

**Developing Independent Learners:  
A Primary Genre Study**  
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**Overview**

This study of written genres was originally developed for the first-grade level, but could be adapted and used for other primary grades. The beginning of the writing curriculum will take teachers through the initial steps needed to create a successful writing environment in any classroom. The lessons provide a lot of information for setting the ground work for writing. Students must develop habits and routines of good writers, which take time and effort. Once routines and procedures are established, various genre lessons are presented. The curriculum covers four kinds of writing; narrative, procedural, informational report and response to literature, included in the appendix. The lessons can be used in conjunction with the Harcourt reading stories, or with trade books in each genre. Resources and various teaching tools to accompany the lessons will also be included in the Appendix. Teachers will be introduced to a writer's workshop style of teaching and be given step by step lessons for developing each genre with their students. Teachers must be ready to make a commitment to teaching writing and becoming writers themselves. They must be willing to set aside a predictable time each day for their students to do the work that writers do. Writing must be made a priority for this work to be successful. If you've ever thought, I just don't know where to begin, this unit may just be what you're looking for!

**Rationale**

The National Commission on writing reports that, "teachers typically receive little instruction on how to teach writing. These instructors, lacking any real understanding of what good writing is or looks like, are often ill equipped to

teach it.”

I too felt ill equipped as I entered my first grade classroom. That’s where I met Chas. Chas was a six-year old who, in September, could barely write his own name. He didn’t know his letters. He had trouble with speech and great difficulty even conveying his thoughts. He struggled in all subject areas, but especially writing. He often asked, “Do I have to write? How long does it have to be?” Chas was the student that I went home and worried about. I questioned whether I could ever get through to him. I searched for ways to build connections for him. I waited in vain, for the moment that his light bulb would click on. I finally realized that my old style of teaching just wasn’t reaching every child. I knew that I had to make changes if I wanted all of my students to succeed.

Every teacher wants to reach his or her students. Instruction must be given at the student's level. This can be achieved through Writer's Workshop. I decided to implement a new teaching style in my classroom, which included the Writer’s Workshop. Donald Graves and Lucy Calkins agree that Writer’s Workshop is “the term most commonly used to describe the process of children choosing their own topic, writing, revising, editing and publishing. We try to simulate an atmosphere where real writers write.” I had learned some aspects from some teachers in my building. I had read, what felt like, a thousand books on the topic. I was ready to see how this approach would work with six-year olds. I wondered, if Writer’s Workshop was the only way to teach writing. In his book *Writer’s Workshop, The Essential Guide*, Ralph Fletcher says, “No, writer’s workshop is not the only way, but none of them (other styles) match the writer’s workshop when it comes to growing strong writers.” So I committed to teaching writing twice a week. I held meetings with my students. We wrote together. They wrote on their own. We drew pictures and painted murals. We grew as a community of learners, as I too was gaining knowledge about my students each day. As I continued to work closely with my students, I found ways to assist them in becoming independent and productive learners. Soon writer’s workshop expanded to 3-4 times per week. As the children wrote more and more, Chas made his own attempts. He wrote first with random letters, until he made the letter-sound connection. Then he began using beginning and ending sounds. He began to feel comfortable with his own writing and the students supported his efforts. Chas continued to produce at his own level, short sentences, then more descriptive words and inventive spellings. One April afternoon, he beamed as he sat in the author’s chair sharing his 6-sentence piece about our trip to the conservatory with the rest of the class. He had come a long way. He finally felt like writer!

Every teacher has a “Chas”, the student that always struggles. “Chas” might even represent a large chunk of your classroom. There will always be

students who need additional support, but we can reach them. This unit shows how the Writer's Workshop style can reach all students. It's more than just the writing lessons though. It's the environment that you create. Teachers must create supportive conditions for this plan to be successful. "Create an atmosphere that encourages students to interact, feel independent and take pride in the upkeep of their classroom. This is crucial for everything we do throughout the year" (Hindley 34).

Throughout the year, primary teachers are expected to work on writing with students. By the end of the school year, Pittsburgh Public School first grade students are expected to have four polished pieces for a portfolio. Unfortunately, teachers are never instructed on how to get their students there. Practically speaking, the language arts program does not offer sufficient support to teachers in developing these writing skills. Professional development support and training have never been given in the area of writing, in our district. Minimal support is given in the curriculum through brief writing activities and generalized rubrics. Young writers need enriching creative experiences in order to develop their writing, not cloze sentences and copied texts. Meaningful writing experiences can be integrated into our existing curriculum by aligning the lessons with genre studies along with the inclusion of other children's literature. Teachers can and must, acquire the skill and expertise to teach writing in an exciting yet understandable way. This unit provides the additional support teachers need to invigorate young children and support them in their journey to become writers.

There are many reasons for developing this writing unit. At the broadest level, it will address the first grade portfolio requirements for the Pittsburgh Public School District. As teachers, we have been handed the task, told what the final product should be, but we've never been provided the means to develop the portfolio. These lessons will take you through the steps in order to achieve that final product. Secondly, this unit will stress the development of a community of learners. It will allow students to grow together, while becoming more familiar with the habits of good writers. Students will develop knowledge in each type of writing and experiment in different writing styles. The students will work together in their efforts to become better writers.

By participating in the seminar *Understanding Nonfiction Genres*, many valuable teaching tools may be added to this curriculum unit. Experience with the visualization technology, provided by Dr. David Kaufer at Carnegie Mellon University, will support students in their journey to become better writers. The color-coded system that Dr. Kaufer has designed will be integrated later in this unit as an evaluative tool for both students and teachers. The students will use various parts of language, which are color-coded, throughout their study of writing genres.

## **Objectives**

There are various goals for this unit. The overall objective is to establish a writer's workshop in the primary classroom. This will lay the groundwork for further objectives of this unit. In the short term, this unit will aid in the cultivation of a love of writing. One first grader writes, "I am a writer. I love writing stories about things I like. Everyone in Room 110 can write good stories." First grade students crave the ability to be writers and storytellers, to express themselves in creative ways. However, this requires a nurturing environment where students feel supported as they take risks with language. This unit supports students in their writing endeavors and encourages them to take risks in a supportive environment. Students at varying levels will work together to move their writing forward.

The unit is designed to have long term benefits for students. They will identify the different writing genres. They will show evidence of writing elements in their writing. Elements such as, engaging beginnings, sequenced stories, creative titles, interesting characters and meaningful dialogue can be developed in primary classrooms. Within each genre study, students will work on language and word choice for that particular type of writing. The students will demonstrate a basic understanding of the writing process. They will develop standards based writing pieces during the writer's workshop to be included in the district portfolio. The students will become familiar with a color system that will be used to design "student friendly" rubrics.

This unit of study will address many of the communications standards for the Pittsburgh Public School District. Standards will be addressed in each lesson plan. The most common standard used throughout this unit states, "students write for a variety of purposes." (A list of all standards are in the Appendix.) There are many purposes for young children to engage in writing. Kids write about things they know, such as, people, feelings and special times. They write to tell stories about what they like and things they remember. Children need to write often in many different forms. This particular standard will remain as the center for this unit.

## **Strategies**

In order for students to understand the various types of writing and engage in different writing experiences, they will need to have a basic knowledge of the writer's workshop style. This style allows both students and teacher to work at different levels on various tasks.

The classroom environment itself will be an important component of this unit. The physical space inhabited by students will be a huge factor in the success of writer's workshop. Areas should be provided for different activities, including whole group, small group and independent work. Materials should be organized and labeled for student use. Students should have access to the materials they need for daily work. Students must know how to use the materials properly, and should be able to explain the purpose for the materials. A student once explained to our reading coach, "Those are our book baskets. Everyone has one. I have 5 books and a chapter book in mine. I read it with my book group. Sometimes I read these other books with my teacher. I read on Level K, you know."

Writer's workshop begins with the mini lesson, "a short focused burst of writing instruction" (Fletcher 18). The topic of instruction is chosen by the teacher, but is driven by the students' needs. In primary classrooms, this often takes place in a general meeting area. Lucy Calkins suggests "create a comfortable space where we can do work that we love". This comfortable meeting space should be large enough for everyone in the class to gather for mini lesson. It might include a carpet, pillows, benches or chairs. At the primary level, gathering together is an essential part of creating a community of learners.

