

**The *Write Time*—A Three-Fold Approach to Supporting Growth in Writing**  
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**Overview**

**Rationale**

**Objectives**

**Strategies**

**Classroom Activities**

**Annotated Bibliography/Resources**

**Appendices-Standards**

**Overview**

As the name suggests, it's more and more difficult to find the "right" time to teach writing. Unlike the other subjects a self-contained second grade instructor teaches, there is not a set uniform curriculum to explicitly and systematically teach writing. It can be frustrating for teachers because although we have high expectations for our students, we continually search for better ways to help our students meet those expectations. It's not just enough to know what to expect; we need to set the tiny measurable goals that lead to those ultimate expectations. Knowing that is one thing, finding the time in an already busy day is another.

The guiding questions for this curriculum unit are:

- How can teachers establish a classroom environment that supports growth in writing?
- How can teachers realistically teach writing in an explicit way spending enough time to create a rhythm, while adhering to the district's rigorous curricular expectations?
- How can teachers move students past their initial drafts and drive instruction so that they become self-sufficient, moving into the role of facilitators?

If you have been searching for ways to help your students meet your writing expectations, then you may want to consider some of the guided and modeled writing exercises. They are offered as a means of providing explicit, systematic lessons to teach writing. If you are also struggling with the issue of time and the importance of writing in the second grade curriculum, then this unit is for you. The purpose of this curriculum is to change how our students perceive writing, either as a punishment or something they have to do ever so often to fill up a portfolio. The goal is to increase the importance of writing, make it a daily occurrence and empower our students through writing. By using the literature

and materials that the district has in place, and using them as teaching tools, we can more effectively use our time by forming connections. This will allow us to improve the quality of written response to literature, while at the same time allow our students to see themselves as writers with their own stories to tell.

In an effort to help support students' growth in writing, a three-fold approach is presented. The first step involves guiding and modeling writing. The teacher reads aloud from a story and then guides the class as they respond to writing prompts that address specific writing/story elements. As the students respond, the teacher writes their responses on chart paper or an overhead transparency, thinking aloud about the strategies and skills as he/she writes. The goal is to get the students thinking about how authors craft their stories, so that they begin to think about craft as they write their own pieces. *As teachers we read aloud to our students all of the time. By forming a connection, we're making the write time possible.*

The second step involves adding the use of a double-entry journal. Not only does it support students as they try to comprehend what they are reading, it also allows students to focus on the writer's craft and the necessary elements of what makes a good story. Second grade students spend a large portion of their day reading. *When we ask students to respond to stories and extend them by connecting with their own experiences, we're making the write time possible.*

The third step involves having students keep a personal journal. In it they can collect thoughts and ideas, appropriately respond to their emotions, and build a bank that they can draw upon as they write throughout the year in writing workshop. Our students must have portfolios. *As educators, when we show them that writing is useful and not a chore, we empower them. We're making the write time possible!*

## **Rationale**

Why develop a unit on writing? Why connect it to reading? The simplest answer is that there is a **need** for units to be developed with a combined emphasis on reading and writing. At the second grade level, a lot of emphasis is placed on children's developing reading skills. Literacy Plus has strategies in place to help with decoding, vocabulary, fluency and comprehension; however, at this point, there is not a set writing curriculum.

On a daily basis, teachers are required to have a 90 minute block in our schedules for reading. There exists a need for special emphasis on teaching children to write. During that 90 minute block, we can have our students respond in writing to text, but time spent working through the writing process must be

done at other times. Unfortunately, because time is so precious, writing is often neglected.

This curriculum makes strong correlations between the stories that second graders read in the Harcourt reading series and establishes the routines necessary for Writer's Workshop. The goal of this curriculum unit is to have a classroom of proficient writers. I realize that in order to make that achievable, I must find a way to offer explicit and systematic writing instruction just as I offer my students explicit and systematic reading instruction. This curriculum ties reading and writing instruction together.

The curriculum unit addresses the Pittsburgh Public Schools Content standards for reading, writing and speaking, specifically addressing Content Standard #3: "All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems." The unit will also address Content Standard #4: "All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas." By addressing these content standards, this unit can have a place in any second grade teacher's classroom.

Throughout the district, there exists a need to improve a student's ability to respond in writing to text. In order to do this successfully, students must be able to independently read text, demonstrate comprehension of the text by getting the information correct and then make strong connections among ideas in the text. This often involves connecting something that happened to a character with a personal experience. This is very difficult for most students because of the many skills involved and the higher level of thinking that is required. At the simplest level a student must be able to decode and read the text with enough fluency to make sense of what is happening in the story. At the next level, the student must be able to translate those thoughts into written form. At the highest level, a student must be able to synthesize what has occurred in the text and connect it to their own lives, once again turning those thoughts into the written form.

As already mentioned, the district, through Literacy Plus, has a lot of tools, strategies and materials available for teachers to use to aid in reading instruction. The purpose of this research and curriculum will be to find a way to use those tools to forge a reading and writing connection which in the long run will help students become better readers and writers. The thinking and processing students use while working through the writing process will help them produce well-written, thoughtful pieces that demonstrate comprehension. On a deeper level, the hope is that the students will begin to see themselves as writers with their own unique stories to tell.

Most children are natural communicators. They love to share stories telling about things that have happened in their lives. It is my experience that once you get a group of children together and ask a question, everyone in the group likes to add something, piggy backing on what the others have already said. If they were allowed, most students could continue sharing their experiences for the better part of the day. It is only when those same children are asked to write about those experiences that all of a sudden no one has anything to write about. At that time many of them feel as if nothing important happens in their lives. It's as if an invisible wall holds these children back from the freedom of expressing themselves through writing. Most of my students are fearful of making errors, some aren't sure how to word their sentences, others cringe because they know they are making errors, and some simply have trouble with the fine motor coordination involved in holding a pencil and forming the letters. There are also those that shy away at the thought of writing. It's as if the blank page represents some chasm that they may never cross if they step into it.

