our website at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)) and notice which words many writers do not seem to have mastered yet. Start with those! The word wall is not a place for new and fancy vocabulary or for social studies words—it is a place for the high-frequency or high-utility words that you plan to teach and then hold children accountable to always spelling correctly.

Of course, it will be important to link word study to the writing workshop. Perhaps during a few mid-workshop teaching points, you will ask writers to take a second to reread their writing and check that they've spelled words on the word wall correctly.

“You guys are in third grade, and third graders take just an extra second to be sure we spell the words we almost know correctly.” This does not mean you expect children’s first-draft writing to be entirely correct or that you want them obsessing about spelling in their first draft. You do, on the other hand, want to be sure that some high-frequency words are becoming automatic for them.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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If you do an on-demand assessment of your students’ narrative writing skills before you approach this unit, then you can be clear about your goals. You’ll want the work that every writer does during the unit to progress upward from that first piece. Become accustomed to looking between what students produced on the first assessment and their entries.

Very often, students enter third grade without a real sense for how to write narratives. They write about an event rather than re-create the event on the page. An entry will begin, “On Saturday I got my grandmother at the airport. I was excited because I love her. We had to wait because her plane was late but then she came.” If students write about events rather than reliving them, you’ll want to keep a sharp eye out for the day in which their writing begins to change: ““Do you want to go to the airport to get Nana?” my Dad asked me one day at breakfast. ‘Yes,’ I said. We jumped in the car and drove out the driveway.” Sometimes the transition from summary to storytelling leads to a batch of other problems, such as runaway dialogue or reports that are tediously detailed, but you will still want to celebrate this as a step ahead—and to worry about children who continue summarizing well into this month.

Your third graders should be writing approximately a page a day in school. Some may write much more slowly, which is okay for the very start of the year, but you will want to deliberately push these writers toward greater fluency and volume. You may need to relax other expectations for a week or two while you ramp up their fluency. You can encourage these (and other) children to count the number of lines they have written, to set goal posts for themselves, to say aloud to a partner what they plan to write before writing it.

After gathering entries for a week, you’ll help students work an entry into a draft, and then you’ll bring them back through this process for a second time. Some teachers decide to eliminate that second cycle, which is a reasonable decision, although you will then want to help students do more revision and keep a keen eye on maintaining writing volume. We encourage you to do a second on-demand piece of writing after students publish, as this will help you know what this student has internalized from the previous unit and inform your instruction for the next round of personal narrative writing in October.

The following teaching points are based on material in *Launching the Writing Workshop*, the first volume of *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*, and include suggestions for additional teaching points you might incorporate. As with all

our units, we encourage you to build on and adapt this work to meet the specific needs of your children.

## **Part One: Writers Draw on What They Know about Themselves as Writers**

- “Today I want to teach you that readers and writers get ready to read and write, both, by setting up places and tools that will make it easy for us to read and to write really well. We can think, ‘What have I seen or done in other years, in other times, that made reading and writing really work for me?’ and then share ideas with others so that together we come up with ideas for what we can do to make this year, this time, really work for us as readers and as writers.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you a strategy I use to help me decide which story to write (because writers aren’t usually given topics; we decide which stories we will tell). If I can’t figure out what to write, one strategy I use is this: I think of a person who matters to me and then I list small moments I’ve had with that person. I list moments that, for some reason, I remember with crystal clarity. Then I sketch the memory and write the story of that one time.”
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers get ourselves started, not waiting for the teacher to come around and jump-start each writer!”
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers know that when we finish one entry, we leave a few lines blank, and then move on to another entry. Writers don’t just sit there!”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writers sometimes think not of a person but of a place that matters; then we list small moments that occurred in that place, moments we remember with crystal clarity. Then, just like we did when we thought of the person, we choose just one Small Moment story from our list. Sometimes we take a second to sketch what happened first; sometimes we just go straight to writing.”
  
- “Today I want to give you a tip. It is important to remember that we know a lot about writing and that as we continue to generate ideas and start to write stories, we can draw on all the strategies we know. Yesterday, you learned about thinking about special moments with the people you love. Today you thought about stories about those special places in your world. From now on, those are both strategies you can use anytime you start to write!”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that in addition to strategies for generating writing, writers keep in mind qualities of good writing that help us shape our ideas.

Specifically, writers know that to write a story that draws readers close to listen, it helps to write about a small episode, something that happened in twenty minutes or even in just three minutes! It is important to zoom in on one small story and to tell the parts of the story that matter, leaving out sections that don't matter. Writers create movies in our minds and then retell the sequence of events in our stories, writing with details, telling the story in a step-by-step way."

- ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers, remember that as you are writing, you can't forget about writing conventions. As you are busy generating ideas, zooming in on these many special moments in your lives, take a second to spell correctly the words you know you use a lot. You may want to circle a word you aren't sure of, use the word wall as a quick reference, or take a second to try a tricky word a few different ways on a Post-it."
  
- "Today I want to teach you that you can also count on how a writing conference will tend to go. This can help you do your part of the writing conference well. When writing teachers confer with you, we want to know what you are trying to do as a writer, what you've done so far, and what you are planning to do next. So I will start by interviewing you, asking questions about your writing (not your topic). I'll tend to ask questions like these:
  - ▶ What are you working on as a writer?
  - ▶ What kind of writing are you making?
  - ▶ What are you doing to make this piece of writing work?
  - ▶ What do you think of what you've done so far?
  - ▶ What will you do next?
  - ▶ How will you go about doing that?

"My job at the start of the conference is to figure out how to help you—and your job is to teach me. You are teaching me not about your subject but about the ways you've figured out to write. That way, I can be helpful."

- ▶ *Teaching share:* "Today I want to teach you that writers don't just write one entry and then write another and another as we have been doing. As writers, after we collect entries and ideas for a while, we reread and we find one story, one entry, that especially matters to us, and we make a commitment to that one entry. We decide to work on it so that it becomes our very best writing ever."

## **Part Two: Rehearsing and Drafting in Ways That Set Children Up to Write Effective Narratives**

- "Writers rehearse our stories by telling them in multiple ways. Today I want to teach you that before we start drafting our stories, we practice telling them in

different ways. You may try to tell the story in a way that gives your partner goose bumps, stretching out the important parts and making your reader feel the way you felt in each moment of your story.”

- “Writers do sometimes write all about a topic. But for now, in this class, we are writing true stories or personal narratives. And today what I want to teach you is that stories, or narratives, are almost always organized to tell what happened first and then next and then next. One writer’s strategy we can use to help us write true stories is to start by thinking back to the very start of the memory; then we make a movie in our mind of what happened first, then next, and next. One way you may organize your ideas is by creating a timeline. The timeline can help us remember what happened first, then next, until the end of the story.”
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Today I want to teach you that as writers, we revise not only by eliminating dots that seem unnecessary to the timeline but also by adding dots, expanding the most important events.”
  
- “Today I’m going to suggest you all try writing a discovery draft. Writers sometimes decide that after carefully crafting each word of a lead, it’s a good next step to do the opposite kind of thing and just fix our eyes on our subject, writing our story fast and long, without stopping.”

### **Part Three: Revising Writing**

- “I want to teach you today that revision is about finding and developing the potential in your piece. This means, first of all, that when we revise, we return to drafts that seem promising to us. So today you’ll reread both the stories you’ve written and decide which one has special promise; that will be the piece you revise and publish. And then, once it is time to settle into serious revision, you again need to reread, asking, ‘Which section of this do I think works especially well?’ That is, after looking for the piece that is good enough to revise, you look for the section that is the heart of it! Usually in any story, there will be a part where the readers should pull in to listen—the part that really matters, the heart of the story. And one important thing we can do when we revise is find the heart of a story and develop it further. So revision is not about cleaning up messes; it is about finding and developing powerful writing, and one way we develop writing is by adding more to the important parts of the story.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writing personal narratives well involves reliving episodes from our own lives. As we tell stories, we shift between telling

what we do, say, and think, so that our reader can step into the story, living it just as we did.”

#### **Part Four: When You’re Done, You’ve Just Begun: Moving On to a New Piece**

- “Some of you have reached the end of your drafts; others still have lots to write. Either way, what I want to teach you today is that you don’t need to line up alongside me and ask, ‘What should I do in writing time today?’ You are in charge of your writing—writers make their own writing decisions. You may decide to return to your notebook and generate more story ideas, you may decide to rehearse for a new story, or you may continue to make revisions on your current story.”
- “Today I want to teach you that the lead in a story matters. It matters tremendously because a great lead sets us up to write a great story. More specifically, I want to teach you that we don’t just improve our leads by trying and trying to make them better on our own or by simply reading beautiful leads written by other authors. We improve our leads by closely examining work we admire, asking, ‘What exactly has this author done that I could try?’”
- “You’ve all discovered how we writers ease the way into stories, luring the readers to follow us with a special lead. But the secret that many beginning writers don’t know is that writers work just as hard—maybe even harder—on our endings. Today I want to teach you some ways to do that using the ending of one of our mentor texts, *Fireflies!* by Julie Brinckloe.”
  - ▮ *Teaching share:* “At this point, most of you have drafted and revised at least two stories. Today I want to teach you that writers draft story after story, consider which one is the most powerful, and then carry the best one to publication.”

#### **Part Five: Revising for Publication**

- “Sometimes, revision is more than just sticking in a new sentence here or there into a draft. Often, writers just turn over our first drafts on our desks and restart the process of rehearsing and drafting, re-creating the story so that it truly showing how the story unfolds, rather than relying on summary.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when your piece has lots of tiny paragraphs, this is a sign that you need to elaborate more. It means you need to say more

about a topic, a moment, a scene, before you move to the next paragraph. It's great to elaborate in your first drafts as you write, but you can also go back to a complete draft and realize there are places where you need to say more."

## **Part Six: Editing**

- "Today I want to teach you that a personalized editing checklist gives you a focused way to check and recheck your draft. Writers read through their draft using an item on the checklist as a lens to edit their work."



## UNIT TWO

# Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing

## OCTOBER

**W**e believe it is crucial for third graders to return to a second cycle of narrative writing. We linger for two months within this one kind of writing because we know that real progress comes not from constantly exposing children to yet another form of writing but from working within any one form to help children write longer, more significant, more conventional, and more graceful texts. The Common Core State Standards for narrative writing are exceedingly high—one look at the exemplar narratives included in the appendix proves it. Then, too, it is especially important that children learn to write effective narratives because every other kind of writing they will do relies upon their being skilled at writing narratives. For example, stories entail at least 50% of most essays, only these stories are angled to advance ideas. The unit, as described here, focuses on lifting the quality of student writing; on teaching rehearsal, revision, and editing skills; and on making reading-writing connections. This unit largely follows the *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing* unit in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. The real goal of this unit, then, is not to improve the quality of *narrative* writing but to improve the quality of *writing*—and of the *writers*—in general.

Decide whether you want to end your first personal narrative unit and start your second with another day devoted to an on-demand narrative writing assessment so that you can identify where in the continuum of narrative writing your students' work falls and use this knowledge to calibrate your instruction. You may decide not to do this assessment yet, saving it until the end of this upcoming unit, but keep in mind that at any point you can collect your students' notebooks and regard the entries they wrote that day as a very informal on-demand writing assessment, comparing those

entries with the ones they wrote at the start of the school year and seeing where their writing is on the RWP Narrative Writing Continuum. Look especially between the writing that students did at the start of Unit One and the writing they are doing now at the start of Unit Two. You should see tremendous growth—writers respond to strong instruction quickly and the results are unmistakable. Develop high aspirations for the month ahead.

## Part One: Drawing on What We Already Know about Narrative Writing

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You will probably begin this unit by telling children they will be revisiting narrative writing so that they learn to write it really, really well, with increasing independence. From the very start, help them understand that they will need to draw on all they already know. This is a perfect opportunity to teach children that writers carry a cumulative repertoire of strategies with us (a toolbox of sorts), drawing on these tools as needed. For example, you might say, “You already have a whole repertoire of strategies for generating narrative writing, so you can use one of those strategies to get started collecting entries,” and briefly direct children’s attention to the chart listing strategies for generating writing that you and your students developed during the preceding unit.

By referring to all that your young writers already know and by inviting them to draw on that full repertoire, you can emphasize that learning to write is cumulative and that any new work writers do will always stand on the shoulders of previous work. Children will have already learned that writers sometimes think about a person or a place or a thing that is important to us; jot down the name of the person, place, or thing; and then brainstorm small moments spent with that person or thing or in that place. You will certainly remind children to use those strategies again during this unit.

If the stories children wrote in September were sequenced, detailed, and a bit dull, you’ll want to tell them that this month they’ll bring more meaning into their writing. Sometimes when writers want to generate ideas for really powerful stories, we use particular strategies that make it likely our stories will be meaningful (and pleasingly constructed). For example, when writers want to compose a powerful personal narrative, we sometimes write about the first (or last) time we did something or about a time we learned something or a time we felt a strong emotion—hope, worry, sorrow. We sometimes generate ideas for writing by thinking about major issues in our lives—bullying, family pressure, and fitting in at school. Then we think of specific times we struggled with that issue. The resulting stories are often significant and shapely. In *Raising the Quality of Personal Narrative Writing*, you’ll find minilessons that convey a cluster of additional strategies for generating writing, and you’ll see, too, that this portion of the unit—suggesting strategies for generating writing—does not last long. The real work of the unit revolves around lifting the level of student writing!

Once children have written entries for a day or two, you'll want to read that writing. Look at their entries and think back to all you taught during Unit One. Surely you will have taught children to write about focused events, to start with dialogue or a small action, to storytell rather than comment on the event, to write with punctuation (and perhaps with paragraphs). Are children doing all these things in their entries? If not, act dumbfounded (publicly, in front of them). We suggest you make your astonishment at finding that kids' entries don't reflect all that you have just taught something of an event. You could stop the class in its tracks, ask writers to go to the bulletin board and get their published pieces down, and then ask them to look over those pieces as you call out some of what you thought you had taught. "Look at the writing. That's *you* as a writer. That is what you now know how to do. Look at the piece. Do some of you now know that when you are writing a true story, it helps to start with dialogue or with a small action? If you know that, give me a thumbs up." Many children will so signal—and then you can say, "So if you know to do that, why didn't you in your entries in this unit? I'm floored." Then you can list a few other things you taught during the first unit and ask writers to confirm that they've learned those things as well and then look at the entry they've just written. "How could it be that you aren't doing what you just learned?" This can lead you to suggest children try writing that day's entry again, this time using what they know about narrative writing to write well. This should lift the level of this unit from the start and remind children their learning is cumulative. If they added paragraphs during editing, they now know to write in paragraphs. Of course, children won't use everything they have been taught, but you'll want to let them know that in general, what writers do during revision and editing in one piece of writing moves forward in the writing process, becoming part of rehearsal and drafting.

As always, your children will gather entries for the first few days of this unit. You'll teach during this time by suggesting strategies and also by immersing children in mentor texts. Be sure that the touchstone text you choose to study is not the same text that wove its way through your children's narrative unit last year. Cisneros' "Eleven" is an all-time favorite mentor text for this unit and is used as an example in *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*. Some picture books can be useful in this unit, including Bob Graham's *Let's Get a Pup*, Jonathan London's *Hurricane!*, Yolen's *Owl Moon*, and Brinckloe's *Fireflies!* English's *Hot Day on Abbott Avenue* and Hesse's *Come On, Rain!* are also helpful. Once you have selected a touchstone text, read it as well as you can to your children, letting the text give them goose bumps. If the text doesn't have magical chemistry with your class, choose another! Afterward, you can show children that it is important to pause to ask, "What has this writer done that has affected me?"

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## Part Two: Rehearsing for Writing: "What Do I Really Want to Say?"

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It is important for you to realize that third graders can't usually spend more than a day rehearsing. There are a bunch of things they can do on that one day—storytelling,

writing leads, making and revising a timeline—but they usually do all these things quickly and then they’ll be ready to start drafting. Perhaps some of your stronger writers will have enough rehearsal skills to do this work for two days, but certainly by then you’ll want to channel them into a day of writing their drafts, fast and furiously.

At any rate, after children have collected entries for a few days, you can remind them that writers choose their seed ideas and then begin rehearsing for the piece they’ll write outside the notebook, and you can let them do this work with new independence. Your children will already have learned to tell their story many times, and of course it’s important to raise the level of children’s storytelling. You may want to teach children to plan a story with a beginning, a middle, and an end and remind them, before they tell the story, to think, “What do I want my listener to feel?” You could also remind children that storytellers stretch out the good parts, trying to be sure those parts really capture the listener. Before children draft, they also need to write a couple of leads, working to explore where in the sequence of events the story will begin, and try starting the story with a small action, dialogue, or the setting. The third-grade Common Core State Standards call for students to write leads that orient the reader, and sometimes this instruction leads students to summarize at the start of a story, giving background explanatory information. The risk is that once students start their writing this way instead of with a character (in this instance, probably themselves) saying or doing something, they often continue summarizing throughout the whole story. You may, therefore, teach them to start a story in mid-action, with no orienting sentences, and then show them how, during the final moments of revision, they can revise their lead to be sure the reader receives whatever orientation is needed. (For example, “I’ll never forget a moment when my Dad and I finally got along. It happened when we were on summer vacation, when I was six. ‘Dad,’ I called.”) You’ll probably want them to study effective leads. A minilesson in *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing* uses the lead to *Fireflies!* as an example (Brinckloe is an author worth studying). Of course, writing leads is just one way to get ready to write a story; thinking about the storyline is another. Your students will have already learned they can draft and revise timelines and, as they do so, explore whether to start their story closer to the main action or farther from it, so you’ll want to remind writers that strategies they learned earlier in the year are tools to use over and over throughout one’s life.

When you look at your kids’ writing to assess it, you’ll notice what qualities of writing you especially need to teach, and some of that instruction may influence the work you ask students to do as they rehearse for writing. For example, some of your writers will not yet have learned to zoom in on a small moment, so you’ll want to show them how they can take a big “watermelon”—the last day at camp—and think, “What are the little seed stories inside that topic?” This can lead a writer to zoom in on one small moment, an episode that might last about twenty or thirty minutes, and tell that story with detail because the writer is practically reenacting the story as he or she writes it. Then again, in some classrooms, many children are already doing this, so you can show writers that it is really important to ask, “What am I trying to show in

this story?” and then tell that episode in ways that highlight what it is the writer really wants to convey. This work is described below in the discussion of revision, but any revision strategy can eventually be moved forward in the writing process, becoming a consideration during drafting.

### Part Three: Drafting and Revising

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As in the previous unit, children will begin by making movies in their mind and drafting quickly—writing fast and furiously so the entire draft is created in a single sitting. They may not finish the draft in one day, but by the end of one day of writing, they can shift from writing to revising—and the fact that the draft was written quickly will make students all the more game to revise. You may need to talk up the fact that every writer revises, that revision is how a writer goes from writing well to writing wonderfully. This is where writing development happens especially. Children will have learned earlier that writers reread and ask, “Where is the heart of my story?” and then stretch that part of the story out, writing it with more detail. In Unit One, this revision usually involved cutting a paragraph out of a draft and replacing it with a page of writing. If children did that sort of revision in Unit One, then this time, you can probably rally your writers to do even more extensive and ambitious revision. Most of your students should be game (with nudging) to write an entirely new draft. The most important source of direction for this new draft will come from asking the all-important question, “What am I trying to show about myself through this story?” You’ll want to help your students know that when writing personal narratives, the same question can be phrased, “What do I want readers to know about me? How can I bring that meaning out in this episode?” As part of this, children need to learn that the same story can be told differently, depending on the theme the writer wants to bring out. An episode about falling from the monkey bars could be written to show that the writer was afraid but conquered her fears or to show that peer pressure goaded the writer to take reckless risks. This work, of course, is sophisticated for third graders. The CD connected to *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* will have student work you can also use to illustrate this.

There are other ways to support large-scale and important revisions. One of them relates to the fact that writers need to tell not only the external but also the internal story. It’s critical for young writers to add the characters’ thoughts, feelings, and reactions to events—this is part of the Common Core State Standards expectations for third grade. You will not want to teach this as if your writers have never heard of it before now, but you will need to remind them to reference the charts you’ve made during previous units and to draw on strategies they learned earlier in the year. In other words, explicitly teach transference from unit to unit!

In addition, in this unit you may want to teach children that writers’ revisions are always informed by their sense of how stories tend to go. This could become your entry into teaching children that stories are not, in fact, chains of equally developed

micro-events (as illustrated by a timeline), but instead have problems and solutions and are characterized by rising action and increasing tension. Of course, when children develop the heart of a story as they did in the previous unit, what they really do is turn a *timeline* into a *story mountain*—we’ve found over time, though, that it’s easier to talk about this as a story arc and not get children worrying about what exactly is at the pinnacle of their story mountain. Once you’ve helped a child realize that it can help to think of one’s personal narrative as a story, it is not hard to teach that youngster that the beginning and ending of her story needs to relate to the heart of the story. That is, if a child writes about the day she wins a big swim race, she may want to set up this vignette with a moment showing that all her life she longed to be a competitive swimmer and then progress to the big day. Children learn, then, significant ways to craft effective stories, and this knowledge is important as they continue to grow as writers. On the DVD *Seeing Possibilities*, you can watch Mary Chiarella give a minilesson in which she shows youngsters how to relate the ending of a story to the heart of it.

You’ll probably also want to help children learn that writers get ideas for revision by rereading touchstone texts as insiders, noticing sections that particularly affect them and then examining the text closely, thinking, “What has the author done to create this effect?” You might say that their stories remind you of those written by a published author. You could say, “Many of you are writing a whole lot like [an author of a text the children read earlier in the unit]. I wondered if maybe, as a class, we could study what she did, and see if there are techniques she’s used that we could borrow in our writing.”

## Part Four: Editing and Publishing

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Before publishing and celebrating their stories, remind writers of the importance of editing. Pull out that chart from the first unit of study and remind children what they should already be doing. Assuming your children have written with dialogue, you will want to be sure they edit for correct use of quotation marks. Make sure they are writing in paragraphs. Your children should also be responsible for correctly spelling the growing list of high-frequency words you have emphasized during word study. Some children will, of course, need more instruction in these things, and these groups of children will become your targets for a small-group editing strategy lesson. With the whole class, move on to a new goal, again keeping in mind the types of conventions that will be assessed in your state test.

Many TCRWP schools are using *Words Their Way* to teach children to analyze the spelling patterns in words. You’ll probably want to do this as well and also begin some developmentally appropriate spelling instruction. Whatever you are teaching in spelling, you can teach kids to use the strategy, “If I know \_\_\_\_\_, then I can spell \_\_\_\_\_.” “If I know *light*, then I can spell *bright*, *fight*, or *sight*.” You can demonstrate this strategy across the day, pretending to get stuck on words and calling

on familiar words to help you out. Encourage kids to remind each other of this strategy as well.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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During this second unit of study, your goal will be for students to work with more independence, drawing on strategies learned during September. If in your mini-lessons you refrain from telling writers what to do on a given day, you can watch for ways writers make decisions about the work they'll need to do and how they get themselves started. You'll also want to reassess the movement students have made with regard to crafting and structuring narrative and plan accordingly. A second on-demand writing at the launch of this unit will help inform the instructional decisions you make.

