

Grade 7 Sampler

UNITS OF STUDY

in Argument, Information, *and* Narrative Writing

A COMMON CORE WORKSHOP CURRICULUM

LUCY CALKINS

with Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project



7

Grade 7 Components

Professional and Classroom Support

A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop crystallizes the essential principles, methods, and structures of effective writing workshop instruction.

The *Resources for Teaching Writing* CD-ROM provides unit-specific print resources to support your teaching throughout the year.

Three Units of Study

- ◆ Are organized around the three types of writing mandated by the Common Core—*argument*, *information*, and *narrative writing*
- ◆ Lay out six weeks of instruction (16–17 sessions) in each unit
- ◆ Include all of the teaching points, minilessons, conferences, and small-group work needed to teach a comprehensive workshop curriculum
- ◆ Model Lucy and her colleagues' carefully crafted teaching moves and language

Writing Pathways

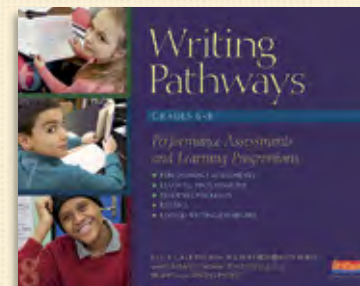
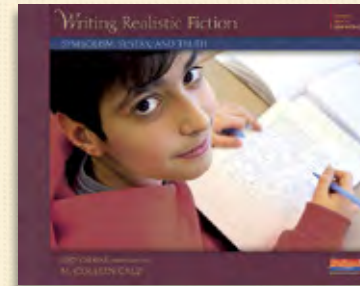
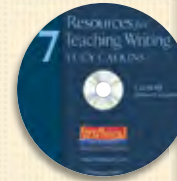
Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades 6-8

- ◆ Is organized around a continuum of learning progressions across argument, information, and narrative writing
- ◆ Includes benchmark student texts, writing checklists, learning progressions, and rubrics

If... Then... Curriculum

Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6-8

- ◆ Offers nine alternate units of study
- ◆ Presents if/then conferring scenarios that support targeted instruction and differentiation



Welcome to this sampler of the Grade 7 components in the Units of Study in Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing series. The first pages of this sampler provide an overview of the units of study. They describe the instructional pathways each unit follows and how this journey is subdivided into bends, or parts. This overview describes how each bend builds on the learning in the previous bend and sets the stage for the learning in the next bend. Likewise, it describes how each larger unit of study builds on the learning in past units and sets the stage for learning in future units and grades. The tables of contents that follow delineate the steps of the journey and map in detail the learning students will see and experience.

The bulk of this sampler is the first bend from Unit 1, *Writing Realistic Fiction: Symbolism, Syntax, and Truth*. This bend extends your students' journey into narrative writing. This in-depth look allows you to see how learning is progressively built in each unit and how students become immersed in the writing process. In addition to mapping your teaching points, minilessons, conferences, and small-group work, each session also includes Lucy's coaching commentary. In these side-column notes, Lucy is at your side explaining proven strategies, offering professional insight, and coaching you through the nitty-gritty details of teaching.

Also included are samples of the instructional resources that support these core units. *Writing Pathways* shows you the types of learning progressions, checklists, and benchmark writing samples that will help you evaluate your students' work and establish where students are in their writing development. *If... Then... Curriculum* describes the alternate units you can use to enhance or differentiate your instruction. And finally, the samples from the resources CD-ROM show you the wealth of teaching tools that support each unit.

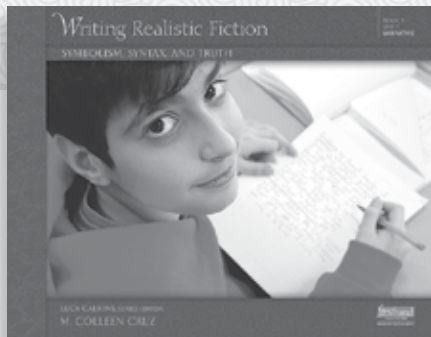
As you review this Grade 7 sampler, it is important to remember that the goal of this series is to model thoughtful, reflective teaching in ways that enable you to extrapolate guidelines and methods, so that you will feel ready to invent your own clear, sequenced, vibrant writing instruction.

“Seventh-graders relish their growing sense of control over their own lives and their growing sense of agency. So, in this first unit of the year, you offer them the power of controlling their own characters and worlds as they write short fiction. With their engagement high, you can coach them to lift the sophistication of their writing through attention to individual scenes, symbols, and writing techniques they've discovered from close readings of powerful short fiction.”