The challenge then becomes for me as a teacher of writers, to set up a safe environment in the classroom where it is okay to make mistakes, where writing is as natural and as important as speaking. One of the goals of this unit is to give significance to writing. Writing must be seen as having the same importance as reading and math. Just as our students hear us reading to them, they also need to see us writing. We have D.E.A.R. time where everyone stops to read; this curriculum will call for D.E.A.W. time—Drop Everything and Write. If students can spend 5- 10 minutes a day, writing in a journal that is theirs, not to be graded or evaluated, just to be enjoyed, perhaps writing will be seen as less threatening. Perhaps we as educators would be making the point that just as we read for different reasons, we write for different reasons—enjoyment being one of them.

Another area where writing can and will be incorporated in this unit will be in the form of a think sheet or personal journal. Our students deal with so many outside influences. Often family situations make our students feel as if they have no control over what is happening in their lives. Students often lash out at one another or become defiant with the teachers they come in contact with because it is a way of claiming control over their lives. Why not empower them through writing?

This year I have a student who is dealing with loss and grief. This youngster exhibits angry, impatient behavior. His notebook has become a tool to help gain control over out-of-control emotions. After an outburst, this youngster will pick up a notebook and begin writing until the emotional outburst has passed. The personal journal is an amazing gift we can give our students!

Another important piece of my proposed curriculum will be to establish rules and routines in a safe environment so that writing time in the classroom moves smoothly. As Lucy Calkins says in her book, The Art of Teaching Writing, “writing workshops need to be modeled after art studios and researchers’ laboratories; we need to invite students to pursue their own important projects in an environment that is ongoing and stable and then move around among them—watching, demonstrating, and giving pointers” (p. 15). Those rules and routines prove critical when a teacher conducts writing conferences. My students will find any excuse to get out of their seats and come over to ask me a question when I am in the middle of working with a small group or working one on one. The best guidance is done in those conferences because you are using the student’s own words to guide him/her, and best of all, each child’s voice gets heard.

To address the issue of time, the allocated time that is spent on reading instruction and the limited time left over for writing, it is important to forge a link between reading and writing that is apparent to our students. After all, “the quality of writing is inextricably linked to the quality of reading” (The Reading and Writing Connection). By making a connection, the issue of improving a child’s written response to literature is also being addressed. I propose incorporating writing into the fabric of the students’ expected readings. This would be a great way to start the school year. It allows for the teacher to set the tone for a community of writers from the very beginning. Children could start out collecting wonderings, thoughts, ideas, new words in a container, whether it is like Donald Graves’s journal, Donald Murray’s day book, or even Betsy Byars’s bureau drawer.

Calkins says that “we care about writing when it is personal and interpersonal” (p. 14). At the start of the school year, we begin by getting to know one another. The first literacy theme in the second grade Harcourt reading series is “Being Me.” The five stories in the theme all explore family themes and the importance of being you. By writing personal narratives that address these core ideas, students will have a chance to write about a subject that they know well. In turn, the richness of the writing and the discussions surrounding it can aid in the comprehension of the story. This will also allow students to draw a parallel between themselves and the characters about which they are reading. This will in turn give more meaning to the text and allow our students to create strong connections between ideas in the stories and their own lives. It is the goal of this curriculum for students to see themselves as writers, and to respect all of the gifts that writing has to offer.

Dr. Eldridge, my seminar instructor at The Pittsburgh Teacher's Institute, recently wrote on the board two pieces of advice for us to use when forming our units.

- "Do less."
- "Do it often."

Research has proven that intensity and duration bring about success. In an attempt to make this unit more manageable, I'm going to focus on the overall importance of including different types of writing in the classroom and show that with a little effort and the right attitude, there is time and a place for writing in our curriculum.

## **Objectives**

The major objectives of this curriculum are to establish a classroom environment that supports growth in writing by demonstrating ways to teach writing in an explicit way, and to move into the role of facilitator as students begin to see themselves as writers. As stated earlier, it is the goal of this curriculum for students to see themselves as writers, and to respect all of the gifts that writing has to offer. In order to reach this lofty goal, an interconnected network needs to be established between reading and writing. Gail Tompkins lists ten strategies that writers use: "tapping prior knowledge, organizing ideas, visualizing, summarizing, making connections, revising meaning, monitoring, playing with language, generalizing, and evaluating" (p. 79). I use these same strategies on a daily basis when teaching reading. Before reading a story, I always tap into students' prior knowledge. We use webs, charts and outlines to organize our ideas to aid in comprehension. We explore the language used in text i.e. metaphors and similes. After reading each story, we summarize what we've read. We reread stories to gain new insights and to improve our comprehension of what we've read. We play with language each time we do Wordbuilding and Syllasearch and create silly sentences. It is apparent that these "writing" strategies are also "reading" strategies. When teaching reading strategies, it is further apparent that I already am using many of the strategies that writers need. It now falls to me to point that out to my students so they can benefit from the pattern. It also is a relief as a teacher to know that time already spent teaching reading strategies can be reiterated by making the connection to writing for my students.

In order to put this into practice, at the beginning of the school year, students will be asked to keep two types of journals and a writing folder. One of the journals will be a personal journal. In the personal journal, students will be asked to write about events in their lives, explore thinking, wonder, predict, hypothesize, ask questions, and engage their imaginations, work out feelings and

personal issues, and share experiences with readers. The personal journals will give students an opportunity to write about events in their own lives informally and for themselves. Personal journals provide a way for students to develop fluency through informal writing. The students get to choose the topics. Their writing will not be assessed, and will not have to go through the entire writing process. The journal writings will serve as a resource for those individuals who began to see their wonderings as a collection. Those students will then be able to reflect on their work, perhaps choosing to put together some entries in order to write a narrative piece.