Your third graders should be writing approximately a page a day in school, and you should be noticing growth in both fluency and volume. Continue to help students who still struggle with volume set goals for themselves and rehearse their stories verbally with a partner before writing.

During the September unit, you most likely brought your students through the process of collecting, drafting, and revising twice and then taught them to revise (more in-depth this time), edit, and publish the better of their two pieces. You will need to decide whether you will do the same in this unit or if you will instead take them through the writing process just once, teaching them additional ways to linger and develop a seed idea, elaborate, and engage in large-scale revision and rewriting. You might ask, "Have my students developed the fluency to elaborate on one piece of writing for an extended period? Are they willing and ready to stay with one story, which will most certainly mean creating several drafts and revisions?"

The following suggested teaching points are based on *Raising the Quality of Personal Narrative Writing*. There are suggestions for additional teaching points you might incorporate. As with all our units, we encourage you to build on and adapt this work to meet the specific needs of your children.

### Part One: Drawing on What We Already Know about Narrative Writing

- "Writers hold on to the strategies they have learned along the way. They don't just forget them after a unit of study comes to a close. Today, I want to teach you that you already have a whole repertoire of strategies for generating narrative writing. You can use those strategies to get started collecting entries."
- "Today, what I want to teach you is this: when we want to write powerfully, one strategy we can use is to study the writing of authors we admire. We can read

their writing and ask, ‘What did this author do that I could also do to make my own writing more powerful?’”

- “Today, before you start generating personal narrative entries, I want to teach you one more strategy that I often use when I want to write personal narratives. This is a strategy that especially helps me write entries that can become powerful stories. Specifically, I find it helps to list moments in my life that have been turning points for me. These are often first times, last times, or times when I realized something important.”
- “Today I am going to teach you one more strategy that writers use to generate personal narratives. This one is especially good for generating entries that can be turned into really powerful true stories. We know it is easier to write well if we are writing about small moments that are important for some reason. So usually, we’ll want to recall times when we wanted something badly or felt something strongly. It sometimes works to think first of a strong feeling—worry or hopefulness, embarrassment or sadness. We can write a feeling on the top of a page, and then ask ourselves, ‘Can I remember one *particular* time when I felt that feeling?’ Then we write the story of that time.”
  - ▮ *Teaching share:* “Today I want to teach you that once writers have accumulated a mass of seed ideas, we search for one that we care about so deeply we know we need to develop it into the best story we can. We choose a seed idea that calls to us because it carries such strong meaning for us, we can’t help but develop it to bring out the beauty of the story.”

## **Part Two: Rehearsing for Writing: “What Do I Really Want to Say?”**

- “Before you can decide which lead will work best for your story or whether you want to stretch out one section or another, you need to decide what you really want to say in your story. You need to ask, ‘What is my story *really* about?’ and to realize that the same story could be written to show very different things. You could write about going on a Ferris wheel, and your story could show that you conquered your fear of heights. Or you could write about the same ride on the Ferris wheel and show that when you are in a crowd of people, you always find ways to be alone. As a writer, once you have chosen the entry that will be your seed idea, you need to pause and think, ‘What am I *really* trying to say in this story?’ and then let your answer to that question guide your work as a writer.”
  - ▮ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Have any of you tried to do a skateboarding trick? Or a skiing trick? Or a new dance step? If so, I bet you’ve watched someone who can do these things—maybe in real life, maybe on TV—and

then you've tried to imitate that person's prowess. I'm bringing this up because today I want to remind you that in the same way, writers study other writers whom we admire. This is how we learn moves that we want to use in our writing. Today I want to teach you to expand your options for writing leads by looking closely at how writers whom we admire begin their stories."

- ▶ *Teaching share:* "Today I want to teach you to become good teachers for yourselves and for one another, because each of you needs someone who can listen so deeply and so intently that you find yourself saying more than you thought you had to say. Good writing teachers listen, and allow writers—the writer in each of us—to uncover layers of an idea. Good writing teachers help us know we've chosen a good seed idea, and help us continue to find the words to write about that idea."

### Part Three: Drafting and Revising

- "As you work on your drafts, I have one bit of advice that I think can set you up to write an especially true story. This is it: you need to put yourself inside the skin of the main character. (The character is you, of course, just you in a different time and place.) Your job as a writer is to tell the story as you see it unfolding, looking through the narrator's eyes. Then, write on and on, letting your pen fly."
- ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Today, instead of helping you think about *what* to write, I want to help you think about *how* to write. And specifically, I want to teach you this. Everything that you did to revise and edit your last piece of writing can now move forward in your writing process, becoming part of what you naturally do as you write an entry or a first draft. What was at one time a revision and editing strategy ends up becoming part of planning and drafting."
- "Our stories are not just about what happens; they are also our responses to what happens. Specifically, I want to teach you that if I'm going to write not only what happens but also my response to what happens, then much of the story will be the internal story, and not just the external one."
- "I want to teach you today that revision is about finding and developing the potential in your piece. This means, first of all, that when we revise, we return to drafts that seem promising. So today you'll reread both the stories you've written and decide which one has special promise; that will be the piece you revise and publish. And then, once it is time to settle into serious revision, you again need to reread, asking, 'Which section of this do I think works especially well?' That is, after looking for the piece that is good enough to revise, you look for

the section that is the heart of it! Usually in any story, there will be a part where the readers should pull in to listen—the part that really matters, the heart of the story. And one important thing we can do when we revise is find the heart of a story and develop it further. So revision is not about cleaning up messes; it is about finding and developing powerful writing, and one way we develop writing is by adding more to the important parts of the story.”

- ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “Today I want to teach you that good writing comes from a variety of thought, action, and dialogue. As we reread our drafts, we often realize that we overrely on just one of these components of storytelling. We might realize our writing overrelies on dialogue, providing just the sound track. When we notice this, we revise our writing to show the aspects of the story that we have left out.”
  
- Today I want to teach you that just as our writing workshops usually follow one general plan or format, so too stories usually follow one plan or format; they both have a “way they usually go.” Writers know how stories usually go, and when we write stories, our stories tend to follow the same general plan. One way to revise our writing is to bring out the story structure that is probably hiding underneath our personal narratives.”
  
- ▶ *Possible small-group teaching point for strong writers:* “Today I want to teach you that characters in personal narratives sometimes travel through time and place. We do this by remembering and fantasizing.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writers orient their readers from the very start by establishing the situation and introducing the narrator or characters in the story. When you reread your writing, think, ‘Is the situation clear to my reader? Do they know not only when and where this is happening, but also why it matters?’”
  
- “Today I want to help you wrestle with just one part of your story arc, and that’s the part represented by the words *and so* or *finally*. Today I want to remind you that writers don’t just *end* our stories, we resolve our problems, we change our feelings, we learn our lessons.”

## Part Four: Editing and Publishing

- “Whenever you want to learn a punctuation mark’s secret, when you are ready to add its power to your writing, what you have to do is study that mark. You have to scrutinize it, examine it, study it with both your eyes and your whole mind, to figure out what it does. Today, what I want to teach you is this: you can figure out any punctuation mark’s secrets by studying it in great writing.”

- ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “As with most situations, when we are looking for something in particular in our writing, we will find it. Today I want to teach you, as you are editing, it is important to look at your work through many different lenses. Read and reread your work, each time focusing on one particular convention. One time, you may look for spelling. Another, you may look for fragments or run-on sentences. By dedicating each reading to one convention, your mind will be clear and focused, allowing you to clarify your writing through smart edits.”
- ▶ *Teaching share:* “Today I want to teach you that in this class, we have a great number of resources to strengthen our writing: each other! Our peer editors can look at our work with fresh eyes, helping us to notice ways in which we can improve the mechanics of our writing.”
- ▶ *Celebration:* “Today, we’ll hear a few stories together as a community. And then we’ll disperse to our story corners. It is here where we can have a more intimate audience.”



## UNIT THREE

# Realistic Fiction

## NOVEMBER

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There's no question you'll want to teach this unit to your third graders; the question is only whether to present it now or postpone it and shift into nonfiction writing for a bit, as we have often recommended in previous years. We've decided this year to recommend an unbroken string of narrative writing alongside some serious fiction reading. The reason is that the Common Core State Standards call for extremely high achievement levels in reading comprehension and the writing of narrative, and we're convinced that these increased levels of work are most reachable if units can build, one on the next, and if there can be reciprocity between reading and writing. Writing fiction is complex work, and students are most apt to be successful if it is absolutely linked to their prior work writing personal narrative. There are compelling reasons, then, to devote November to a unit on fiction writing. But one can imagine a counteropinion, and surely another option is for students to write realistic fiction while reading mysteries. What we do not recommend is that teachers ask third graders to write mysteries instead of writing realistic fiction. Many teachers tried this in 2010–2011, and the consensus was that a unit in realistic fiction is more appropriate for eight- and nine-year-olds.

As many of you experienced last year, the fiction unit detailed in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions* is a favorite among children and teachers alike. Kids are dying to write fiction, and their zeal is something to behold. They are ready to invest heart and soul into the unit, eager to write more and work harder than before. Although this energy is a wonderful resource, it also poses challenges. Youngsters are no sooner out of the starting gate than they are creating stories that are longer than anything they have written so far. As wonderful as this is, conferences can be

cumbersome. Partnerships can be awkward simply because sharing the stories can take forever. All of these wonderful problems are sometimes compounded by the fact that kids are in love with *every word* of their stories. We will offer suggestions for these situations, and you'll want to recall whatever you and your colleagues did last year that worked and tap into that knowledge.

Because this unit is sure to be an exciting one for kids, it gives you a chance to revitalize your own learning community alongside the kids' learning communities. Many teachers have written personal narratives in summer institutes and the like, but they don't often write fiction. If you and the other third-grade teachers in your school or district set aside one hour to work together, and if during that hour one of you teaches a fast-paced miniversion of this unit to the group and everyone writes flash-draft versions of tiny fictional stories, each teacher will leave that hour with a story he or she can use as a demonstration text during the unit. And each teacher will have a felt sense of what the youngsters experience in this unit. Best of all, you and your colleagues will have rekindled a professional learning community, and that cohesiveness could provide new energy not only to this unit but to all the units that follow. If you decide to do this, use the minilessons from *Writing Fiction*, only cut to the chase (you need to learn to crop them down anyhow!). Just use the teaching point and a tiny example, then give writers only five minutes to write. Usually you can skip mid-workshop teaching points and the share, but occasionally they will be important. Suggest writers don't bother developing several alternate stories but instead focus on the story they'll use as their demonstration text. Plan to get through seven or eight sessions in just over an hour of shared writing (yes, seven or eight!).

If you cannot do the work described above with colleagues, do it on your own. Also, whether working alone or collaboratively, you will want to remember everything you learned from teaching this unit last year and make sure that instead of brushing off whatever you did then, you stand on the shoulders of that previous teaching and learn from it. What worked especially well that could become a bigger part of your unit this year? What derailed your youngsters last year and could be circumvented or scaffolded this year? Although the unit is largely based on the *Writing Fiction* volume in the *Units of Study* series, you will also want to draw on additional professional texts and websites. But more than that, you will want to draw on your own experiences teaching this unit.

## Approaching This Unit with Clear Goals

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Kids will approach a unit of study on fiction thinking the goal is to write *fiction*. But, of course, we are teaching *writing to writers*. We always approach a unit of study by thinking, "What will this unit contribute to my kids' overall development as writers?" Throughout this unit, you and your colleagues will want to help children write a lot more than usual. Whereas your young writers' personal narratives probably tended to be a page or two, their fiction stories will tend to be four pages. For youngsters to

create a world, bring characters to life, and let a drama unfold, they need to write with volume, fluency, and stamina.

Because your children will be writing with terrific volume, it is crucial to encourage writers to spend more time planning. Rehearsal and large-scale revision are vital components of this unit. Revision is essential for writers to ratchet up their level of skills, and in recent years, we haven't seen anywhere near enough revision. So this is a wonderful unit for ramping up students' appetite for revision and their skills as revisers. Approach the unit knowing you will be insisting on much more dramatic, larger-scale revisions. Expect that students will create several different drafts rather than just inserting revisions into an existing draft. Of course, an emphasis on revision is also an emphasis on helping students understand the qualities of strong narrative writing, and this means that it will be important for you to locate mentor texts that can help students develop a keener sense of these qualities. All of this is aligned to the Common Core State Standards for third grade that call for students to engage in research, reflection, and revision and to write routinely over extended time frames.

Before starting this unit, you and your colleagues will want to assess your children's habits and abilities as narrative writers, using an on-demand narrative assessment. Then, to figure out a starting point for your instruction that matches your students' abilities, you can compare and contrast the students' pieces to those in the narrative continuum (found at [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com)). Think about what your young writers *can* do and can *almost* do, and use the continuum to help imagine a pathway that could pay off for many of your budding writers. Remember that craft is equally essential whether students are writing personal narratives or short fiction.

You will want to set whole-class goals at the start of the unit. Ask yourself, "What should students know and be able to do at the end of the unit?" As you consider this question (drawing on the on-demand texts your students have written), be sure you use your emerging sense of your goals for your students to help you choose mentor texts that match your students' needs. Although *Writing Fiction* uses *Peter's Chair*, you could choose a different text. For example, if you notice that your young writers are struggling to weave meaningful, internal struggles into their stories, it would serve you well to find short stories that have clear internal journeys, such as those in the Pinky and Rex series or in *Ruby the Copy Cat*. Or if you notice that the students are struggling to create tension or a turning point, you may want to find a text that does this well, such as *Come On, Rain*.

## Teach Students Strategies for Generating Story Ideas: The First Two Days of the Unit

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From the very beginning of this unit, teach children to see ideas for stories everywhere. Fiction writers get ideas for their stories by paying attention to the moments of their lives, letting everything provoke ideas for stories to write. *Writing Fiction*, for

example, includes a minilesson in which the teacher tells children, “When I was young, I thought fiction writers looked up into the clouds and imagined make-believe stories about castles and puppy dogs. But then I grew up and learned how real fiction writers get their ideas.” If you were to teach that concept to your children, you could tell them that Robert McCloskey got the idea for *Make Way for Ducklings* while he was stopped in traffic and a line of ducks waddled across the street in front of him. You can then remind them that writers carry our writer’s notebook everywhere so we can constantly jot down story ideas. As a child waits for the bus, he might see someone running to the bus stop and write, “Kid misses bus and has to walk to school.” As the child heads off to art class, he may write, “Boy makes great painting in art and wins prize.” Notice that fiction writers record story ideas, not just whole stories.

Of course, when writing fiction, we often take the true events or issues of our lives and think, “How could that have gone differently?” You’ll want to teach children that they can take both the tiny details and big issues of their lives and speculate on how they could become stories. Children may write entries in which they recount a bit of their lives and then speculate (in writing) on how they could turn this into a story. Session I of *Writing Fiction* gives the example of a child who has recently moved and who might make up a story about a girl who moved, only this time she could give that girl a companion (a dog or sister?). This could be the companion the writer wished she’d had.

Some writers collect ideas for stories by thinking of settings that resonate with us, allowing the setting to inspire potential plots and characters. A writer might think of the school playground and imagine, “Who’s at recess? What time of year is it? What kinds of events naturally happen on the playground?” Other writers get intrigued by the idea of characters and invent people who are fully fleshed out. These characters can then be mined for possible story ideas. A writer might spot a child on the subway teasing his baby sister. The writer then thinks of a name for that person, motivations, fears, obstacles, and then imagines the possible plotlines that would be natural outgrowths of such a character. Children can live collect story ideas just by living their lives.

You can also teach children they can use their notebook to collect story ideas. Any one idea can spark scores of others, and it will be fun and easy for children to fill their notebook with all kinds of musings about possible stories. You might demonstrate how you can start with a small moment, perhaps one you wrote about during the previous work on personal narratives, and use that experience to prompt a chain of thoughts. For example, you could say, “When Joe called me names in the art room—maybe I could write a story about a boy who also gets called names, but like me he doesn’t do anything about it—or *maybe* I could write a story about a boy who gets called names but gets the courage to stand up for himself—or *maybe* I could write a story about a boy who is a bully and discovers he is alienating himself—or *maybe* it could be about a girl who. . . .” Sofiya’s example on page 9 in Session I of *Writing Fiction* illustrates this nicely.

The important thing is that you do not identify four or five possible ways writers might use to generate story ideas and teach each one in a separate minilesson,

requiring all students to then try that specific method. Instead, cluster a few possible methods for generating story ideas into a single minilesson and then expand that repertoire through the mid-workshop teaching point or the share, so that within a day or two of starting this unit students will already be drawing from an excess of options, making choices, and progressing from writing one “story blurb” to another and another.

Throughout the first two or three days of your unit, then, children will be writing *plans* for how their stories might go, not the stories themselves. Some people call these “story blurbs.” A story blurb is a series of short statements, or jottings, that tell a story. You can expect that some students will misunderstand and end up collecting mere lists of totally undeveloped story ideas, each only a sentence or two. If this happens, you’ll want to demonstrate how to flesh out those undeveloped story blurbs. Using your own writing, you can tell them, “When I first wrote, I wrote like this” (and show them a one-sentence version of your own story blurb). Then, you can tell them how you returned to your single sentence to flesh it out, showing them that in your jottings about a possible story, you wrote a bit more about your characters’ traits and motivations and how your characters felt, what they wanted, feared, or cared about. Explain that it was important to be specific. You could give an example: “My character wants to have a new best friend because her old best friend has moved away. She tries to make new friends by trying out for a soccer team, because a lot of the kids in her class are also trying out. Hmm. I have to think about how this is going to turn out—how it could end.” Another example: “My character wants to go to sleepaway camp, but she is scared to be away from her parents for a week. She tries to overcome her fears by trying to do different things not to be scared. The first thing she does is \_\_\_\_\_; then she \_\_\_\_\_.”

As children make plans for possible stories, they will profit from trying out story ideas. A great way for them to do this is to storytell those ideas to a partner. A share like the one at the end of Session II in *Writing Fiction* will help them do this. Try telling children that the beginning of their stories should sound like the beginning of a famous book or of a fairy tale. “Once, not long ago, a little girl named Cissy. . . .” You might invite children to listen to storytellers on tape or help children rehearse their storytelling skills by telling a partner a fairy tale they know well. Elevating their storytelling a bit will help them cultivate a storyteller’s voice—and an aura of literary language—in their own story plans. But a word of caution: when children tell stories to one another, remind them that the stories need to begin and end within five minutes. It is helpful for children to become accustomed to fitting their entire story arc into a curtailed length of time. Their time will be better spent retelling one story to make it better and better rather than telling the one longest story in the world. The *Writing Fiction* CD includes homework assignments that you can make your own and use to invite them to do lots of storytelling. You’ll find that lifting the level of your homework assignments wins you lots of support from parents and doubles the amount of time your children spend writing, so use the CD as a resource or tackle this with your colleagues.

After collecting blurbs about possible stories that a writer could write, the writer will reread them and choose a seed idea (which in this unit will be called a *story idea*). Many teachers set a few constraints on writers, having learned from previous years what works best. You can choose whatever constraints make sense to you. Here are some possibilities: stories work best if the characters are approximately the age of the writer (this prevents the getting-married-and-having-quintuplets stories); short stories work best if there are no more than two or three main characters (this lifts the level of the writing); stories work best if none of the names used (or characters developed) are children within the class; stories work best if they can be told within two scenes, three at the most, each involving not more than approximately an hour of time, often less. Of course, that list is open to debate, and you will need to decide whether these make sense for you and your classroom.

## Teach Students Ways to Develop Ideas and Plan for Stories

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The young writer's instinct will be to dive right into writing the story, doing so in ways that rush the plot. The Common Core State Standards remind us how important it is for students to develop their writing through planning. Your job will be to prolong rehearsal, helping your children understand that revision begins during rehearsal. Meanwhile, you'll need to have on figurative roller skates to get around and confer with students ASAP. Front-end revisions are vastly preferable to rear-end revisions! For starters, you will probably want to encourage your children to imagine various ways their stories might go before they become locked into any one plan. Use your own story idea (or a student's idea that you shared earlier) to show that now, at this point, writers need to do some thinking that goes a bit like this: "I'm thinking that I really want to show how mean the older sister can be in my story, so I might have the boy be at home so I can have that older sister do something mean. I don't know if he should have an argument with her or what. It could be an argument about something mean she did at school in front of his friends—actually, maybe it could take place at school in the first place, with her doing that mean thing. That way I could be showing how important friends are, as well as how mean she can get." Thinking like this, written down in a writer's notebook, can help children understand what it can mean to write as a way to grow ideas, to write what they have not yet thought.

As you confer with writers and their story ideas, you'll be developing their knowledge of how to write effective stories. Be sure to carry with you all that you know your writers learned last year and during earlier units this year and show utter incomprehension if writers' plans for their stories suggest they have forgotten all they have learned. It is impossible to overemphasize the need to make sure that your writers draw on all they have already learned. As the teaching share at the end of Session IV suggests, you might pull out the charts you created during prior units. As you catch glimpses of the stories your children are on the verge of writing, be sure those stories are focused on micro-events, start with dialogue or a small action, and rely on story-

telling rather than merely summarizing and commenting on the event. A word of caution: the Common Core State Standards call for third graders to learn to start a story “by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or the characters.” As mentioned earlier, this has sometimes led students to start their stories using a summarizing voice. Third graders sometimes interpret the admonition to “establish a situation and introduce characters” by writing, “When this kid, Rob, gets home, he always wonders if his mom is there because she has a job and usually is at work,” instead of: “Rob slammed the door behind him as he walked into the kitchen. ‘I’m home,’ he called, even though he knew chances were good no one was there anyhow.” You’ll want to be sure that students start their stories with dialogue, small actions, the setting, into which they weave any information the reader needs to know. Students will need to study examples of this written by other students as well as in published stories.

As students write story ideas into their notebook, it will help if you bear in mind that the stories they write are not novels but are, instead, short, short stories. The effective story will probably consist of only two scenes (or small moments)—but these two scenes will ideally capture an entire storyline (a character wants something, encounters trouble, then finds a way to persevere, learn, or grow). After about two days in which writers collect story ideas, they’ll decide on a plot outline and, now that they have a general sense of a story idea, begin developing a main character that is central to that idea. One way to do this is to generate a list of external and internal characteristics for the character. (Refer to Session III in *Writing Fiction* for an extended explanation of this strategy.) You may refer to the work that your students are doing as they develop their characters as rehearsal, but this does not mean that writers will not be writing. They will be! But the writing they produce during this first week of the unit will not yet be the *actual story* written out beginning to end. This rehearsal can simply be thoughts kids write to themselves about a character, or it can be little scenes that capture the character in the act of doing something that he or she will probably do within the eventual story. If the story involves the protagonist having an argument with her best friend, we can begin by thinking, “Where might the characters be? What could they be doing?” One writer could take his character out for ice cream. With whom? Does he order a cone or a dish? What flavor? What if the service is slow—how does he act?