Mini lessons will differ depending on the needs of the children. According to Fletcher, the lessons will fall into one of these categories:

1. Procedural- how the workshop runs, where to get materials
2. Writer's process-strategies that writers use to organize, revise, etc.
3. Qualities of good writing-literary elements such as, engaging beginnings, descriptive language, point of view, etc.
4. Editing skills- spelling, punctuation, grammar

During the mini lesson, models will be provided to demonstrate what good writers do. Different levels of support may be given during the mini lesson, based on student need. In **modeled writing**, the teacher will convey her thoughts out loud, also called think aloud, making story decisions and word choices. During this whole class modeling, the teacher may stretch out words, writing each sound, check the word wall for help or play with punctuation. During **shared writing** the teacher and students compose the text together, yet the teacher does all of the writing. Shared writing might include the composing of class rules and charts, thank you notes or an original ending to a class read aloud of a big book. **Interactive writing** involves both teacher and student "sharing the pen" to compose a text. The students take a more active role in the writing process. Interactive writing could be in the form of a story retelling or the recollections from a class field trip. Other times, students may have the responsibility of completing the writing as the teacher looks on. This is called **guided writing**.

The teacher will reinforce some writing skill as the student writes. These examples lead to the ultimate goal of the writer's workshop, which is **independent writing**. The students write on their own, as the teacher monitors and assesses. Independent writing is the goal of the writing workshop.

After the instruction, children will begin their work time. Remind the students to try the skills and strategies presented in the lesson. It's helpful to target one specific skill demonstrated in the mini lesson, though over time, the children will be able to handle more. The students will move through the writing process at their own pace. Children can plan, draft, reread, confer, revise or rewrite. They will then have time to begin a new piece of writing, continue on an existing piece, edit with a friend or publish their work.

During this work time, the teacher will act as facilitator and support person. Calkins explains that, "we need to invite students to pursue their own important projects in an environment that is ongoing and stable. Then move around among them- watching, demonstrating and giving pointers" (15). Teachers meet and conference with between 4-6 students. During the conference, the teacher will check on their individual progress and provide individualized instruction. The teacher will coach the student in their progression through the writing process. It is important to note that students will be progressing through writing at a different pace. Some students will be ready for advice on their writing. Others will just need praise and support for the letters or words that they produced. As students continue on in this work, they will grow to value the opportunity to share their work with readers. So allow them to work at their own pace, and push others, on when they're ready, but don't give up!

"Teaching kids how to write is hard . . . a writing workshop creates an environment where students can acquire these skills along with fluency, confidence and desire to see themselves as writers" (Fletcher 86).

To end the workshop time, the class will gather on the carpet to share their work. All students should be engaged in this reflective time. Positive qualities should be pointed out and highlighted. Students should have a special place to read their work aloud, such as an author's chair. This chair should be important. It is the place where each child's voice will be heard. It may be a chair with a cushion, or fancy decorations. It may be a tall chair with bright colors. The students will know when they sit there; they have accomplished something of importance. Later in Writer's Workshop, this sharing time might also be used to assess or evaluate a piece of writing. The use of checklists, criterion charts and rubrics, including the color system will be used for assessing student work. These tools will help students to become better writers by providing clear expectations for their work.

Checklists may contain statements or questions that students will use to self evaluate at the end of a piece.

#### Writer's Checklist

Did I write my name on my paper?  
Is my written piece complete?  
Have I checked my work with someone?  
Should this piece have a title?  
Did I use the Good Work Chart?

Criterion charts are generated with students and will provide a guideline of what good writers should always be striving to do. This often includes grammar skill and the conventions of writing.

#### Writing Good Work Chart

1. I leave a space between my words.
2. I sound out all parts of the word.
3. I start my sentences with a capital letter.
4. I end my sentence with some ending mark.
5. I draw a picture to match the words.
6. I read my work to myself and to a friend.
7. I can check the word wall for help.

Rubrics are used to guide student writing, as well as an evaluation piece. Rubrics can be specific to each assignment. Rubrics can be used for writing conventions as well as content. The rubrics in this unit will be content based. A 4, 3, 2, 1, point system is often used. Stickers, smiley faces or colored dots may also be used to indicate a child's proficiency on a piece of writing. Several examples follow.

#### Spider Report Rubric

- 4 My report is only about spiders. I wrote at least 8 facts. I wrote what spiders look like, what they eat and where they live. I used many describing words to tell about spiders. I created a picture to show more about spiders.
- 3- My report has 5 or 6 sentences. I included some describing words in my report. My picture matches my words.

2- My report is 3 or 4 sentences. I did not use describing words. I need to continue working on this piece.

1 I did not complete my report. I need to keep trying.

The color-coded system will be used in the genre studies to provide students with some assistance in word choice. The various colors will correlate to different pieces of language. The students will become familiar with these word choices and begin to utilize them in different pieces of writing.

### First Grade Key Words

Red- Narrative  
I am  
I like  
I think

Blue- Descriptive  
color words  
size words

Purple- History  
-ed words  
all the time

Orange- Past/ Present  
Today  
Yesterday  
Every day  
Tomorrow

Green- Informational  
Time words

Gold/Yellow- Sharing  
My mom says

Question words  
The facts are . . .

You should know . .  
Just imagine  
everybody

## **Classroom Activities**

### Lesson 1- Developing Routines

These first few lessons are planned to go in sequential order. The genre lessons that follow can be used at any time. It is suggested that these lessons occur early in the school year. Just as you are developing your classroom management system, establish your writing workshop as well.

Writer's Workshop should begin with the students gathering together on the carpet or some comfortable space. This initial meeting should set the tone for the workshop style.

**Teacher:** Today we are going to do some important work. I'm really excited about sharing this news with you. We are all going to be writers, just like the authors of the books that we read in our classroom. Every day we will write and that time is called writer's workshop. Sometimes we'll read a story and talk and write about it. Sometimes we'll write together and sometimes you'll get to write things on your own. We'll always get to talk about our writing. At the end of our time together, some people will have a chance to share what he or she wrote in the author's chair.

**Teacher:** Sometimes when I'm getting ready to write, I spend a lot of time thinking. I need to think about what I will write about this morning. Some days I have a lot of good ideas and some days I don't. I like to have help if I'm not sure about something. What do you think I should write about today?

On chart paper, write the question, "What can we write about?" Engage the students in a discussion about different topics. Allowing students to generate their own topics creates ownership of the workshop. Students might suggest writing about their families, pets or playing at the park. Generate a list, allowing each student a chance to share an idea. Accept every answer. Their ideas may be vague at first, but give value to each one. In truth, the students will only use this chart as a reference for the first few weeks. Soon after, they will have more writing topics to write about, with time to develop them.

Another version of this activity might be to give the students the responsibility for generating four original ideas. Create a worksheet with four empty boxes. Our class uses the title, "I can write about. . ." Students can draw one picture in each block of a four-block page and label them. If each student generates 4 topics, that's at least 60 student friendly ideas to choose from. Either version should be displayed in the classroom for student use. The classroom environment should be filled with student work. The walls should reflect the kind of work that is going on in the classroom.

During your think aloud you might say, "I think I'm going to use one of the ideas from our chart. Jasmine said we could write about going to the library. I like going to the library, so that's what I am going to write about today. I going to start with the sentence, I like getting books at the library. I know how to write I, but I'm not sure about the word "like." Model for students the way to sound and stretch out words. Remember, you are writing like a first grader. Ask students for suggestions. Stop from time to time and think. Take a moment and stretch out words or look at the word wall for help. (Tell them, "I don't always know how to spell all of the words that I want, but I try it by writing the sounds that I hear. I need to write the word shelf. Let's say shelf. What sound do you hear at the beginning? What other sounds are in that word? Let's say it again.")

Finish by showing students two or three sentences. This process of modeling is imperative for struggling readers. It will help them to make the language between the spoken and written word. “Demonstration of the writing process steps is the critical factor in establishing successful writer’s workshop with all students. Children who watch their teacher think aloud, invent-spell and organize (ideas) will develop a better feel for writing ”(Cunningham 93). Revisit more inventive spelling in future mini lessons.

**Teacher:** When I finish my writing I always share it with a friend. I read the words to them. Sometimes, my friend will give me advice on how to make my paper better. Maybe I might need to erase some messy marks, or I might forget my name. Sometimes my friend might ask me questions about my work. Is there anything that you want to tell me or ask me about my work today? . . . After I share with my friend, and the teacher, then I can draw a picture to match the words. (In some lessons the illustrations will come first, creating this routine will show students that the writing part is important. It also prevents students from spending an entire period on drawing one picture.) You will also have a chance to choose something to write and draw about.

**Teacher:** Good writers always do some planning before they get started. Let’s take a minute to do some thinking. Then turn to the person next to you and talk about what you are going to write about.

Get the students talking about writing. Conversations will help students to connect language to writing. This will be an important part of the writer’s workshop. The writing workshop cannot be a quiet, solitary time. We need to communicate to our students that what they are writing and sharing is priceless. “You need to tell this to the world. It’s huge. It’s so big. Write it down!” (Calkins 15). Allow the kids a few minutes to share ideas with their friends. Move around the meeting area to stimulate any stagnant conversations. Join in the discussion, guiding students as needed. Regain the students’ attention and comment on some of the ideas that were discussed.