The journals would also provide an opportunity for students to work out issues such as frustration, anger and grief. Writing could then be seen as helpful instead of punitive. Ideally this would carry over into an activity that students could choose to carry back and forth to school. This private journal could serve as a way to work out one's feelings as it did for the youngster mentioned earlier. It gave this child something appropriate to do in the midst of his anger, and better yet, the chance to reflect after writing those angry words. He'd often sheepishly say, upon reflection, "I don't feel that way any more."

The second type of journal students will be asked to keep is a Double-Entry Journal. According to Gail E. Tompkins, in double-entry journals, students divide each page of their journal pages into two columns and write different information in each column. The purpose of a double-entry journal is to support students as they try to comprehend what they are reading. This fits well with our district's standards because it will provide an opportunity for teachers to key in a specific area and give students a chance to respond in writing. I can use this with content vocabulary, character analysis, plot and other story elements. This will provide much needed guided practice for students who struggle to proficiently respond to tasks, scoring low on the standards based assessments. It will also provide a forum for us to examine parts of stories, providing a necessary framework or model so that students can become the characters in their own life stories.

The writing folder will contain a compilation of the student's work. It will be a place where students can house their writing as they work through the writing process, experimenting with the different genres. Gail Tompkins says in Teaching Writing Balancing Process and Product, "When students choose their own topics during writing workshop, the focus is on helping them to become fluent writers and to have a chance to write about their own lives and experiences" (p. 68).

This three-fold approach with an emphasis on writing throughout the day for a variety of purposes addresses the Pittsburgh Public Schools Content Standards for reading, writing and speaking. The curriculum unit specifically

addresses Content Standard #3: “All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.” The unit also addresses Content Standard #4: “All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.” By addressing these content standards and forging a connection to reading, this unit addresses the concern of time by incorporating it into the already existing reading curriculum. It can have a place in any Pittsburgh Public School second grade teacher’s classroom.

### **Strategies**

In The Art of Teaching Writing, Calkins has a section entitled, “Let Children Show Us How to Teach.” In that section there is a useful quotation in which she claims, “I begin to believe that my goal in life isn’t to lure young people to care about writing; it’s to lure them to care about something” (p. 172). She later goes on to say, “When we help our students find and pursue their own projects and goals, we make it more likely that they will turn toward becoming productive and committed rather than disillusioned and bitter” (p. 172). When teachers have an enthusiastic, positive attitude toward writing and are positive about each student’s individual efforts, the students, in turn, want to write. By making writing a daily activity, letting our students see us write for a variety of purposes, we give credence to writing. The key is to entice the students, drawing them in by making writing meaningful to them.

The difficult piece once students are persuaded to write is making time to write in an already packed schedule. Calkins has a helpful view:

The most important thing I can suggest is that we do *not* abbreviate the writing workshop so that it lasts only as long as our children’s attention for writing lasts. One of our major goals at this point is to encourage children to say more, to sustain their work longer, to approach a text expecting it to be more detailed, and all of this means that we need to give children more time for writing than they know what to do with (115).

Since students finish at different times during a writing period, they must know what to do. It is a goal of this curriculum to get them to rely more on themselves and each other rather than solely on the teacher. Instead of interrupting me while I am circulating around the room, having writing conferences or teaching a mini lesson to a flexible group, students can begin to find a “writing teacher” among their peers and have a conference. “When children have the opportunity to chat

with each other about their topic and their writing, writing becomes less lonely” (p. 115).

Marcia Freeman in Teaching the Youngest Children: A Practical Guide, emphatically feels that topics and story starters should not be given to primary children. “Young writers need to have control over the content of their pieces; they must know the subject well.” She continues, “When they do, they can concentrate on the mechanics of writing and composing skills and not be inhibited by lack of knowledge or interest” (p. 138) Marcia Freeman also suggests helping children find topics from photographs, literature and school activities, and teaching them how to use personal experiences and expertise as topic starters.

According to Katie Wood Ray in What You Know by Heart, “One of the very first things we have to teach our students is how to find ideas for writing. Since we were usually given topics for writing by our teachers, the part of the process where you first get ideas was completely skipped over. Today “we believe that it is only by working through the whole process of writing from ideas to publication that students will get the much needed experience to become proficient writers” (p. 32).

By using D.E.A.W. time each day to write in our personal journals, as well as, encouraging children to keep notebooks which travel back and forth from home to school, they can begin to collect ideas, write down experiences, phrases or words that capture their imagination. The notebooks and journals can become writing resources for students as they search for ideas. In addition to generating ideas for writing from a student’s own collection, literature can also be used. When we as teachers study an author’s craft, pointing out the story elements to our students, we’re giving them another strategy to use to guide them in their writing. According to Katie Wood Ray, “The best way to learn anything is to read the kind of thing that you’re learning to write. We believe that good authors are people who know about how our language works and who know how to use it well for all kinds of purposes” (p. 106).

As mentioned earlier, the first literacy theme in the Harcourt reading series is *Being Me*. The theme includes Angela Shelf Medearis’s Lucy’s Quiet Book, Cynthia Rylant’s Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Moon, Arnold Lobel’s Days with Frog and Toad, Debra Hess’s Wilson Sat Alone, and Eric Carle’s The Mixed-Up Chameleon. They are written by well known authors with a gift of storytelling that appeals to children because they are either told from a child’s perspective (Angela Shelf Medearis’s Lucy’s Quiet Book), talk about problems that children face (Debra Hess’s Wilson Sat Alone), or grab a child’s attention through the illustrations (Eric Carle’s The Mixed-Up Chameleon). All of these

stories deal with family, friends, pets, personal interests, personality, and/or the importance of *being you*. These stories provide the perfect opportunity for students to begin writing because they will be writing about topics that they know well (families/friends), that interest them (pets/friends/hobbies), and that provide enough leeway for each student to have control over the content of his/her piece.