—Lucy Calkins



- ◆ Units of Study Overview and Contents *pages 2–10*
- ◆ UNIT 1: Writing Realistic Fiction: Symbolism, Syntax, and Truth (Narrative Writing)
BEND 1: “Creating and Developing Meaningful Stories and Characters” *pages 11–59*
- ◆ *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, Grades 6–8* *pages 60–63*
- ◆ *If... Then... Curriculum: Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8* *pages 64–65*
- ◆ *Resources for Teaching Writing CD-ROM* *pages 66–67*
- ◆ Implementation and Professional Development Options *page 68*
- ◆ About the Grade 7 Authors *back cover*



OVERVIEW AND CONTENTS FOR UNIT 1

Writing Realistic Fiction *Symbolism, Syntax, and Truth* M. Colleen Cruz

As you begin Bend I, you will teach students how to see the world as fiction writers, how to examine their lives for moments that could be turned into compelling fictional stories. Through a one-day writing-intensive “boot camp,” you will show them how to develop scenes, the bedrock of fiction writing. You’ll also teach them some techniques for creating believable characters—such as exploring characters’ motivations and obstacles, quirks and passions, and internal and external lives. You will then guide students in ways to shape their stories by using story arcs and by tracing the journey on which they take the reader.

In Bend II, students move into drafting and revising, drawing on everything they already know about narrative writing. You will call on students to consider what they know from reading and studying fiction and to bring it into their own repertoire of moves as writers. You will teach students ways to craft compelling leads to their stories and ways to ground their scenes in dialogue, action, and setting. Finally, you will show students ways writers write solid endings that give their works of fiction satisfying conclusions.

Finally, in Bend III, you will guide students in getting their works of fiction ready for audiences through deep revision work and editing. In this bend, you will focus students on ways writers revise the meaning and messages behind their stories. You will teach students ways writers develop imagery and use symbols and other literary devices, such as foreshadowing, in their writing work. You will also teach students to rethink the evolution of their stories and to create endings that are worthy of their beginnings—and of their aspirations. At the end of the unit, fiction writers celebrate by publishing their work in a class short story anthology and share reviews of their work.

Welcome to the Unit

BEND I ♦ **Creating and Developing Meaningful Stories and Characters**

1. Imagining Stories from Everyday Moments
2. Imagining Stories You Wish Existed in the World
3. Developing Believable Characters through Scene Boot Camp
4. Giving Characters Struggles and Motivations that Mirror Real Life
5. Plotting with Tools (Story Arcs, Timelines, Story Boards, Mentor Texts)

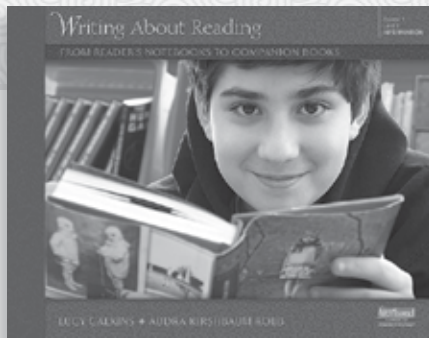
BEND II ♦ **Drafting and Revising with an Eye toward Meaning**

6. From 2-D to 3-D: Planning and Writing Scenes by Including Evidence
7. Stepping into the Drama of the Story to Draft
8. Studying Published Texts to Write Leads
9. Grounding Dialogue in Scenes
10. Writing Endings that Make Readers Swoon

Bend III ♦ **Meticulous Revision and Precise Edits with Audience in Mind**

11. Reading Drafts like Editors
12. Revision: Weaving in Symbolism and Imagery to Bring Out Meaning
13. Conducting the Rhythm of Language: Creating Cadence and Meaning through Syntax
14. Using Mentor Texts to Help Match Authorial Intent with the Page
15. Economizing on the Sentence and Word Level
16. Editing with Lenses and Independence
17. Publishing Anthologies: A Celebration





OVERVIEW AND CONTENTS FOR UNIT 2

Writing about Reading *From Reading Notebooks to Companion Books* Lucy Calkins and Audra Kirshbaum Robb

In Bend I, students will learn that one way readers can better understand what they are reading is to write about it. Students will collect, develop, and justify their ideas about the texts they read as they generate extended and varied entries in their writer's notebooks. You will teach students that writers can analyze texts not only by extended writing, but also by creating visuals—charts, pictures, and diagrams. Midway through this first bend, you will introduce students to companion books. You'll teach them that writers set up to write their own companion books by devising a writing plan that will showcase their most insightful, important thoughts about the stories. You will show them also ways writers of companion books explain and elaborate on important points and details, cite evidence from the story, and incorporate direct quotations from the text. At the end of this bend, students will participate in a museum walk as they share with their classmates their completed drafts of their companion books.

In Bend II, you take students deeper into the writing cycle, moving from generating writing and drafting into revision. You'll continue to teach ways to read, analyze, and present information about texts, but now students will learn to write too about the crafting techniques that the authors they are studying use. You will teach students ways that fan fiction writers write extensions of a story, improvising new scenes that fit the original or that make the original flow in a different direction. You will also teach students ways writers develop and include perspectives of different characters in a story. At the end of this bend, you will teach students ways writers craft introductions that hook readers and preview important sections, and ways they craft memorable conclusions. Finally, students celebrate their learning by inviting other writers, friends, and family to read and enjoy their completed companion books.

