

## **The Write Way through Literature**

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**Overview**

Why is writing important? Recalling my childhood, I cannot remember being asked to write down my thoughts or experiences by anyone. In fact, it was not until high school that I can even recall anyone commenting on anything I wrote, and that person was my English teacher, Mrs. Zikos. After reading one of my papers she told me I should be keeping the poetry and stories I was writing in a journal. She said that she enjoyed my writing. Of course I didn't listen to her at that time because I didn't see any value to my written work.

Often times at the beginning of my teaching career I wrote short stories and plays to use in my teaching. Again I was advised by some of my colleagues to hold on to them because they thought they were pretty good. Still not realizing or understanding the value of my writing, I ignored the advice I was given and did not hold on to these stories or plays.

As an adult and educator, I have come to see the importance of the written word. I realize the value may often be synonymous with the purpose, but in any case writing is important. I remember years ago an administrator my husband worked for would often say, "The pencil remembers what the head forgets." His purpose for writing was strictly as a means of documentation, but the concept behind writing things so they would not be forgotten was important. Whatever it is that we are thinking, the written word helps us to remember. Calkins says writing allows us to revisit our thoughts because spoken words fade away, but print keeps our thoughts on paper. *The Art of Teaching Writing* ( New Edition ) Lucy McCormick Calkins p. 222

As part of my biblical studies, in the book of Leviticus, the Lord tells Moses to have the people write the Laws down on their doorposts, their hearts, whatever.

Why was it so important to write things down somewhere? Because it was important that the people remembered. And not only that they remembered, but that the generations to come would know and remember. The Lord wanted to be sure that 50, 100, 2000 years later, the people would know who He was, who they were, the relationship between them and

Himself, and the history. He also wanted to be sure they always had a template to guide them.

How will our grandchildren know how and why we celebrate certain traditions or holidays if it is not recorded somewhere, and we aren't around to tell them? Many rich traditions and much history have been lost. Why? Because no one wrote any of it down. Whether it was from lack of knowledge, or the tools and resources to record the information, it was not recorded. Many cultures relied on their traditions to be remembered by word of mouth. They would tell their stories to their children over and over again. Then the children were told to repeat the stories back to the adults to ensure that they had it correct. But somehow the stories were lost. Why? Because they were not written down.

### **Rationale**

Ask someone to tell you something orally about just about anything and they go on and on. But ask them to write it and all of a sudden the story gets a lot shorter. When someone asks you to write something, anything, you generally go on the defensive. What should I say? What are they looking for? Who is going to read my paper? Will they find it adequate? Will they understand what I am trying to say? These questions make it hard for us to write as adults. So imagine what goes through the mind of a child.

Do students need a purpose to write? I believe so and the purpose for teaching this unit will be to encourage and model writing for students. Writing, whether creative or to a particular task has always been an area that suffers at any level. There appear to be so many factors that inhibit or impede one from writing, especially children. One factor may be that they are apprehensive about baring themselves on paper to an audience that might be critical or judgmental. Another is they lack models, templates or strategies to help them write effectively what it is they would like to communicate. Their inexperience with manipulating language to effectively communicate may also inhibit their writing or desire to write.

In any case, writing continues to be an area that needs lots of developing at any age, which leads me to my task: getting students to communicate freely through writing. Why are students apprehensive about writing? Students find excuses for

not writing due to lack of understanding the craft of writing. Many of our students do not have experiences with the written word until they enter school.

Why is it easier for children to communicate orally? We ask students to tell us about their experiences, problems, etc. and they babble on and on. From the time children enter the world, someone is communicating with them orally. Mom talks in a quiet, soothing tone to let baby know he is loved, to calm him down, or to instruct him. Babies learn the difference between happy and angry tones. Toddlers learn what to say or not say by the reinforcement they receive be it verbal or physical, positive or negative. They hear oral language being used on a regular continuum by all those around them. They in turn gain the experience and understanding of how to verbally communicate due to the modeling, practice, and reinforcement provided by the different individuals they interact with beginning at birth.