**Teacher:** I heard Tre' say that he was going to write about going to his cousin’s house on Friday. What a good idea! Maya is thinking about writing something about her bus ride to school today. Let’s take some quiet time to write our own ideas and then we’ll meet back on the carpet.

Students will go to their seats with paper and pencils to begin their piece. Teachers should work on their own writing piece. (Always model the habits of good writers!) After a few quiet minutes, move around the room helping students that are stuck, noting successes and reinforcing the strategies taught in the mini lessons. Students may need support with spelling and punctuation. Those skills

should also be addressed in other lessons in language arts. Encourage students to try their best without giving a lot of assistance. Urge them to elaborate on their topic without dwelling on conventions. Do not discourage the creativity of your students by editing their work during conferences. Let them feel comfortable with the own writing.

Sharing should be a celebratory time. After most students have attempted some writing work, gather back in your class meeting place. Invite a student to sit in the author's chair to share their work.

**Teacher:** "Let's all get settled and give our attention to our author, Mark. He wrote this piece to share with us. Let's listen to the writer."

Highlight the positive things that your students have accomplished. As you praise the use of "good writing skills," other students will surely take notice and begin using the same skills. (For example, I complimented Maya's appropriate use of an exclamation point in her piece. The next day 4 more kids attempted to use exclamation points. This was great! All that was needed was a short mini lesson on exactly where the marks belong and my students were well on their way!) Allow a few students to share in an "author's chair". This should be the place where they are the stars. Guidelines should set about listening carefully without interruptions.

One example of class developed guidelines could be:

- Sit with your legs crossed and hands to yourself
- Eyes on the writer
- Listen carefully
- Respond appropriately

Later in the year, "respond appropriately" changed to a more specific item. After a class meeting, our class agreed that we should first "tell the author something that they did well" in the piece. Then point out "something that they could work harder on" next time. Those were added to our guidelines in February.

With additional practice, students will be able to give appropriate compliments and ask probing questions during this sharing time. Coach the students by modeling your comments and questions. Inevitably students will pick up on your wording and mannerisms, and imitate the appropriate behaviors. "You're giving students a powerful image; a grown-up doing what they're trying to do" (Allington and Cunningham 64).

Fletcher encourages that as "students are coached over time" they will be

able to “give and receive responses to each other’s writing.” By the end of the year, students should run the sharing meeting. Children can take turn sharing work with 3-4 students commenting on the work. A first grader named Paris once explained to her friend, "I really like your beginning sentence, but the middle of your narrative really didn't make sense to me. Tell me what you wanted to say." One of the best responses I heard in a writer's workshop was from a young boy. After listening to a friend's response to literature he said, "Well, that was OK, but I know you're a better writer than that. You need to put some power into your writing!" How true.

## Lesson 2- Reinforcing Habits and Routines

As you build on the daily routines of Writer’s Workshop, students will need a lot of modeling and coaching. Demonstrate the kinds of work habits, classroom movement and written work that you want to see. It is crucial to reinforce those desired writing behaviors every day. If you are seeing behaviors that do not fit with your vision of writer’s workshop, address them immediately. Early on, it is wise to be strict with the procedures of writer’s workshop. You will reap the benefits later, if you enforce appropriate behaviors now.

“It is crucial for students to have frequent predictable time set aside for the to write” (Fletcher 28). When you treat writing time as a quality part of the day, students will too. Remind them that this work is important because it allows them to share themselves with others. Their writing can reach other readers. If we can develop these routines within our students at an early age, there is no doubt that the children will value writing as they grow older.

At the earliest stages, writing will come out of personal stories and discussions in your classroom. Once you get your students talking, you will have topics to write about. They will write about themselves, their families, and things that are important to them. Show them that you too have stories to share and that you are willing to open up to them. Consider this dialogue from a class meeting. .

**Teacher:** We get to do some more writing today. We’ll meet here on the carpet and talk. Then we’ll go back and write. At the end of Writer’s Workshop, we’ll have some students share our work in the Author’s Chair. We made a great idea chart yesterday. Maybe some of you will choose a topic from the chart. I am going to look at the chart and see what I can write about. Hmmm, I see the word sister. I don’t have a sister, but I want to write about why I would want to have one. My writing is just going to be about sisters, nothing else.

Create a **modeled writing** piece. Speak out loud about your words and sentences. This process needs to be shown explicitly for students. Demonstrate how a good writer goes about doing this kind of work. Show how to make decisions about content, punctuation, spelling grammar and vocabulary.

**Teacher:** You know, I should have a reason for writing this. I think I'm going to write it to my parents. I'm going to explain to them why I want a sister. Now I have a real purpose for writing this piece. Maybe I'll give it to my mom when I'm done.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I wish I had a sister. I would play dolls with her.  
We could play dress up together and have tea parties. It would have been fun growing up with a sister.

Love,  
Jacie

Students are shown that writing should have a real purpose. We are not just writing because we have to. We can convey our thoughts and wishes to others. When we write, we have the chance to tell people what we have to say. This is an empowering opportunity for students. Be positive. Have faith that your students can do this work. "We demonstrate that faith when we listen well, when we refer to our students as writers, when we expect them to love writing and to pour heart and soul into it" (Calkins 22)

Before the students start their writing work time, they should turn and talk with a friend, discussing their topic. Some children may write letters, like in the model. Many will be ready with their own ideas. Others will need assistance. Remember, it is OK to let students struggle a bit. As your students meet larger challenges you will certainly want to provide encouragement. Allow students the freedom to think and make their own choices in topic and word choice. Writing at this point should feel empowering and fun. If you students are not feeling that way, support them. Let children know that writing is hard work. Explain that the class will write everyday, just as they read everyday. The more you practice, the better you get!

At the beginning of the year, students may be able to maintain their work time for 10-15 minutes. As students finish quickly, it is increasingly harder for the teacher to meet with individual students. Teachers struggle with their options as students say, "I'm done." Set some limits or rules about work time. Some

teachers set timers. Students must try to work, or attempt to, until the timer goes off. Other teachers write their own pieces to model for students that they too, need quiet time to write without interruption. Another option is to have students meet with a partner and share their writing before they share it with the teacher. Many teachers say, “See three before me.” The students must talk with three other students, or volunteers, or teacher’s aides, before seeking assistance from the teacher. This allows time for the teacher to interact with individual students.

Close the lesson by checking the use of the targeted skill from the mini lesson; choose an idea and stick with it. Select students to share in the author’s chair. Again, make this a special time. Don’t let it get pushed aside by other things. When students know that the work they do is important, they will take pride in it.

### Lesson 3- Adding On

As Writer’s Workshop begins today, use the mini lesson to share the successes of your beginning writers. Creating a bulletin board or some kind of display area is helpful. In our classroom, we have a wall that highlights the work of our classroom authors. Again, make this area stand out by using balloons, glitter or fancy wallpaper. Let the students see that it is an honor to have your work displayed here. Praise the efforts of the students by hanging a variety of pieces at different levels. Use this “good work” display as a springboard for today’s lesson. (Be sure to vary the kids that share and are highlighted each day. Every student can do something well. Find what each child is especially good at, and applaud the achievement.)

Begin a chart titled, “What does good work look like?” Ask students this important question and chart their answers. Guiding students with additional questions will help you to get the answers that you are looking for. A good start for first graders might include:

1. I write the sounds I hear in words.
2. I start my sentences with a capital letter.
3. I end my sentence with a period or some ending mark.
4. I draw a picture to match my words.
5. I use a finger space between my words.
6. I reread my own writing.

(You may add or subtract criteria depending on your students, their needs and capabilities. This list will be added onto as the year progresses. Some items may become natural to the students and can be removed, while other items should remain.)

The main lesson will continue in the same fashion as the previous lessons. Students will brainstorm ideas for writing, or choose topics from the existing idea chart. They should confer with a partner or small group before settling on a topic. You may want to include a list on the chalkboard, or on chart paper to set up some guidelines for the “turn and talk” or partner talk. Here is an example:

1. Share your ideas/your topic.
2. Listen to your partner’s topic.
3. Ask questions.
4. Use an inside voice.

To assure that partner conversations are meaningful, sit with a different group of children each day to affirm that they are on task. It is also helpful to model what that partnering should look and sound like. Using two students and yourself, sit in the middle of the meeting area. Here is dialogue from a previous meeting.

**Teacher:** So Davon, what are you thinking about writing today?

Davon: I was thinking about my brother’s basketball game yesterday. They won!

**Teacher:** Oooh , that sound’s exciting!

Jamal: Where does he play?

Davon: At his school. He’s in middle school.

**Teacher:** Who did you go to the game with?

Davon: My mom and my sister and my other brother.

Jamal: Did you brother score any points?

Davon: Yeah, but I don’t know how many.