Welcome to the Unit

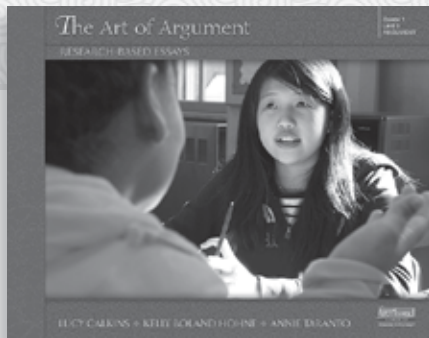
BEND I ♦ Planning and Drafting Companion Books

1. Writing about Reading with Voice and Investment
2. Using Graphics to Think and Rethink about Literature
3. Thinking Big, Thinking Small
4. Explaining Thinking
5. Close Reading and Analytic Writing
6. Letting the Book Teach You How to Respond
7. Working Toward a Companion Book
8. Incorporating Evidence from the Text as a Means to Elaborate
9. Reflection and Goal-Setting Using the Information Writing Checklist—
and a Mini-Celebration

BEND II ♦ Writing to Deepen Literary Analysis

10. Reading Like Writers—and Writing about It
11. Writing about Symbolism in Texts
12. Analyzing Structure in a Text
13. Writing *Inside* the Story: Improvisations and Fan Fiction
14. Writing Inside Perspectives
15. Writing Introductions and Conclusions
16. Final Edits and a Celebration





OVERVIEW AND CONTENTS FOR UNIT 3

The Art of Argument *Research-Based Essays*

Lucy Calkins, Kelly Boland Hohne, and Annie Taranto

Bend I of this unit takes your seventh-graders through a cycle of debate, and in it you'll teach them how to evaluate the evidence behind existing arguments, and you'll teach them ways to rehearse and compose their own positions on a controversial issue. You'll teach students that when taking a side on an issue, it's important to state a claim, give reasons to back up that claim, and give evidence to support each and every reason. You'll teach students ways to sort and rank their evidence, deciding which evidence matches each point and which evidence is most compelling. Then, you will teach students that writers use analysis of the evidence to help readers follow the path of the argument. At the end of this bend, students will self-assess by looking back at their work to see how it might be improved and by looking forward to ask how they can bring all that they have learned to their future writing.

You will coach students to compose more focused and nuanced arguments in Bend II. You'll begin by teaching them to study one topic or issue with the goal of identifying the crux of the matter. Students will learn how to read with a critical eye, looking for contradictions among sources, and paying

careful attention to the author's perspective. You will give students an opportunity to present their arguments orally, in order for them to determine what new evidence they must gather in preparation for writing. You'll teach students how to craft an introduction that will set up their argument well and how to introduce and refute counterarguments. With your instruction, students will learn ways that writers match the tone of their writing to its purpose and audience. This bend concludes with a symposium, a formal opportunity for students to present their arguments and learn from the responses and ideas they get from others.

In Bend III, students cycle through the process of writing a research-based argument once more, this time on a topic of their own choosing. You'll teach students how to identify issues that matter to them, to form cause-focused groups around those issues, to conduct their own research, to revise their argument by qualifying their claims, and to analyze the logic of their arguments. At the end of the unit, students share their arguments with a global audience using social media.

Welcome to the Unit

BEND I ♦ Establishing and Supporting Argument Positions

1. Weighing Evidence to Form Considered Positions
2. Take Your Argument into a Scrimmage: Debating to Test and Strengthen a Position
3. Bam! Bolstering Positions by Adding Relevant Evidence
4. Stay with Me Now: Balancing Evidence with Analysis
5. Taking Stock

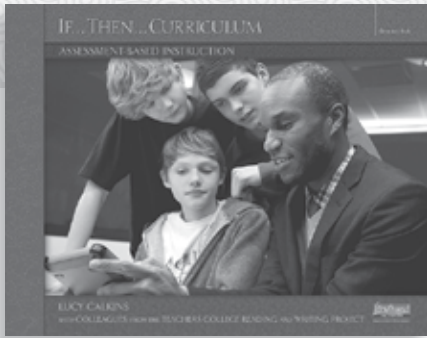
BEND II ♦ Composing More Focused and Nuanced Arguments

6. Forming Coalition Groups
7. Bringing a Critical Perspective to Your Research
8. Debating to Prepare to Draft
9. Introducing and Writing Your Argument
10. Self-Assessment with an Eye Toward Counterargument
11. Studying Author's Craft, Including Rhetorical Devices
12. When Company Comes: Knowing When and How to Maintain a Formal Tone
13. Celebration: Symposium

BEND III ♦ Taking Arguments to a Global Audience

14. Taking Opportunities to Stand and Be Counted
15. Revising by Qualifying Your Claim
16. Revising with Logical Fallacies in Mind: Evaluating Evidence
17. Cyberactivism





CONTENTS

If... Then... Curriculum

Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8

Lucy Calkins with Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project

Introduction: Middle School Writers and Planning Your Year

Alternative and Additional Units

1. Writing Information Books on Topics of Personal Expertise

IF your students have not been part of writing workshop classrooms prior to now and they have not had any experience writing informational texts, THEN you may want to teach this unit. This unit provides foundational teaching and learning about information writing that students will need before attempting more complex units such as research-based information writing. This unit invites students to draw from their own areas of personal expertise to create lively, voice-filled information books. Choose this unit if you'd like your students to experience firsthand that information writing need not be bland or tedious to create; it can be filled with opportunities for choice, engagement, and exploration. This unit will support all middle school writers in reaching toward the demands of the Common Core in information writing.