Why don't students make the connection between oral language and written word? Most students do not make the connection due to lack of experiences. Most of our students are not coming from homes where the parent or guardian is able or willing to sit down and allow them to write down their thoughts in writing. Children observe the written word in their world but don't get many opportunities to use it. Whenever children are scribbling on your walls or furniture, etc., they are just imitating what they see others doing. But what happens when they attempt to express themselves on mom's wall, big brother's homework, dad's contracts, grandma's table? They are reprimanded, disciplined, and told not to do that again. Then they come to school and we say write this, write that and they don't know how. Why? They have not been given many opportunities or experiences to do so.

Is there a connection between reading and writing? I believe that kids learn to read through writing. I see a strong connection between writing and children becoming better readers. I believe that the more children write, the more they'll read, even if it's just their own writing. Writing stories is how my children learned to read. Even before entering school, they would sit on the kitchen floor while I prepared dinner and write stories to read to me about their dolls, friends, etc. They used "invented spelling" as we call it now. I enjoyed listening to their stories and they enjoyed reading them. I would show them how the words actually looked that they used. They would edit their stories and create new ones using the words they had learned. My older daughter loved to write lists about everything and she still does it today.

This unit is to provide students the techniques and strategies for writing through modeling and exposure to a variety of authors.

## Objectives

- The students will listen to stories by various authors to identify writing strategies and styles.
  - The students will listen to story tapes by various authors to identify writing strategies and styles.
  - The students will begin to understand the process of how authors begin to write.
  - The students will listen to at least one published author for personal exposure to that author's thinking and writing strategies.
  - The students will question a published author for insight regarding his/her writing strategies and techniques.
  - The students will discuss with some of the writing styles of the authors to whom they are exposed with peers and or teacher.
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- The students will be able to imitate some of the writing techniques and styles of the various authors to whom they are exposed.
  - The students will develop an appreciation for reading.
  - The students will develop an appreciation for writing.
  - The students will become the authors of short stories based on one or more writing techniques or styles modeled through exposure to various authors.

## Strategies

- **Timeline** – This unit can be taught at any grade level. It was written to be taught over a course of five weeks in the summer; however, it can be taught at any time during the school year. Even though this unit is five weeks long, it can be lengthened or shortened depending on the grade level and timeframe.
- **Modeling** – Modeling is a key strategy to utilize in teaching this unit. Students can gain insight to the expected objectives through observing the teacher and imitating the styles of the authors to whom they are being exposed.
- **Personal Writing Journals** — The teacher will model maintaining and using a personal writing journal for the students. The teacher will discuss with students on a regular continuum what might go into these journals. Each student will be given a personal writing journal to maintain daily.

- **Repetition** – The teacher will begin each writing session with his/her personal journal to help develop habits to encourage in students regarding their personal journals.
- **Time Allotment** – The teacher will set aside a designated time each day to teach writing to encourage consistency in writing behaviors. In allotting time each day for writing, students will begin to recognize the value and importance of writing. Calkins suggests that predictable time for writing is important for it allows children to anticipate and plan for their own writing. *The Art of Teaching Writing* ( New Edition ) by Lucy McCormick Calkins p.185
- **Evaluation** – The evaluation for this unit will be the published stories the students will write developing their own style or utilizing the style of one or more of the authors to which they have been exposed. Students will use rubrics to evaluate their stories.
- **Writing Workshops-** The teacher will set up a daily writing workshop as a vehicle to communicate strategies, ideas, and resources to and from the students. The Writing Workshop will also give students an opportunity to share and challenge their writing ideas and strategies. A format for teaching writing

workshops can be found in chapter 17 of *The Art of Teaching Writing* ( New Edition ) by Lucy McCormick Calkins.

- **Organization** – The teacher will want to have an understanding of how, when, and where he/she wants to establish the writing workshops. Donald Graves states that the best workshops are structured and organized. *The Art of Teaching Writing* ( New Edition ) by Lucy McCormick Calkins pp.184-185
- **Library** - The teacher will set aside a library of books that students may read independently or to each other to familiarize themselves with various authors' strategies and techniques. This library should change periodically to incorporate more books and authors.