It will be important for you and your colleagues to plan not only your minilessons but also your small-group work and conferences around ways to develop characters. *Writing Fiction* will help you teach kids not only to list attributes of a character but also to think about how those characteristics help create a unified, cohesive portrait of someone. They might do this by asking themselves, “Does this character trait fit or make sense with the others I have created for my character? Does it make sense that my character is sensitive and also creative? Do these traits work together to make a realistic person?” The book will also help you lead small groups and conferences in which you help writers think about characters within the structure of stories—that it will be important, for example, for kids to think about a character’s motivations and wishes. You might help children think about what the character thinks he or she

wants—and what, in fact, the deeper motivations are for those wants. The minilesson in Session IV may help you think of other things to teach your writers in order to create believable characters. Students will find that it pays to live with a character for a while, thinking about the character’s daily rituals, routines, secrets, and quirks.

You don’t want your young writers to invest too many days in the work of developing characters—not because character development is not significant (it is!), but because it is important for writers to think about plot and theme as well. After perhaps two days spent developing characters, you will probably want writers to weave their thoughts about characters into their thoughts about the plot as they write a draft of their stories. As children write these drafts, your goal will be for them to write in ways that are aligned to the Common Core State Standards for third grade that call for them to “use dialogue and description of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and show the response of characters.”

## **Storytelling Booklets and Dramatic Enactments Can Make Second Drafts Entirely Different from First Drafts**

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Session V in *Writing Fiction* offers another option for planning—using a story mountain or timeline to develop possible plotlines. If you are unclear about what goes at the apex of such a mountain, you are not alone—the important thing is the story arc, the problem and resolution.

It is helpful for children to progress from thinking about the story they will eventually write to beginning that story, so let them get started on a draft. But before they write more than a page, it is important to teach children that writers have the ability to stop in the midst of writing, to pull back from the text and think, “How else could I have written this?” and then to try starting the story another way. To make sure that your students’ second drafts are substantially different from their first ones, you’ll probably want to coach them to engage in more rehearsal, even though they will have already drafted one start to their story. You might, for example, remind them that it helps to draw on everything they know about effective writing. Earlier in the year, when students worked on personal narrative writing, many of them probably made storytelling booklets to help them storytell a story several times before starting to draft it. Even if children did not do that then, they probably made storytelling booklets in second grade as a way to rehearse the stories they wrote. Remind them of this work, and channel them to use storytelling booklets as a way to revise their writing. You’ll need to remind them to fold a piece of paper in half (top to bottom) then fold it again (left edge to right edge). This will give them a simple four-page booklet. Writers can quickly make a sketch of the starting bit on the first page of the booklet, jotting a word or two beside the sketch. Then they can move from page to page, scrawling quick sketches of what happens second, third, and so on. Show children how you can touch a page in the minibook and say the whole story of that scene: “Janelle sat in her room feeling so lonely, wishing she had a pet. She just sat on her

bed, looking out the window. [Flip page.] Then, Janelle looked out the window and saw people walking their dogs down the street. She wished for one, too." You can then show children how you might revise at this point and try it a different way. You might say, "Wow, it seems like my story is taking a long time to get started! I only have a few pages to tell the story and I haven't even gotten to the good part where Janelle comes up with a way to convince her parents she can be responsible with a pet! So *maybe* the beginning could instead be [point to first page], 'Janelle walked into the kitchen. Her mom is stirring spaghetti sauce. "Mom, I really want a pet," she says' [turn the page], then maybe . . ." and so on. The important thing is for the writer to try out lots of different ways a story could go, revising the plan several times, before ever putting pen to paper. These booklets should be made quickly as they are disposable tools, like a quick, jotted outline.

As you do this work, you will help children understand that the one story could be told in countless ways—and that the story itself will change through this telling and retelling. They might change the character, give their character a different problem, change the ending of the story, change the setting, add or remove a secondary character, stretch out an important part, make the problem get worse and worse, and so on. As the writer imagines his or her story and tells it to a partner, the story will become stronger and the writer will learn ways to incorporate story structure and voice, both, in an effective story.

As you help children revise, the most important thing you will do is help them move away from summarizing toward storytelling. One way to approach this task is to suggest that instead of just *telling* what might happen on a page or two of a storytelling booklet, students can begin to *show* this if they can make quick, dramatic enactments. Session VI in *Writing Fiction* can help you teach or remind your students the difference between summarizing and storytelling a scene. You might demonstrate this by summarizing, then storytelling the first scene of your own story so students can hear the difference. Show children how they can elicit the help of peers to act out a brief scene in which the writer becomes the narrator and tells a small bit of her imagined scene while two or three of her peers act it out. Coach into kids doing this, into kids doing what they already know from the storytelling work they tried earlier in the year, slowing the action down and telling it bit by bit, including not just action but also what the characters are thinking and saying. In classrooms in which kids have tried incorporating bits of drama into a fiction piece, teachers have been astounded by writers who rushed back to their seats brimming with new thoughts!

## Continuing to Revise to Raise the Quality of Writing

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Of course, before long children will be writing another whole draft, and again, many of them will write a lot before you have had a chance to confer with them. Once children have started writing, it will become especially difficult to get around among all of them and intervene to lift the level of what they are doing. Each child's piece will be

long, and each child's plans will be complex and long-winded. To help with this, emphasize revisions that are large-scale enough that they involve writing whole new drafts—and lots of them.

Still, children will need input to write substantially different drafts. Rather than conferring with individuals, chances are good that you will need to devote most of your time to small-group conferences. Remember that your small-group work needn't be about the topic of the day's minilesson. Certainly one thing you will do in your small groups is remind students to use what they have already learned during the personal narrative unit, such as writing with dialogue and showing rather than summarizing their character's feelings. You can help children learn that the heart of their story lies in their character's desires and struggles to fulfill those desires.

Oftentimes in kids' drafts, a character magically receives her fondest dream in the form of a solution that flies in out of nowhere, like Superman. Likewise, usually when kids embark on a story, they plan for the main character to win the award, to be invited to the party, to find the missing item—all you need to do is ask kids whether lives actually turn out that way. Do people always win the awards? Do people always receive the wanted gift? When life doesn't turn out as we hope it will, *that's* when people dig down inside and surprise and outgrow themselves. That's when the real inner action occurs. If you encourage kids to rethink the pat, easy endings, those kids will not only learn about writing to discover, they will also learn that people grow through times of difficulty and that when someone closes a door, often a window somewhere remains open. With your help, children can see that the solutions writers find in fiction—as in life—are generally those we find in ourselves. For some children, the solutions tend to be more an emotional realization than a major surprise action. You could demonstrate: "You know, right now in my story the problem is solved because Janelle's dad sees her crying and surprises her with a puppy, but it seems almost like Superman landed and saved the day! Janelle didn't really get the chance to do anything! Instead, maybe Janelle doesn't get a dog but realizes that helping her neighbor Ms. Johnson take care of her dog gave her not just one friend, but two." You can invite your writers to consider the answers that have often been before their eyes all along.

Sessions VII through XI will be of great help to you as you study your students' drafts and form small groups. Often students are so focused on their characters and dialogue as they write, they forget to orient their readers by grounding their characters in a specific setting. They may have an entire page of dialogue between two friends without revealing that the two girls are in the school yard. Session IX will help you show students how to weave details about the setting throughout each scene, so that the reader can get a clear picture of where the action takes place. Then again, you may find that some students need help creating powerful endings that reveal some sort of change or even transformation in the main character. Session X can guide you as you help students bring out their meaning, resolve difficulties, and tie up loose ends.

While students are drafting over the course of these few days, your minilessons will likely be informed by your assessments of your students—whether from the on-

demand pieces or from your observations and conferences. Each lesson you will teach will be a front-end revision lesson that you expect students will carry with them not just into the draft they are working on that particular day but also into any new stories they will embark on in the days to come. You will likely want to devote at least one session to teaching students about staying in the moment—showing, not telling. Many students feel that when they are writing fiction they want to cover big swaths of story, as if they are writing a novel in a few pages. They simply do not see the small-moment work in a personal narrative applying to something that is made up. One nice way to make this clear is to pull out a mentor text and on a document camera or Smart Board highlight the places in the text where the author is showing (what fiction writers call being “in scene”).

You can also demonstrate coaching into a writer’s work to make it more “in scene.” For example, if a writer has written, “This is the story of a girl who wants a cell phone for Christmas,” you’ll teach her to make a movie in her mind of the exact story, and begin reimagining it, reliving it. The author should be stretched to write more like this: “Emily bent low over the paper and whispered, ‘Cell, cell, cell,’ as she wrote. On the page, she wrote *c-e-l*. Then she said, ‘Phone, phone,’ and soon she’d written, in her best spelling, *cel-fone*. Emily got up and went to the refrigerator and stuck her Christmas list under a magnet. ‘Mom,’ she said, ‘my Christmas list only has one thing on it.’” You can see a dramatic improvement between this detailed, in-the-moment writing and just telling (what can also be called *summary*). Students will quickly see that the most important points in a story are always in the moment, while transitions, time shifts, and background information are almost always summarized. Barry Lane calls this “exploding a moment and shrinking a century.”

Dialogue—and the overuse of dialogue at the cost of the setting and characters’ thoughts and actions—will undoubtedly be another key teaching point. We encourage you to show students that most realistic fiction has a nice balance of everything, allowing readers to hear, see, and feel everything the characters in the stories are hearing, seeing, and feeling. On the other hand, you might decide that the students in your class need help with plotting believable stories and making smooth transitions from one scene or even one paragraph to the next (a big push in the third-grade Common Core State Standards). If that is the case, we caution you against giving students a formula to follow when plotting their stories (“page 1 is this, page 2 is this” or “the set-up, the mix-up, the fix-up”), which leads students to believe, falsely, that stories only go one way and takes away important decision making that brings this work to a more complex level of cognition. Rather, we suggest that you return to mentor texts to note different ways stories can go—perhaps even imagining what beloved authors’ story plans might have looked like if we could have peeked. (What would Kevin Henkes’ story booklet for *Chrysanthemum* have looked like? What about Maribeth Boelts’ plans for *Those Shoes*?) You can then identify the arc of these stories and point out how and where authors give background information, get momentum going, and offer satisfaction to their readers when they read the ending.

Some teachers find the CD that comes with the upper-grade *Units of Study* an invaluable resource in this detour work. You might find that navigating through the “Tailoring Your Teaching” files on that disk will yield more teaching points than those detailed here.

After these few days of drafting, you have some additional choices to make. Do you want students to pick one of their draft stories and work it through to publication? Or would you rather students try their hand at choosing a few stories to try various revision techniques on? Whichever you choose, you will want to teach into students’ repertoire of skills for revising writing.

## Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

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Editing is certainly important in the writing process, as we are reminded by the Common Core State Standards. By now you’ve taught children explicitly to use a repertoire of strategies for spelling tricky words as best they can, all by themselves. You’ve made a big deal about using spelling patterns from the word study they’ve been doing (especially if you’re using *Words Their Way*), and you’ve impressed upon them that using the word wall to spell commonly misspelled words is an important tool that will not only help them spell a word correctly when they need to but also, over time, help them learn the word by heart, so that eventually it will be a word they just know. These are all the things we want children to carry with them as they begin to edit their fiction stories.

In addition, based on your observations and assessments, you may decide on some of the other lenses you want your children to use as they reread their writing. For example, children may read their writing through a punctuation lens—particularly the use of quotation marks and commas when writing dialogue. Kids’ fictional stories, which include lots of places and characters, also provide the opportunity for writers to pay attention to capital letters for proper nouns. Session XIV in *Writing Fiction* is filled with ideas for other possible editing lenses young writers might use. What you’re really teaching them is that when you edit carefully, you need to make a plan for yourself, choosing to focus on just one thing at a time, then returning with another focus.

You might also present this editing work to students by reminding them that there are some “rules” to editing, but there are mainly *decisions* that need to be made throughout our writing. A single sentence can be punctuated many ways, depending on the author’s intended meaning. In *Shortcut*, Donald Crews could have easily punctuated the first page as, “We looked, we listened, we decided to take the shortcut home.” Or he could have separated each simple sentence with a period. Instead, he decided to separate each part with an ellipsis, to build the tension and indicate the anticipation of the train. Writers are always making these kinds of decisions, and your students will benefit from your encouragement to take risks with more sophisticated types of punctuation.

Finally, at the very end of the unit, you can prepare children to do what they have been excited to do all along: publish and publicly share their writing! As this will probably be the most developed narrative writing they have done to date, you will want to make the celebration match your children's accomplishments. Your children can plan for a book-release party and invite friends and fans. You can read more about this in *Writing Fiction*.

## Word Study and Grammar to Support Writing Workshop

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The Common Core State Standards are a reminder that it is important for third graders to use spelling patterns and generalizations as they write. You might teach kids that when they are stuck on a word, they can think about the meaning of the word to help them spell it. For example, if the word is *patched*, kids may realize the word is in past tense, which will help them spell it with an *ed* instead of a *t*. If the tricky word is *return*, kids may know that the word refers to doing something again, and this knowledge will help them spell it with the prefix *re*, not as *riturn* or *ruturn*. Many prefixes and suffixes change the word in a meaningful way.

Many teachers find this is a wonderful time to help children use more complex punctuation to build suspense, show emphasis, and create mood in their writing. You can encourage children to find sentences they admire in published stories, ones that have lots of feeling and punctuation, and then consider how the story could have been punctuated differently to different effect, and from there try to think of different ways their own writing could be punctuated. How would it sound if it were in short sentences? If it contained a list? If sentences were combined? You can also help writers be sure the subject and verb agree in number and action: *A dog barks. Dogs bark. The girls were playing jump rope. The girl was playing.*

Before moving into a new genre in the next unit, you will most likely want to conduct another on-demand assessment, which allows you to examine your students' growth across this fiction-writing unit and study their use of grammar—once again you'll compare their work with the narrative continuum assessment and make plans for how their writing life will continue to grow.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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As you approach this unit, remember that the most important work in a unit of study is to create opportunities for kids to engage in work that matters. For this reason, we suggest that while these teaching points will prove helpful as a possible pathway, the preceding discussion will help give you a felt sense of where you need to make choices based on who your kids are right now and how you most want to help them. It can help you issue the wide, 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 the unit aims to highlight.

But in the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. This part of your teaching relies on your assessing students often—not in big fancy ways but by watching the work they do—and your seeing their work as feedback on your teaching. If you have taught something and only a handful of kids are able to do that work to good effect, then you'll want to decide whether that skill was essential, whether you want to reteach it in a new way, or whether you want to detour around it. You'll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching through attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they can and can't do, it is also showing you what you can do. From this attentiveness to student work and from your own persistence in reaching students, one way or another, and your inventive response to what they do, you'll find that your teaching becomes a course of study for you as well as for your students.

When referenced, the following teaching points can be found along with supporting materials in *Writing Fiction* from *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. The teaching points that do not refer to the book directly are possible models for modifying some of the book's lessons or supplementing them with teaching that will likely be more supportive of third graders early in the year. Of course, you will use them only when you find them appropriate and make your own modifications as well. For additional editing lessons, see Mary Ehrenworth's *The Power of Grammar*. For information on celebrating the publishing of fiction anthologies, see Session XV in *Writing Fiction*.

- “Today is an important day because we’re going to begin collecting ideas for fictional stories in our writer’s notebooks, and I want to teach you where writers look to find those ideas. And the most important thing I can teach you is this: we get ideas for fiction, just as we get ideas for personal narratives and essays, by paying attention to the moments and issues in our own lives!”
  - ◆ *Mid-workshop teaching point or strategy lesson tip:* “Writers can look back over earlier narrative notebook entries and can ask, ‘What if?’ or ‘What would have happened if?’ ”
  - ◆ *Mid-workshop teaching point or strategy lesson tip:* “Writers sometimes use photographs from our lives to help us come up with story ideas. When we look at these photos, we think of the story of the photo and then think of another story that could go with the photo.”
  
- “Today, I want to teach you that writers collect ideas for stories not only by finding bits of life or entries that could grow into whole stories but also by paying attention to the stories *we wish existed* in the world. Sometimes we get ideas for stories by thinking, ‘How can I write a story for people like me, so we can see ourselves in books?’ ” (See Session II in *Writing Fiction*.)



making a bunch of little story booklets and then telling versions of the same story (the writer's story) across pages of one booklet, another, and another. This helps writers figure out how lots of different plans for a story might actually sound, even before we write anything."

- "Today I want to teach you that just when writers are most fired up to write, most ready to charge into page after page of writing, we force ourselves to pause. We pause, rewind, and then we listen to what we've written. And we revise it. We revise our lead because by doing so, we revise our entire story. Sometimes, we do this with help from a pro." (See Session VIII in *Writing Fiction*.)
- "I want to remind you today that when we want to create a scene, we are creating drama. We sometimes use a line of dialogue—we make a character talk. Or we describe a small action—we make the character move or react physically to what is going on in the scene." (See Session VI in *Writing Fiction*.) This teaching could include enactments and role playing.
- "Today what I want to teach you is this. Before writers actually get going on a draft, we think a lot about ways to make a draft into a really good story. But once we're in the midst of the story, most of us try, above all, to lose ourselves in the story. We become the characters, and writing is a bit like a drama happening to us." (See Session VII in *Writing Fiction*.)
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point or strategy lesson tip:* "A sense of story structure can help writers stretch out the heart of the story. Trouble will grow worse and worse, the character will dig into internal resources to try to respond. How one deals with bumps in the road reveals what's inside."
- "Today I want to teach you that we need to be sure that we 'turn on the lights' in our stories in order to show the place and time, so that our readers don't have that disoriented feeling, asking, 'Wait, where is this? What's going on?'" (See Session IX in *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that writers take our time with endings, weighing and considering, drafting and revising, until we find one that fits. We know that a just-right ending will feel as if it's tailored exactly to fit our particular story. We know this ending will tie up loose ends, resolve the unresolved difficulties, and bring home the story's meaning." (See Session X in *Writing Fiction*.)
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point or strategy lesson tip:* "Today I want to teach you that writers rethink easy endings and discover ways that stories might get resolved, ways we at first did not imagine. We do this by thinking about changes our character will go through from the beginning of the story—and those changes often happen not just on the outside, but also on the inside."

- “Today I want to remind you that even when we move heaven and earth to write our drafts really well, we will each shift from drafting to revision. And specifically, I want to teach you that revision means just what the words says—*re-vision*. To see again. We can put on special lenses, lenses that allow us to reread our writing with one particular question or concern in mind. We might, for example, reread looking specifically to see whether our character development satisfies us, or to see if we’ve shown the passage of time effectively, or to study the way we’ve used varied sentence lengths and punctuation to create rhythm and suspense in a story.” (See Session XI in *Writing Fiction*.)
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point or strategy lesson tip:* “We may also opt to focus on the lens of *What do I want to show?*”
  
- “Today as you continue drafting your story, you’ll want to draw on everything you’ve ever learned about how to write stories well to make your new draft as spectacular as it can be. Specifically, I want to teach you that most writers set up spaces in which we can do our best work. We can put items and words into those spaces that remind us of all we resolve to do and be as writers.” (See Session XII in *Writing Fiction*.)
  
- “Today I want to be sure you realize that there is a place that we, as writers, can go to get new lenses with which to view our drafts. We can go to stories that resemble the ones we hope to write. We can let specific parts (or aspects) of a story matter to us. We can feel the lump in our throat, or see ourselves pull in close at a favorite part or sense ourselves getting hooked by the story. Then we can ask, ‘What did this author do that seems to work so well?’ And we can reread our own draft, asking, ‘Are there places in my draft where I could use that same technique?’ And then, reseeing can lead us to rewriting.” (See Session XIII in *Writing Fiction*.)
  
- “Today I am going to teach you that before or after you edit your draft for other concerns—paragraphing, punctuation, and so forth—you will want to read your draft, checking on your spellings. Usually this means eyeing each word and thinking, *Does this look right?* It also means rereading the letters in each word to double-check that those letters actually do spell the word you have in mind. When writers are uncertain whether a word is correctly spelled, we generally mark that word and then we try spelling the word again and again, drawing on all we know and on all the help we can locate to assist us with those spellings.” (See Session XIV of *Writing Fiction*.)



## UNIT FOUR

# Opinion Writing

## *Persuasive Reviews and Speeches/Letters*

### DECEMBER

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**T**he Common Core State Standards spotlight the importance of what they refer to as *opinion writing* (many people refer to as *persuasive writing*). The standards call for third graders to be able not only to state an opinion and give reasons to support it but also to create an organizational structure for those reasons and use linking words and phrases (*first, another reason, for example*, and the like) to help readers access that structure. The good news is that third graders want to be not only seen but heard, and the invitation to make their opinions known far and wide is appealing. They are primed and ready to produce their opinions about the books they read, the foods they eat, the movies they watch, and the video games they play. They argue for a later bedtime, a trip to Disneyland, and the opportunity to get a new puppy. It's a small step, then, to teach children to channel their opinion writing into a specific genre that exists in the world.

This unit supports opinion writing by teaching third graders to write persuasive reviews (work many third graders will have done in a less sophisticated fashion during second grade) and persuasive letters. Now that students are in third grade, they'll be taught to elaborate more on their thinking, to structure their arguments, and possibly to introduce counterargument as a persuasive skill. These reviews and letters, of course, are precursors to the op-ed essays and literacy essays that they'll write as they become older. The real goal of the unit is not to teach students the specific genre of persuasive reviews but instead to teach them the skills involved in using their writing to persuade others to believe what they believe and, ultimately, take action.

Long before you launch this unit, when you are just starting to read and think about how to present it, you may find it helpful to orient yourself to the quality of

opinion writing that your students may have done in second grade by reading some of the sample opinion-writing pieces included in the RWP Opinion Writing Continuum. The Common Core State Standards suggest that second graders should end the year creating pieces similar to the level 5 samples, and chances are good that students in writing process classrooms will have achieved or outstripped this goal. Of course, before you launch this unit, you will ask your third graders to devote one day to an on-demand writing assessment so that you can see more precisely what it is they can already do and can remind them to call on these skills. You will probably be teaching your students to write, within a fifty-minute period, opinion pieces that look like the level 6, 7, and 8 samples. In these pieces, students group reasons or supports into subcategories, elaborate on those subcategories from personal experience, and begin to think about counterarguments.