2. Fiction Writing

IF your sixth-grade students display a solid understanding of personal narrative writing and you want them to develop their skills in writing realistic fiction, THEN you may want to teach this unit. This unit will support sixth-grade writers in learning to craft and revise integral scenes, to create well-developed characters that respond to conflict in realistic ways, and to use tension and pacing to draw readers into their unfolding plot. If you choose to teach this alongside fiction reading, this unit will particularly build reading–writing connections. This unit will support all middle school writers in reaching toward the demands of the Common Core in narrative writing.

3. Persuasive Essays

IF your students are new to the genre of argument writing, or if they would benefit from additional practice in writing persuasively, THEN you may want to teach this unit. This unit introduces students to the foundational skills of persuasive writing and then quickly builds on those in more ambitious ways, with the invitation to students to learn from source-based material and to produce argument essays that draw on that research. The work this unit covers sets the stage for the literary essay writing unit that is detailed in the full-length book for Grade 6 (*The Literary Essay: From Character to Compare/Contrast*), Grade 7 (*The Art of Argument: Research-Based Essays*), and Grade 8 (*The Literary Essay: Analyzing Craft and Theme*). It could as easily follow these, especially with a greater focus on the final bends.

4. Memoir: Writing to Reflect on Experience and Suggest Thematic Connections

IF you want to teach a unit that will tap into students' motivation because it is especially personal, and that can also show students that structure follows content and that authors decide upon their structure as they figure out what they want to say, THEN a unit on memoir is a good choice. Such a unit can extend the personal narrative work that your students experienced in sixth grade, bringing the power of that unit to seventh grade, while also adding a new spin. Choose memoir if your students need to engage with their lives and each other in the curriculum, in order to build a cohesive community of writers, and if you'd like their writing to be more reflective, purposeful, and disciplined.

5. Historical Fiction: Weaving Together Fact and Fiction

IF your students have already experienced a realistic fiction writing unit and display a solid understanding of personal narrative writing, THEN this unit would be a good choice. This unit will especially appeal to your budding historians. Many teachers accompany this unit with social studies research, though you could teach it in isolation if your students have in-depth knowledge of a particular time period. Either way, the work is challenging in that it calls on students to weave historically accurate details through a well-crafted, fictional narrative; the unit also invites students to incorporate informational text through an accompanying prelude or endnote. Especially (but not only) if you choose to teach this alongside historical fiction reading, this unit will particularly build reading–writing connections.

6. Poetry: Immersion and Innovation

IF the language with which your students write tends to be social rather than literary, and you'd like to build their sense of playfulness, their love of words, their ability to make reading–writing connections, and their engagement with writing, THEN poetry gets teen writers writing up a storm. If you have students who struggle with stamina or writing long, poetry allows them to be successful as writers and therefore to build positive relationships with writing. When studying poetry, writers can mine mentor texts closely and repeatedly, so this unit provides you with a powerful opportunity to teach students to apprentice themselves deeply to the craft and form of writers they admire.

7. Documentaries: Bringing History to Life

IF your students know enough about topics to teach others and you'd like to see their informational writing have more voice, authenticity, and craft, THEN the invitation to produce historical documentaries gives them an opportunity to practice the essential skills of information writing such as organizing information, writing with both ideas and information, and highlighting a perspective. This unit also allows students to compose multimedia digital texts in a short, nine-session unit. To do this work, students need access to research sources, time to research, and opportunities to teach one another digital media.

8. Literary Essays: A Mini-Unit on Analyzing Complex Texts for Meaning, Craft, and Tone

IF you want a quick, minor unit to hone students' skills with text-based writing and to support their engaged reading, THEN writing literary essays will give students an opportunity to explore how theme and craft are related in the stories they read. Literary essays will also strengthen students' skills with analyzing text evidence and elaborating their thinking about complex texts. Choose literary essays to sustain a trajectory of writing about reading, analyzing texts, and illuminating complexity.

9. Fantasy: Writing within Literary Traditions

IF your students are game to build upon their experience writing fiction with a unit that extends that work, THEN you'll want to teach them to write fantasy. This will be an especially good fit if you teach students who are fairly strong readers and who love fantasy and dystopian novels. A unit on writing fantasy will give these avid readers the chance to create their own worlds; work with archetypes, quest structures, and universal themes; and generally to revel in complexity. A unit on fantasy will particularly build reading-writing connections.

Differentiating Instruction for Individuals and Small Groups: If ... Then ... Conferring Scenarios

INTRODUCTION/RATIONALE

NARRATIVE WRITING

Structure and Cohesion

If the writer is new to the writing workshop or this particular genre of writing . . .