To support children as they learn to write, Gail Tompkins in Teaching Writing Balancing Process and Product suggests the use of modeled writing, shared writing and independent writing. In modeled writing, the “teacher writes in front of students, creating the text, doing the writing, and thinking aloud about strategies and skills” (p. 27). This is the highest level of support. It can be done for the whole class or a small group. This would be a strategy for demonstrating to students how to do a new type of writing activity before they have to do it independently. We would be able to work through the writing process giving them a sense of community with a strong foundation.

Guided writing is when “the teacher presents a structured lesson and supervises as students write. The teacher also teaches a writing procedure, strategy or skill” (Tompkins, 27). Guided writing can be done with small groups, with buddies or partners or with individual students. This would better allow the teacher to meet the individual needs of his/her students and allow for flexibility. With students on a basic or below basic level, the teacher may be working on anything from choosing what to write to organize their thoughts into sentences to actually getting the words on the paper. With the students that are proficient or advanced, the teacher could be guiding the writing during conferences through the different stages of writing from revision to editing, introducing different types of writing activities.

Students use a combination of guided writing and independent writing in writing workshop. Tompkins’s states six purposes for writing independently: “to provide an authentic context for writing practices, to give students opportunities to choose writing topics, to gain writing fluency and stamina, as a tool for learning, such as when children write in reading logs and other types of journals, to make and publish books and to document learning in literature focus units and thematic units” (Tompkins, 34).

Through the use of modeled, guided and independent writing I will be adhering to the Pittsburgh Public School district’s Content Standards for Communications. I will be helping my second graders develop skills that they will need throughout their lives. The best time to start is at an early age. By conducting a daily writing workshop and teaching children writing information and techniques, it is reasonable to expect them to achieve. Lucy McCormick Calkins says in The Art of Teaching Writing, “When children know the

parameters within which they are working, they can be more strategic, deliberate writers” (p. 185). Teachers who experience success with their students during writing workshop, structure in predictable time for writing and give a lot of time to writing.

As Calkins says, “I want children to experience what it is to find meaning in the moments of their lives, and so I want to help them to write about moments that do not come already packaged in ready-made significance” (Calkins, 119). Only then will writing become powerful and meaningful for those students. Like the child in my class who uses writing as a means of venting his anger and grief, I want each of my students to feel the power of writing and the sense of accomplishment that comes with writing. Calkins quotes Anne Morrow Lindbergh on the power of writing, “I must write, I must write at all costs. For writing is more than living, it is being conscious of living” (Calkins, p.4). Writing for me has always been a powerful tool from the mundane and ordinary to the special and extraordinary. I am eager to pass that empowering gift of consciousness to my students. Join me.

### **Classroom Activities**

A three-fold approach is presented in an effort to help support students growth in writing. The first step involves guiding and modeling writing. The second step involves adding the use of a double-entry journal. The third step involves having students keep a personal journal. The steps are established at the beginning of the school year because it is important to have a routine. This unit, “Being Me,” will be about 6-8 weeks long, although the strategies and ideas in this curriculum could be elaborated and applied to other themes throughout the year.

For the purpose of this paper, I listed the read aloud activities over the course of 7 weeks. There are 2- 3 activities per week to be done during your English period. The double-entry journal activities are listed according to the stories. If you work for the Pittsburgh Public Schools, the theme “Being Me” is the first in the second grade Harcourt Reading Series. If not, then the trade books are available. For an integrated approach the three can be done simultaneously. Making writing important and writing for a variety of purposes will show your students that writing is fun, useful and empowering—not a chore!

### **Guided and Modeled Writing**

The guided and modeled writing activities revolve around the novel Gooney Bird Greene by Lois Lowry. The teacher reads aloud from the story, and then guides the class as they respond to writing prompts. Different story elements and devices that writers use as they craft their responses are addressed. The writing is not

formally assessed. It is a springboard for discussion and a guide to better writing. There are also activities for students to work on at home which involve interviewing a relative/guardian and writing a response.

## **Week One**

Writer's Craft: Beginning, Middle, and End  
Grammar: What is a sentence?

The teacher begins by introducing the novel Gooney Bird Greene. Explain to students that the purpose of reading this story is not only for enjoyment, but also to learn about the writer's craft. Before reading the story each day, encourage your students to pay close attention to the techniques Gooney Bird uses to make something ordinary seem extraordinary. Tell your students that shortly they will have their own double-entry journal to respond to the stories in their reading book. After reading aloud each day, the teacher models and guides the students to respond.

### Day 1

After reading aloud pages 1-3 (through the 5<sup>th</sup> paragraph), have the following quotation from the book written on chart paper or on an overhead transparency:

“But soon it was clear that Gooney Bird was mysterious and interesting” (Lowry, 3).

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Discuss what the words mysterious and interesting mean. Then ask,

1. What do we know about Gooney Bird? What makes her unusual?
2. Why do you think Lois Lowry included a mysterious, interesting character in her book?
3. Tell about an unusual person that you've encountered. What were they like?

Write the student responses on the chart paper. Insist that your students must respond in complete sentences. The teacher thinks aloud as he/she writes, recognizing sentence structure and appropriate responses. Make a paragraph or list of the various student responses of unusual people that they've met. Plant the seed that these mysterious people could become characters in their writing.

### Day 2

After reading aloud page 3 (6<sup>th</sup> paragraph) - top of page 6 have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

When Chelsea says that a good story needs a book, Mrs. Pidgeon explains to the class, “There are many good stories that don’t need a book. If Grandma tells you about when she was a little girl, she doesn’t have to have that story in a book (Lowry, 4). Can you think of a story that your family tells about you when you were little?

List some of the interesting responses on chart paper. Do not include the details. For example:

- Julie was looking for sea shells and got lost on the beach.
- Aaron called his grandmother every time he got in trouble with his parents so that she could calm down his mother.