**Teacher:** So, it sounds like you have some sentences to write already. You went to a basketball game to watch your brother. Write that down! Write who went and what you did. That will make a good story! Now, Jamal, what are you choosing for today?

Jamal: Hmmm, I don’t know.

**Teacher:** Davon, what can Jamal do if he isn’t sure what to write about?

Davon: He can look at the chart for an idea.

**Teacher:** That sound s like a good plan. Why don’t you look at our chart and see if you get any ideas for a story. Come back and let me know what you have decided.

Through modeling, coaching and practice, students will have these productive and meaningful discussions. They will also gain the content knowledge necessary to have these types of conversations through consistent guidance and instruction. Ultimately, the teacher can be removed from the conversations, as students will probe and question one another. For now, engage

in the conversations with your students. You are their best model!

Students will return to their seats for the work session. Attempt to extend the writing work time today by at least 5 minutes. Continue to build up to 25 minutes of work time over the next week. As students work at their seats, move around the room checking on student progress. Set a goal to sit down with at least 4 kids. There will always be a few students that will just sit without any motivation to write. Work with those struggling kids, sitting right along side them at their work area. As you meet with students, it's important to get them thinking and speaking like writers. Initiate dialogue with the children.

Consider these conferring questions to get students talking about their writing.

- What are you planning to write about?
- What are you working on?
- What are you having trouble with in this piece?
- How do you feel about your writing?
- What made you pick this topic?
- What did you mean by . . . ?
- Tell me more about that
- What will you do next?
- What could you do to make your writing more meaningful?
- What might be a good title for this piece?

You may want to document your individual conferences with students. This will help you to keep track of whom you have met with and what he or she is currently working on. Jotting down skills or concepts that students are just on the verge of, will be helpful when planning the mini lessons.

#### Lesson 4- Writing Journals

Students are beginning to build up their skills and their confidence. To aid in their development as writers, continue to hold writer's workshop as a special time of day. Stress its importance by giving students a unique place to keep their writing. A personal writing journal filled with paper will house a variety of stories this year. There are many versions of a writing journal. Plain composition books can be covered and decorated by students. If your budget permits, bound journals can be purchased at discount stores. Binders can be used, and filled with paper. Construction paper, lined paper and a three-hole punch will work just fine. Whatever works for you is great, just include the students in the process. Allow them to choose colors, decorate and personalize the covers of their journals. This will be the place where they will keep many pictures, stories and poems.

During today's lesson, establish the use of journals. If you don't have one of your own, create a personal journal. Collect items to include in the journal. Personal items may help to tell a story. Include things such as; a newspaper headline from an important day, a scrap of wrapping paper from a favorite gift, or a ticket stub from an exciting event. Share your journal and an entry in it. Show students that you have stories in your journal, just as they will. Allow students to choose their topic and begin writing. Many students will be excited and ready to go. Circulate among the students, possibly using the writing conference worksheet. Note any students who are continuing to struggle. At this point, you may want to hold a more in depth lesson for those students. As the others are working, gather 4-5 students back at the meeting place. Model for them; choosing a topic, writing some sentences and drawing a picture. By working through the process again, the students will see what good writers do. Confer with the small group. Urge them to choose a topic and write it on their paper. The students should "turn and talk" with a friend, then work through the rest of the session.

Using the writing conference worksheet, or some other documentation tool will show common problems among students. Pull students with similar difficulties together and re-teach the concepts as needed. They may need additional support with punctuation, sounding out words or leaving spaces within their sentences. Model the appropriate ways to do these things, or point out samples of student work that demonstrate those criteria.

During sharing, give those struggling students a chance to demonstrate their progress. (Remember that writing is hard work. Praise even the tiniest of accomplishments.) Allow all students to take a minute or less to show their new journal and describe what they put on it. Create a permanent place where journals will be stored.

### Lesson 5- Try This

Many students will now be actively involved in the writing process. Others may remain hesitant. Change things up today by using a different technique for generating writing. Begin by using the turn and talk with students. Continue using discussion as a way to create stories. Each student will share a topic during the mini lesson. On chart paper, write each student's name and their topic. This will provide some commitment on the part of the student. Communicate to students that today's lesson will be different.

**Teacher:** Today we will work on some drawings first. A person that does the drawing for a story is called an illustrator. We are all going to become illustrators today! Everyone will choose a paper to work on. (Make available papers of

various sizes and colors. The papers should be folded into 4's, 6's or 8's. Each block will include one picture, which will in turn be developed into a sentence by the student.)

**Teacher:** Today, I am going to use an idea from our chart. Hmmmm, I think I'll write about flowers. I am going to choose a paper with six blocks, because I think that I have a lot to show about flowers. In the first block I am going to draw some seeds, since flowers come from seeds. In my next block, I'm going to draw me watering the seeds with the sun out. Next I'm going to draw some red flowers. They're roses. In this block I'm putting yellow flowers. I'm going to draw me again, smelling the flowers, because I like to do that. Last, I'm going to draw me picking a flower and giving it to my mom.

As you model, keep it simple. Drawings should be first grade drawings. When the pictures are complete, retell the story in full to the students. Encourage an open discussion about the modeled piece. Remind students that asking questions will help the writer to get additional ideas. The students should work only on their illustrations today. They should engage in discussions about their topic throughout the writer's workshop time.

During sharing time, students sit in small groups of 4 or 5 to share their stories with their peers. Circulate among the groups to be sure that meaningful conversations are taking place. Students must be held accountable for this group meeting. Talk should be focused on the assignment. (If this is not happening, stop, model and try again.) Remind students each picture looks different and their words should tell about each individual block of the story, just like the modeled writing. Choose 2 or 3 students to share ideas and illustrations in the author's chair. Support the author by complimenting their work as well as their plan for a story. Ask students to comment on the author's work, too. Possible responses will be: "I like your picture", "Your drawing is nice", "The girl in your picture looks pretty". While these are good starters to generate students input, these are not quality responses. Engage students in more accountable talk. Use probing questions like:

What do you like about Justin's picture?

What makes the drawing look nice? Is it the colors? The background?

Is there one part that you like the best? Why?

What can illustrators do to make the pictures enjoyable?

**Teacher:** Tomorrow we will add the words to our stories. Think about the words you will use to describe your picture and tell your story. We will continue this work during tomorrow's writing workshop.

It would be wise to have writing folders or baskets, etc. to store student writing for continued work. Hanging file folders work well to collect cumulative student writing. For organizational purposes, all writing utensils, storage, etc. should be housed in the same area of the classroom. A writing corner might consist of student journals, pencils, erasers, crayons, markers, pens, plain paper, lined paper, colored construction paper of various shapes and sizes, folders, bins or baskets. This might also be the area where a bulletin board or display area shows some examples of proficient student work.

Remember to keep this writing time consistent. Students should have a predictable time to write as well as a place to do this work. A specific writing corner or table will show students that writing is a priority.

### Part Two- Adding Words

Begin today lesson by posting yesterday's student drawing around the meeting area or the classroom. This will help students to recall yesterday's work and help to motivate them towards completion of this writing piece. You may even have students spend a few minutes looking at each other's work, as if it were a gallery. Inevitably, students will begin talking about what they see. Interact in these conversations and encourage the use of detailed and specific compliments.

**Teacher:** Today we are going to continue working on our drawing pieces that I have hung up in the room. All of the pictures look really great, but it makes me want to know more than just what I see in the pictures. If we add words to our illustrations, then we will really be able to explain our stories to everyone else. I want to add some sentences for my pictures. What was my story going to be about?

Student: Flowers!

**Teacher:** Yes, so I am going to write "flowers" at the top of my paper. That is the title of my story. What should I write for my first picture?

(The students will have a lot of ideas. Use this time as **shared writing**. Allow student to suggest responses as you write the piece. Encourage complete sentences, as the goal is to model what good writing looks like.)

Student: Seeds.

**Teacher:** You're right. There are seeds in this picture, but I can't just write "seeds". I need to explain why the seeds are there. What else could I say?

Student: Flowers come from seeds.

**Teacher:** Ooohhh, I like that sentence. Now how will I write that?

Take students through the process of sounding out the word. What sound do you hear first? Stretch out the word. Write the other sounds that you hear.

Encourage kids to repeat the words listening for additional sounds. (Since this is the process that we want our students to engage in on their own, we must demonstrate how that should happen in a whole group setting. As time goes on, this scaffolding may be removed.) Inventive spelling is encouraged at this point. These types of skills should also be supported throughout other daily activities involving phonics skill instruction, outside of the writer's workshop. The final modeled writing might look something like this:

Flowrs com frum sedz. Flowrs ned sun and wtr.  
Red flowrs r roz. Thay can be yellow to.  
Flowrs smel nis. I wil giv a flowr to my mom.

This piece shows students that writing includes words and sentences. It shows correctly words that first graders know such as; be, mom, my, can and to. This piece promotes stretching out words and writing the sounds. This kind of writing is within reach for beginning first graders.