If the student seems to paragraph randomly or not much at all . . .

If the story lacks tension . . .

If the beginning of the piece is lacking story elements or does not hint at larger issues or tension . . .

If the ending of the piece seems incomplete or incongruous with the rest of the piece . . .

If the writer is ready to learn about the use of flashbacks and flash-forwards . . .

Elaboration

If the writer has elaborated, but in seemingly haphazard ways . . .

If the writer has created a story that is sparse, with little elaboration . . .

If the writer has written the external story but not the internal story . . .

If the writer relies on dialogue and internal thinking to show what a character is thinking and feeling and is ready for new techniques to achieve the same effect . . .

If the writer is not making use of literary devices . . .

Language Conventions

If the student is struggling with spelling, halting his or her progress . . .

If the writer constructs short, simple sentences and is ready to learn to punctuate longer, more complex sentences using median punctuation . . .

INFORMATION WRITING

Structure and Cohesion

If the writer has not established a clear organizational structure . . .

If there is no logical order to the sequence of information . . .

If the writer is ready to experiment with alternative organizing structures . . .

If the writer has chosen a topic that is too broad . . .

If the writer does not use transition words and phrases to help readers understand how the text is organized or how information fits together . . .

If the introduction to the piece is lacking or weak . . .

If the conclusion is lacking or weak . . .

Elaboration

If each section is short and needs elaboration . . .

If the writer elaborates by adding fact after fact . . .

If the writer does not elaborate on information from outside sources . . .

If the writer does not credit outside sources in his or her writing . . .

If the writer does not incorporate domain-specific vocabulary . . .

Language Conventions

If the writer incorporates quotes, facts, and statistics, but does so awkwardly . . .

If the writer struggles with spelling, particularly domain-specific vocabulary words . . .

ARGUMENT WRITING

Structure and Cohesion

If the introduction does not forecast the structure of the essay . . .

If the writer's introduction and/or conclusion feel formulaic . . .

If the writer's supports overlap . . .

If the writer's supports are not parallel or equal in weight . . .

If the writer has developed a thesis that is complex and nuanced, but lacks the skills to organize an essay that supports it . . .

If the writer needs help incorporating counterargument into her essay . . .

If the writer has a thesis and supports, but there is no evidence that he has considered a logical order for his supporting paragraphs . . .

Elaboration

If the writer is struggling to elaborate . . .

If the writer has chosen evidence for each body paragraph, but it does not all support his claim . . .

If the writer has included a variety of details and evidence, but it has swamped her piece . . .

If, when writing about reading, the writer is ready to analyze the craft moves an author makes and use those to support his argument . . .