The discussion below is divided into two portions. The first is about writing reviews, the second, persuasive letters and/or speeches. You could, of course, decide to teach only the first portion of the unit. Notice that there is not a long stretch of days for topic choice, then a few days for rehearsal, then some for drafting and finally for revision. The unit is structured more like a unit on poetry, in which you probably do not expect writers to stretch out work on a single poem for a month. The same is true for reviews and letters. Instead, writers produce a notebook or folder full of texts and revise them often to incorporate whatever new thing the writer has learned.

## Reviews

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### *Getting Kids Started Writing Lots and Lots of Reviews and Living Differently Because They Are Critics*

The unit should start off with great momentum and energy. Your students will not want to spend days coming up with one opinion piece, nurturing it slowly, and toiling over drafts and revisions. Because the genesis of this writing lies in the likes and dislikes of children, you can encourage your students to generate many opinions and draft many reviews, each one becoming slightly better than the last. We envision your classroom during this unit as a hotbed of debate and talk, with drafts of reviews flying off the pencils to be read by partners, argued over, and finally revised for publication.

You may want to begin by gathering your kids and reminding them how people see reviewers as friends to lean on for advice. You can remind students where, in addition to newspapers and magazines, they can find reviews: book reviews are posted online; movie reviews are part of weekly television and radio newscasts; and the local bookstore has travel guides for favorite neighborhood restaurants, shops, and hotels. Then, you can invite the students to think of the things they like or dislike and to write reviews that will, like the reviews they have read, influence others. For example, a child's review of a pizza restaurant will become part of a restaurant guide written either by that child, alone, or by a group of children from the class. You can also read

aloud *Check, Please!* (a book in the Frankly, Frannie series) to show students the power a persuasive writer has over the audience. It will help create a drumroll around this unit if you display the reviews that children collect from newspapers, magazines, and the Internet. You can also encourage children to interview adults in their lives to learn how reviews affect grown-ups' decisions. Meanwhile, you'll want to show children that you use reviews as well. Perhaps you'll read a few reviews of possible read-aloud books and help children see how these reviews influence your choices. Tell them how you lean on reviews to find the next movie you want to see or decide which cupcakes to buy for the publishing party. Point out words that the reviewer has used, in particular those that express opinions, reasons, or details you think are especially influential.

You may also want to consider kicking the unit off by giving children a shared experience that invites an opinionated response and also reviews what the students know about review writing from last year. Perhaps they can taste different sorts of chocolate or ice cream (be sure to get permission from caretakers for an activity like this). Clusters of children who prefer one kind of chocolate or one kind of ice cream can work on shared reviews to promote whatever it is they like best. You may want to incorporate some debate moves in student talk during this part of the unit, having each student group quickly name what makes their choice the best and then having a class discussion in which all the groups hash out their reasons for why one chocolate is better than another and so on. This will help your students see that often reviews are not simply an "I like this" statement but arguments in favor of one restaurant, video game, book, or movie over others. Focusing on debate as they collect ideas can help your third graders begin the important work of this unit—elaborating why their opinions are sound and considering counterarguments. As your students are debating, you can remind them of moves from previous review-writing work; for example, as students are talking you can urge them to use specific details about their favorite to back up their thinking or to make sure that the words they are using are the best words to describe why their choice is best. Such an activity could provide a grand start for the unit and help both you and the children realize that they already know a lot about how to write persuasively and they needn't wait to begin cranking out tons of reviews.

You'll find that you needn't spend a great deal of time and effort helping children generate ideas for reviews. They need only think about their favorite things or books or places, then state an opinion, and bolster it with precise information that they'll dig up from their memories of personal experiences. Eventually, you can complicate this process by teaching them ways to gather information beyond what they already know, but for starters, this work is, in and of itself, important. Invite them to work with zeal and independence, writing one review, then another, and another. Some will work for half a day on a review, then write another. More of your students will work for a day or a day and a half on a review before starting a second one. You definitely do not want them all doing this work in sync, ankles tied, under your direction, so that they all crank out one made-to-spec review.

Once your children are writing reviews, you will start teaching them as intensely and directly as possible. There is no one topic to teach first, but a natural place to begin is by teaching them that they should find themselves living differently because they are now reviewers, seeing their lives as rehearsal. To support the idea that people who write reviews walk through life as critics, you may want to suggest that they carry their writer's notebook with them everywhere, recording the specific facts that can stud their reviews. Then, too, some students may want to use little scratchpads or memo pads just like the *New York Magazine* food critic Adam Platt. These pads can be made from half sheets of paper with eight to ten lines and perhaps a small box for a sketch, stapled together at the top. You might want to cover the staples with thick tape (they make colored duct tape if you want to get fancy) to make the binding stronger. The children can carry these around with them to jot notes about school lunch, the local pizza joint after school, and the movie they rented for the weekend. Figure 3.1 on page 44 of *Teaching Persuasive Writing, K–2*, by Sarah Picard Taylor, has more ideas for teaching students to generate ideas for their reviews.

### *Making Reviews More Persuasive: Adding Details and More Specific Language and Using Mentor Texts*

As children continue writing up a storm, you'll add instruction—via mentor reviews, explicit teaching, conferences, and small-group work—that lifts the level of their work. Earlier, you will have taught students to live as critics, seeing potential reviews everywhere and understanding that it's important to capture precise details: the name of the pizza that tasted so good, who produced the terrific movie, a description of the amazing opening number. In a similar way, it will be important to teach youngsters that as writers of reviews, they need to read reviews differently, asking, "How did the writer go about making this?" and "What does this reviewer do that I could try as well?" That is, you'll remind the children that just as they learn from mentor authors of narratives, they can learn from mentor authors of reviews.

As students join you in studying effective reviews, you'll want to be ready to point out some of the qualities that in fact will pay off for them. Of course, if your students have never written reviews before, you may find yourself needing to teach the basics of opinion writing. They may need you to teach them that a reviewer not only states his or her opinion but also provides reasons to back up that opinion. You can teach students who do not already seem to know this that it is important to state the reasons they are recommending something and then to elaborate on those reasons. For example, if a child is writing, "I like Roma's pizza the best," you can first teach them to make sure they write down why that is true.

Many of your students will write claims such as "Roma's pizza is the best" and then, as they proceed through their persuasive writing, they'll dedicate each paragraph to one reason why that pizza is the best. In one paragraph, the writer may suggest it is the best because the owners are friendly and then provide details. Then, in

another paragraph (not just another sentence), the writer may say that the pizza is the best for another reason and again provide supporting details. There are many ways in which a writer can work to make these details more compelling and vivid.

First, the writer can elaborate, providing more substantiating information. To teach writers to do this, you can always lean on the prompts to push thinking that you have taught in your reading workshop and that students have been taught in prior years' writing workshops. Prompts that could especially help reviewers elaborate more are *this is important because \_\_\_\_\_* or *the reason for this is \_\_\_\_\_* or *this shows that \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_*. With all of these tools in hand, your students will be writing powerfully persuasive lines like this: "Roma's pizza is awesome because the pizza is never greasy. The reason for this is they use real butter, not grease. This is important because grease is really bad for you."

Another way to help students improve their writing is to help them use more powerful material to elaborate. For example, you can help them notice that carefully chosen details affect readers. You can remind children that earlier, in narrative writing, they have learned that details matter—do they see this in the reviews they are studying? Chances are good that any well-written or persuasive review will contain carefully chosen details. You'll want to channel children to look back at all the reviews they will have written thus far in the unit—and they may have produced half a dozen by now—and think, "How could I rewrite these so that I include details that are going to persuade my readers?" The child who wants to convey that the pizza is delicious might write about the steaming hot cheese that oozes over the edge of the pizza. You might teach your students—all of them or just the more proficient—that the secret is not only to choose details that make one's case but also to choose words that have the right connotation. The pizza may have a slick pool of grease on its surface—but if that grease is going to be described at all, the writer might choose to call it a glistening layer of butter, not a slick pool of grease. Remember, if you teach this to writers, they'll then return to their folder (or notebook) full of reviews and put this new lesson into action by revising those reviews. You'll decide if these revisions require an entirely new draft or can be accomplished with flaps, arrows, insertions, and the like.

Of course, the details need to be relevant. You may want to teach children that reviewers tend to have in mind the sorts of things that are important to describe, whether they are writing about a book, a movie, or a restaurant. They can study different sorts of reviews and discern, for example, that food critics tend to elaborate on the taste and texture of the food, the décor, and service in the restaurant. Book and movie critics tend to elaborate on the characters and setting. Video game critics elaborate on a game's graphics and sound effects and what is required to play the game. Soon your classroom will be budding with experts on all sorts of reviews and using language like, "I could add some more about the ambience," or "I haven't said anything about the fun sound effects yet." Then you can encourage student partnerships to refer to charts listing these techniques as they reread their reviews searching for ways to add more and be more persuasive.

Students can also make their reviews more persuasive if they tuck small anecdotes about their subject into the review. Students can use what they learned from the personal narrative and realistic fiction units of study to craft tight narratives that illustrate the example they are using. The food critic may tell the story of the friendly waiter who delivered special straws shaped like flamingos for the kids to illustrate the high quality of service at the restaurant.

Another way to lift the level of students' reviews is to help them develop an organizing structure into which their reasons will fit. This sort of revision will be the most dramatic of all and will almost certainly require that writers write an entirely new draft. It may be, then, that you ask students to select their best review and to do this more extensive work on just that review. To do this, students will need to make a claim—"Roma's pizza is the best"—think about possible reasons they can cite to support this, and choose reasons that go together. For example, one child might say, "From the time I entered the door till the time I took my first bite, I knew Roma's pizza was the best. When I first entered the restaurant, the people were so friendly. Then when I sat down, the service was so good. But the best thing happened when my food arrived—the pizza was delicious." This persuasive review contains reasons why Roma's was best, and these reasons fit into an organizational structure. A simpler organizational structure is: "One reason is \_\_\_\_\_." "Another reason is \_\_\_\_\_." "The most important reason is \_\_\_\_\_." Then again, a writer could say, "My whole family thinks Roma's pizza is the best. My brother likes it because \_\_\_\_\_. My father likes it because \_\_\_\_\_. I like it because \_\_\_\_\_."

All of this work is essential to the Common Core State Standards for third-grade opinion writing, which expect children to "introduce the topic. . . , state an opinion, and create an organizational structure that lists reasons"; to "provide reasons that support an opinion"; and to "use linking words and phrases to connect opinions and reasons."

Yet another way for students to elaborate on their reviews is to have an audience in mind. If they can visualize their readers, they can craft sentences with language tailored to that audience. If the review is about the fourth Harry Potter movie, the student needs to think if he is writing his review for people who saw the first three Harry Potter movies; for people who saw only the fourth movie; or for people who have seen only the fourth movie *and* people who have seen the fourth movie and some of the others. Alternatively, writers can persuade through sentences that make readers believe the subject appeals to everyone. A food critic may write about the long lines, stretching around the block, of hungry kids and adults outside a restaurant. Comments like this make readers feel like they are missing out on something really important if they don't read a book, play a game, or eat at a specific restaurant. You may decide to tuck these ideas into a revision minilesson or two that support kids to revise their introductions or conclusions. You can teach kids that some reviewers build credibility in their introductions by writing things like, "I eat pizza at least twice a week, and I believe that Gino's is by far the best place in the neighborhood to get

plain cheese pizza.” Other writers begin with an introduction that quotes an expert or perhaps a character in the book. Showing your students these options, charting the possibilities with mentor texts nearby, and providing choice will be important. You can then teach students to revise their endings by providing conclusions that sum up their opinions, recommending similar books or restaurants if the opinion is positive, or perhaps directing readers or diners to a better book or restaurant if the opinion is negative. A star rating system or other ranking code invented by your young critics can also be added to the end of the review.

For strong writers who have mastered some or all of the basic persuasive structures, you may want to introduce the counterargument as a way to bump up the level of their thinking and writing. Although this standard doesn’t appear in the opinion-writing section of the Common Core State Standards until later years, the third-grade reading standards expect children to be able to distinguish their own viewpoint from that of the author of a nonfiction text. You can therefore reasonably expect (or teach) your strong thinkers and writers to entertain the possibility of another point of view on their topic and write a bit about that as a way to give the “other side” of the argument an airing. You could reasonably expect, for example, that your third graders understand that their favorite pizza place is not the favorite of all their friends. Reviewers, you might teach them, try to include other perspectives in their review to show that they know there are other opinions out there. So an added paragraph in their review might begin, “Not everyone feels this way about Roma’s. Some people say that the crust is too thin and that you always have to wait in line.” Then you can teach them that reviewers always like to get the last word in, so the paragraph might end, “But this reviewer thinks that Roma’s crusts are just the right thickness, because any more bread would be too much. And if there’s a line, well, it’s because the pizza is worth waiting for!”

### *Getting Reviews Ready to Share with the World*

Once children have been writing for about two weeks and have drafted and revised a bunch of reviews, you may want to teach them that some reviewers choose a review they want everyone to read and publish it on the Internet, in an anthology of similar kinds of reviews, or in the local newspaper. Other writers only want to persuade a small audience; after reading a spectacular book, a writer may write to her closest friend to recommend a book and tell the reasons her friend should read it. The same writer may also choose to write to the author of the book to tell him why the book was so great. Likewise, students may decide to write a persuasive letter to the chef at the local pizzeria complementing him on the yummy pizza but also suggesting a change in the decor. Meanwhile, the child who excels at movie or other sorts of reviews may want to study that genre in earnest and work with like reviewers to create an anthology. As you and the kids discover qualities of effective reviews—persuasive reviews—you’ll be encouraging children to revise the half-dozen draft reviews they have already

written, and you'll teach them to incorporate all they are learning in more ambitious plans for the new reviews they are writing.

Students will need to reread the reviews in their folders and imagine where the reviews might go. You can encourage them to post their reviews on popular review websites, in gamer magazines, or in the school newspaper.

## Persuasive Speeches or Letters

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You want to end your opinion writing unit by teaching your students that they can write in hopes of persuading people to do, think, or feel something. This sort of writing often happens in persuasive letters or speeches. To help students generate ideas for persuasive letters—letters to change the world—you might suggest they look to see whether their reviews spawn ideas for persuasive letters. If a student wrote about the educational advantages of a video game, she might write a letter to her parents in which she argues for more opportunities to play video games, or a letter to teachers in which she suggests that video games be part of social studies class. Other students may write speeches to give to the principal of the school asking for more recess. Still others may create videos or podcasts that encourage people to eat more often at the corner vegetarian restaurant. One way students can generate ideas is to use prompts that help them uncover their opinions: *people should* \_\_\_\_\_ or *people shouldn't* \_\_\_\_\_.

Of course, the students' reviews are not the only source of opinions in the room! You may want to encourage your young writers to branch off and use these same strategies to generate opinions on any topic in their lives. They can think about what needs to be changed in the world around them and what they would want to say to the people in charge. Your room will be buzzing with students saying things like, "I think we should have more recess!" Of course, students not only need to talk about their opinions but also must offer reasons for these opinions.

The reviews students have already written will help them write persuasive letters or speeches. Best of all, they will be applying knowledge learned in one domain to another domain. Webb's research on depth of knowledge suggests that when students are challenged to apply information, they work at deeper levels; the challenge to bring what they know about persuading readers to this new genre will be good for your students. They can remind one another to sketch out reasons an opinion has merit. They can remind one another to supply details and anecdotes to back up those reasons. You will remind them to be sure to use the words that really show what they are trying to say and to rehearse a few different ways of saying things to find the most persuasive form. And you will probably want to emphasize that they should elaborate on why their reasons are important. In other words, your students can use the same muscles they used to review their favorite pizza place to argue for a cleanup squad of kids to pick up the litter outside the school. In this work, you will be strengthening

the ability of students to have a position and argue its worth, which will be an essential writing move during the rest of their school days.

A letter or speech is nothing, however, if it is not intended to be sent or read to someone; this allows us to examine audience a little more closely. As outlined above, we can consider what information our audience has and what we might need to include in our writing to educate our audience. And we can definitely think about how the craft of anecdotes or examples can create a feeling in our audience. This is work we should do whenever we write. When writing letters or speeches, however, we will want to pay careful attention to the argument we are making, and look to see whether there is another reason or support that may be more powerful and persuasive to our audience.

One way to do this is for writers to think about the person we are writing to and ask, “Is there anything I can add that would really convince this person that I am right?” If we are writing to the principal about recess, our argument might be better if we add how more recess will help kids work harder the rest of the day, instead of just talking about how fun recess is. We can ask, “What kinds of things does my audience care about? What can I add that speaks to those things?” Another way to push your students to consider their audience more thoughtfully is to consider any counterarguments. You can teach your class to stop and think, “Is there anything that this person might say to disagree with me?” Partners will help mightily with this work—imagine students playing the part of the principal, hearing the writer’s argument, and considering where the holes in the argument are. Writers can then go back and add in lines like *some people might think \_\_\_\_\_, but I think \_\_\_\_\_* here and there, weaving in an anticipation of and an answer to the possible disagreements that might exist in the minds of their audience.

In publishing, of course we will want to honor these pieces as true letters or true speeches, which means pushing our students to send or present these pieces to their intended audience. In many cases, as teachers have tried this work, they have also taught their students to write a reflection of how this experience went—what was the person’s reaction, and what did it feel like to work on a piece of writing that had a real purpose and a real audience? Many teachers have reported that this has been a game changer in the classroom—third graders have realized their writing can have a real effect on their lives beyond the walls of the classroom, and this has altered the way these students have seen themselves, their writing, and ultimately, school.

## Grammar and Vocabulary Work

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Students at this time of year are looking to express their ideas and points of view. What a perfect time to explore various sentence types writers use. You might suggest some phrases that persuade readers: *clearly, you’d want; wouldn’t you rather; how could you not want to*. As this is the first expository writing unit for your third graders this year, you will want to teach students that writers of expository texts

also use paragraphs to separate parts of their writing, but with different purposes than in narrative writing: whereas in stories paragraphs change to indicate that time is passing or the setting is changing or a new character is present, in opinion writing paragraphs change to show the reader that different evidence will be presented, that the opinion writer is moving to another thought that nevertheless still connects to the main idea. Lastly, an investigation of the words used to hold a text together seems important at this juncture. The Common Core State Standards expect third graders to be able to “use linking words and phrases to connect opinions and reasons” and a perfect opportunity to teach this is while students are revising or editing their opinion pieces. You will want to teach children to use vocabulary to signal agreement (*in addition, furthermore*), to compare or contrast a viewpoint (*however, on the other hand*), or to interject (*or, yet*).

## Publishing and Celebrating

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As you can no doubt imagine, this unit lends itself to hearty celebrations. You can encourage your students to post their reviews on popular review websites, in gamer magazines, or in the school newspaper. Positive reviews can be handed to store owners or waitresses. Bulletin boards around the building can guide students to different local establishments or popular games or can warn students away from spending money on products they may not like. Another option is for students to videotape themselves delivering an “infomercial” based on their review and have other students watch the tape and reveal whether they were persuaded.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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You will need to assess your students and study what it is they need to know. The Common Core State Standards suggest third graders should be at level 6 by the end of this year. This can help orient you to the goals of this unit. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to understand where your children are on the RWP Opinion Writing Continuum at the start of the unit and help you plan your pathway. You also need to assess your students at many points along the way. For example, in Part One of the unit, you are hoping students create lots of reviews, beginning by reading like a writer and studying mentor texts to gather ideas for how reviews feel and sound, then quickly 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 this quickly. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and call out mileposts: “By now, your hand should be flying down the page.” “By now you should have written half a page.” You may need to observe your students closely to understand what is slowing them down, then gather a small group to nudge them into writing more quickly.

Later in this unit, you will be looking for students' writing to go beyond the basics of claims or requests followed by reasons. You'll be looking to amp up the other qualities of effective writing, such as using a persuasive voice and precise language and writing with detail and focus, pushing your students toward level 6 writing. You certainly don't want your third-grade reviews to look just like the second-grade writing down the hall! Meanwhile, watch to see whether students are engaged in revision. If you teach a new quality, you should see your writers going back to previous reviews—several of them—rereading their own work to judge whether they have already done whatever you taught and then initiating revision when needed. This part, then, supports revision as well as qualities of good writing. You will also look for independence. On any one day, some children will be revising previously written reviews, and some will be writing new ones. Keep an eye on volume and be prepared to set clear expectations and require children to spend extra time during free moments to make up the missing work if they haven't produced at least six or seven lengthy reviews by the end of ten days or so of work within this unit.

You'll also look for children's willingness to edit and their particular needs. Note what they can do without help, and think about how you can help different groups of children progress in this area. If some are not using pronoun references appropriately, for example, you can teach that now. If some are not rereading for meaning, noticing when their writing makes no sense or is overly repetitive, you can do small-group work to support that.

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

## Part One: Writing Persuasive Reviews

- "Today I want to teach you that some writers produce a kind of writing called *reviews*. They might write reviews of restaurants or of TV shows or of movies. If you want to do that kind of writing—reviews—then it helps to collect reviews that other authors have written and to read them over, asking, 'What has this writer done that I could do?'"
- ▮ *Teaching share:* "Writers, I want to teach you that writers who are trying to be reviewers (or *critics*, as reviewers are sometimes called) live differently because we are trying to write reviews. We watch TV differently, because we're thinking, 'Hmm, what is my opinion of this show? Is my opinion important enough to me that I might want to share it with others?' If our opinion is important to us and we think we might want to write it in a review, then we need to collect reasons for our opinion, so we pull out our reviewer's notebook and take notes. We use our notebook as a place to record the specific facts that can stud our reviews. Tonight, will you collect details so that you'll be ready to write a review tomorrow—of a TV show you

love or hate, or an ice cream flavor you love or hate, or a book you love or hate, or anything else.”

- “Today I want to remind you that after a writer studies a kind of writing—looking at a couple of stories or a couple of essays or a couple of reviews—we then say to ourselves, ‘So now I know how this kind of thing goes.’ And then we plan how *we* can write that same kind of thing—and we get started. We get started by scratching out a quick plan and then writing fast and furiously.”
- “Today I want to teach you that reviewers don’t just write one review and put our feet up—the restaurant reviewer in the *New York Times* publishes a different restaurant review every week! You, as well, can finish one review and start another.”
- “Today I want to teach you that after reviewers write a review, we reread it and think, ‘How could I make my review more persuasive?’ Sometimes we get ideas for how to make our reviews better by rereading the reviews that others have written and noticing things they did that really worked. Then we try those same things.”
- “Writers should find ourselves living differently because we are reviewers, seeing our lives as rehearsals. To do this we can carry around our notebooks everywhere, using the notebooks as a place to record the specific facts that can stud our reviews.”