**Teacher:** OK, so let's talk about my work. What do I need to do to finish my work? What makes it "good work"? How will I know that?

As students respond, create a list of requirements for this particular assignment, also called a **criterion chart**. It will guide them as they are writing, reminding them what is needed. Since they take part in its creation, students will feel that they have ownership over this assignment. This will also be used during the closing to assess how well students were able to complete the work. Here is a sample criterion chart for this lesson:

- Draw a picture in every block
- Write a title
- Write one sentence to match each picture
- Stretch out your words

**Teacher:** There are four things that you think will make a good piece of writing for this assignment. You will earn one star, (or heart, or smiley face, etc.) for each part that you include in your paper. If you only do 2 things, then you will only earn 2 stars. Let's all try to get 3 or 4 stars today!

Before students return to their tables, encourage them to restate the necessary criteria for this assignment. Move around the room meeting with various students. Transferring pictures into words may be difficult for some students. Many students will use repetitive sentences beginning with "I like". Encourage them to revisit the classroom model, which did not include I like. Urge students to vary their sentences. Expose the students to the option of

different sentence starters. Some will catch on and use it, and others won't. If children move quickly through this piece, encourage self-checking and peer editing, as well as revisiting the rubric, before students ask to meet with you.

Meeting with students today will allow you to gauge their ability to transfer thoughts into writing. Children with weak phonemic awareness will need more support. Note, as you confer, the students who are struggling with letters and sounds, or sight words. (For example, is, my, like and the should be words that the children are comfortable using in their writing.) Your anecdotal notes may signal the need for mini lessons with small groups of students. While you will be conferring with students, the students should also be conferring with each other. Encourage the children to always point out one good thing that they see in the writing and one thing that the writer should work on. "In a class where many kids have their hands in the air asking for you to confer with them, that's a sign that the kids don't feel independent enough to work on their own." (Fletcher 87). Many activities in this curriculum will aid in the development of independence and taking responsibility. "Good writing teachers find a way to put themselves out of a job" (Calkins 56).

During Author's Chair, use stickers, stamps or draw stars to score a few student papers with the rubric. Some teachers prefer not to write on a child's paper. In that case, use a post-it note to add the score and write a comment to the student, (ex. \*\*\*Great job Shay. You earned 3 stars, since you forgot to write your title.) Attempt to share a high, medium and low paper. All students should take part in this activity. Students need experience in reflecting on their work and the work of others. Sharing will also give students a model for good work. It's an opportunity for students to talk about the work that has been presented and explain what "good work" looks like. Always refer back to the rubric. Author's chair is not a time for personal opinions. The basis for which decisions are made is through the class rubric. As all students were a part of its creation, they will be held to it and use it to assess their work. By setting very clear expectations at the beginning of this assignment, students will work to meet the expectations. Those who don't will see the results. The students that have earned 3's and 4's on this piece should have a chance to display their work, in the hall or the classroom. These pieces meet the standards for writing and should be honored for their work. (In one session of writer's workshop, we have addressed standards C-4, C-5 and C-6.) In the same respect, student who are not able to meet the expectations will see what they need to do in order to meet the standards in the future. Students will step up to the challenge.

Spend the first several weeks of school building your community of writers. Create and reinforce the routines of your writer's workshop. Model and praise. Confer and share. Set a comfortable tone. Build an environment where

students feel ready to take chances with themselves and their writing. Only then, can you move on to the more in depth lessons on genre.

### The Genres

The various genres of writing are somewhat consistent through out K-8 education. Students are expected to write narratives, telling some story about themselves or a character. At the primary level, students are writing personal narratives. These stories are about family, self and friends, topics close to the child. Students at many grade levels are responsible for informational reports. For primary students, this may be a whole class report on the classroom pet or an individual animal report on bugs. Students at all levels are required to write responses to literature. First graders too, can respond to stories they have heard and books they have read on their own. Another type of report is the procedural paper. This is also know as the “how to” paper. This genre allows elementary kids to brag about their expertise in an area. Students will use their writing to explain something that they know how to do. Many genres can be explored by students. Poetry, persuasive writing and responses to informational text are used in many classrooms. Those presented in this unit lend themselves to the development of basic writing skills. These skills can be extended and enriched as the students engage in more writing opportunities throughout the elementary grades.

The genre lessons begin with narrative writing. Young children are very egocentric. They have a lot to say about themselves. They can express this in writing through the narrative genre. Additional genre lessons can be found in the Appendix.

### Narrative

Narrative writing can presented as personal narrative or fictional stories. First graders are capable of both. Six-year olds love to talk about themselves and their families. They always have a story to tell. Writing gives them the opportunity to write their story for others to read. Putting their words on paper is empowering for a child. This let’s their voice be heard.

#### Lesson 1

**Teacher:** For the next week or so during Writer’s Workshop, we are going to write stories about ourselves. This kind of writing is called personal narrative. I thought of a great idea for my narrative on my way to school today, so I am going to write about that. Yesterday I visited my friend in the hospital.

Student 1: Is your friend sick?

**Teacher:** Oh no! She's not sick, she had a baby! Isn't that exciting?

Student 2: Yeah, my mom just had a baby too.

Student 3: I have a new baby brother at home. Did your friend have a boy or a girl?

**Teacher:** She had a girl.

Student 4: What's her name?

**Teacher:** The baby's name is Anna. I'm so glad you are asking me a lot of questions about it. When you ask me questions, it gives me more ideas for my writing.

Today we will turn and talk to our friends about our writing. Once your friend tells you what they are writing about, ask them some questions, just like you asked me.

For this lesson, share a personal story with the students. Students may make a connection with the sample piece of writing. Their connections will be helpful in generating stories of their own. The student's experiences make great stories. Students can write about a trip to the grocery store, a birthday party, or a walk at the park. The previous dialogue presents the brainstorming that I did for one piece of writing. Great stories can come out of everyday experiences as well as exciting events. Students have these stories inside of them. Creating a comfortable space where open dialogue can take place will help to develop those stories. Encourage students to turn and talk about their own stories. Remind students that one of their goals for the day is to ask questions. This habit will help students to extend their thoughts and create descriptive details. (Even if it is as simple as the color of the birthday cake or the size of the pet dog.)

**Teacher:** Today we are all going to write some narrative stories in our journals. Think about one special time or person or thing. Turn to a friend and tell them what you have chosen. Try to tell your friend all of the important details about it. And remember partners, ask questions to find out more.

During work time, check to see that all students have settled on a story. This tends to be a comfortable genre for young writers, as they have a lot to say about themselves. However, students tend to fall out of focus when writing narratives. They begin explaining about their neighbor and the dog and their cousin's house, never quite getting to the story. One way to discourage that is by having them commit to a title. Then, when conferencing, always refer back to their title. They should focus on that throughout the piece.

Narrative writing often produces the "breakfast to bed" stories. Students will explain what they did in the morning and several events throughout their day. They love to end with, "then I went home and went to bed." These types of stories are OK to start with, but the goal is to get students to focus on one part of

that day. Prompt them to choose one aspect of their day and tell about it. Teacher modeling will provide a focused example, rather than a long drawn out story.

Close the lesson by checking on the targeted skill from the mini lesson; asking questions. Talk with the students about the questions that they asked each other. Use student papers that show evidence of the target skill, in sharing today. Reinforce the good habit and have those kids share in the author's chair.

## Lesson 2

Students have taken their first shot at narrative, without much instruction. One way to build up students story writing skills is by providing examples of good stories. What a better way to do that than reading quality children's literature to your students. Choose a story that has a clear beginning, middle and end. This will demonstrate the flow of a narrative. The Harcourt story, *Digger Pig and the Turnip*, is one example from the reading curriculum. It has a predictable repeating pattern that students will remember. (Other books to share include; *Today was a Terrible Day* by Patricia Reilly Giff, *A Chair for my Mother* by Vera B. Williams or *Chrysanthemum* by Kevin Henkes.) Read the story aloud to the students. Create a story map, through **interactive writing**. Include students in the writing process by having them come up and write the title, author, characters and setting. Ask what was happening at the beginning of the story? Allow a few minutes for students to turn and talk. Students should share a few answers, then call on one to write a sentence about the beginning of the story. Continue on in this way for middle and end. You may want to use these questions to guide students discussion or use it as a class chart.

Beginning Who are the characters in the story? Where does the story take place?
---

Middle What is happening now in the story? What are the problems? How is the story changing?
---

End How are the problems solved? What finally happens with the characters?
--

Read a similar story such as, *The Little Red Hen*. Proceed with the turn and talk, encouraging students to discuss the beginning, middle and end (BME) of

the story. Explain that they will be returning to their seats to complete their own writing on BME. A story map will work for this activity. 12x18 story paper also work well when divided into three parts. Refer back to original model to explain that the middle is usually the part with the most writing. Since a lot is going on in the middle of the story, students will have more to say in that section.