## **Classroom Activities**

In teaching this unit, the students will be given the opportunity to imitate and use the writing styles of various authors. The books used in these lessons can be substituted with any books you may choose to incorporate. The books you choose can represent any techniques or styles you want to expose your students to.

### ***Week One***

Materials – A teacher’s writing journal  
Student Writing Journals ( One for each student )  
*The World of William Joyce Scrapbook* by William Joyce

Advanced Preparation – Invite an author to your classroom to meet your students during the fourth or fifth week of your unit.

**Objective:** To assist students in recognizing how authors come up with ideas for writing; to take away their anxiety about not knowing what to write; to provide them strategies for writing.

This unit is going to be taught through a series of mini lessons. Suggestions on how to use mini lessons for teaching can be found in chapter 12 of *The Art of Teaching Writing*, (New Edition) by Lucy McCormick Calkins.

### **Day 1**

The first thing to be established in teaching this unit is a routine for the “Writing Workshop” that will be utilized each day. In establishing routines, children will be assisted in developing an understanding for organization which will enhance their writing.

A routine that will be established in this workshop is maintaining writing journals for recording your writing. The teacher will model how to have students establish this routine the first day without drawing a lot of attention to the task.

The teacher will read an excerpt from his/her personal writing journal to develop student interest in wanting to do so. Establish that the journal is a writing book in which to record their thoughts. At this point the teacher may want to make a list on the board or chart paper as to what might go into the journal for those who may need some ideas. Then give each child their own personal journal.

Children will be given a blank writing journal that they can illustrate however they choose to encourage individuality and ownership. They will be told that they will want to carry this journal back and forth daily to put their writing in. The purpose as to why they should carry it back and forth can be discussed with them.

## **Day 2**

The second day of the “Writing Workshop” the teacher will again read from his/her writing journal to continue the routine. Make a big deal out of those who remembered their journals without any attention given to those who didn’t. ( The point here is to encourage only the expected outcome which is for the students to keep their personal journals with them. ) Then ask the students if any of them would like to share something from their writing journal with the group.

The teacher will then read aloud *The World of William Joyce Scrapbook* by William Joyce.

After reading this selection the teacher will state something that he/she might want to write in his writing journal about William Joyce that is worth remembering or using at another time.

The teacher will encourage the students to write one or more things that they think they might want to remember about William Joyce.

After giving students some time to reflect on the selection to find a treasure to write, the teacher may ask students to share what it is they wrote or just end the workshop.

## **Day 3**

The teacher will again begin with the routine of reading from his/her writing journal and then allow others to share from theirs.

Then begin a discussion on William Joyce to help students understand the process that some writers use in creating writing pieces. This will hopefully assist them in feeling less

apprehensive about their writing. If they didn’t get any ideas that they felt worthy, discussing this selection may help them realize that it’s okay. Some of the questions below may be utilized.

When did William Joyce begin writing?

Where did William Joyce get his ideas for writing?

Did he always know in advance what he would write about? Why or why not?

After the discussion, the teacher should ask students to write a sentence or two about something that they thought was really silly or hurtful, etc. The teacher should only ask for a sentence or two because you don't want to discourage them by asking too much at once.

#### **Day 4**

The teacher will begin with established routines. Next, the teacher will share a sentence written the previous day from his/her personal journal. Then elaborate on this sentence. After this, have students look back on their sentences from the previous day and expand on them. Students can share at the end of this writing session with their peers.

#### ***Week Two***

Materials - Teacher's Writing Journal

*The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown

Student Journals

During Week Two, the teacher will expose children to another reading selection. Use this exposure for an opportunity to allow students to imitate an author's writing technique.

Objective: To introduce students to *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown. To help students see how Margaret Wise Brown uses repetition for effect in writing and to allow students to see how everyday thoughts and experiences are being shared in Brown's book.