Today’s writing assignment is for homework. Each student must go home and ask their parents/guardians for a family story. It can be a story that they talked about during the discussion following read aloud or it can be a new story. The story must have a beginning, middle and an end.

Day 3

After reading aloud pages 6-10 have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

When Gooney Bird asks to be “right smack in the middle of everything,” Mrs. Pidgeon responds, “Well, since you would be the main character, I guess that would put you in the middle of everything. I guess that would make you the hero” (Lowry, 4).

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Then ask,

1. What is a main character?
2. Why do you think that the class chose Gooney Bird as the main character?
3. Who was the main character of your family story?
4. Who are some of your favorite main characters? What makes them your favorite?

**Week Two**

Writer's Craft: Characters and Dialogue  
Grammar: Statements and Questions

Over the course of week 2, read Chapter 2 in Gooney Bird Greene (pages 11-21). Show the students the book when you get to page 14 *How Gooney Bird Got Her Name* so that they realize that Gooney Bird is telling **her** story. Keep in mind that the goal is to get students to see that they have their own unique stories to tell.

This week's writing assignment is for homework. Each student must go home and ask their parents/guardians how they got their name. Gooney Bird included a lot of dialogue in her story when she was telling how her parents named her. Students must write a paragraph telling how they got their name and for whom they were named. This week's grammar emphasis is on statements vs. questions. Both must be included. Children will be exposed to quotation marks, but are not expected to master their use. This story will be the first chapter in the student's book, "Being Me."

### **Week Three**

Writer's Craft: suspense  
Grammar: exclamations and commands

#### Day 1

After reading aloud page 22 to the last paragraph on p. 28, have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

1. If Gooney Bird tells only absolutely true stories, how did she get from China to Watertown on a flying carpet?
2. How can you take something ordinary and make it extraordinary?
3. How did not mentioning which China Gooney moved from cause suspense?

Have a student read and discuss the questions. Refer back to the list of family stories from Week 1, Day 2 and the family stories that students wrote at home. Have students work with a partner to come up with exciting titles that build suspense for their family stories.

#### Day 2

After reading aloud page 28 (last paragraph) through p. 34, have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

1. How did the author and Gooney Bird build suspense into the story?
2. What emotions were mentioned and felt?
3. What does Gooney Bird's story "How Gooney Bird Came from China on a flying Carpet" make you think of?

Look back at your family story. Does it have enough suspense to keep the reader interested? How can you add suspense to your story?

### Day 3

Have students retell the story Gooney Bird and the Flying Carpet. Focus on the build up of emotions and suspense. Have students share suspenseful titles that they've written for their stories. List the titles on chart paper. Allow the class to offer feedback and suggestions. Build a community by teaching students helpful ways to respond to their fellow students' work. Students need to learn to rely on their peers for answers to questions, help on their writing, compliments and suggestions.

In this week's writing homework assignment, each student must go home and ask their parents/guardians about a time when something unexpected happened. This week's grammar emphasis is on commands vs. exclamations. Both must be included.

### Week Four

Writer's Craft: suspense and audience

Grammar: end marks

### Day 1

After reading aloud pages 35-43 (until the last paragraph), have the following quotation from the book written on chart paper or the overhead:

"Listen for the word *suddenly*. I put one in the story already, but I like to sprinkle in several. Some other *suddenlys* will be coming soon" (Lowry, 42).

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Then ask,

1. Why does Gooney Bird sprinkle "suddenlys" in her stories?
2. How does that help build suspense in a story?
3. What are other words that build suspense?

Go around the room having the students come up with true or make believe sentences that are full of suspense. Examples:

Last night I was doing my homework when suddenly\_\_\_\_\_.

I was lying in my bed trying to go to sleep when suddenly \_\_\_\_\_.

When time permits, have your students read through their writing in their writing folder and add a word that builds suspense.

## Day 2

After reading aloud pages 43 (last paragraph)-p. 46, have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

“The main character in this story is Gooney Bird, and it is important to tell a lot about the main character because the main character is right smack in the middle of everything. All of the others are just minor characters and it is boring to tell about their clothes” (Lowry, 45-46).

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Discuss the difference between main and secondary characters. Then ask,

1. What’s going on here? Why is Malcolm under his desk, Ben doing Math, Nicholas sitting with his eyes closed?
2. Why is Keiko the only one paying attention?
3. What does that tell us as writers about what writers need to do when crafting their stories?
4. What kind of stories do you like to read? Are they the same kind as your mom or grandmother reads? (Explicitly address audience.)

Write the student responses on the chart paper. Insist that your students must respond in complete sentences. The teacher thinks aloud as he/she writes, recognizing sentence structure and appropriate responses. Have students focus on the importance of knowing your audience and eliminating unnecessary details.

## Day 3

After reading aloud pages 47-53, have the following quotation from the book written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

“When an author jumps backward in a story, it is called a ‘flashback.’ So maybe jumping ahead would be a ‘flash-forward’ ” (Lowry, 49-50)?

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Then ask,

1. Why does Gooney Bird ‘flash-forward’ when telling the story “The Prince, the Palace and the Diamond Earrings?”
2. How could you use that device when writing a story?
3. Think of some favorite movies and books that flashback or flash-forward.
4. How can that be effective when writing a story?

This would be a good opportunity to mention all of the plays on words that Gooney Bird uses in this story. Examples:

Prince-Prinns

Palace-The Palace (an ice cream parlor)

### **Week Five**

Writer’s Craft: twist in the plot

Grammar: end marks

Day 1

After reading aloud pages 54-59, have the following quotation from the book written on chart paper or the overhead:

“Sometimes stories start in the most ordinary way. Then they become exciting when something unexpected happens” (Lowry, 59).