End the day's writer's workshop by sharing clear student models of beginning, middle and end. Teachers may want to try similar lessons several more times to ensure the understanding of BME. Traditional stories work well for BME lessons such as, Little Red Riding Hood or The Three Little Pigs. You may also want to try stories such as, *Where the Wild Things Are*, *Corduroy's Pocket* or *Thunder Cake*. Harcourt stories that work well for BME lessons are *Market Day*, *A Bed Full of Cats* or *Carmen's Star*.

### Lesson 3

Integrate today's writing lesson into the reading lesson that your students are working on. For example, if your class is reading *The Chick that Wouldn't Hatch* from Harcourt, read the story as you normally would, independently, whole group or small group. After reading the story, use a story map to aid children in retelling the stories and recalling important facts. Show students the story map on large chart paper. It should include places to write the following information: Title, Author, Characters, Setting, Problem and Solution. For each item, have students "turn and talk" with a friend. When the partnerships have come to a consensus, write the responses on the chart paper. Continue through the story map as a whole group.

As an extension, assign stories to small groups for additional practice with retelling. The stories can be Harcourt stories previously read in class, future Harcourt stories for your advanced readers and writers or stories from your classroom collection. Most books from the Harcourt Guided Reading library work well using Level D or higher. As students attempt this task in groups, move around the room and document positive interaction skills as well as retelling skills.

During sharing time, allow group members to talk about their story to the rest of the class, rather than just reading straight from their story map. Encourage audience members to comment and ask questions about the stories. (This activity can also be done several times at different points in the year to reinforce skills.)

### Lesson 4

**Teacher:** We have worked on some elements of narrative writing like,

beginning, middle, end, characters, setting, problems and solutions. We are going to take what we know and try some narratives of our own. The narratives that we create are all going to be made into books. We will all develop stories to put into books that we design ourselves. Maybe you will want to write a personal narrative again, like we tried earlier this week. These are personal stories about our friends, families and things that are important to use. Other students might want to try a fictional narrative that tells the story about some make believe character. That will be your choice. But today, I want to meet with everyone individually to discuss your choice. While you are waiting to meet with me, there are several things you can do. Here are some tasks that you can work on.

1. Draw a picture of a character you might write about. (It can be a person or an animal.)
2. Write your plan on a story map.
3. Read quietly on the carpet to get ideas from other books.
4. Discuss your ideas at your table with a friend.
5. Start a draft of your narrative.

While students are planning, this allows the teacher time to have individual conferences with students on their plans. Students should bring evidence of the plan, either their maps, drawings or rough drafts. Take this time to lead struggling students in the right direction and provide support to students that are well on their way. As today's work period continues, you will get a true sense of where your students are in their writing. By giving them an assignment with few boundaries, you are allowing for their creativity and imagination to come through. Some students may need more guidance from peers or teachers. Take time to pull small groups of students together for mini lessons, as needed. The remainder of the workshop time will consist of working and conferencing.

Student made books are an exciting way to present student work. There are many options for this activity. Student books can be as simple as construction paper and a few staples or as complex as sewing together fabric covered cardboard. Many schools have binding machines available. It is completely to the discretion of the classroom teacher on how the books will be created. Any option will be exciting to students who are generating their first "published" book.

## Lesson 5

The task of completing the student books may take several workshop periods. The culmination of the narrative writing can be a book party. Students can celebrate their published books by having a book reading. Parents should be invited as well as administrators and even other classes. Students can send invitations out for their book party and create signs to advertise the event. Serve

refreshments to make the occasion special. This is the time for students to shine. Allow them to read their stories aloud and share the illustrations. This type of event promotes student writing and provides a meaningful audience for the new authors.

Continue reading! The genre lessons continue in Appendix A.

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## **Appendix A**

### Informational Report

#### Lesson 1

**Teacher:** Today we are going to work on a new piece of writing. This writing is called informational writing because it gives the reader information. This kind of writing is non-fiction, which means that it's true. So when we write in this genre, we don't tell if we like something or if it's nice, we write what's true. Sometimes we already know a lot about something. Other times we might need to research to find out more. I'm going to start by writing about something that I think I already know about. I have some fish at home, so I think I'll write about them.

Model on large chart paper by quickly writing several sentences about fish. Consider this modeled writing.

Fish live in the water. Fish have fins they swim around. Gold fish are orange. I feed my fish at night. Fish can also live in the ocean. Fish are blue or gray. I like fish.

Reread this piece with the students. Allow some discussion about the modeled writing. Students may think that the writing is fine. They might point out conventions such as missing capital letters and periods. Some students may comment on the content, noting that some ideas are jumbled. The piece is also missing both a beginning and ending sentence. Explain that this is just your first try, and that tomorrow there will be time to work on the piece again.

After you have modeled an example, read some stories that may help students with topic selection for this piece. Harcourt stories such as *Animals on the Go* and *I Wonder* show many creatures that students can write about for their animal reports.

**Teacher:** Take a minute to think about what you can write about. Remember, we are not writing stories on our topics. We are choosing one thing that we can share information on. I know that Justin has a guinea pig, maybe he will give us some facts on guinea pigs. Paris just went to the zoo, perhaps she can share some information she gathered on her trip. Turn and Talk to a partner about what you

will write about.

As students return to their seats for work time, remind them again that today's writing is factual, not narrative. Encourage students to write down whatever they know about their topic. First grade reports tend to be on creatures; bugs, snakes, frogs or cats, whatever animal the students have had experience with. Let students write for about 20 minutes and then collect the papers for the day.

Lessons 2,3,4

**Teacher:** We going to take a second look at our informational reports today. Yesterday we worked kind of quickly. We didn't spend time sharing or checking our work. Today we need to take a closer look. Good writers always reread their work, so that's what I'll do first. Is there anything that you can see that I should work on? Be sure to look carefully at your own papers. everyone should find at least 1 thing that needs to be changed. Good writers always make changes to improve their writing. (Make the suggested changes to the modeled writing and encourage students to do the same. Reconvene back at the meeting space after about 5 minutes.)

**Teacher:** I thought that I knew a lot about fish, but there must be ways that I can learn more. When you want to find out more about something, we call it research. How can we research our topics and learn more?

Discuss this with students and create another class chart. Students will suggest:

- read books
- watch videos
- take a field trip
- talk to people that know

**Teacher:** Today we are going to use one of the ideas you suggested. We are going to explore some books and read to find out more about our topics. During today's work time, everyone will research their topic and write down any new information. We will use the new information to improve our reports.

Instruction in this genre must be individualized. Teachers must know their students and what they are capable of. Each child may have a different topic. Meeting with students frequently will be imperative. Some children will thrive as independent researchers. Push them to find more information and to add more organization to their piece. Some children may need the support of organization tools. As the teacher, suggest options that you feel will fit the needs of the

students.

First grade students are capable of taking notes from what they have read and jotting information on note cards. Note cards are actually a great way for students to organize their writing. Students write one important fact on each notecard, or post-it. Once they have all of their facts, the notes can be spread out on the floor and organized into categories. The information that students usually find on animals tends to fall into about 5 categories; what the animal looks like, what the animal eats, where it lives, things that the animal does and information about its babies. Each notecard can then be turned into a sentence to be included in the child's informational report. This process allows students to plan for some organization in their writing. The modeled writing is a good example, as it shows jumbled information that should be grouped together.

Another option for organization is the use of webs. Teachers can model the use of webs during a mini lesson using chart paper. Place the topic "fish", in the center of the web. Place the main categories around the main topic. (Refer to the categories above.) Write any facts on the web in the appropriate group. While researching, add any new facts to the web as well. The web can remain on the wall as a reference as students create webs of their own.

Both of these options work well for helping students to organize information. Teachers should choose the method that they feel would best work for their students. Many teachers prefer to complete informational reports with the whole group as **shared**, or **interactive writing**. Teachers can create K-W-L charts with students. The students can suggest things that they know about frogs. The class can create a list of questions about what they want to find out about frogs. Finally, after their class has done research to answer their questions, students can state the additional information that they have learned about the topic.

Remember, the goal of the writing workshop is to promote student choice and develop independent learners. Allow the students an opportunity to try this genre on their own. Our first informational report usually begins in November. The first time around, support is given to students. Then in April, we revisit this genre again. This time, minimal support is given, as students take more control over the writing process. Have faith, your students just might surprise you!

Each day during this genre study, students will be reading, taking notes, organizing, conferencing and drafting. The process should be spread over several days. Students do look forward to adding information to their written reports. One first grader told our science teacher, "I am an expert on bears. My report was five pages. Can you believe what a good researcher I am now!" This may seem

like a difficult genre for young children. It is also a genre that motivates students and allows them to work independently to produce a final product.