#### **Day 1**

The teacher will begin with the established routines. The teacher will then read *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown. Then say that he is going to write something worth remembering about this book. Then ask the students to write one or more things they want to remember about this book or the author.

## **Day 2**

The teacher will start with established routines. Then begin a discussion about *The Important Book*. Ask students what they noticed about this story. Children will recognize that the word “important” is used repetitively. A mini lesson today may focus on being specific and adding details to your writing. *The Art of Teaching Writing* ( New Edition ) by Lucy McCormick Calkins p.214

The teacher can then write something that is important to him/her in the writing journal. Then ask the students to list some things that are important to them.

## **Day 3**

After beginning with established routines, ask students to share something that Margaret Wise Brown thought was important. Then ask students if Margaret Wise Brown just listed what was important to her as we did in our lists.

Students should recognize that Brown gave some details about each item she found to be important.

Next the teacher will have some students share their lists with the class. The teacher can share a personal list at this time. Next, try to imitate Brown’s style by expanding on a few of the things from this personal list that is worth elaborating on. Then ask students to do the same thing.

## **Day 4**

Begin with routines. Then the teacher can share some of the important things necessary to expand on or have some students share their writings.

## ***Week Three***

Materials – Teacher’s writing journal.  
Student writing journals  
*The Patchwork Quilt* by Valerie Flourney  
A quilt ( One with special memories for the teacher. )  
Paper to create quilts

**Objective** – To have children recognize ideas for stories come from their personal experiences; to have children relate to how different items can be significant to individuals; to have children share some of their memories of something of value

after hearing *The Patchwork Quilt*; to have children create a quilt; to have children write a short story relating to one of their items from their quilts.

### **Day 1**

Begin with the established routines. Then tell students a story by Valerie Flournoy will be read this week; the name of the book is *The Patchwork Quilt*. Then read the story *The Patchwork Quilt* to the students. After reading, tell them you are going to write something that you liked about this book in your journal so you don't forget. Tell them to write something worth remembering in their writing journals.

### **Day 2**

Begin with the established routines. Share something that you wanted to remember from your journal regarding *The Patchwork Quilt* or ask some students to share a note from theirs. Next ask the students what was so important about the quilt in the story and to whom it was important. Ask them why it was important to grandma or Annie. Tell the students that everything that you put in your writing journal to help you remember something about a story or author doesn't have to be in written form. Then ask them what the quilt in the story looked like. Then tell the students that you are going to draw a little quilt in your journal to help you to remember this story. Tell them you are going to make a rectangle and draw something that has special meaning to you in the rectangle. Have them make a quilt in their writing journals and have them draw something that was significant to them on it to help them remember the story.

### **Day 3**

Begin with the established routines. Then share with the children what you drew on your quilt in your writing journal. Have some students share something they drew. Ask them again what the patchwork quilt in the story looked like. Then show the children a quilt that has some importance to you and share why. Tell them you were thinking about some of the things that were special to you last night and decided to make a patchwork quilt of your own to draw them on. Tell them that you decided to let them make a quilt also. (Show them an example of a quilt that you have begun to make.) Tell them you are putting items from your writing journal on the quilt along with a couple of other things that are important to you. Remind students that some people may only have one or two things to put on their quilts while others may have a lot. Let them know that they can just color the squares that do not have pictures on them. Show them how to fold their paper

in sixteen squares to represent their quilt. Then have them proceed in completing their quilt.

#### **Day 4**

Begin with the established routines. Ask students if they ever asked their moms where they got a particular piece of jewelry or a purse and she told them she didn't remember. (This is to set up why we need to write things down.) Ask the students what happened after grandma had completed the quilt and everyone recognized one of the squares made from a particular piece of clothing that belonged to them. (At this point of the lesson children should recognize that everyone has a story to tell about something or other.)

Then tell the students that as you looked at your quilt you started thinking about the stories that go with the pictures. (Select one picture to write about.) Tell the students you are to write about just one of these pictures today and at another time you may pull your quilt out of your journal and write another story about a different picture. Tell them then you could always remember what it was and why it was important to you. Suggest for them to look at their quilts and to choose one picture from their quilt to write about so they don't forget what it was or why it was important.