## **Part Two: Making Reviews More Persuasive: Adding Details and More Specific Language and Using Mentor Texts**

- “Today I want to teach you that there are things reviewers sometimes do that we can try in our reviews, but there are other things reviewers *always* do—and we definitely need to reread our reviews to make sure we do those things. Writers *always* state an opinion and provide reasons to back up that opinion. Writers, if you are having trouble adding the reasons to back up your opinions, you might try asking yourself, ‘Why?’ and then adding the answer to that question.”
- “Today I want to remind you that as reviewers, we come to work at our writing desk each day, and we need to make a decision: ‘Will I be writing a new review? Will I be rewriting one of my previously written reviews?’ If you try your hand at writing new reviews, remember to use all that you now know about reviews—right away. You don’t need to wait until it’s time to revise to include your reasons or do any of the other things you’ve learned that reviewers do.”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers know the importance of finding the exact detail, that details really matter. One way to do this is to ask ourselves, ‘How can I include details that are going to persuade my readers?’ and not only choose details that make our case but also select words that have the perfect connotation.”
  
- “Reviewers tend to have in mind the sorts of things that are important to describe, whether they are writing about a book, a movie, or a restaurant. One way to do this is to elaborate on the important parts of the subject with the persuasive language critics often use. For example, food critics might elaborate on the décor or the service. Movie critics might elaborate on the character or the plot.” (It might be a good idea to prepare a chart students can use as support.)
  
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers are having a hard time thinking up reasons for liking or not liking something, it can help to put ourselves back in that place, that time. When we envision ourselves at the restaurant, playing the game, or watching the movie, we often remember more reasons why we liked or didn’t like it. We go back to that mental picture and ask, ‘What *else* can I remember about my experience? What was it that really made this experience so great? Or so awful?’ Then, if we do remember something that we think will help persuade our readers, we make sure to add it to our reviews.”
  
- “Today, I want to teach you that it is really important for reviewers to think about who’s going to read our reviews. Writers, some reviews that we write are for a particular kind of person. Sometimes we try to convince moms to buy things for their kids or kids to see a new movie. When we write reviews, we ask ourselves, ‘Who might read this?’ Then we think of information that person, that reader, needs to know.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that by giving specific information, we make our reviews more persuasive. It is more persuasive to say that a bakery has *thirty-five kinds of cupcakes* instead of *a lot of cupcakes*.
  - ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* “When we are including specific details, it can help to add how much something costs; where it is located; the names of the author, the chef, or the actors; or what is included, like the plot in a book or the entrees on a menu. This helps people feel more connected. It makes our views more personal.”
  
- “Today I want to teach you that writers persuade by making sure our readers believe the subject appeals to masses of people. We can do this by describing crowds, describing other people’s reactions, or describing things as popular or widely used.”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers persuade our audience by using sentences that make readers feel they are missing out on something really important. For example, we could add sentences like these: ‘If you don’t read this book you are going to be missing out on meeting the funniest character in the world.’ ‘If you don’t go to this restaurant, you are missing out on the best fettucini Alfredo, there is no other that tastes this good.’”

### **Part Three: Writers Revise and Edit for Precision and Clarity**

- “Today I want to teach you that when writers are ready to publish and share our writing with the world, it means we are ready to revise and to make our reviews the best we can before we put them out there for other people to read. Today I want to teach you that when reviewers reread to revise our reviews, we often think about taking away parts that don’t support our claim. We ask ourselves, ‘Do I have any details that *don’t* support my idea?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that one way reviewers use boldface type, underlining, italics, and exclamation points is to think about which parts are really important and we want our readers to pay special attention to! We ask ourselves, ‘Is this a big idea?’”
- “Today, I want to teach you that reviewers revise our writing by choosing strategies that will make our writing more persuasive. When we reread to revise our reviews we think, ‘Should I add more reasons to express my opinion? Should I envision the scene to give a clearer picture? Should I add more specific details?’ Then we ask ourselves, ‘Which strategy will I choose to help make my review more persuasive?’ Once we choose a strategy, we get to work, and then perhaps when we finish with one strategy, we move on to the next.”
- “Today I want to remind you that we can use our editing checklists as we reread our reviews to make sure they are ready to share with the world. We can check to see whether all the word wall words are spelled correctly, whether we used our best spelling, and whether we ended our reviews with proper punctuation and capitalization.”

### **Part Four: Writing Speeches and Letters (optional)**

- “Today, I want to teach you that writers write persuasive pieces. Writers, we have persuaded people well with our reviews. Now we can begin to think about persuading others—persuading people to do or think or feel something about the world. We can use our reviews as a jumping point to spawn ideas for writing

letters and speeches. We can start our writing by saying *people should* or *people shouldn't*."

- "Today, I want to teach you that writers don't just use our reviews but also use our lives to generate ideas for our opinion pieces. We can think of what needs to be changed in the world around us and what we would want to say to people in charge."
- "Listen up, writers! We already know so much about writing to persuade other people. Today I want to teach you that we can bring all that we have learned about writing persuasive reviews into writing persuasive speeches and letters. We want to make sure we back up our opinion with reasons, supply details that back up those reasons, and of course make sure we use words that really show what we are trying to say."
- "Today I want to teach you that writers pay careful attention to the argument we are making. We push ourselves to see whether another reason may be more powerful or persuasive. 'Is there anything else that I can add that would really convince that person that I am right? What information is vital to make this person feel that what I am trying to convince them will also be good for them?' "
- "Today I want to teach you that writers think about audience. We ask ourselves, 'What might my audience care about? What can I add that speaks to those things?' We think about the counterargument too. 'Is there anything a person might say to disagree with me?' Then we might add, 'Some people might think \_\_\_\_\_, but I think \_\_\_\_\_.'"
- "Today I want to teach you that writers pay attention to how our letters or speeches affect a real audience. We reflect on our real audience and how they reacted to our writing. We think, 'What did it feel like to work on a piece of writing that had a real purpose? What will I do the same or differently next time I write something like this?'"



## UNIT FIVE

# Informational Writing

## JANUARY

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Choosing Touchstone Texts That Align with Nonfiction Reading

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

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

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

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

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

## Assessing Informational Writing

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Drafting and Revising

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## Editing Informational Books and Preparing Them for Publication

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

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

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

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

- ▶ *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Information writers understand that the way the page looks helps make the information clear to readers. We choose paper that fits with the structure we're writing in."
- ▶ *Teaching share:* "\_\_\_\_\_ realized something as she was writing. She had planned to have chapters about \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, but as she was planning how those would go, she realized she doesn't know enough about those subtopics to write those chapters. But that's okay! I want to remind you how, when we were writing persuasive letters, we learned that persuasive writers cut the parts that are weak from our writing, and the same is true of information writers. We can decide to cut the chapters that we don't have enough information for, and either come up with new chapter ideas or focus on the ones we know a lot about."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers often turn to mentor writers to discover new structures for our chapters and find models for the structures we already know. If we're stuck and can't think of how a certain chapter should go, or if we just want to be clearer about a structure we're already trying, we can look closely at how the mentor author organized information in a chapter or a section and try out that same kind of organization for a chapter we're planning."
- "Information writers are not so different from opinion writers! Often information writers will include at least a section of our book that sounds more persuasive and that gets an opinion or an idea across to our readers. We know that kind of writing well, as we've just published our reviews and speeches! I want to teach you today that information writers might choose to include a chapter that shares an opinion. This might sound like, 'People should \_\_\_\_\_,' or 'This \_\_\_\_\_ is the best because \_\_\_\_\_,' or 'It's important to know about \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.' Of course, these opinions would then be followed by reasons to back them up."
- ▶ *Teaching share:* "Today I want to teach you that one way information writers rehearse before drafting is to teach all we know about our topic to a partner. We notice places where we need to collect more information and make a plan to either find out more about that particular subtopic or to replace it with one that we have more information about."

## Part Three: Drafting and Revising

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

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

## **Part Four: Editing Informational Books and Preparing Them for Publication**

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



## UNIT SIX

# Poetry

### FEBRUARY/MARCH

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A poetry unit is an exciting time in the writing workshop. No other genre grants young writers quite the same amount of license to explore, play with, and celebrate language; to be silly with words; or simply to give raw images and emotions a chance to fly off the page. No other genre allows young writers to infuse as much rhythm and beat into their writing. The playfulness of the poet pays off: well-crafted poems deliver deep truths, capture stirring moments in time, evoke images that readers carry with them forever.

A unit of study in poetry writing can usher your third graders into a new world of language appreciation: a world that fosters deep connections between reading and writing and a commitment to repeated revision. This unit offers a unique opportunity to zoom in on craft—from both the reader’s and the writer’s perspective. For although poets write to find and communicate meaning, just like any other authors, they also regularly “shift attention from the *what* (subject/meaning) to the *how* (language).” Ralph Fletcher recommends this shift in his new book *Pyrotechnics on the Page: Playful Craft That Sparks Writing*, and he’s not alone. The Common Core State Standards also expect our young readers to develop their understanding and appreciation of not just *what* the author of a text is saying but *how* that text gets that meaning across. “Playing” with language in poetry, if channeled, can make children feel like insiders in this world of literary meaning making and craft.

In this unit, you’ll invite children to explore the effects that are created when words are strung this way and that and repeated—sometimes even *invented* in response to some onomatopoeic need. Just as they learn to manipulate play dough or rearrange blocks and Legos, children can learn to take words and manipulate them to create new,

interesting things: wisps of thought, a captured image, a difficult-to-describe feeling. You'll teach children to see poems, itching to be written, in the playground trees, in the recess bell and the math test, in the best friend who's moving away. You'll teach children to find the poems that are hiding in the details of their lives. You'll do all this not only because poetry is its own powerful genre but also because the habits children develop as poets—specificity, comparative thinking, understatement, hyperbole—will serve them well in any genre of writing. It's also true that an understanding of poetry from the inside out will help them build a lasting mental framework for how poetry works and support their ability to read poetry with comprehension and appreciation, skills that are expected by the Common Core State Standards as well as the NAEP.

You'll find that authoring poems can free even the shyest of writers to experiment with words and their forms. This depends largely on how the genre is introduced. Too often, poetry is taught in ways that restrict and restrain. For example, in many instances, children are taught that poems must rhyme or follow some structure or format *before* they are taught that poems need to be meaningful or significant. Teaching form over function can backfire if children become so preoccupied with the need to alliterate and rhyme or be deliberately "figurative" in their language that they lose the heart and meaning of what it means to write a poem. For these reasons and more, you will want to start off on the right foot, putting first things first. "Poets write best when we write about what we know," you might tell children, repeating the maxim that helped them write their first personal narratives. As in previous units, you will probably want to remind your young poets that they can find significance in the big issues and ordinary details of their own lives, gathering entries and images and lists that might later be developed into publishable texts.

While poetry instruction can sometimes be too restrictive, if you're not careful to move quickly from collecting to revising and rewriting, you might leave students believing that in poetry, it doesn't really matter what we write or how we write it, because all bets are off and anything goes. On the contrary, because all bets *are* off, to some extent, in poetry, poets, more so probably as a group than any other kind of writer, care terribly about each and every word, comma, line break—even the white space, where there isn't any writing, is thought through and revised! After a broad and welcoming invitation to come at the page from many possible directions, you will want to nudge your poets along in the writing process, showing them a few ways that they might quickly move from first tries into revision, the harder but rewarding work of pushing toward more purposeful writing.

Some poets sit down to write poems right away, using only a little spark of inspiration to create lines and lines of their own poetry, then going back to reread, then rewriting again and again. Other poets cling closely to published poets, reading scores of poetry before writing their own, and may try out different versions of the same idea using different poems as mentor texts. Whatever the entry point, you will want to show your writers, through your own modeling and by looking at mentor poems and imagining the process, how to take a first-try poem, rethink it, and ask, "What am I really trying to say with this?" then use various techniques to tease out

different possibilities, different nuances and tones that are hidden in the first draft and that take many reworkings to emerge.

Explained on paper, this process sounds longer than it is. In fact, you can set the goal for children to write many poems this month, encouraging them to try their hand at a variety of themes, moods, tones, even forms. A child might decide to write about a sad or painful subject *as well as* try his hand at nonsense verse. She may decide to write about some element in nature (a bird or a tree) *as well as* write about a person—a favorite grandparent or a not-so-favorite sibling. In addition, you might encourage children to dabble in a variety of poetic forms, both free verse and rhyming verse, for example. Once children have achieved a bit of success in their initial efforts, you might even decide to spend a small portion of the unit teaching one or two more structured forms such as haiku.

Watch for pleasant surprises from your English language learners this month. This genre is relatively flexible in terms of grammar, and poems are often shorter than prose. This can make poetry feel more accessible to ELL writers, especially if they have an internalized sense of rhythm and meter from being exposed to the richness of a poetic tradition in their primary language. Also, this genre borrows from intelligences other than linguistic. Since poetry requires a sense of rhythm and since poems can have a lyrical quality, this genre may tap into a writer's *musical* intelligence too, just as the balance, precision, and symmetry in some poetic forms will appeal to a writer's *mathematical* sensibility. Expect your children to bring their own voice and style to the poems that will be created in your room this month—and be ready to celebrate this voice when you see it.

## Gathering Resources

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To start off the month, you'll want to create an environment in which children read, hear, and speak poetry. Perhaps you'll make fresh baskets of poems, poetry books, and collections in your classroom library. Or you might recruit the school librarian to add his or her expertise by generating opportunities for students to find, read, and reread poems they love. You will also want to gather and keep handy a core collection of poetry that creates opportunities for mentoring and inspiring students. *Honey, I Love*, by Eloise Greenfield; *This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort*, edited by Georgia Heard; *Hey World, Here I Am!* by Jean Little; and *A Writing Kind of Day*, by Ralph Fletcher are recommended. You may want to explore the Poetry Foundation's website, [www.poetryfoundation.org](http://www.poetryfoundation.org), which has a children's poetry section that includes children's poet laureates. An extensive list of poetry resources is also available on the TCRWP website: [www.readingandwritingproject.com](http://www.readingandwritingproject.com).

When designing this unit, *you* might need to call on some inspiration and mentors too! You can draw on professional books, including *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School* and *The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques That Work*, by Georgia Heard; *A Note Slipped Under the Door: Teaching from Poems We Love*, by Nick Flynn and Shirley McPhillips; *Handbook of Poetic Forms*, edited by Ron

Padgett; *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry*, by Sara Holbrook; *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms*, edited by Paul B. Janeczko; and *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises*, by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford. The poetry curriculum suggested in *Units of Study for Primary Writing, Grades K–2* could be adapted to older writers. Visit our website to find a list of other professional texts you might consider using.

## Planning the Unit

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From the start, you will want to develop and articulate a clear vision of how your third graders will publish. How many poems will they publish? Where and for whom and in what format will they publish them? This will, in part, be based on what you discover after conducting an on-demand assessment; your decision will also be based on what's realistic for the time you have carved out and your access to materials and publishing/performance space. That said, third graders are most likely still novices at writing poetry and will need support in crafting poems that intentionally convey meanings that are surprising, original, and thought through. Set a realistic deadline, and expect that, whatever the form of publication, every child will draft, revise, and edit several poems, using mentor texts and your lessons as guides throughout the process.

Immersion will play a larger role in this unit than in other units, from the very start and all the way through. Because you will want to teach your kids to be able to read poems well and thoughtfully, as well as how to use those poems as mentors, you will want to pick some touchstones that serve both purposes. You will also want to select a variety of poems to share with the whole class, so that you do not reinforce your kids' ideas that poetry has to look or sound a certain way. In addition to these touchstones, of course, you will need a much broader selection of poetry books or folders of poetry that students have access to for independent reading and apprenticeship.

The typical phases of the writing cycle blur together somewhat in a poetry unit, because, as mentioned earlier, you will want to teach revision from the start, not letting writers go for too long feeling that the work of poetry is simply to generate first try after first try. (Not that this will feel "simple" to everyone—some of your third graders will need more support in coming to the page with ideas for poems.) Instead, you will most likely introduce a few strategies for first-try poetry in the first day or so, then in a mid-workshop teaching point or share quickly show how poets don't wait for revision, that any first try is open for rethinking and reworking. You may then choose to teach a generating lesson that shows how a first try can spawn new thinking that leads to the writing of a whole new poem, not just changing a word here and there. In this way you will continue to support an important trend in your writing workshop: writing volume, which in poetry probably means writing lots of poems and lots of versions of poems, rather than writing long poems.

After students have a few pages of poems in progress, you will move into more serious revision, teaching children poetic techniques that will amplify the messages in

their poems. You will want to maintain a balance between the spirit of playfulness that makes poetry such a winner in the classroom and the intensity of trying to make a piece of writing get better, become more meaningful through craft. These endeavors are not as contradictory as they seem, and if you use examples of student work consistently to demonstrate how poems not only change but get better through revision, you will get buy-in from your young writers. The continued use of published poems as mentors will also maintain a sense of exploration and inspiration, as your young poets strive to mimic the work of their poetry heroes.

Partner work will be important to maintaining energy during revision—partners can help each other by giving feedback and even recommending next steps. A poet who has written about the loss of her dog in a story poem, for example, might read the poem to a partner, and the partner might say, “Is there an image of your dog that comes back to you over and over? You could try finding that image and repeating it.” In other words, partners can coach each other to try out the teaching you’ve already done.

You may wish to invite or require your young poets to create anthologies of their work, collections of the poems they have shepherded through the writing cycle. If this is the case, make sure that you plan time for teaching them how to select poems for an anthology, knowing that for the most part, the selection process will be one of picking the writer’s favorite, most polished work and possibly including the mentor poems that inspired their work, not necessarily choosing poems on a common theme. However, if you feel that some of your writers are ready to challenge themselves in this way, see the curricular plan for the fourth-grade poetry unit, which focuses on teaching students how to create themed or topic-based anthologies of poems by reflecting on different sides of the same topic. Since this is an extra constraint for a poet, we imagine that for many third graders, the task of assembling a collection of carefully revised poems in an interesting order will be challenging enough.

Depending on your choice of how your poets will publish their work, you will want to spend some days at the end of the unit preparing for publication. Whether this involves creating illustrations to go with the central images of the poems they’ve written or rehearsing performances to deliver their poetry so that the meaning is clear to the audience, this will be a critical time. It’s especially important that you teach into this a bit; in Webb’s depth of knowledge rankings, these activities can be low-level (if students simply make drawings for the sake of sprucing up an anthology) or high-level (if you teach them to identify the most important image in the poem and create a visual of that image that goes with the tone of the poem).

## Conducting an On-Demand Assessment

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Other units often begin with an on-demand assessment that allows students to show what they know about writing in a specific genre. Poetry need not be an exception. From their shared reading of poems and songs and their participation in previous

writing workshop poetry units, your students bring a diverse knowledge of poetry with them into the classroom. As always, you will want to assess what your kids know so you can tailor the unit and be responsive in your teaching. You might gather your students close and say, “Writers, we are about to make an important shift in our writing lives. We are about to move from being information writers to being—poets! As poets, we are going to see and think and write differently, because poets notice what other people miss, poets see the world with wide-awake eyes. So when I walked into our room this morning, I looked with my poet’s eyes and I realized that we have an emergency right here, right now in this room. We need poems! And not just any poems, we need the poems that only you can write. So let’s take today’s writing workshop to fill our room with our poems.” You may want to provide paper choices for your writers—long and narrow, short and fat, with lines, without lines. You might also want to provide colored pencils so that after drafting, writers can make their poems beautiful. When studying these on-demand poems you will want to notice, above all else, meaning—what is the message the writer is trying to convey?

## Poets Begin by Immersing Themselves in Poems and Generating Ideas

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Your monthlong unit on poetry may begin with what will probably be a two- or three-day period in which students generate lots of notebook entries that may later be developed into full poems. The generating process is as diverse as poetry itself. Poems can grow out of observations or emotions; out of memories and images; or from a clever turn of phrase that is borrowed, overheard, or invented out of the blue. Poems may grow out of or respond to other poems. They may grow out of a story or the writer’s concern about an issue or the need to make a difference. You’ll want to teach writers how to use their notebook to begin collecting ideas for their poems.

Surround your writers with mentor texts, not just by lining the bookshelves with popular anthologies but by displaying several poems around the room—perhaps even having a Poem of the Day display. (Most poems are short enough to be displayed this way.) Immerse your young poets in the world of poetry by making poetry visible all around them—published poets and poems help give children a vision for what’s possible. In addition to the collections you gather for them, put poems in places they frequent: “Pencil Sharpener,” by Zoe Ryder White, can be posted by the pencil sharpener; “The Drinking Fountain,” by Ken Nesbitt, can be mounted near the drinking fountain in the hallway; other appropriately themed poems can be displayed in the cafeteria, near your classroom library, next to the clock or the nurse’s office or the bathrooms, anywhere your students might spend a little time. Listening to poems being read aloud can also spur spontaneous ideas and words. An effective read-aloud of one or several (complementary) poems can create the mood and set the tone for your writers. “Poets get into the mood to write after we listen to what poets before us have written,” you might say before you read aloud a poem from your collection of

inspirational poems. “Poets sometimes respond to other poems,” you might add, asking them to jot a sentence or two after you’ve read a poem out loud. During this beginning-of-the-month generating phase, you’ll probably not be alerting children to particular craft moves that poets have made—that will come later. Instead, in these initial two or three days, you’ll immerse children in the genre so that they develop an active feel for it, and you’ll urge them to jot snippets of thoughts into their notebooks—lots of them—as seeds for their own poems.

Combing through *previous* notebook entries might evoke inspiration as well. “Flipping through the pages of our previous writing might lead us to poems that are hiding in the words, waiting to be written,” you might say, urging your young poets to take their pencil to previous notebook entries, circling or copying out a line or a paragraph that they might turn into a poem. Demonstrate how they might identify a section in one of their narratives or essays that has a clear idea or expresses a strong emotion or insight. Show how this idea or emotion might be lifted out and revised so that it becomes stronger.

Looking at images or going on observation walks (nature walks, community walks, building walks) with notebook and pen in hand is another way for children to observe and imagine what they might write about. Teach them to first write long about what they see, what they notice, and what this makes them think. Above all, you will try to teach—and model—a thoughtfulness and a wakefulness that is essential to getting a poem going. “Look at this sky!” you might exclaim during a nature walk, throwing your head back to marvel at the streaks of cloud and the the vivid blue above you. Say the visual words that occur to you out loud: “Blue—so blue—cloud shaped like a kangaroo.” Nothing you say need be very poetic or profound as long as you uninhibitedly model a sense of being alert to the visual details around you.

Varying the theme, you might read aloud a poem or two that express a strong emotion, telling your readers, “Poets pay attention to how things make us *feel*. We then write these feelings down.” You might follow this by showing them a few visuals (slides or photographs) asking them to look at these through the lens of how the picture makes them feel. Suggest that they try jotting more than just the feeling (*happy, sad, worried*) by *also* jotting what the visual reminds them of. Encourage association of one image with another remembered image or anecdote. These associations (“this reminds me of \_\_\_\_\_,” “this is just like \_\_\_\_\_”) will help your young poets come up with other images and pave the way for thinking more figuratively.