## Lesson 5

Once the written reports are complete, it's time to celebrate the work of the writers. There are a variety of ways to honor the work from this genre. One possibility is to organize all of the animal reports into categories with the students. Then create several different chapters for a giant class book of animals. The book can be bound and decorated. Students can take turns taking the class book home to share with their families. Once the book has made its journey through the class, it can remain a part of the classroom library, or sent to the school library for other students to view. Other options include creating clay models of each animal, painting a huge animal mural or presenting the animal reports at a science fair.

### Response to Literature

“Literature is valuable simply for modeling the possibilities open to writers” (Fletcher 81). By exposing children to literature, they are able to see the variety of possibilities that author's have in creating texts. Students should engage in a variety of ways to respond to a text. This enables the student to improve his or her comprehension of the text, make comparisons, analyze specific parts of the text and make judgements on what they have read. What powerful things our independent learners can do!

Rather than setting out specific lessons in this genre, the unit provides instructional tools and offer suggestions. It allows more specific choices to be made by teachers and students using this writing unit.

Responding to literature can take many different forms. Students might write about their favorite part of a story. They might make predictions about something to come. The children can create alternate endings to a story. After exposure to many books, students might compare to similar books, or two books by the same author. Students can recommend books that they enjoyed to the class. A bulletin board is a great place to hang written book recommendations, so that all students can find out about lots of different books. These options are just a few to get you started in responding to literature. The activities can be used with almost any books; read alouds, chapter books, trade books or stories from the reading curriculum. In my classroom, we generate a class chart to include these writing opportunities and post it as a reference all year.

It is important to expose children to a variety of children's literature. The district reading curriculum provides quality literature for students in first grade. Children love to read about characters like Poppleton, Little Bear and Frog and Toad. Another great way to provide exciting experiences for kids is with author studies. An author study allows classes to read many books by one author. Children can compare different stories and identify similarities in characters, style or illustrations. Various responses to literature should be included in an author study, as well as opportunities for creating murals, models, class books and independent projects. Author studies can last for a week or two, or even longer. By studying various authors, teachers are able to integrate many subject areas into the unit. It also provides an opportunity for teachers in other disciplines to participate in the author study. The librarian can read stories by the author. The technology teacher might be able to find the author's web site. The art teacher can discuss the illustrator and engage students in examples of the artwork. Student interest is the best way to time your study. As long as students are interested, continue on. Be ready to introduce another author soon, because the students will want to experience other writers and their styles throughout the year. Suggested authors studies and author study written rubric are located later in the Appendix.

Another way to explore responding to literature is through literature circles, also called book groups or book clubs. Students are able to meet in small groups to read and discuss books. These groups can be categorized by ability, like in guided reading, or by student interests. Children as young as six years old can meet in small groups to make predictions, ask questions and summarize the stories that they have read. After reading, students may be guided by a set of questions that might include: What did you think about as you read? Why do you think that the character did that? What predictions do you have about the next chapter? How did that happen at the end? Students will often refer to the text to point out important information or to clarify something. These literature circles meet regularly during the week and often end their discussions with some kind of extension activity. Extension activities might include role play, art and of course, writing. Students can work together to write a response to literature or work independently on one specific aspect of the book.

### Procedural Writing

Procedural is often described as the “how to” piece. First graders know how to do a lot of things. This genre allows students to show their expertise. They are capable of explaining to others what they know how to do. For young children topics include, how to tie my shoes, how to make Kool-Aid, or how to get to the library. Students can tell about each step in the process. This type of writing does take some rehearsal. Students will need several attempts at this genre before becoming proficient.

## Lesson 1

Start the lesson by modeling for students how to play a game with a partner. Sit in the middle of the group “fishbowl” style, on the carpet. Pick a classroom game that everyone is familiar with and has played many times. Model with a student the setting up of the game, repeating the rules for clarification and determining who goes first. Play the game with the child for a few minutes as the others students look on. Ask students, what did I have to do in order to play this game? List their responses on chart paper in random order. Once the class has generated 8-10 responses, reread the list out loud. Ask, does this make sense? Could someone follow these steps to learn how to play the game? Are these steps in the right order? How can we fix this list so that it would make sense to someone who wanted to play the game? Include students in the rewriting process through **interactive writing**. Students should come up and write a sentence detailing the steps in this process. Allow for discussion, as children may argue over what step comes next. This is crucial to developing a procedural piece that will be clear and concise.

Prompt students to use order words that will explain what step they are on. Create a list of order words that can be used for future procedural pieces. Words like first, second, third, then, last, next and finally should be used.

When student responses are exhausted, read through the piece together and check for clarity. Have 2 students act out the step by step process to see if anything was left out. If needed, select students to return to the piece and make additions or eliminations. This process is demonstrating the early stages of revision. Students will see that it is OK to go back to a piece of writing and make changes.

The common example of making peanut butter and jelly sandwiches with the class also works as a physical example for procedural writing. The Harcourt reading series also provides take home books that include "How to Make a Face," which takes students through the drawing process.

## Lesson 2

**Teacher:** Today, we are going to continue our work on procedural writing, the how to writing. I'm going to share some books with you that are procedures.

(The Harcourt Guided Reading library includes, *How to Make a Lion Mask* and *How a Seed Grows*. Another option is *The Snowman* from the Hello Reader series. These books go through the steps of a process using order words.) After reading the stories, encourage students to retell one story to their partner using the order words.

**Teacher:** When we write in this genre, we are in charge. We can explain things to other people. We are the experts. I know how to bake cupcakes. I can explain every step in making good cupcakes, and that makes me an expert. Let's talk about things that you know how to do. What are you an expert at?

Create a class list of student names and what they can do. The topic should be something that they can explain how to do with out any assistance. Some students may not feel like they are experts at anything. Use examples such as; "You walked to school today. How did you get here? Then you are an expert at that! Did you get dressed by yourself today? Tell me how?"

Each child should choose one thing that they know how to do. Try to get a variety of topics. Students should turn and talk with a partner to elaborate on their choice. By discussing what they know, flaws in the plan may be pointed out by peers. Encourage the questioning strategy used earlier in the unit.

Talk with the whole group on ways to begin you paper. The piece should begin with a sentence that describes the topic or subject of the writing. Students will suggest, "I am going to tell you how to make my bed," which is a modest beginning. Encourage kids reach higher to finds ways to grab the attention of the person reading their piece. Using questions is a different way to begin a paper. "Do you like Kool-Aid? Well if you do, I will show you how to make some," an engaging beginning thought of by one of my first graders. Teachers may want to model various beginning sentences and ask students to identify the more interesting ones.

**Teacher:** Here are two beginning sentences. My writing is all about making hot chocolate. Or, mmmmmm, can you smell the chocolate? Read more to learn how to make hot chocolate for yourself. Which sentence interests you more? Why is one sentence better than the other? (Allow time to discuss.) Now I am going to write my beginning sentence. I am going to write about something that I know a lot about. It's something that I do everyday, drive my car. I could write, "this is how to drive a car", but I know that I can think of something better than that. How about, "Vrrrooom, driving is fun, but it's important to follow these important steps"?

Creating an engaging beginning sentence is the targeted skill for this mini lesson. (It will also be used on the rubric for this piece). Some students will respond by creating a sentence that is exciting and different. Many students won't and that is fine. Revisit this topic again in individual conferences. Aim to reach at least 5 students each time you present a new skill. The next time around more students will respond, especially when they see the recognition that the other

students receive for applying the targeted skill.

During today's work time, the only focus should be the introductory sentence. As students work at their seats, meet with struggling students to aid in their brainstorming session. Allow only 5-10 minutes for work time, then return to the meeting place. Spend the remainder of the time sharing and analyzing the beginning sentences created by the class. Ask students what makes someone's beginning sentence "good"? Or interesting? You may want to list some on chart paper or on the board, so that other children will have concrete examples of what good writers do. All work should be stored in student folders until the next writer's workshop.

### Lesson 3

As students are developing their skills and strategies as writers, you will notice a willingness and a pleasure in writing. The students want to show what they know. They have a desire to be successful. They have been given the necessary skills, and will put them to use, given a supportive and encouraging environment.

As the previous day's lesson was a bit shorter, today's lesson will run a bit longer. Students will be able to maintain the extended time limit due to their expertise on the topic. The children are getting to do the explaining. They will be excited to show what they know through writing

**Teacher:** Today we are going to work on the main part of our procedural writing. Yesterday, we all wrote exciting beginning sentences. Today, we will explain all of the important details. I decided to write about driving a car, since that is something that I know a lot about. My writing needs to explain all the steps you need to start driving a car. I'll need to use the order words from our chart in my piece. Hmmmmm, so first, you need to unlock the door and sit inside. Then, you should put on your seat belt. ( As you generate each idea, write in on large paper for the students to view it.) Next I have to adjust the mirrors, so that I can see behind the car and the side of the car. The next step is to put the key in the ignition and start the car. When I am ready to go, I put my right foot on the brake and put the gear to "drive".