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Then ask students,

1. Brainstorm stories that start off as ordinary until something extraordinary happens. (Example: *Little Red Riding Hood* and Where the Wild Things Are.)
2. Tell about an ordinary day that turned extraordinary. If students are having trouble thinking of ideas, give them a prompt. Here are some true stories of days that turned extraordinary. One of my students wrote a paper this year entitled “A Day Like No Day Else.” What started off as an ordinary modern dance class turned extraordinary when the fire alarm went off. We had to leave the building without shoes and socks! Another day there was a bad storm with thunder and lightning. It turned extraordinary when the tree in front of my house was poking through the roof into my living room.

In this week's writing homework assignment, each student must go home, ask their parents/guardians about a time when an ordinary day turned extraordinary, and write about it. Once the writers share their stories, have the listeners point out the twist in the plot.

## Day 2

After reading aloud pages 60-68, have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

The trombone player asks Gooney Bird how the orchestra can thank her. Gooney Bird whispers something in her ear. What do you think she whispers?

Once again you're emphasizing the importance of suspense in a story. Continue having writers share their ordinary/extraordinary stories with listeners, pointing out the twist in the plot. Students by now have a collection of pieces in their writing folders. During Writing Workshop, they can revise and edit their pieces. They may also begin new pieces. Writing conferences will prove critical as the teacher strives to meet individual needs.

## Week Six

Writer's Craft: descriptive language, endings

Grammar: commas, adjectives

## Day 1

After reading aloud pages 69-75 (through the 3<sup>rd</sup> paragraph), have the students fill in a chart using the describing words that Gooney Bird uses in her story *Beloved Catman Is Consumed by a Cow*.

Catman-brown and white, furry and fat, enormously fluffy, tailless  
Cow- walks heavily and with determination, smells of thick, sun-warmed cowhide and meadow flowers, low throaty moo

Discuss how a writer's use of descriptive words helps the reader get a mental picture. Have the students work with a partner and reread some of the stories in their reading book. What descriptive clues did those authors use in their writing? Next have the students draw a picture of their favorite room in their house. Then, have the students write a descriptive paragraph of that room. Commas should be used when listing 3 or more words in a series.

Notes: Stellaluna by Janell Cannon is a picture book rich in descriptive language.

Marcia Freeman has a list of descriptive attributes on page 87 of Teaching the Youngest Writers: A Practical Guide.

## Day 2

After reading aloud pages 75 (4<sup>th</sup> paragraph) - 81 have the following written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

“I love happy endings” (Lowry, 80).  
“I will tell you how to get stories” (Lowry, 81).

Now is an opportunity to discuss different kinds of stories. Not all stories have happy endings. A story must have a beginning, middle and end. It must have primary and even secondary characters. Some stories are full of suspense. Others take an unexpected turn. There are mysteries, tragedies and even love stories like Gooney Bird's *Beloved Catman Is Consumed by a Cow*. Students can begin to explore what their favorite genres are to read and write.

Gooney Bird ends this chapter by offering to tell her classmates how to get stories. By now your class can also answer that question. Ask and see how they respond.

## Week Seven

Writer's Craft: Wrap-up Week

### Day 1

After reading aloud pages 82-88, have the following quotation from the book written on chart paper or an overhead transparency:

“Out there, invisible, are a lot of stories not yet told” (Lowry, 82).

Have a student read the quotation aloud. Discuss what Gooney Bird means. Explore the suggestions that Gooney Bird makes to her class. Your students already wrote about how they got their name in Week Two, but now give them a chance to write other topics: How \_\_\_\_\_'s Family Came to Pittsburgh, When \_\_\_\_\_ Spent Every Penny He/ She Had on Something He/She Really Wanted, Why \_\_\_\_\_ Was Late for School and/or How \_\_\_\_\_ Lost a Pet. The stories should include elements of writer's craft and grammar that were emphasized over the past 6 weeks. Students should have an opportunity to work through the writing process, conferencing with the teacher and their peers as they make revisions. A personal narrative rubric will be used to assess this piece.

As students begin to write they must ask themselves:

- How will I organize my writing?
- Who will be my audience?

As students are drafting, revising and editing, they must ask?

- Does my story have a beginning, middle and end?
- How did I build suspense?
- Does my story have an unexpected ending?
- Is there a twist in the plot?
- How did I make something ordinary extraordinary?
- Did I use dialogue effectively?
- Do I have complete thoughts? Did I use different kinds of sentences?
- After listening to my teacher's and my writing partner's suggestions and compliments, how will I revise my paper?

### **Double-Entry Journals**

The second step in the three-fold approach is a double-entry journal. The double-entry journals can be done simultaneously with the guided and modeled writing exercises as part of reading instruction. Double-entry journals support students as they try to comprehend what they are reading and allow students to focus on the writer's craft.

Students can either divide each page of their journal into two columns and write different information in each column or use the left side for the response to the story and the right side for a personal response. The journals provide an opportunity for teachers to focus on a specific area and give students a chance to respond in writing. Double-entry journals assist in the teaching of concept vocabulary, character analysis, plot and other story elements. Students will use the double-entry journals as they read the stories in their reading books making entries 1- 3 times a week during their reading period. The entries in this journal along with the collection of writing in response to the read aloud will become a bank from which students can draw the next chapters in their book, *Being Me*.

### **“Lucy’s Quiet Book” by Andrea Shelf Medearis**

Day 1

Concept vocabulary- **personality** (definition- the whole collection of individual emotions and behavior that make one person different from others: **individuality**)

Before reading, “Lucy’s Quiet Book,” discuss the definition of personality.  
Double Journal Entries to be done after reading “Lucy’s Quiet Book.”

Day 2

Left side-What was Lucy's problem? How did she solve it?

Right side-Tell about a problem you have had with your brothers and sisters.

How did you solve it?

Day 3

Left side-Lucy's family is very noisy. She has six noisy brothers who yell, cry and laugh. Are you more like Lucy or her brothers? How so?