Just as some poems originate in ideas and images, some begin, quite literally, with words. A catchy phrase or a lyrical line can play in a poet’s head and eventually spur a bigger, binding idea. Many teachers start a poetry unit by bringing in song lyrics and inviting children to bring in the (appropriate) lyrics to music they are obsessed with. This is a way both to notice how songs are really poems (including line breaks, repetition, figurative language, rhyme schemes) and to use lines in songs to inspire new writing based on the same theme or image.

After a day or two of generating or collecting, your writers should end up with lots of small blurbs and/or first tries, all waiting to become poems. Often, these gathering-type

entries will not start out looking like poems, instead taking the shape of small paragraphs, perhaps similar to story blurbs collected during narrative writing or small patches of thought captured during essay writing. This is fine—and to be expected. These entries are initial fodder for powerful poems and will not arrive in their final and perfected form. It’s also fine if your children are using line breaks and creating entries that do look poetic right away. What is important is that children learn to generate ideas that have power and resonance for them.

A mid-workshop teaching point or a share during these first couple of days could already introduce the idea of on-the-run revision. Poets don’t wait until “revision” time to rethink and recraft something they’re working on. It’s always revision time in poetry. Right away, you can look at the lines you just wrote about a visit to the ER in the night:

I had to go to the hospital  
in the middle of the night  
for them to check my breathing.  
I was so scared,  
and so was everyone else.  
But none of us said anything.  
I wish I had spoken to the boy next to me.

And you can quickly try to add an image from the setting or a detail about an object or piece of clothing that will make this poem more piercing. You can especially look for a surprising detail or one that adds a new emotion to the poem. You might remind children of how, in personal narrative, in fiction, in information writing—in every kind of writing—they worked on bringing in important details. Poetry is no different. So you might close your eyes and picture the waiting room at the hospital and end the poem this way:

Most kids were there with family  
hugging them and cheering them up.  
One boy, a teenager, sat alone,  
no family, no one at all. His leg  
shook as he tapped his foot.  
I wish I had spoken to him.

You might also suggest that as the unit progresses, children can still go back and collect more entries, living their lives with the wide-open eyes of poets. In a few classrooms last year, students carried tiny notepads with them for just this purpose. One teacher described it this way, “Poets see both the big and the small, they notice great big issues and ideas that other people haven’t realized yet. They also see the smallest little details that other people just walk by. When you are out walking around, you might stop and see a crack in the sidewalk that no one else is noticing or think about

how everyone is walking around so fast and no one is stopping to talk. All of these things you might quickly jot down.”

## Poets Get Strong Drafts Going and Revise All Along

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Early on, you might also encourage children to talk with a partner and then write reflectively about the notebook entries they have collected: “I’m writing about this because \_\_\_\_\_.” “I want my reader to feel or think \_\_\_\_\_.” “One thing that may be missing here is \_\_\_\_\_.” This work helps children uncover the deeper meaning in their entries and prepares them to select entries that are calling out to become poems. Other good prep work is to have students start thinking early about how these budding poems might have similarities, how they could potentially become poems for an anthology that they might develop.

Now that students have several short entries chock-full of meaningful moments, observations, and ideas, you can invite them to draft these more formally and to experiment with the craft of poets. You will probably emphasize free verse at the beginning. Rhyming well is a precise skill that many adult poets find difficult to master! Teach children to aim first for meaning and for finding a way to describe what matters with words that will make the reader see the world in a brand-new way. You will want to teach students how to draft the bare-bones—the preliminary sketch—of a poem out of the ideas they’ve generated. Model how this might be done, especially for students who tend to capture or generate ideas in prose or to help students mold poems out of previous notebook entries, which will, of course, be in prose. “Poets know how to turn prose into poetry,” you might say, showing them that they can discover rhythm in the sentences they’ve jotted by breaking them up. For example, you may put one of the blurbs you wrote up on chart paper or the document camera and read it aloud:

I remember when I was at the park with my little sister. Normally we would fight a lot. One of us always wanted to get on the slide first. But this one time, my sister saw a worm. “Look,” she said, “it’s like a jungle snake.” I went over. “Ahh! A snake! Oh, no!” I said and pretended I was afraid. That is when she grabbed my hand and said, “I’ll save you.” I looked at her and smiled. I was really happy she was my sister.

“This is not a poem,” you’ll tell kids. “But I can find the rhythm in these words—break the prose into lines—and convert it into a poem. When I take a sentence and break it into lines, poets call those places *line breaks*. I can mark the spots with a little slash. I know from the poems I looked at that sometimes lines breaks happen at end punctuation, sometimes they happen at important words, and sometimes they just happen when it would sound good to pause. I’m going to add a few and then ask you

and your partner to help me.” You might turn back to the chart and begin adding slashes, all the while thinking out loud about your decisions:

I remember when / I was at the park / with my little sister. / Normally / we would  
fight / a lot./

You could then ask students to help you add other line breaks to the poem.

Next, show your class how you can quickly rewrite a draft of your poem, going to a new line at each slash mark:

I remember when  
I was at the park  
with my little sister.

While you write you might think about your mentor texts and decide to experiment with the same blurb again but in a different way. Usually, when students feel that each try is just experimenting, just playing around, there is a lot more freedom—even willingness—in their choices and in their attempts.

You will decide which kinds of work to demonstrate for your whole class, which are good for small groups or individual conferences, and what order feels most appropriate. Beginning with more structural changes will help students very quickly see their potential as poets. Experimenting with making lines and stanzas will quickly create the visual look of a poem. Noticing how poets often do not write out full and complete sentences, instead eliminating extra words and getting right to the important stuff, will also quickly help your children see themselves as poets. For example:

Going from:	To:
I remember when	I remember
I was at the park	the park
with my little sister.	my little sister

In addition to structure, students might experiment (at this point rather freely and loosely) with imagery or rhyme schemes, which they will develop further during revision. “Poets sometimes create powerful pictures,” you might say, perhaps introducing the academic term *imagery* and explaining that poets, just like other kinds of writers, often create images to help readers better understand what they are trying to say. All the while continue to help your students look back to the mentor poems for examples and inspiration.

Sometimes at a point like this teachers instinctively jump into tons of rules: explaining the difference between *metaphors* and *similes* and studying many examples of them. All of this is important, but for this rehearsal stage you might decide that your students will benefit more from feeling free to try things out and discover what it is that their

poem should say or do. Help children see craft choices as just that, *choices*, not assignments or gimmicks to force into their writing. We have all read student poems that, for example, make rhyme far more important than substance: “My mom is nice / I like to eat rice,” or poems that have so much onomatopoeia that you can barely make sense of what is going on: “Smash, boom / Gurgle, splat.” The danger is that students start plugging craft techniques into their poems *just because*, not because it really matters to the meaning they are trying to convey. Instead of teaching the formal functions of similes and metaphors at this point, you might teach them how to create “mind pictures” by placing an ordinary thing next to something it’s never been compared with before: “Today the sky looks soft and worn, like my old baby blanket.” Save a further discussion of rules until later in the unit, after they have fallen more in love with this craft strategy.

## Poets Revise, Revise, Revise to Perfect Our Craft

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Although it’s important to complete a piece of writing, and deeply satisfying to publish, we need to switch the focus away from the final product to the process of writing, which, of course, includes the revision process.

—GEORGIA HEARD, *The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques That Work*

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Once children have a few strong drafts in progress, you’ll want to teach deliberate craft moves to help them polish and revise their work. That is, once they have a general idea of what they want their poems to say, you’ll remind them that “revision makes the poet” (as it does the prose writer). Remind them of revision strategies they *already know* from their earlier narrative and even essay units. For example, they could try starting right in the moment, instead of summarizing everything about their subject. They could try choosing more precise words. While poetry is a looser, freer form of writing, it is still *writing* and your year is built on spiraling skills to help students become more and more independent about the choices they make as writers; you want them to tap the potential of poetry to deepen the work they have been developing all year.

The revision strategies you might teach your young poets are limitless. These “revisions” will often be specific craft moves such as whittling away excess words, being deliberate about tone and mood, inserting figurative language—the list is long and you will choose what you might fit comfortably into your instruction this month. You will want to draft a poem or two of your own in front of the class and use them as models on which to demonstrate each revision strategy. In each case, you’ll want children to see clearly what you did, how they might do the same, and also that this move made the poem visibly better.

For example, one revision lesson could focus on how alternate titles can enhance the meaning of a poem by adding more to the ideas, being more literal than the rest

of the poem, or even setting up readers to expect one thing and then be surprised when the poem goes in a totally new direction. As readers of poems, your students also no doubt have already learned how beginnings and endings play a huge role in the poem's meaning; they can now put great care into the construction of their own. You might teach them that the last moments of a poem are like a gift to the reader, how they usually leave a final special image or contain the poet's big idea or comment about everything that come before, and how this can be surprising or beautiful or moving. Just as in narrative and essay writing, your young poets will want to try out various ways their endings could go.

As students meet with their partners to read and revise their poems, you will want to urge them to play with punctuation. They might refer to the inquiry charts on punctuation. You will want students to challenge one another on the true meaning of their poems. If they want the mood of the poem to be sad, they might decide that it is best to have fewer exclamation points ("Exclamation points make everything sound upbeat and exciting, so they won't fit here") and more periods and perhaps a dash to show long pauses. Students might plan to use commas to break apart a list of things or to add more detail-supplying words: "The bright, yellow leaf died / as it drifted, softly, quietly to the ground."

You will also want to teach children how the tone of a poem is crafted quite deliberately by the poet, and how word choice plays a large part in creating that tone. Read a few poems out loud and ask children to identify the tone of each before examining more closely how each poet crafted this tone: the words, the punctuation, the line breaks will all have played their part. This is a good time, also, to chart "degrees" of verbs for students to refer to as they make word choices. For example, create a chart with children that lists different words they can use instead of *walk* such as *trot*, *tiptoe*, and *strut*. In this way you are not only teaching word choice but also helping children learn new vocabulary. Often, third graders spend time adding adjectives that don't necessarily create a vivid image. Teach students to abandon overused adjectives such as *beautiful* and *pretty* and focus on using precise description. "The beautiful bird" could be changed to "the grey and white striped bird." You are really teaching children to write with precision—a skill they need in any genre.

As your young poets revise, it might help them to think about the ways poets share their messages with readers: through ideas, through sounds, and through visual images. Teachers in previous years have sometimes categorized their revision strategies in these ways, both in their instruction and on charts posted in the room. Children can try to create *sounds* in their poem to further express their thoughts and feelings, how their lines could have rhymes between them or even within them. You might show them published poets who are really skilled at rhyming, like Jack Prelutsky, and teach your students that to rhyme is a choice, not a requirement, of poetry. Which words to rhyme are a more important decision. Prelutsky often chooses words for comic effect. In his poem "My Parents Think I'm Sleeping" he rhymes the word *gone* with *flashlight on*: "I was quiet as my shadow / till the moment they were gone, / then I dove beneath the covers / and I snapped my flashlight on." Other sounds are

important too. You might go back to one of your own mentor texts that you read aloud and look again with your class at how long vowel sounds can have a very different effect than short, choppy, hard consonant sounds. They might also revise for the sounds of their poems by looking again at the choices they are making with repetition and punctuation, both of which can change the way lines and stanzas sound. Your young poets will hardly be able to contain the urge to read their poems aloud, and partners can help a great deal here—either listening, or better yet, reading the poem back to the poet to see whether the words he or she wrote make a reader hear the sounds the way the poet hoped.

Poets also convey their ideas visually, and as they revise children can decide how long or short their lines are on the page, whether there are stanzas or not and how many, which words are capitalized, and what punctuation to use. They will learn how poets use the “white space” around the words to pause, take a breath, and make something stand out from all the other words.

Revision is a perfect time to look at a few standard forms of poetry, though it is probably not necessary (or wise) to attempt to teach every (or even any) form unless you feel that both you and your students will benefit and be interested. Once students have lived with their entries for some time and have worked on many different permutations and mined them for meaning, inviting them to experiment with how, say, a limerick or haiku or pantoum might enhance what they are trying to say can feel really powerful and now purposeful. Choosing to work on form near the end of the unit, not the beginning, means that students are making *choices* about how and when to use a certain form, versus simply filling in blanks just to get the right number of syllables. For instance, the entry about going to the park with your younger sister might be really beautiful as a haiku, now that you understand what you are really trying to say:

Always we would fight.  
But, when a pretend snake came,  
my sister saved me.

## Poets Edit Our Poems before Sharing Them with the World

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Editing poetry, at first, can feel oxymoronic. How do you teach students to look for rules of standard English when poetry breaks so many of those rules? Although poetry *can* break rules, no one poem breaks *all* the rules—otherwise readers could make no sense of it. So you may want to tell your writers that poets edit with our reader in mind. We make purposeful choices about what kinds of grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules we are going to follow and if we choose not follow some, what alternate rules we will follow. For instance, we might decide that at the end of every idea we will not use a period but instead go to a new line. When we edit, we’ll check that we always do this. Or we might choose to capitalize following standard rules and check for this. In other words, you’ll teach children to edit their poems for consistency in the grammar rules they’ve chosen to observe.

Editing in poetry is also about sound. Children will probably read their poems aloud several times checking each time whether they included all the marks, line breaks, and kinds of words that make their poem read just as they want it to sound.

As you approach celebration, you may invite your poets to make choices about how they will share their poems with others. Poetry is multisensory: create a celebration that reflects the many dimensions of poetry. In some classrooms, students decorate the poems and post them in public places throughout the school and the neighborhood. In others, students read and perform poems, both ones they've written and those published by their mentors—not only in the classroom but also in the larger community. Some students mail a poem to someone who really needs to hear it or would be grateful to receive it. Still other classrooms create poetry anthologies. Students might look at all their different poems and consider how some of them might fit together. Some poets do this within themes—we might notice that many of our poems are about family or about feeling proud or about an important place.

Writing partners are very helpful during this phase of the writing process. Questions to ask a writer to help him or her choose poems to publish are:

- Which of your poems do you like the best? Why?
- What are some different ways you could group your poems together?
- What kind of poetry writing do you enjoy the most?
- Which images do you love?

As children assemble their poems, they might also decide to include the mentor poems they used or other published poems that fit the theme. This might also be a good opportunity to invite students to carry some of their biggest discoveries about themselves as writers into different genres. A writer might go back to an entry from, say, September or October that fits within their same theme and revise it, considering not only the meaning but also the sound of the sentences. An excerpt could find its way into the celebration.

Regardless of how students choose to publish, remember that the secret of poetry is heart. Poets write from the heart. Poets teach all of us to look at the world differently. They help us celebrate small beauties. They inspire us to be outraged over injustices great and small. Therefore, as this unit draws to a close, focus on the work that poets do in the world, the way poets love the world through words. Focus on the way poems sustain us during hard times, the way poets express outrage and grief and joy, how poems can connect our hearts and minds to one another.



## UNIT SEVEN

# Genre Studies

MARCH/APRIL

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**A**t this point in the year, as our students prepare for the state test, we often find ourselves assessing the strides they have made and anticipating the ground they still need to cover to meet the challenges ahead. “What have my children mastered in reading and writing?” you might find yourself asking. “What do they still need to learn to do well on the test?” We know that one skill children must master is that of reading and writing flexibly enough to attend to the nuanced demands of the test. In reading, they must be ready to attune themselves to meaning and theme when reading a folktale and then switch their mind’s eye to looking for boxes and bullets when reading a nonfiction article. This elasticity is imperative to their success, and this writing unit is designed to prepare your students for these challenges. You will help prepare third graders for the *reading* portion of the text by teaching them to *write* in various genres—employing the craft techniques and structures that are synonymous with specific forms of writing as they do.

In this unit you will teach children to write quickly in the genres they’ll see on the state test. That is, they will write a two- or three-day draft of an article, then a two- or three-day draft of a folktale, and so on. The ultimate goal is not to finish this unit with a pile of perfectly published, final drafts. Rather, you’ll want to teach children to write with a consciousness of craft, to ask, “How do pieces in this genre tend to go?” and then write to exemplify those qualities. You will want to plan this unit carefully, building in just a few days for quick-writing in various genres. During each of these “mini-genre studies,” students will study mentor texts, flash-draft a piece of their own, and revise with the qualities of that genre in mind.

The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of reciprocity in the “craft and structure” band of the reading standards: they expect students to be able to identify craft moves and structures in texts and apply what they notice to their own writing. Even third graders are expected to be able to recognize, discuss, and differentiate genres. If students spend a bit of time studying a text and then a bit of time creating a similar text, they are in essence moving back and forth between modes of thinking—between the role of the reader and the role of the writer—which will enable them to more deeply understand the texts they encounter in the world. This kind of work also represents a high level of cognitive complexity in Webb’s depth of knowledge progression, because students will be analyzing the texts they are reading, then applying this analysis to their own writing in a new context. If they can write it, they can read it—that is, reading and writing are reciprocal.

It may be helpful to consider the world of sports and games for a moment. If you were to encounter a group of people playing a game you had never played or seen before, you would probably take a few minutes to study the game. You would try to figure out the purpose of the game, the central objective or goal. You would study the players, trying to identify what is similar to or different from other games you have played and determine the rules of the game. Once you had a sense of the game, you might ask to play, to participate, knowing that you will never understand the game without having tried it, without having played. The application of your observations to actual play would heighten your understanding of the game enormously; either activity on its own would not have such an impact. After playing you might step out and watch again, identifying strategies with a greater understanding of the structure and purpose of the game. Reading and writing are similar. If students are given opportunities to study texts, naming the relevant attributes and purposes, and then are given opportunities to write these same types of texts, they will benefit as readers, writers, and test takers.

In reading workshop you will want to lead your class in shared experiences using passages from past years’ tests, paying attention to how to read powerfully on the day of the test. In writing workshop, you will return to these same texts, this time showing students how they can read like writers, paying attention to purpose, structure, and craft. Because your writers are expected to produce many pieces each week, you will want to teach them that their previous writing can be a jumping-off point in a new genre. For example, students might go back to an entry for or a published piece of realistic fiction and think, “How could I rewrite this scene to become a play?” They might also return to their nonfiction “expert” book to craft a poem on the same topic or even rewrite the book as an article.

Don Murray says that writers return to the same life topics again and again. For one child, that life topic might be baseball. For another, it might be a parent. You might seize this multigenre opportunity to teach children that writers can return to the same topic over and over, each time reimagining the way that topic can be expressed in a different genre. Let’s take a life topic like “my mom.” This child has already learned, in previous units, that she can write about the time her mom let her

play dress-up with her fancy shoes or the time she taught her how to throw a perfect three-pointer. Now, you'll want to teach that same child that she can write a poem about her mom, write a how-to text about being a good daughter, or even write an article about how moms can help kids be strong people. This same student might even take her big idea about her mom—that she is important—and write a folktale in which a character learns the importance of moms. This is not to say that all your students will stay with one topic throughout this unit, but it is certainly a possibility you'll want to offer your young writers, especially those that tend to struggle for topics or have difficulty getting started.

You will need to collect a variety of mentor texts because of the wide range of genres in this unit. You will probably want to return to your collection of folktales, fables, and poems that you have used in previous units of study. For newer genres such as interviews, plays, and minibiographies, the Internet will be a great resource. For instance, PBS Kids ([www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org)) has interviews with famous child actors such as Kleo Thomas, who was in the movie *Holes*. Often authors' official websites have minibiographies and interviews students can study. Recipes and craft projects in your favorite cookbooks or kids' activity books are great how-to exemplars.

Below we outline some of the teaching considerations for a variety of genres. Specifically we describe content you may want to highlight when teaching your students about poetry, procedural or how-to texts, interviews, folktales, and articles. We have not focused on realistic fiction, because students typically have spent more time reading and writing stories than reading and writing these other genres. However, you will need to make decisions about the genres you choose to teach your students. Most likely, you will choose to teach your students about genres that you think pose challenges for them on the test or that will engage and motivate them in writing workshop. (Please keep in mind that for each of these genres other than articles, there is no guarantee that students will encounter these on the 2012 NYS ELA test.)

## Poetry

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Although there are many poetic forms, two are often found on the third-grade New York State ELA test. The first are those that tell a story, such as "Homework" and "My Favorite Sweater." If students are writing narrative poems, they may take their Small Moment stories or realistic fiction and write a poem about the same event. The second are informational poems. To write a nonfiction poem, students may use information related to their "expert" book topic. Of course another option is to write a new poem from scratch.

Although there are many tools you could teach your young poets, you will want to focus on those that will help students read poetry on the test. To begin, in the multiple-choice section of the ELA test, readers are frequently asked to figure out the author's purpose or message. Certainly, this is an appropriate question and one we want our students to be thinking about whenever they read poetry. Further, poets often repeat

phrases or lines that highlight the main idea. For example, in “Song of the Polar Bear,” each stanza ends with the phrase “he doesn’t pack up and move away,” which teaches the reader that polar bears remain in their harsh environment year-round. You might decide to teach your children to try this out in their own poems: using a repeated phrase as a kind of drumbeat to bring home an important theme. You can also remind children that poets do pay special attention at the end of sections and the end of a whole poem—often showing the meaning of the poem in the last lines or stanza or sometimes revealing a secret in these last lines.

You will also want to teach readers that poems are often meant to be read aloud and that poets use line breaks (and sometimes rhyme schemes) to create rhythm. As students write their own poems, they will need to decide where they would like their reader to pause and therefore where to place their line breaks.

You will probably want to teach your writers that poets make specific word choices, that we attend to word choice in our reading and writing. Because poets use fewer words, we usually want to be sure that every word in a poem is precise and serves our purpose. This means that as readers of poetry we need to pay attention to the exact words that are used and as writers of poetry we need to be specific. Since poets think about the reaction we want readers to have, we may sometimes play with a few different word choices to figure out which word gives the impression we really want to give.

## How-To Pieces

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We hope that your students will enter third grade with plenty of experience writing how-to texts and will draw on this knowledge when reading and writing how-to texts in the days preceding the ELA exam. As you study mentor texts, especially those found in past ELA exams, your students will notice that these procedural texts often begin with an introduction that explains the topic and purpose for the text. Of course, understanding the purpose for a piece of writing is essential to understanding that text, so this will be an important aspect to highlight.

You will notice that when writing a how-to text the author will speak directly to the audience, often using an informal teaching tone. You will also notice that early on in the how-to text there is a list of materials that the reader will need to gather.

Of course, procedural texts are about following a sequence of steps, so when students write their own texts this will be of primary importance, along with tips for their readers that explain why particular steps or procedures are important to follow. The directions in a how-to text might be presented in a step-by-step format but could also be written as a narrative paragraph. The important thing to highlight is that each step needs to be written explicitly, with actions and specific descriptions of those actions. Many of the questions students will be asked when reading how-to passages focus on the sequence of the steps taken, the reason for particular warnings, and the meaning of specific words (like *gently* in the 2009 NYS ELA exam), so you will want to draw

your students' attention to these aspects of the texts. In addition, procedural texts often end with conclusions that tell readers how to use the thing being made, so you may want to encourage your students to write similar conclusions and to look for them in the texts they read.