#### **Week Four**

Materials – Teacher's writing journal  
Students' writing journals  
A blank book for students to write and illustrate their stories  
Copies of : *The Important Book*  
*The World of William Joyce Scrapbook*  
*The Patchwork Quilt*

*Note: Activities for weeks four and five can be interchanged.*

**Objective** – Students will reread the notes in their writing journal containing the styles and techniques of the author's that they read and heard about these past three weeks; students will imitate the style of one or more of these authors to create their own books; students will create their own books.

## **Day 1**

Begin with established routines. Review briefly the three books that you have read over the past three weeks. Tell students you are going to read over your notes from your writing journal from the past few weeks. This is the time to get them to review and reflect on what they have been exposed to over the past few weeks. At this point the teacher is giving them the opportunity to shape and reshape their ideas and writing. Calkins says she tells children that “writing is not very different from making clay rabbits.” *The Art of Teaching Writing* ( New Edition ) Lucy McCormick Calkins p.222-223 (This is an excellent time to relay this thought to the children since they are getting ready to create their stories.) Ask the children to read over their notes from their writing journals also. Then ask them to write in their journals which books and styles they liked and why. Next have the students share some of the things they liked about the various authors or books. Tell them this week they are going to create short books of their own imitating the writing styles and or techniques of one or more of the authors they learned about.

## **Day 2**

Begin with established routines. Review with the class the style of one of the authors you read about. Ask them if these books only have words in them. They will then say no, there are pictures in them too. Let them know these pictures are often not drawn by the author of the books. Ask the class what we call the person who draws the pictures. They should state the “illustrator”. Read the names of the authors and illustrators so they can determine they don’t have to be the same person. Tell them next week they are going to get a blank book to create a book of their own. Inform them they should write their first draft of their books in their writing journals so they can make any changes they want before they put it in their blank books. Tell them they are only going to write one page of their stories today unless they want to continue working on them. Also tell them they can continue working on their stories at home if they like.

## **Day 3**

Begin with established routines. Read the first page of your book or have some of the students who have started their books read their first page to the class. Doing this may help generate ideas for those who may have trouble getting started. Then review briefly the writing style of one or more of the authors that they have been exposed to. Help students understand the authors use a pattern or style throughout their book. Then tell them to begin the next page of their books. They should decide if they want to continue imitating the style of the author they are using or use another style. If time allots have at least one student read their first two pages to the class.

#### **Day 4**

Begin with established routines. Then have a few students read over their books. Tell them they are going to add more pages to their stories today. Tell them they can add to their stories over the weekend if they like. If time allows, have someone read their story to the class.

#### **Week Five**

Materials – Student writing journals  
Storybooks students are writing.  
Markers and crayons

Human Resource- Author

**Objective** – To complete their stories; to put their final drafts of their stories in the blank books; to have students illustrate their books; to have students assess their stories; to have students meet and question an author; to share their stories with their peers.

#### **Day 1**

Begin with established routines. Tell students today they should read through their stories. They should add, delete or change anything they want. Tell them tomorrow they will get blank books to rewrite and illustrate their stories.

#### **Day 2**

Begin with established routines. Then pass out blank books to each student. Tell students they are going to rewrite these stories in these blank books. Tell them they can illustrate their books or have someone illustrate for them.

#### **Day 3**

Begin with established routines. Have students continue working on their books. Tell students that tomorrow they are going to meet the guest author. Give them some background on the author and tell them to write any questions or comments they might have for the author.

#### **Day 4**

Begin with established routines. Tell them to take out their writing journals so they can record anything they might want to remember about the author.

Introduce them to the author and let him or her speak. After the author has spoken and questions and comments have been addressed, tell students to complete their books. Have them use the rubrics to evaluate their books. (see Appendix B) After this anyone who finishes can share his/her book with the author.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

Aragon, Jane Chelsea. – *Salt Hands*. Illustrated by Ted Rand. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989.