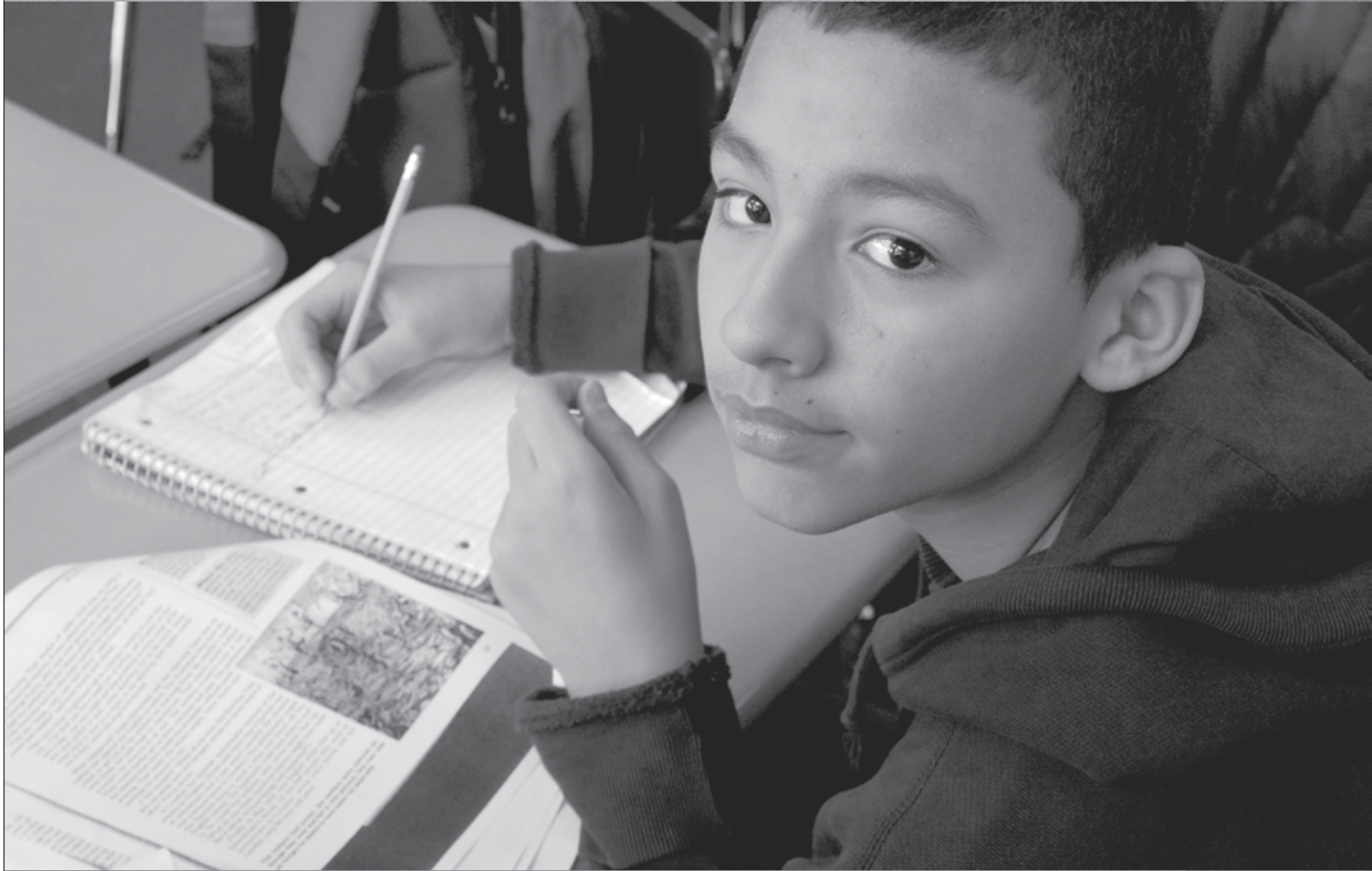
Language Conventions

If the writer uses a casual, informal tone when writing . . .

If the writer struggles to punctuate correctly when quoting, especially when using only part of a quote from a text . . .

Creating and Developing Meaningful Stories and Characters

BEND I



SAMPLE BEND



Session 1

Imagining Stories from Everyday Moments

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that fiction writers get ideas for writing stories by paying close attention to the small moments in their lives.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Entries from your own writer's notebook that you can use to demonstrate thinking about potential stories, and a pen (see Teaching and Share)
- ✓ Before this session, find a premade chart from a sixth-grade classroom, or create your own with strategies you know your students learned in sixth grade titled "Strategies for Generating Personal Narrative Topics" (see Active Engagement and Mid-Workshop Teaching).
- ✓ Have one copy of a Grade 6 Narrative Writing Checklist to project for the class and enough additional copies to provide one to each student (see Share).
- ✓ Students' writer's notebooks

IF YOUR STUDENTS ARE LIKE MOST STUDENTS, they will be thrilled to kick off their seventh-grade year with this unit! Though fiction is one of the more challenging genres to write well, it is also one of the most beloved. Students—even middle-schoolers—are eager to imagine, to create make-believe characters and storylines, and to enjoy the freedom to write whatever they want versus the facts as they actually occurred.

The trick, of course, is teaching students to make believe without making a mess on the page. For anyone who has tried teaching fiction—or has shied away from teaching fiction—you are probably all too familiar with the stories that go on and on—and on—without any real purpose or clarity.

Keep in mind that when done well, one of the beauties of teaching fiction is that it allows you to “market” lessons on the qualities of good writing. First, you grab students’ attention with the announcement that they’ll be writing fiction. Then, with kids fully engaged, you teach them how to write with focus, meaning, and detail. With the right structure and scaffolds, which this unit provides, your students will produce pieces full of craft and significance—ones that entice readers.

Today’s session launches the unit with instruction in how to generate ideas for fictional stories. Building on what they know from writing personal narrative in past years, you will teach students to look to their own lives for moments worth fictionalizing. You will also challenge them, from Day One, to reflect on how well they craft those moments, so students can embark on this unit with not only a love for story, but also a clear path toward success.

“The trick is teaching students to make believe without making a mess on the page.”

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.7.3.a,b; W.7.5, W.7.10, RL.7.3, SL.7.1, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3



MINILESSON

Imagining Stories from Everyday Moments

CONNECTION

Tell students that you already know a lot about them as writers, and remind them that they already know a lot about writing.

"Writers, I spent last night looking over the quick on-demands you wrote yesterday. They made me both excited and terrified. Excited, because you already know so much about writing from all your years as writers. You know a ton about how to craft a tight personal narrative. But I also know from talking to your other teachers and to you that you also know a lot about other kinds of writing, too, like how to write sophisticated information pieces and literary essays thick with evidence."

I leaned forward and made eye contact with each one of my newly minted seventh-graders scattered across chairs, benches, and patches of floor in our meeting area. "But you can also see how that might terrify a writing teacher, can't you? Because you already know so much about writing, I have to bring my A-game to teach you something you *don't* already know! I decided that the best way to do that would be for us to jump into realistic fiction. This way, you can bring all your hard-won writing skills out right away, and I can teach you some new, high-level ones."

✿ Name the teaching point.

"This is an important day in your lives as writers. You're about to start gathering and sifting through ideas for stories. Here's the most important thing I can teach you: just as it works for almost every other type of writing, writers get ideas for fiction by paying close attention to the small moments in their own lives."