## Interviews

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Often, when third graders encounter interviews as readers they are disoriented by the structure of the text; it is not one they see every day. You will therefore probably want to support students by emphasizing the concept that an interview is a conversation on paper, but that the two people engaged in the conversation have different roles. That is, one person, the interviewer, asks the questions, and the other, the interviewee, answers the questions. Readers need to note the exchange of information that exists between the two participants. Once you have studied a few interviews with your students, you can have them interview one another or go out in the school to interview other people or go home and interview friends or family members. You will probably want to help them identify a subject and then think of appropriate questions for that person.

You may ask students to look back at their interviews and ask questions similar to those found on the NYS ELA test. For instance, you may ask students to reread their interviews to determine what the text is mostly about. Or you may ask students to highlight important details related to their interview subject. Students could write their own test questions for their interviews and exchange them with partners to gain an appreciation of the form.

## Folktales

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Writing a folktale is a bit more complicated than writing a poem or an interview. Further, the common purpose for writing folktales relates to explaining why or how something came to be, as in legends, or teaching morals, as in fables. Therefore, for this genre, we have a slightly different suggestion for your teaching and your students' work during the writing workshop. We do suggest that you study the passages used on previous years' tests (or passages that are similar to those found on the tests). We suggest, once again, that you study the texts thinking and talking about the purposes for these texts. Next, you may decide to "borrow" one of the messages or explanations and have your students rewrite one of these stories—the situation or scene would change but the lesson would remain the same. For instance, if you read "The Tortoise and the Hare," you would retain the message or lesson that "slow and steady wins the race" but change the scene—perhaps two students race through their math homework and one invariably goes too quickly, gets distracted, and therefore does not do her best.

In addition to studying the messages and typical plot structures of folktales, you may also highlight vocabulary and word choice. Invariably, students are asked about the meaning of words in context. As a way to spotlight this, if you are writing a folktale with your students or your students are writing their own folktales on common themes, you and they will want to be specific about the words used to describe the characters. Instead of describing a character as *mad*, say she was *frustrated*; instead of using the word *scared*, describe the character as *frightened* or *terrified*, depending on intended meaning.

## Articles

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We do expect that students will be asked to read one or two articles on the 2012 NYS ELA test. For many readers the challenges presented by the article passages found on the test focus on the formats, which vary from articles found in *Time for Kids* to the expository texts they read in their classroom libraries. We suggest that you spend time with students reading and outlining a few passages found on previous ELA tests and then encourage writers to reread their information books thinking about what portions they could include in an article. It will help your students to ask, “What is the information that I think my readers need to have about this topic?”

You will probably want to teach your writers to take out unimportant information, to make use of subheadings, and to write with detail about their topic. Please keep in mind that this experience offers your students an opportunity to revise their information books and thereby improve their earlier work. For instance, if they did not incorporate sidebars with definitions of technical vocabulary related to their topics, now is the perfect time to teach them this feature. Once again, if students have written their own article very similar to articles they have read, they will have a greater understanding of the genre, which will support their reading on the day of the exam.

## One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

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As you approach this unit, you’ll want to reflect on the work you’ve already done in your writing workshop this year, as well as speak to your colleagues about units they have taught your students in years past. Each year, the ELA test includes a variety of genres, some expected and some new. However, many students bring to the test a myriad of experiences with different genres from prior years with writing workshop. At this time, you’ll need to take stock of which genres your students have had lots of experience with, which genres they have read but not written in, and which genres they’ve never seen before. This will help determine how long you spend on each genre.

Since your students will have just completed a poetry unit if you are following our recommended curricular calendar of units in writing, you will know what students do and don't understand about this genre. You will now want to use a different lens to think about what kind of poetry writing you'll teach in this unit: in looking at past poems on the ELA, you can choose specific devices that are likely to be referred to or tested for and focus just on them. While you may have been stressing in your poetry unit that poems don't have to rhyme (and encouraging kids to begin their poems without rhyme), most ELA poems over the past five years do rhyme, so you may choose now to give kids more instruction in the specifics of rhyme schemes. On the other hand, if you spent the last part of the poetry unit studying forms and covered rhyming poems extensively, you will not want to reteach this unless you're seeing that kids are still not understanding.

This same thinking should guide your teaching in the other genres. If you've taught the genre or something like it already this year, you will use your knowledge of how kids are approximating it to decide which teaching points are right for you and for them.

For example, even if you haven't had a unit of study specifically on reading and writing folktales, you know that ultimately folktales are a type of fiction and that students should carry their knowledge of fiction writing into this relatively new genre. As in realistic fiction, there still needs to be a main character who faces a problem, eventually solves that problem, and most likely learns a lesson or changes. If students have already written realistic fiction, you'll build on the lessons you already taught and use this unit's discussion of the specifics of folktales to support and enrich your teaching where you need it. If students have already spent a unit of study writing folktales and fairy tales, they will be even more equipped to revisit this genre.

Based on these considerations, you will decide how best to use the teaching points listed below. They are not set in stone; they are possible markers along a path that you will create, knowing your kids and your goals for them as well as you do this deep into the year.

## Poetry

- "Today I want to teach you that poets pay attention to the figurative language we use in our poetry. Poets write using personification—making inanimate objects come alive with human qualities. We think about what the object is doing and then how to describe that action as if it were being performed by a human being."
- "Today I want to teach you that poets make important decisions when choosing words for our poems. The nouns and verbs are precise. When we write poetry we don't have the opportunity to use many words, so each word has to

pack a lot. When we read a poem, we think, ‘What does this word really mean and why did the poet choose it? What does she want me to picture when I read that word?’ When we write poetry, we need to ask the same questions: ‘What picture do I want to create in my poetry? What is the exact subject and action I can write, trying out another and another to say it even more precisely than before?’”

- “Today I want to teach you that poets continue our journey by studying the genre. We look closely at structure. Looking for repetition, we ask ourselves, ‘How is this repeating line holding the poem together? What does it say about what the poem is mostly about?’ We consider this when we are writing poetry, asking ourselves, ‘What repeating line might we write that carries great meaning throughout the poem? What is my poem really, really about?’”

## How-To Pieces

- “Today I want to teach you that when we read a how-to text, we notice that the writer lets the reader know the topic and the necessary materials early on. Therefore, when we write a how-to piece, we need to let our reader know the topic and then list the materials needed to do this step-by-step thing. We think hard about the materials we need to feed a pet, play baseball, create the perfect hairstyle.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when writing a how-to piece it is important to consider the sequence. Writers know that every step is important and including all steps in order is critical. We ask ourselves, ‘What do I do *right* after \_\_\_\_\_.’”
- “Today I want to teach you to pay close attention to the ending of your how-to piece. One way to create an ending is to consider how you might use this thing you just put together. Or how you might admire your creation. For example, if you’ve described how to make a special treat for your dog, you might say, ‘Watch Spot—do you see how he eats every morsel, savoring it?’”

## Interviews

- “Today I want to teach you that writers study the thing we are reading to figure out what genre it is. We do this especially when we are not as familiar with that genre. We ask ourselves, ‘What are we noticing in this kind of writing?’ For example, when we look at an interview, we might notice that there

are two people who are having a conversation; however, they have different roles.”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers notice the style of an interview. We see that an interview is a conversation in which one person asks the questions and the another person answers them. When we write an interview, oftentimes we are the interviewer. We have a purpose and create the questions. Through those questions we learn many things about the person we are interviewing.”
- “Today I want to teach you that once we see the possibilities inside the genre we can then write one, two, three pieces. Writing one piece after another, we grow stronger writing muscles and understand the genre better.”

## **Folktales**

- “Today I want to teach you that one way writers can write folktales is first to read one and ask ourselves, ‘What is the lesson learned from this?’ Then we might think of other stories that would teach our reader a similar lesson.”
- “Today I want to teach you that in a folktale, the problem is often introduced right away, then gets worse and worse, until at the very end it gets solved. As you plan and flash-draft your folktales, you might think, ‘What is the problem my character has? How does that problem repeat or get worse in the next scene? What will happen at the end to solve this problem?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that in folktales, the characters’ feelings are very important and so it’s vital that you are picky about which words you choose to describe your characters’ feelings. You can do this by thinking about a variety of words that mean the same thing and choosing the one that best matches your meaning.”

## **Articles**

- “Today I want to teach you that when we begin to write articles, we can go back to our information books and make them better. We can ask ourselves, ‘Do I have a main idea? Do my supporting points fit within this main idea? Does this sentence fit?’”
- “Today I want to teach you that when we write an article, we ask ourselves, ‘What big thing do I want to teach others? What thing feels important to bring

to my readers' attention? What is my topic and what are my opinions, feelings, and passions about that topic?"

- "Today I want to teach you that once writers study and read several texts in a genre, we often notice something that is found in many other genres as well. For example, we notice all writing has a focus, a main idea, a purpose. Therefore, when we write, regardless of the genre, we always consider the focus. We always ask ourselves, 'What is my poem, folktale, article, interview, or how-to piece really, really about?' Then we bring that meaning out in our writing."



## UNIT EIGHT

# Informational Writing

## *Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas*

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**T**his unit builds on children’s energy and enthusiasm for the content areas they have studied all year and extends that energy into writing workshop. This month, students will once again become information writers as they craft books that are a hybrid of many genres—exposition, narrative, images—on topics they find fascinating. This time, in addition to practicing crucial informational writing skills, they will also use research that they gather in the concurrent reading unit to deepen their knowledge of a topic, an invaluable skill outlined in the Common Core State Standards. Third graders will be asked to build on the writing structures they practiced during the earlier informational writing unit of study; their ability to write quick well-crafted essays and stories; and their knowledge of how to use mentor texts to raise the quality of their writing. Drawing from all the writing structures they’ve practiced all year, they might create nonfiction books that end up looking like the DK Readers or the Rosen Primary Source books.

During reading workshop this month, your children will read widely about a content-area topic. You will have gathered all sorts of nonfiction materials—expository nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, songs and poems, even images. Your students will be members of partnerships or clubs that are reading about this content. They’ll have time to talk to one another to deepen their understanding and grow ideas. They’ll mark interesting parts of articles and books with thoughts and reactions that are then ready to be shared with friends. As readers, they are beginning to be able to read and understand a wider array of nonfiction: narrative nonfiction that takes the reader through a timeline of historical events; expository nonfiction (informational/all-about) that teaches all about a topic; and question-and-answer books that invite the

reader to wonder along with the author and answer questions. The books you have collected will be your writers' mentors, providing a wealth of publishing possibilities.

In the first part of the unit, children will study a whole-class topic during a daily social studies workshop, writing, sketching, and questioning to document and expand their thinking without a particular end product in mind. Concurrently, during writing workshop, they'll write longer about the observations they've made, new knowledge they've learned, and ideas they've had during social studies. In reading workshop, children will be reading to learn, expanding their historical knowledge. In the second part of the unit, they will spend two weeks alternating between looking closely at mentor texts and writing many potential parts of their nonfiction book on a topic in the social studies workshop that interests them. During the final part of the unit, week four, children review all the pieces they've crafted and choose several to revise and edit with support from their mentor texts. The unit will culminate with a celebration in which the children teach others about what they've learned.

## Preparing for This Unit

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During your content-area workshops all year, particularly if you've been following the content-area calendar, your children have probably learned about content in a variety of ways. They've likely engaged in long conversations based on fascinating picture books. You may have read to them the story of Ruby Bridges and talked about what it might have been like to live during the civil rights era. You may have led discussions in which they gave their reactions to what was fair and unfair. They've watched video clips, guided by you, in which they stopped to turn and talk, role-play, or watch you think aloud. They've pored over countless primary sources—photographs, woodblock prints, maps, timelines—and used them to develop ideas and talk to their partners. They've listened to minilectures you've given in which you've clearly taught big ideas and the facts that support those ideas.

The social studies content you choose this month should be highly engaging. Likely, you'll align this unit with your district's scope-and-sequence document. You'll want to choose a topic for which you have many, many resources: books, videos, primary documents. You'll want to be sure your whole class can study many subtopics within the main topic, so you'll ask yourself, "Does this topic have breadth?" If you are teaching in New York State, for example, you may decide to focus on a country study, as suggested by the State Learning Standards. A country study lends itself very well to this kind of work, as long as you keep the topic broad enough to support your third graders' choices about what aspect(s) of the country interest them the most. Some children might write about music and famous musicians. Some might write about important historical events. Some might write about daily life in the country; some might write about education or the climate, flora, and fauna. Or you might decide to study more than one country, which would lend itself well to the compare-and-contrast work that the Common Core State Standards remind us is so important for third graders.

This month, it's essential that you continue a strong social studies workshop, for children can only write about new learning if they've truly learned something new! Flood your children with images, facts, and stories about the time period being studied. Even better, begin the work of the social studies unit a week or two *before* launching this writing unit so children will begin on day one with lots and lots to say. As your researchers become experts, they'll be eager to share what they've learned and the ideas they have about all the new information they know. Students will then begin to imagine how their books might go, thinking about the parts and pages they will include and how they will best teach readers all they are learning.

Your decisions are:

- What's the topic of study? What will my whole class be learning about? What are the choices for students within that larger topic?
- What materials do I have or need to serve as writing *mentors*, and what materials do I have or need to teach the *content*?
- When will I begin this unit to ensure that children know enough about the content before they write about it?

## Week One: Writing to Develop Expertise and Grow Ideas

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### *In Social Studies Workshop*

Your job in the weeks leading up to this writing unit and in its first week or two will be to teach your children lots and lots about the topic of study. You might want to set up a special place to house all of this collecting of information, sketching, and writing. Perhaps it's a social studies folder that students decorate with a picture of themselves as a historian or person of the time period on the cover. Perhaps it's just a tabbed section in their already established social studies notebook or writer's notebook. Because your third graders will be using this research to fuel their writing, you might decide to have them take all of their notes in their writer's notebook, but that choice is up to you.

Decide if you want children forming groups around one subtopic of inquiry, or whether you want each child to survey the whole of the topic, gaining broad knowledge, before zeroing in on a subtopic to study with more depth. For example, if you are choosing to study "The European Community" as a whole-class topic, you might steer the class into groups that study countries (or aspects of countries) within the European Community. You could also have children choose one of the social studies thematic strands as a lens through which to study a country or even compare and contrast more than one country. Examples of such lenses are culture; time, continuity, and change; people, places, and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups, and institutions; power, authority, and governance; production, distribution,

and consumption; science, technology, and society; global connections; civic ideas and responsibility. Of course you would need to present these in ways your third graders could relate to. It could also be that children are individually choosing their own topic that comes from them reading and thinking broadly during writing workshop.

### *In Writing Workshop*

As the unit begins, you will immerse your children in all the different ways they can write about what they are learning in social studies workshop. You will want to teach them that social scientists write in many ways for many purposes. During this first week of the unit, most often their purpose for writing will be to capture what they are learning and what they are thinking and writing to grow their ideas. Therefore, you will probably teach them that their notebook is a collection of many kinds of writing. You will want to refer back to the teaching you have done all year in the content areas, particularly the writing-to-learn unit, if you have been following the TCRWP's content-area calendar.

One kind of writing is observational writing. During social studies workshop, students may have observed and sketched their reactions to a primary document or drawing from the time period. During writing workshop they will record in as much detail as possible all that they observed. You will teach them how they can go back to those sketches and observations and write in words, phrases, sentences, even paragraphs, about what they have seen and sketched. Teach them that they can use prompts like *I notice, I see, this reminds me of*.

Another kind of writing is sketching with labels and captions. During social studies workshop, children may have drawn a striking image from one of their books and then labeled it using precise vocabulary. In writing workshop, they could add captions that explain the image in greater detail. 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 on to another and another. It's important to teach them that historians (and writers!) linger. This means teaching them to add all they can to their sketches, in both words and images. The Common Core State Standards expect third-grade information writers to include illustrations and other text features along with the written text to help readers understand the content. The sketches and captions that your writers create now may end up being crucial components of the pages of their informational books.

Remind your third graders of all they know about note-taking to grow ideas about reading. They may learn to take notes as boxes-and-bullets, recording a main idea and supporting facts. You may teach them to read a chunk of text and think, "What is the most important part? What facts support this important part?" You may teach them to keep their topic of inquiry in mind (if they have decided on one) and return to their books to take notes. That is, they'll be using tables of contents and an index to find sections in a text to reread and take notes on. All the while, they'll continue to

make entries in their notebook. Coach your writers to ensure that they aren't recopying sections from the book but, instead, jotting quick notes about what they've learned.

Social scientists may create an annotated timeline. We take notes about events that happened in a sequence. Above the timeline, we might record facts about what happened on various dates. Below, we might annotate this timeline with our own thoughts or ideas.

Additionally, historians often use our notebooks to question and wonder. Because it is important that children continue to write with volume and stamina, you will also want to teach them to hypothesize answers to their "I wonder why" or "how come" musings. Teach kids to catch these thoughts by quickly jotting them in their notebook. Then, teach them to think through possible answers by using prompts such as *maybe*, *could it be that*, *but what about*, and *the best explanation is*. For example, a child might look at a picture in one of her books about Italy. The picture shows a crowded marketplace with many different kinds of vendors. The caption reads, "Food is a very important part of the Italian culture." The child might write in her notebook:

I notice in the picture that a woman is shopping in a big, open marketplace. It looks like the marketplace is outside, and it is very, very crowded. I wonder why it is so crowded, is there anywhere else they can go to shop? There are many people shopping, and I notice that there are lots of men there shopping for food, as well as women, and some children are there. It looks like people are selling just one kind of thing, for example one man is selling just fruits and vegetables. There is a woman selling bread. And another man is selling cheese. It makes me think that people don't go to the grocery store like we do here to buy everything. Maybe the people selling those things made them themselves. From what I've already learned I know that cooking and making good food is really important. Maybe that's why this place is so crowded.

As the unit progresses, you'll notice that your children are beginning to have more developed thoughts, ideas, and opinions about the class topic of study. Congratulate your students on figuring out the value of writing to think about their topic. Here you might want to teach kids that historians not only write about what we observe or notice, we also write about what we think about these observations. Therefore, you might teach kids to look back over the writing they've collected in their notebook and write long about what they are thinking or realizing. These entries might begin with "I know some things about \_\_\_\_\_" and continue with examples: "One thing I know." "Another thing I know." This could then lead into some writing to think: "This makes me realize \_\_\_\_\_." "This helps me understand \_\_\_\_\_." "I used to think \_\_\_\_\_, but now I know \_\_\_\_\_. My thinking changed because \_\_\_\_\_."

One way to be sure your children are doing this writing in as much detail as possible is to remind them of the thinking skills of a social scientist and the note-taking

strategies you taught during the writing-to-learn unit, such as considering cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, evaluating, and drawing inferences.

## **Weeks Two and Three: Deepening Our Expertise/Studying Mentors and Writing Drafts**

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### *In Social Studies Workshop*

It is important that you continue a strong social studies workshop, perhaps at least two or three days a week, because that work is the fuel for your writing workshop. Your children, during these next weeks, will continue to listen to read-alouds, watch videos, take field trips. In reading workshop they will continue reading about their topic. All the while, they can write in their special notebook or folder, collecting their thoughts, questions, and ideas.

### *In Writing Workshop*

For this next phase, you may decide to closely follow the writing structures outlined in the informational writing unit as well as draw from lessons on writing short narratives. What you'll be going for is student drafts of multigenre, hybrid texts, like those put out by DK Publishing or Rosen Publishing. The bulk of your teaching during this time will be to help your writers choose the best structure to teach the information they are presenting on each page of their informational book. You will also support your writers in compiling the facts, definitions, and details the Common Core State Standards remind us that information writers should include in their pieces. In one of the early sessions, as a way to plan the sections of their books, you may want to teach your writers to imagine how their books will go by drafting (and possibly revising) a table of contents.

As your students draft, you will want to draw heavily on mentor texts. You can mine your classroom and school libraries and ask your children to bring in their favorite nonfiction books from home that are like the ones they'll be writing. Your goal is to collect many books that are models for the ones your children will write, not to collect all books about the topic of study. It may even be better if the models are about topics very different from the ones your children will write about so that they cannot copy the content but instead are being inspired by the layout, structure, and craft of the books.

Help your children notice the structures that pages within nonfiction books can take, and together imagine how a writer went about creating this kind of writing. Perhaps your writers will notice and name helpful structures other than the ones you teach explicitly. Create opportunities to share with the whole group what individual writers are learning as they study mentor texts. Remind your children what they know about informational writing. Often expository nonfiction is divided into chapters, each

with its own subtopic. To produce a book like this, the writer probably learned a lot about the topic, collecting facts and ideas, and then organized those ideas into categories. Instead, the writer might have learned a lot about the topic, thought of categories, and then went out in search of specific facts to fit those categories. You might also draw from some work they've done writing about nonfiction, showing them how some chapters take on a compare/contrast format, others a cause/effect format. Nonfiction, you'll help the children see, is detailed, with specific words about the topic and partner sentences that explain, define, and teach the reader. You might think about supportive paper choices to help your writers draft using these different structures. Additionally, while it certainly isn't imperative that third graders learn to cite sources formally, you might want to teach them some ways to credit some of the authors and books whose information they use. You can teach them prompts such as *the book* [title] *says* or *according to* [author] to link sources with pieces of information in their drafts.

On many pages, students will use a boxes-and-bullets structure, giving main ideas and some supporting details in organized paragraphs. Other pages may have a compare-contrast structure, perhaps with bold section headings like "Similarities between Our School and Schools in Italy" and "Differences between Our School and Schools in Italy." Other pages may have a narrative structure, perhaps telling a story about one particular family in Italy the child has read about, or even something more personal—perhaps the child knows someone who has been to Italy, or has visited there herself and wants to include a story about that visit. Yet other pages may have a persuasive structure in which writers make a suggestion and follow up the suggestion with some reasons: "Everyone should visit Italy if they have the chance," followed by reasons why a trip to Italy would be wonderful.

It will be very important to be reading aloud and facilitating shared reading and even shared writing of nonfiction. Reading like a writer and writing as a whole class will immerse students in what they'll write and remind them how to use mentor texts. For example, you could make an overhead of two pages from a nonfiction book or place them on your Smart Board and have the whole class read the pages together. You could ask your children questions prompting them to notice how the pages are structured and the kinds of information they find. You could ask them to talk about how they think a writer might have created this particular page, with this particular kind of writing. All the while, you can be making charts of "directions" for producing the different pages that will form their nonfiction books. A chart could have a photocopy of a page from a text with arrows labeling the different parts. Then, during shared writing, you may show your children how to use the resources—mentor texts, charts—to do that kind of writing.

Across these ten days or so of writing workshop, the children will have written many, many pages of different types from which they will choose several to publish—timelines, images, compare/contrast paragraphs, little stories. They will use the charts in the room and the mentor texts on their tables to help them. Throughout this time, you will teach your children the valuable skill of how to proceed independently. You

will want to think carefully about whole-class teaching that will help your children work productively, with volume, stamina, and engagement, over the next few weeks. You will teach skills for working with independence and purpose as they rely on their partners, their mentors, and your previous teaching.