This book helps writers to understand that they need to take their time when writing. Sharing this story will provide an excellent model.

Baylor, Byrd. *The Other Way to Listen*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1978.

This book is another example to use to encourage students to take their time to view things carefully before writing.

Bunting, Eve. *The Wednesday Surprise*. Illustrated by Donald Carrick. New York: Clarion Books.

This story is about a seven year old teaching her grandmother to read and can be used for students in modeling styles or techniques.

Calkins, Lucy McCormick. *The Art of Teaching Writing*, New Edition. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1994.

This book will serve as an excellent guide for preparing and teaching writing. Not only do you gain lots of insight, but it provides a wealth of additional resources.

Fletcher, Ralph. *What a Writer Needs*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1992.

Ralph's book is an excellent resource for teachers for teaching and learning the qualities of writing. He provides excellent modeling in his book.

Graves, Donald H. *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work*. Portsmouth, NH: Heineman, 1983.

An excellent guide for teachers who are new to the writing process or need review in the writing process.

Murray, Donald M. *Expecting the Unexpected: Teaching Myself-and others- to Read and Write*. Portsmouth, NH Boynton/Cook-Heineman, 1989.

Donald Murray is a gifted and noted professional in the field of writing. This book would be great as a resource to teaching both reading and writing.

## **Appendix A**

### **Reading Library**

Brown, Margaret Wise. *The Important Book*

Bruna, Dick. *The Little Bird*.

Flournoy, Valerie. *The Patchwork Quilt*

Greywolf, Sopoiea. *When I Look in the Mirror*

Heller, Ruth. *The Front Hall Carpet*.

Howard, Elizabeth Fitzgerald. *Aunt Flossie's Hats*.

Joyce, William. *The Scrapbook of William Joyce*.

Miller, Montzalee. *My grandmother's Cookie Jar*.

Munsch, Robert. *Love You Forever*

Polacco, Patricia. *Chicken Sunday*.

Rylant, Cynthia. *When I Was Young On the Mountain*.

Smalls, Irene. *Jonathan and His Mommy*

Woodson, Jacqueline. *We had a Picnic this Past Sunday*

## **Appendix B**

### **Content Standards**

This unit will utilize the Pittsburgh Public Schools Content Standards below:

#### **Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening**

2. All students read and use a variety of methods to make sense of various kinds of complex text.
4. All students write for a variety of purposes, including to narrate, inform, and persuade, in all subject areas.
6. All students exchange information orally, including understanding and given spoken instructions, asking and answering questions appropriately, and promoting effective group communications.
7. All students listen to and understand complex oral messages and identify their purpose, structure and use.
10. All students communicate appropriately in business, work and other applied situations.

#### **Arts and Humanities**

2. All students evaluate and respond critically to works from the visual and performing arts and literature of various individuals and cultures, showing that they understand features of the works.

#### **Citizenship**

8. All students demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

## Appendix C

### Rubric

The rubric incorporates most of the scoring guidelines from the Pennsylvania Writing Assessment Domain Scoring Guide.

**4**

- Shows thorough understanding on the purpose of the task
- Substantial, specific, and/or illustrative content demonstrating strong development and ideas
- Precise illustrative use of a variety of words and sentence structures to create consistent writer's voice and tone
- Evident control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation

**3**

- Establishes and focuses on the purpose of the writing task
- Sufficiently developed content with adequate elaboration
- Functional arrangement that sustains a logical order with some evidence of transitions
- Sufficient control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation

**2**

- Shows some awareness of the purpose for writing
- Limited content with inadequate elaboration or expansion
- Confused or inconsistent arrangement of content
- Limited word choice and control of sentence structures
- Limited control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation

**1**

- Minimal evidence of topic or understanding of task
- Minimal content
- Minimal control of content arrangement
- Minimal variety in word choice and control of sentence structures
- Minimal control of grammar, mechanics, spelling, usage and sentence formation