Right side-What is your family like? (size, ages and names of siblings, noisy or quiet)

Day 4

Left side-When Lucy's house got too loud she went to the library because it was quiet. Mrs. Stone, the librarian helps Lucy solve her problem. How?

Right side-Where do you go when you need to escape from \_\_\_\_\_ at home?

Tell about someone special who has helped you.

\*Note—Roma Downey's Love is a Family talks about different kinds of families.

### **“Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Sun” by Cynthia Rylant**

Day 1

Concept vocabulary- **friendship** (definition-the state of being friends)

**friend** (someone you like and trust)

Before reading “Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Sun,” discuss the definitions of friends and friendship.

Double Journal Entries to be done after reading “Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Sun.”

Day 2

Left side-Henry and Mudge loved spending time together, but never did things the same way.

Right side- Tell about a special friend. How are you alike? How are you different?

Day 3

Left side- What are some of the fun things Henry and Mudge do in the fall?

Right side- Pick a season. What are some of the fun things that you like to do with a friend during that season?

(The focus should be on setting. This story is useful in teaching setting. Children can also make drawings and/or picture books. Emphasize the details in the setting.)

Day 4

Left side- “Henry and his dog Mudge liked being together most of all.”

Right side- Tell about a special pet. It can be yours or a friend. What special things do you like to do together?

\*Note—Students who enjoyed this story should be directed to the other Henry and Mudge books so that they can read more about things that the two friends like to do together.

### “Days with Frog and Toad” by Arnold Lobel

Day 1

Concept vocabulary- **alone vs. lonely** (separated from others vs. sad from lack of companionship or separation from others)

**misunderstanding** (hurt feelings caused mistaken belief)

**reflect** (to consider or think over carefully)

Before reading, “Days with Frog and Toad,” discuss the concept vocabulary definitions.

Double Journal Entries to be done after reading “Days with Frog and Toad.”

Day 2

Left side-What did Frog do when he wanted to be alone?

Right side-What do you do when you want to be alone? What’s the difference between alone and lonely? Tell about a time that you felt lonely.

Day 3

Left side-Frog thought Toad was sad. How did he try to cheer him up?

Right side-Tell about a time that you cheered someone up or when someone cheered you up. Who was sad? Why were they sad? What did you try to do to cheer them up? Did it work?

Day 4

Left side-Frog misunderstood the reason that Toad wanted to be alone. He thought that Toad didn’t want to be his friend anymore. Frog certainly didn’t help by getting involved. Why did Toad really want to be alone?

Right side- Tell about a misunderstanding that you had with a friend. How did you clear it up?

\*Note—Students who enjoyed this story should be directed to the other Frog and Toad books so that they can enjoy their many adventures.

## “Wilson Sat Alone” by Debra Hess

Day 1

Concept vocabulary- **shy vs. outgoing** (not feeling comfortable around people: not wanting or able to call attention to oneself vs. being at ease and friendly when dealing with others)

Before reading, “Wilson Sat Alone,” discuss the concept vocabulary definitions. Double Journal Entries to be done after reading “Wilson Sat Alone.”

Day 2

Left side-How are Wilson and Sara different?

Right side- Give examples to explain if you’re more like Wilson or Sara. (I’m more like \_\_\_\_\_ because\_\_\_\_\_.

Day 3

Left side- Wilson must have wanted to play with the other children all along. Why did he wait for Sara to roar at him?

Right side- Is Gooney Bird Greene more like Sara or Wilson? How do you know?

(The focus should be on characters and personality. Have the students go through their writing folders and pick out a main character that is shy or outgoing, and then add details or events that make that character trait clear to the reader.)

\*Note—Jack Prelutsky’s book of poems entitled Rolling Harvey Down the Hill talks about friends and their different personalities.

## “The Mixed-Up Chameleon” by Eric Carle

Day 1

Concept vocabulary- **confident** (definition- sure of oneself)

**mixed-up** (definition- unsure of oneself)

**content** (definition- pleased and satisfied with what one has or is)

Before reading, “The Mixed-Up Chameleon,” discuss the definition of personality. Double Journal Entries to be done after reading “The Mixed-Up Chameleon.”

Day 2

Left side- What did it take for the chameleon to learn that it was better to be a chameleon than a mixed combination of other animals?

Right side-What lesson does that teach you? What does it mean to “be yourself”?

\*Note—Camilla Cream, the main character in David Shannon’s A Bad Case of Stripes worries about what other people think of her until she breaks out in a bad case of stripes.

By this point the students have a reserve of information about themselves that they have been collecting by writing in the right hand side of their double-entry journal, participating in guided writing exercises and discussing family stories with parents/guardians. Students can go back and read what they’ve written and write what they’ve learned about themselves. Not everyone has to be working on the same topic. Some children may choose to write more about a favorite pet. Others may choose to write about a friend, and still others may choose to write about a family member. What’s important is that your students are now armed to write. They can meet with writing partners to ask and answer questions, to offer feedback and to bounce ideas off of one another. Teacher conferences play a critical role in the students’ developing writing skills.

### **Personal Journals**

The third part of this approach is the personal journal. This is done on a daily basis. It is a good activity for right after lunch or gym. It allows students to quietly collect themselves and get focused. In the personal journals, students write thoughts and ideas and appropriately respond to their emotions. They can also use the journals as a bank that they can draw upon as they write throughout the year in writing workshop. The first step is to make writing in the personal journals a habit. Like DEAR time, Drop Everything and Read, make a DEAW time in your day. Your students should drop everything and write for a minimum of 5- 10 minutes per day. I usually write while my students are writing. This affords me the opportunity to model how I write. Erasers are banned in my room. If you decide to change your mind, cross out what you wrote and start a new line. Add scribbles and carrots and make notes to yourself, but don’t lose your train of thought. It also gives me the opportunity to show how much enjoyment I get from writing. When I write, I make a point of looking up and laughing. Often times, the entire class ends up giggling. Writing can make us happy.