All the while you'll also remind students that their notebook is a valuable resource filled with their thoughts, musings, observations, and conclusions. They could look back at what they've already written and use it not only as inspiration but also for elaboration. Or they could take detailed drawings or diagrams that they created in their notebook and cut them out and tape them to new pages, adding lines of text on the bottom of the page. You might teach children to look back to their detailed drawings to write more on the page, or teach them to go back to a sentence in which they used a word that might be new for their readers and write another supporting sentence defining what it means. Other children would benefit from thinking about how to elaborate on other parts of pages, like the captions or labels. To decide what to teach in these few days, it will be helpful to look at your children's writing to see what they are already doing, and teach them some new ways to elaborate.

Writing partners will also be an important part of learning to work independently. You might teach a lesson about how a writing partner can give us ideas about what information will be helpful to include. You can teach your children how to use their partners as sounding boards, asking them, "Did that make sense? Do you feel like there is anything missing? What questions do you still have about my topic after you read that page?" Later in the second week, you might ask partners to read each other's work, making sure what they've written makes sense.

As suggested in the Common Core State Standards, information writers should group related information. If you find that some of your children are including more information on a page than fits their topic, you might teach children to read back over what they have written, making sure to stay focused on what each page is about. As they group information that goes together, remind your students of the Common Core State Standards expectation that information writers use linking words to connect ideas and information. You may already have a chart from the previous unit with some potential linking words for third grade: *also, another, and, more, but*.

## **Week Four: Revising, Editing, and Publishing to Get Ready to Teach Others**

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At this point in the unit, many of your children will have drafted many, many pages in a variety of structures. In this final week, you will want to rally their passion and purpose in studying history in support of sharing what they have learned with others. First, you will teach them to lay out all the writing they have done and choose the best parts to turn into a book. They'll take those pieces and revise, edit, and publish them to share at the culminating celebration. You might teach them to choose by thinking about audience: "Would others be interested in reading about this?" Then,

you will teach them to return to their mentor texts, reading closely to notice the details and subtlety within a given structure. You will definitely want to help kids notice and then try revision techniques again—things like partner sentences (if you can write one sentence about something, you can write two or more), sequencing (going from main idea to details that support), vocabulary (using specific words pertaining to the class topic of study), and adding extra pages (charts, diagrams, timelines, captions, front covers, back covers, and blurbs). It's okay, and probable, that you will be reteaching some of the same lessons you taught earlier, lessons from either this unit or the informational writing unit.

It will serve your writers well if you spend a few sessions on elaboration strategies. Teach your writers some different ways that information writers say more, such as asking a question and answering it, sharing an anecdote, giving an opinion about some of the information, giving an example, or comparing or contrasting a detail to something the reader may know.

Since children have authored informational texts this month, you might remind them to check that their paragraphs each have a clear topic sentence, that the boxes-and-bullets structure is clear to the reader. Model how you might split one paragraph into two smaller paragraphs to make each present a distinct idea. Ask writers to revise their headings and subheadings. Urge them to ponder, "Ought a new subheading be inserted in this part of the text?" You'll want also to alert writers to the diagrams they might have included in the text. Ask them to revise these diagrams, looking them over carefully to ensure there are adequate captions and labels that explain each diagram clearly to the reader. "Does the diagram explain or connect to the text on that page?" children might ask themselves. "Would this diagram work better for another portion of the text? Should I shift it there?"

Teach your writers to think about the ways that the authors of their mentor texts help guide readers through the information. Your third graders can look back over the sections of their books, thinking about the table of contents and perhaps even a glossary they might create to help readers.

The Common Core State Standards suggest that third-grade information writers provide a concluding section. You can teach your writers to think about ways that informational books typically begin and end. They might write simple beginning sections telling the reader what he or she will learn by reading the book. In their concluding section, they might write some of the reasons that the information in the book is important, or they might include some of their own opinions about the topic.

Part of the revision process might include inserting new text features to give more clarity to the writing. Suggest that writers insert a text box or two if their readers might benefit from knowing a related extra fact. Demonstrate how one might choose a title and a cover illustration for one's book. Before they begin their final edit for spellings and punctuation, ask writers to think, "Is this book teaching the reader about my topic in a clear way? What can I do to make my teaching even clearer?"

As the unit draws to a close, it will be important to remind your young historians that they've already learned so much about what to do to fix up their writing for

publication—capitalization, beginning and ending punctuation, limiting the number of *ands* in any given sentence. You can teach kids to edit their work by rereading it to make sure it all makes sense, crossing out and adding parts as necessary. Kids, all by themselves, can check their writing for frequently misspelled words and spelling patterns they have been working on.

Finally, to fancy up the pieces, kids might use real photographs, just like many published informational texts do. They might also add more details to their pictures and diagrams, as well as color. Kids might also boldface or underline important vocabulary.

Set aside a special time for your students to present their informational books and teach all they learned to others. They may want to visit a second-grade classroom and read parts of their books to a second-grade partner, or you may decide to invite parents to come to your classroom and learn from your students' new expertise. You could set up a gallery of your students' books and invite parents to leave notes for different writers, commenting on all they learned after reading their books.



## UNIT NINE

# Revision

## JUNE

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I'm a rewriter. That's the part I like best . . . once I have a pile of paper to work with it's like having the pieces of a puzzle. I just have to put the pieces together to make a picture.

—JUDY BLUME

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**W**riting is a powerful tool for thinking: 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, our thoughts stay with us, on the page. But another power of writing is the possibility of reconsidering previous work, changing our words, matching our latest and best ideas with the best of our abilities as writers. We all wish we could do that as we're speaking, take something back or go back in time to say something another way—in writing, we have this power. We can reread our first thoughts and see gaps. Through rereading and revision, writing becomes a tool for making our thinking better. The Common Core State Standards mention revising and editing as important elements of the writing process. And any time we ask students to reconsider their work, to pause and read back through to try to lift the level of it, we are in fact helping them work to a higher standard of cognitive complexity.

Many students view revision as a quick fix—time to change a word here or add a sentence there. While revision does exist on the word or sentence level, you will want

your students, as they become more proficient, to see revision as reworking or revisiting entire parts and, ultimately, the whole piece. This unit gives your children the time to step back and reflect on what they have done and then dive back into previous work with new vigor, making shapely and significant changes. They will look over their entire collection of written work and think about how they can make this work even stronger.

Children have been in writing workshop for yet another year. They have grown as writers and as people. Now is their chance to show this growth to the world. As your children look back on their writing, asking, “What is it I want my piece to show?” or “What does this moment say about my life?” they will find a deeper importance, maybe one they didn’t realize was there. They will then use what they know as writers to craft and create the effects they desire. You encourage this thinking during any writing cycle, but sometimes it’s hard to truly “step back” from a piece that we are currently writing, especially if a publishing date is looming on the horizon.

A unit on revision is also a unit on independence. At this time, your writers will be working in different genres. Some writers will return to realistic fiction, while others return to personal narrative, personal essay, or content-area writing. Some writers will revise a number of pieces; others will work deeply on one piece. With all of your writers in different genres and in different parts of the writing process, children will need to use their entire repertoire of strategies. They will need to think not about what the class is doing but about what each of them is doing individually. They will need to look over their writing and ask, “What is it I will work on now?” Then they will need to execute that plan. They will, of course, have the support of your mini-lessons, the charts they’ve helped create, and the other writers in the room. However, now more than ever, they will steer their own ship, deciding when to move on to the next piece and when to linger.

Creating a space for this kind of independent work will foster writers who take up their pencils at any time of day, look at their writing and the world around them, and then begin a writing journey. This work will support children in creating writing plans for themselves and seeing those plans through. You will want to foster this motivation to write and to create one’s own writing projects. As children look ahead into the summer, you will want to set them up to keep their own writing lives going. They can always return to their writing notebook, find an entry, and then rework that entry through extensive revision. If we build a community of writers who are excited to take this work on, we are working toward preventing the atrophy of writing skills that often occurs during the summer.

There are many useful professional texts on revision. You may wish to consult Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi’s books on revision, *Craft Lessons* and *Nonfiction Craft Lessons*, as well as Georgia Heard’s *The Revision Toolbox* (it’s not just for poetry). For your own reference, you may also be interested in Roy Peter Clark’s *Writing Tools: 50 Essential Strategies for Every Writer* and Don Murray’s *The Craft of Revision*.

## Rallying Students to Revise and Teaching the Importance of Carrying Forward All We've Learned

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Some of the best writing comes when you rehash. It's in the retelling of stories that the improvement comes. The reflection comes in the polish. What a person will see, what a person will feel, comes in the polish. When you finish polishing your writing, it forms the image you're trying to create.

—DONALD PERRY

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At the beginning of this unit, you will help students see that they have grown as writers and that they know more now about writing than they did at the beginning of the year. You will teach children to look back on all the work they have done this year, reviewing notebook entries, drafts, and published pieces and asking, “Which piece feels worthy of revision?” Generally, the pieces students select should be meaningful (this may or may not be evident in the writing yet). The least successful writing pieces may not be worth deep revision, even if it seems there is much to revise in them, since these pieces may not feel significant to the child. Students will place the pieces they select in a special revision folder.

Many children are apprehensive about revision because they “like it the way it is.” You can immerse students in examples of revision by showing them how you revise stories you’ve written as models in previous units of study, showing them how former students have revised (by providing before and after versions), and revising class stories together. If you wrote a class story or two in the first few units on chart paper or a transparency, you can have students join you in revising the class story using a variety of strategies. Give students a feeling of strength as revisers and remind them that they know so much more now than they did earlier in the year!

At this point in the year, students have cycled through several units in many genres. Invite them to use all they’ve learned through the year as they revisit their writing. You can begin by having students recall revision strategies they’ve practiced throughout the year. Teach them to look with a critical eye at their work, using past charts for strategies in that genre, past rubrics, and their own writer’s notebook to decide what works and what could be better. Especially if the narrative continuum played a role in your teaching of narrative writing throughout the year, now is the time to return to it as a way to help students see where their writing is and where it could be. In all of your teaching, but especially in this unit of study, it is critical to help students apply all they’ve learned about revision during the year. You want their work in this month to reflect the cumulative nature of workshop teaching.

In every stage of the writing cycle, purpose is key. This holds true tenfold for revision. Students need reasons to change their writing. At the beginning of this unit, you can teach them to think purposefully about revision—to decide why they want to

change their writing before jumping into the craft moves that will help them change it successfully. They may begin their revision work by writing long in their notebook about why they want to revise this piece and what they want to change about it.

Writers have many reasons for changing their writing, and you can offer these reasons as possible purposes. Sometimes writers realize that the way we wrote something doesn't match what we really intended to say. In narrative writing, this often happens if a scene doesn't quite come alive in full detail for the reader or if the heart of the story doesn't seem important enough. In essay writing, this can happen if our thesis statement is not clear or is not supported throughout the whole essay. Sometimes, writers decide that we've changed our thinking about the piece. Rereading narrative writing, secondary characters may seem more important and may need more elaboration. Essay writers may have new evidence to support our ideas, or we may have shifted our thinking about the subject and need to modify our thesis. Poets may have found fresher images or a broader vocabulary. You will want to model for students how you think through some of these possible reasons to revise, using pieces you've written with them earlier in the year.

Audience is another real reason to revise: we revise when we have in mind a particular person or group of people that we know will be reading our work, keeping in mind the effect we want the piece to have on that particular person or group. You may give the children an audience for their newly revised pieces by stating from the outset that all the pieces will go immediately to their new teacher as an introduction to their writing or by planning a celebration in which they present their work to the incoming third-grade class. You may also give children the opportunity to choose an audience for their piece, either in addition to or instead of whole-class publishing, thereby letting them decide who they want to read their piece and why.

## **Adding to Students' Revision Toolbox**

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You will want to teach children to add to their revision toolbox during this unit. Consider teaching revision strategies that are somewhat dramatic, as well as those that appear to be subtle but effective. Dramatic revision includes cutting to the bone, rereading a piece and asking after every sentence, "Is this necessary?" Another possible revision for narrative writing is to think like a movie director and decide where to pan out for a wider view and where to zoom in on a tiny detail. There may be places where a sweeping view of the whole scene might be particularly effective, like looking across the entire lunch room and noticing all the tables crammed with kids laughing and eating, and other places where the close-up of a trembling hand might tell the story best.

Some writers may need to read their work aloud, and they may try first revising by varying their reading tone of voice, then changing the writing to match the tone they like the best. In both narrative and essay writing, it's worth considering repetition, both by trying out the repeated use of particular words or phrases and by making sure there isn't inadvertent repetition of nonessential words or phrases.

You may teach children to reconsider the sequence of their stories, thinking about where to start, where to build suspense, and where to end, and then use revision strategies for resequencing, including cutting and stapling. Adding details is an important part of revision. Children can reread their pieces and think about which parts are the most important, and they can elaborate on those sections. If kids are having a hard time determining the most important part of their story, they might ask, “Where in my story do I show the biggest feelings or the most important ideas?” For example, a student rereading his story about cooking arroz con pollo with Grandma on Saturday could realize that the most important part happened when he and his grandmother smelled something burning. He would then decide to develop this part of the story, adding dialogue and small actions that show his feelings. You can teach strategies for adding more details to the text, one of which is using strips of paper in the middle of sections. It is important to teach children the reasons for altering a draft in addition to teaching the physical work of revision.

You may also want to teach children to review their leads and endings. Show kids that they can try writing several versions of any part of their story and then think about which version works best. To write new leads or new endings, children can study previous mentor texts or new mentor texts you introduce, then name what the author did that the child might emulate. For example, children might reread the ending of *Fireflies* and recognize that Julie Brinckloe ended her story with a strong feeling. Kids could then try to write similarly in their own pieces. Or they might notice that an author began her story by describing the setting and try to write similarly.

Mentor authors will play a large role in this unit as students pore over texts that will help them improve their pieces. You’ll want to show students how they can study a published text that resembles the one they are trying to produce. If a student is revising her own realistic fiction piece, you may pull out a few great fiction picture books and help her see how these authors crafted the details to bring out the internal journey of their main characters. If some of your students have returned to their angled all-about books, you may highlight pages of a great nonfiction book that uses diagrams with a zoomed-in image to teach the reader even more. Or you may point out to a small group of students how an author starts with the most important information first, then gives more specific details later on the page. All of this work will support the Common Core State Standards for reading, which require that third graders discuss craft within a specific scene and notice how subsequent scenes build on each other.

Most important, you will want to teach your writers that they must find their own mentor authors, combing through the baskets of your classroom library to find a text they would like to emulate. While it will help them to watch you point out authorial choices and craft moves, it will create even greater independence if you teach them how to notice great writing on their own. You might suggest that your students read like writers, noticing particular parts that worked well in these published texts and then asking themselves, “How did the author do that? How might that go in my piece? Where could I use that language in my writing?” You can model for students

how once you've noticed great writing in another text, you can return to your own draft and revise through that particular lens. This work supports the Common Core State Standards that call for students to notice an author's word choice and discuss the intended meaning and effect.

## **Revising Our Habits: Using a Writing Community to Build Not Only Our Writing but Also Ourselves as Writers**

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This unit is a great opportunity to show students that strong revision lies not only in their own solitary processes but also in the thoughts and feedback of a writing community. You will want to offer students opportunities to share, talk, and revise with others. Through talking with others about their own writing, children will learn that they are not alone on this journey. All writers encounter similar struggles and experience similar successes, and our fellow writers are usually able to see our pieces with fresh eyes and offer suggestions for further revision.

There are many ways this can go. You might choose to teach a revision strategy in a minilesson and then send kids off to talk about and work on the strategy with a partner. Kids might discuss places in their writing where they could try the day's strategy and help each other get started. Alternately, you may teach a revision strategy, send students off to write independently, and then schedule time for partnerships to meet at the workshop's end. You might teach students to share how revision strategies are helping the piece or share before-and-after versions or share their further revision suggestions. You'll want to remind children that they don't need to take all of their partner's suggestions—a suggestion is a recommendation, a possible way to go, not a command. Ultimately, partners have the opportunity to read and reread their stories together, thinking more deeply about their pieces. The Common Core State Standards expect that by third grade students are not relying solely on teachers for feedback but are also using “support from peers” to revise their writing and move their work through the writing process.

You might want to explore various opportunities for grouping children throughout the unit. Often times you'll take this upon yourself, organizing students who have common needs. For instance, you might form a small group of students who are revising essays, another group of students who are working on a collection of pieces, and another group of students who are using mentor texts to revise. Other times, you'll want to support students in making their own grouping choices. You might encourage them to find partners who are working on similar kinds of pieces or revising using specific strategies. You might have one group of writers helping one another resequence their stories, another group studying leads, and yet another group taking their pieces and rewriting them into a different genre.

Regardless of grouping, give children time at the end of a work session to talk about what they tried, what worked, and what is still giving them trouble. Another way you can support the focus of a group is by requiring that they “workshop” one

writer's piece each day. So one writer will share his work on Monday, another writer on Tuesday, and so on. This way there is a sense that the whole group will focus on one writer's piece, as well as an understanding that every writer is expected to open up her work to the group.

Groups may want to choose a mentor text in their genre to serve as a guidepost for their revisions and their talks about their writing. Children may choose a touchstone text they've read as a class, an example from the narrative continuum (if they're doing narrative writing), or some other source you have made available to them in folders organized by genre. During the first days of group work, kids may spend time at the end of writing workshop reading the mentor text as writers to construct their own language for what they want to try in their writing based on their mentor author's work.

While many teachers provide revision checklists, it is often more helpful to list revision strategies step by step on a chart. These charts can be typed up, given to students, stored in their revision folders, and used during partner or group conferences. In this way students can discuss strategies, such as adding details to a setting by creating a movie in our mind to help us remember where the characters were and what was around them. We want to push children not to say, "I am going to add setting here," but to say, "I am going to describe the kitchen by adding, 'A round white table sat in the middle of the room with five wooden chairs around it.'" By discussing the specific revisions they could make, children are more apt to follow through. You might choose to showcase strong examples of partner and group work by asking children to gather around a group and listen to the members' conversation, naming the positive qualities children might replicate in their own partner and group work.

## Create a Writing Center That Supports Revision

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Materials and tools play an important role in the revision process. Tell kids that part of the work of revision is deciding not only what they want to revise but also how they will revise and the tools they need. Providing writers opportunities to use various revising tools can help energize them and encourage independence. Having a revision folder and a color pen can motivate writers to bring zealous energy to the job of revising writing. You will want to be sure students have access to various tools, including strips of paper to add sentences and sections into the middle of their writing; flaps of paper to tape over neglected parts of their stories; and single sheets of paper to staple to the end or the middle parts. You may also want your children to have access to Post-it notes, tape, staplers, and scissors during writing workshop.

You may want to create a chart for the writing center that lists the tools, how the tools are used, and what revision strategies they support. For example, you might list the tool *strips of paper* and then describe uses for paper strips—to insert details, for example. You can also describe specific details that can be added—dialogue, internal thinking, or physical description. This will help shift the focus from the strips of paper

and toward revision strategies. Invite students to create their own revision tools as well, offering them the opportunity to share these tools and how to use them with the entire writing community.

## **Editing and Word Study to Support Writing Workshop**

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Throughout the year, you've encouraged kids to give tricky words their best try and move on, to use spelling patterns from word study to spell tricky words, and to use the word wall to learn commonly misspelled high-frequency words. You've nudged kids to use big, fancy vocabulary even when they aren't sure of the exact spelling, and you've been studying words during word study, read-alouds, and other times of the day.

Now is the time of year to bring it all together. Dust off all the old charts—if you've still got them—and teach kids to use them all, all the time. In this unit, you may want to teach kids that they can create their own personal editing checklists by looking through their own writing and noticing the kinds of things about which they need reminders. Writers notice our own spelling challenges so that we can always be on the lookout. All of us who write know our own weaknesses. Teach kids to search their writing to see whether they are the kind of writer who misspells certain high-frequency words every time. Or maybe they are the kind of writer who always forgets a particular spelling pattern, or perhaps they forget to reread their writing to check it over. Teach kids that every writer has some habit or even a bunch of habits or patterns in our writing. Finding those patterns and knowing to double-check for them is incredibly useful.

## **Celebrating a Year of Writing Workshop and Building Momentum for Next Year**

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As the unit and the year wind down, you will want to celebrate the extensive work children have done during this month and throughout the year. You will want to take time to have children celebrate the work they have produced and the great strides they have made as writers. You will want to hold a writing celebration that is about not only the writing but also the writers.

If you made photocopies of the original pieces that children revised, you might choose this time to take those pieces back out and put them side by side with the newest version. As children share their before-and-after pieces, they can take their classmates on their journey of revision, sharing what made them decide to revise these particular pieces and how they chose to revise them. Then too, writers might share how this process enhanced not only their work but also themselves as writers.

Many times children leave our classrooms strong and energetic writers and then return from summer break the following September out of practice and out of passion.

Therefore, you will likely want to spend some time helping the kids take with them all they've learned into next year's writing workshop. You might ask children to write a reflection, sharing what they learned and how they have grown. This reflection, accompanied by original work, drafts created during revision, and published pieces, can travel with them into next year's classroom. Next year's teachers might even begin writing workshop by having children share their body of revised work and all they know about writing with the class as a way of building a writing community and learning about the children in their room.

Then, too, you might choose to invite next year's teachers to an end-of-year writing workshop to acquaint themselves with the students with whom they will be working. They can talk with your children about their process and their pieces. They might study their notebooks and folders. They might also join the celebration and end-of-year reflection. Listening to your kids share all that they know about writing will help their future teachers plan units of study that build on the work you and your students have done.

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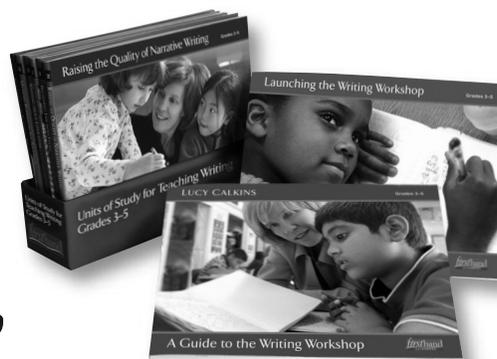
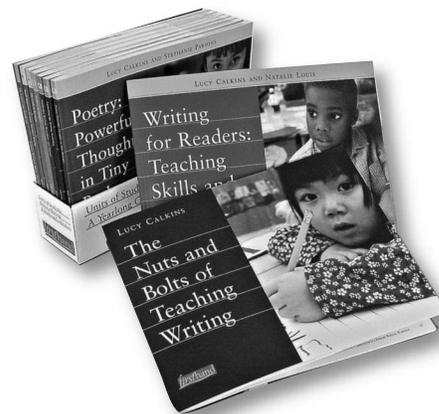
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