TEACHING

Share how you came to realize that fiction writers get their ideas from real life, drawing on a couple of published authors' inspirations.

"Let me tell you a secret. When I was in seventh grade, I decided I wanted to write fiction. The school I went to didn't have a regular writing workshop, so my notion of how fiction writers worked came from my imagination. I thought fiction writers just looked up at the clouds and *imagined* make-believe stories about exciting adventures and heart-breaking dramas.

SESSION 1: IMAGINING STORIES FROM EVERYDAY MOMENTS

◆ COACHING

Because today's session launches your writing workshop for the year, your goal today expands far beyond your teaching point. Yes, you want to teach students how to gather ideas for fiction, but above all, you want to rally their excitement for writing—which includes fostering a sense of community, the notion that you are all (yourself included) writers together, embarking on a journey of exploration and learning. And of course, you want to lay the groundwork for a productive workshop, which means imparting, whether explicitly or implicitly, the rituals and routines that will carry you through the year. Many of your students will come to you with years of experience with writing workshop, but others will need to learn quickly what your various roles are during a minilesson and independent writing, conferences, and small groups.

Sharing stories of myself as a writer, whether they are from past or present, is a critical means of engaging students and developing a community of writers. The more I share my real-life writing struggles and successes, the more likely kids are to share their own writing stories—which soon enough will also make them more apt to see themselves as writers. Sharing stories of my writing life supports more specific aims, as well. For example, when I tell an "I-used-to-but-now-I-realize" story as I do here, it is typically to encourage students who identify with my old way of thinking to embrace new thinking.

3

"But as I grew up and matured as a writer, I learned the truth about how fiction writers get their story ideas. I realized that fiction writers often get story ideas from observing not the clouds, but real life. Did you know that S. E. Hinton got the idea to write the *Outsiders* when she was fifteen years old, and one of her friends got called a 'greaser' and beaten up while walking home from school? S. E. Hinton was so angry about what happened to her friend that she went home and started to write a story inspired by that incident. And did you know that John Green got the idea for *The Fault in Our Stars* from a friend of his who was sick? I bet he wrote an entry about one of the times he spent with her, and then later, sitting at his desk, he reread his notebook, recalled that moment, and thought, 'There's a story here!'

"Of course, when I say that writers get ideas for writing by paying attention to their own lives, I don't mean that writers just record exactly what happened and call the text fiction. When S. E. Hinton raced home after hearing the news about her friend to start pounding out her story, she didn't record everything that happened. Her friend wasn't named Pony Boy, and there wasn't really a fire."

Convey to students the power of imagination: it allows a writer to see story ideas in the grit of everyday life.

"Fiction writers do, however, pay close attention to their lives. They cup their hands around tiny true particles of their lives, and they wait. Sometimes, while they wait, the idea for a story grows. And here is my biggest tip of all. The imagination that *really* matters to fiction writers is this. Fiction writers—like S. E. Hinton, John Green, any fiction writer that you know—can find significant stories in the most ordinary, maybe even boring moments from their notebooks. And you, as budding fiction writers, can do this, too. You can write a Small Moment story from your lives—or anything else you have seen or done—and you can say, 'Wait a minute. This is giving me an idea for a fiction story. Maybe I could write a story about . . .'"

Tell students what to watch for as you demonstrate writing the start of a Small Moment story from your life that could be a seed for a fiction story.

"Let me see what I can do here. I am going to think about a small moment from my life, remembering some of the strategies I learned in the past for getting Small Moment stories, some of the strategies you learned in sixth grade or maybe even elementary school. Like, one of my favorite strategies is to write about times where I was feeling strong emotions. And I think that's a particularly good strategy here because I know that strong emotions can make for great fiction stories too." I uncapped my pen and prepared to write, clearly indicating that I was thinking through what I was going to write, that it wasn't coming to me easily.

"One time I remember that I had some really strong emotions was when I was in seventh grade, and I was walking up to Ms. Wuerer's classroom, and all the kids standing outside started singing a song about what a goodie-goodie I was. I was so embarrassed. I'm going to try to write that story now, as a Small Moment story, telling it bit by bit, but also remembering, in the back of my mind, that I'm on the lookout for ideas for possible fiction stories." I started writing quickly and read aloud as I wrote.

"There she is," I heard someone whisper as I stepped up to the crowd gathered around Ms. Wuerer's door, waiting for the bell to ring. I pulled my backpack up on my shoulder. Then, all of the sudden I heard this soft singing under a few kids' breath, "Goodie-two shoes . . ." My mouth dried up.

There are many ways to develop cohesion or unity within a minilesson. In this one, I thread references to imagination, friends, S. E. Hinton, John Green, and The Outsiders throughout the minilesson. This helps to make the minilesson clear to students.

You have probably prepared this story before class, and you've already written it into your notebook. Here, you can jot down some words as you demonstrate this process for your students.

Pause to convey additional story ideas you got from this one life story. Share these with students as you jot them in your notebook, under the story beginning.