Another important time to use the personal journal is to help resolve issues. When the teacher sees students getting frustrated, classmates about to fight, or someone who had an argument with a parent before school, rather than letting the animosity reach a boiling point, the teacher directs students to write in their personal journals. The journals are private, not graded and meant for reflection. After the students write and cool off, they should be encouraged to

read what they wrote and write if their feelings have changed and what caused the change.

Finally, the personal journal can be a collection box for ideas for future stories. Students should be encouraged to note something suspenseful that happened, an exciting word that they learned, or an interesting character that they've met. In doing so, our students will fill up many notebooks as they move through the years. They will see themselves as the main characters in this story we call life. They will have the opportunity to grasp and celebrate many occasions that form the chapters of their lives.

## **Annotated Bibliography/Resources**

### Teacher Reading List

Anderson, Carl. How's It Going? A Practical Guide to Conferencing With Student Writers. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

Carl Anderson provides a lot of useful advice for writing conferences.

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. The Art of Teaching Writing. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.

Calkins thoroughly develops her ideas in ongoing structures in the writing workshop. Throughout the text, Calkins recommends children's and professional literature. She also provides a reader's guide and annotated bibliography at the end of the text which is very useful to teachers.

Freeman, Marcia S. Teaching the Youngest Writers: A Practical Guide. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House Publishing, Inc., 1998.

This certainly is a practical guide. Freeman starts by helping teachers establish goals and set up their classrooms for writing. She then moves into conducting the daily writing workshop taking her readers through the writing process. Next Freeman explores writing different genres. Finally, there is information for record keeping and evaluation, as well as, parent education.

Ray, Katie Wood. What You Know by Heart: How to Develop Curriculum for Your Writing Workshop. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.

What You Know by Heart: How to Develop Curriculum for Your Writing Workshop is a useful book for teachers to read as they develop the writing curriculum for their class. It helps teachers use a thought process to turn their experiences with writing and reading into curriculum for teaching.

Harmatiuk, Sandra J. "The Reading and Writing Connection." 2002. 19 Feb. 2004 <[http://fys.nd.edu/reading\\_writing.html](http://fys.nd.edu/reading_writing.html)>

This site has some general reflections that link the quality of reading to the quality of writing. As teachers struggle to make time for writing alongside of reading, the reflections and questions Harmatiuk poses are helpful.

Tompkins, Gail E. Teaching Writing Balancing Process and Product. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 2000.

This book is very useful to have as a reference. Each chapter is filled with tables and figures that contain charts, rubrics, questioning strategies and more!

## Student Reading List

Carle, Eric, "The Mixed-Up Chameleon," Something New, Collections: A Harcourt Reading/Language Arts Program, Harcourt, Inc., 2001.

The chameleon feels wishes to be like other animals rather than being happy as a chameleon. A useful book to begin the discussion with students about what makes them special.

Cannon, Janell. Stellaluna. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1993.

Janell Cannon uses a lot of descriptive language. This book can be helpful to teachers trying to get their students to use language rich in description.

Downey, Roma. Love is a Family. New York, NY: Derry-Air, Inc., 2001.

Lily struggles with the idea of wanting a *real* family when it's Family Fun Night at School. Teachers can use this book to open up a discussion on what makes each student's family unique.

Hess, Debra, "Wilson Sat Alone," Something New, Collections: A Harcourt Reading/Language Arts Program, Harcourt, Inc., 2001.

When exploring different personality traits, most students can relate to times that they've felt shy like Wilson or outgoing like Sara.

Lobel, Arnold, "Days with Frog and Toad," Something New, Collections: A Harcourt Reading/Language Arts Program, Harcourt, Inc., 2001.

Frog and Toad help students explore the theme of friendship, as well as the difference between being alone versus feeling lonely.

Lowry, Lois. Gooney Bird Greene. New York, NY: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.

This book is fantastic as a read aloud for teachers as they work on improving their students story telling and writing skills. Gooney Bird is a mysterious and unusual student in Mrs. Pidgeon's class. Her "absolutely true stories" will keep your students enthralled.

Medearis, Andrea Shelf, "Lucy's Quiet Book," Something New, Collections: A Harcourt Reading/Language Arts Program, Harcourt, Inc., 2001.

Lucy surprises herself as she learns how to deal with her six noisy brothers with the help of the librarian.

Prelutsky, Jack. Rolling Harvey Down the Hill. New York, NY: Mulberry Paperback Books, 1993.

This book contains fun poems that explore how different friends can be.

Rylant, Cynthia, "Henry and Mudge Under the Yellow Moon," Something New, Collections: A Harcourt Reading/Language Arts Program, Harcourt, Inc., 2001.

Henry and his pet dog Mudge love to be together. This book allows children to see that friends don't have to do things exactly the same way to enjoy being around one another.

Shannon, David. A Bad Case of Stripes. New York, NY: The Blue Sky Press, 1998.

Camilla Cream won't eat lima beans because she's too worried about what other people think of her. The words and pictures will help students as they struggle with what it means to be themselves.

Walsh, Ellen Stoll. For Pete's Sake. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1998.

Pete the alligator thinks he's a flamingo. He worries when he starts noticing that he's different than his friends (They're flamingos.). Children can learn acceptance from Pete and his friends who did not see their differences as something to worry about.

## **Appendices/Standards**

### **Content Standards for the Pittsburgh Public Schools**

#### Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including primary and secondary sources of information with traditional and emerging library technologies.
2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex texts.
3. All students respond orally and in writing to information and ideas gained by reading narrative and informational texts and use the information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, to inform and persuade, in all subjects.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgments about all forms of communication, separating fact from opinion, recognizing propaganda, stereotypes and statements of bias, recognizing inconsistencies and judging the validity of evidence.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and giving spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.
8. All students compose and make oral presentations for each academic area of study that are designed to persuade, inform or describe.
9. All students communicate appropriately in all situations.
10. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.