There are a few reasons to use this kind of model. Driving is not a topic that your students can write about. This will eliminate the chances that they would copy the modeled work. This piece also explains something that is at a higher level, which allows the use of extended vocabulary. Words like, adjust and ignition are new to first graders, but they can always be exposed to new parts of language.

**Teacher:** In my writing I used some important words. When good writers work on procedural writing, they use order words. In my paper I used words that told you the order things should go. Does anyone see an order word on my paper?

Students should refer back to the list of words created on the first day of this unit. The children can come up to the modeled writing piece and circle the order words that were used such as, first, then and next. They can use the chart as a reference while they are working on the body of the piece.

**Teacher:** As you work today, you will need to use order words when you describe how to do something. Order words will be a part of our rubric for this lesson.

Students already have chosen their topic and included a beginning sentence. So they are ready to begin the body of their piece. Allow enough time today for students to work through the necessary steps. Fidgeting and restlessness will occur during writer's workshop, but don't give up. If students are working for an extended period of time, offer assistance to those that need it. As you support needy students, provide some suggestions, then move away. Give students the opportunity to implement what you have instructed. Come back to them later and check on their progress.

The students will be working at various levels and various speeds. At the end of the allotted time, some students will be ready to share. Those that aren't will have a chance to look at student work that meets the standard for a procedural piece. The work should include a sentence that describes the topic or subject of the writing. All steps should be explicitly described and correctly sequenced. If appropriate, the piece should include a list of materials needed to accomplish the task.

#### Lesson 4

**Teacher:** We have all been working on our procedural writing. A lot of you are close to the end of your explanations. But there is one last thing that we need to talk about. It's the ending sentence. An ending sentence should let the reader know that your paper is finished without saying "the end". Once the reader has followed all of your steps, you need to tell them what to do next. In my piece, I explained how to get ready to drive the car, but I never told the reader to drive. I think my ending sentence will say, "Now you are ready to take a nice drive off into the sunset!" I like that sentence because it's kind of exciting and a little bit silly too. When you reach the last step of your paper today, you will need to create an exciting ending sentence. The ending sentence will also be a part of the rubric for this piece. Turn and talk to your neighbor about some of your ideas for a good ending sentence, then return to your work area.

This will be a continuation of the previous day's work. Many students will be ready to add ending sentences or illustrations to the steps of their procedural paper. A piece of folded construction will allow students to include a picture for each step of their process. Model adding pictures in this manner for the students that are ready. Other children should continue the writing process. The independent workers will spend writer's workshop on their individual pieces and sharing informally with their peers, which will free the teacher to work with the other students. This may be a good time for remediation. Many students will need support and additional examples through mini lessons. Encourage students to read their work aloud. This will get them back in the correct frame of mind to complete the assignment. Always begin by reading the work that was done yesterday. It will put the topic fresh in the writer's mind. "You should be the best expert in the world on your own writing, and the way to do that is by rereading it over as you write" (Fletcher 69). Allow work time to continue. Meet with various students to document the progress in this genre.

Close workshop time today by letting students know that the genre study is almost complete. Inform them that tomorrow will be the last day to complete the procedural writing piece that they have started. By providing a deadline, you are letting students know that their writing should be wrapping up. They will certainly have additional opportunities to write, but this unit of study is coming to a close.

### Lesson 5

**Teacher:** Today is an exciting day. I can't wait to hear some of the great work from our writers. I have posted the rubric for this unit on the bulletin board. I included all of the mini lessons that we had together. Everyone should have included an engaging beginning sentence and an exciting ending sentence. Everyone should have used order words to explain the steps in their writing. Through sharing with your friends, you should have a piece that makes sense to other readers. I should be able to read your paper and follow your steps without any trouble. So take some time this morning to share your final piece with some friends. Take a look at the rubric and make any changes that will make your paper stronger. We meet back for sharing in about 15-20 minutes.

Most students will finish up their procedural papers, as they enjoy sharing in the author's chair. Spend time highlighting student accomplishments in the author's chair. The goal of studying procedural writing was explaining how to do something in detail. Celebrate the students that achieved proficiency in this genre. Spend some time using the rubric to score some papers with the students. This will model what good writing looks like. This process also allows students to discuss and evaluate their work and the work of others. A rubric for this genre

study is located in the Appendix.

The modeling and work time provided throughout these lessons will yield many final products from the students. Some pieces will be polished enough to include in the student portfolios. Many pieces will not. Remember that 80% of all student writing is merely practice. If students did not catch onto this genre in the time provided, at least they were exposed to it through direct instruction. You can encourage the use of procedural writing during free writing. When students are writing in their journals, instead of allowing for topic choice everyday, suggest that students try a previous genre that they struggled with.

## **Appendix B**

### Rubrics

#### Procedural Writing

- 4- I chose one topic that I am an expert in. I wrote an engaging beginning sentence. My writing includes order words in most of the sentences to explain the different steps. My steps are in order and make sense to the reader. I wrote an exciting ending sentence to let the reader know that the steps are complete.
- 3- I am an expert in my topic. I wrote an exciting beginning sentence. My writing has some order words. My steps are in order. I wrote an ending sentence.
- 2- I wrote a beginning sentence. I explained how to do something. I wrote an ending sentence.
- 1- My topic is not clear. The steps included do not make sense to the reader. I need to try this genre again.

#### "Colored Dot" Rubric for an Author Study of Ezra Jack Keats

This rubric is on a four point scale. One color represents one elements that must be present in the student writing. A colored dot is shown on the rubric, which students then use to identify the place in the text where they used the same element.

- (green dot) I wrote the title of my favorite story by Ezra Jack Keats.

- (red dot) I gave three reasons why I liked this story.
- (bluedot) I described something that the author does that is unique.
- (gold/yellow dot) I made a text to self connection.

### Narrative Writing Checklist

My writing has a title.

My story has one or more characters that are important to the story.

My story takes place in a special setting.

My story has a clear beginning, middle and end.

The story addresses some problem that the character has.

A solution to the problem is presented.

I created illustrations to go with my story.

### Informational Writing Rubric

4- My report has an engaging beginning. I included at least 10 facts about my topic. I used describing words in my report. I created pictures to go with my report. I ended with a good concluding sentence.

3- My report has a beginning sentence. I included at least 8 facts about my topic. I have pictures to match my words. I have an ending sentence.

2- My report has at least 6 facts about my topic.

1- My report is at least 3 sentences. I need to continue working on my writing.

### Literature for Narrative Writing

Plot-

Maniac Magee by Jerry Spinelli

Julie of the Wolves by Jean Craighead George

Nate the Great (series) by Marjorie Sharmat

Setting-

Charlotte's Web by E.B. White

Town Mouse, Country Mouse by Jan Brett

Goggles and Apt.3 by Ezra Jack Keats

Make Way for Ducklings by Robert McCloskey

Sarah Plain and Tall by Patricia MacLachan

Characters-

Amazing Grace by Mary Hoffman  
Lily's Purple Plastic Purse by Kevin Henkes  
Amber Brown (series) by Paula Danziger  
Henry and Mudge (series) by Cynthia Rylant

Theme-

(Friendship) Rainbow Fish by Marcus Pfister  
(Family) Chicken Sunday, Thunder Cake by Patricia Polacco  
(Growing Up) Leo the Late Bloomer by Robert Kraus  
(Friendship) Frog and Toad (series) by Arnold Lobel

Point of View-

Junie B. Jones (series) by Barbara Park  
The True Story of the Three Little Pigs by Jon Scieszka  
Shiloh by Phyllis Reynolds Naylor  
Alexander stories by Judith Viorst

Suggested Author Studies

**Kindergarten and First Grade**

Eric Carle  
Dr. Seuss  
Mem Fox  
Leo Lionni  
Ezra Jack Keats  
Jan Brett  
Marc Brown

**Second and Third Grade**

Tomie dePaola  
Faith Ringgold  
Gail Gibbons  
Stven Kellogg  
Chris Van Allsburg  
Patricia Polacco

**Fourth and Fifth Grade**

Cynthia Rylant  
E.B. White

Katherine Paterson  
Judy Blume  
Jerry Spinelli  
Mildred Taylor  
Phyllis Reynolds Naylor

## **Appendix C**

### Content Standards for the Pittsburgh Public Schools

#### Reading, Writing, Speaking And Listening

1. All students use effective research and information management skills, including locating primary and secondary sources of information and ideas to make decisions and solve problems.
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, inform and persuade, in all subject areas.
5. All students analyze and make critical judgements 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 instruction, 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.

#### Citizenship

7. All students demonstrate their skills of communicating, negotiating and cooperating with others.
8. All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.