"Oh, writers, I'm going to stop right there! As I was writing down that story, I realized I don't even need to finish writing it down, because I started to get some possible fiction story ideas from my real-life story. I started thinking I could write a whole fiction story just about a girl who likes to play by the rules, even though other kids make fun of her for it. Or maybe I could write a story about a kid who changes who she really is so that people will stop making fun of her. But that's not the message I want to convey! So maybe—I'm just going to draw a line under my first entry here and jot down a couple of little story blurbs, just my thoughts for possible story ideas." And I wrote down my ideas in my notebook:

- ✓ I could write a story about a girl who always likes to do the right thing, even though she knows some people think she's a little strange because of it. But, it does make it hard for her to make friends and she gets really lonely. Maybe one day something happens, and she just loses it.
- ✓ Maybe there's a story about a kid who gets picked on every day for being different. Sometimes it's name-calling, sometimes it's worse. He's afraid to go online because he knows that's the place he gets it the worst. Perhaps his teacher starts a unit that's going to need a lot of online time, so he decides he needs to change something.

Debrief. Reiterate the steps you took so that students will be able to replicate them.

I put down my pen to indicate that I was moving out of writer mode back into teacher mode. "Writers, did you notice how first, I thought back to all my personal narratives from my past and remembered one of the strategies that works best for me, so that I could begin collecting small moments in my notebook? Did you see how I started writing a Small Moment story, and then, as I got some ideas for possible fiction stories, I jotted those down?"

Notice how the ideas I record in my notebook are more fleshed out than a single phrase or sentence. Rather than simply writing, "a girl who always likes to do the right thing" or "I could write about a girl who is teased," I am already beginning to imagine how each story might unfold, from a character's wants and desires, to the obstacles she might face, to pinnacle moments that could spur change.

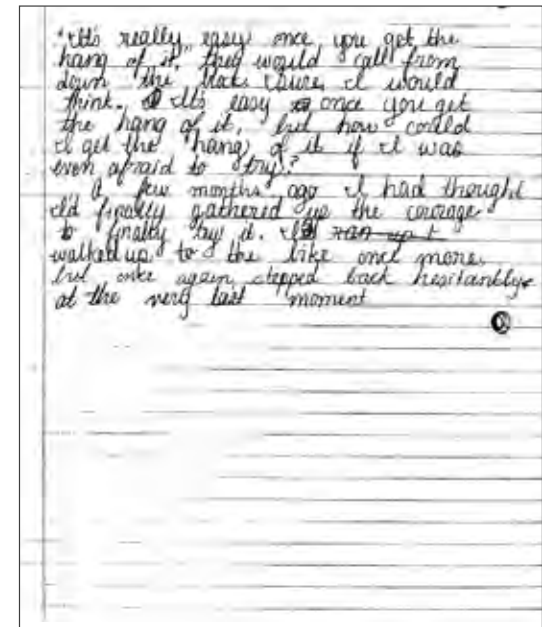
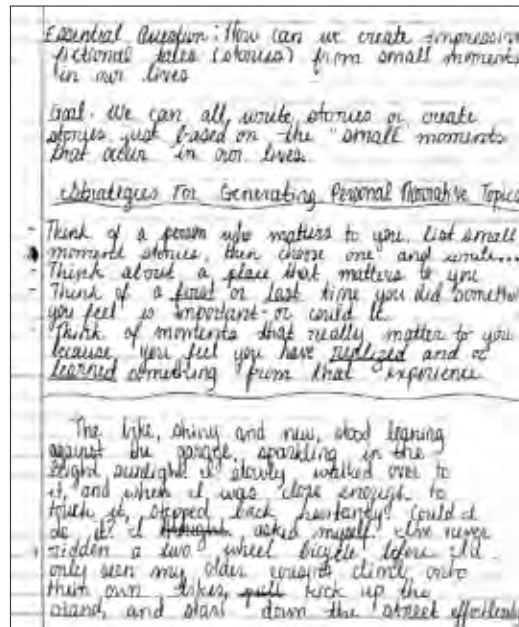


FIG. 1-1 Annabelle writes a personal narrative entry to help generate fiction ideas.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Set students up to recall shared-class Small Moment stories that could lead to possible fiction ideas. Refer students to their sixth-grade “Strategies for Generating Personal Narrative Topics” chart in case they get stuck.

“Let’s think of a small moment you’ve had together as Class 702 since the first day of school. Luckily it hasn’t been long, so it should be really easy for you to think of a moment. If you’re having a hard time thinking of one, look back at your old sixth-grade ‘Strategies for Generating Personal Narrative Topics’ chart for help.” Some students stared at the ceiling, some referred to the chart, and some whispered to each other.

Strategies for Generating Personal Narrative Topics

- ✓ Think of a person who matters to you, list Small Moment stories, choose one, and write the whole story.
- ✓ Think of first times or last times you did something, list Small Moment stories you could tell about each, choose one, and write the whole story.
- ✓ Think of moments that really mattered because you realized or learned something, list those moments, choose one, and write the whole story.

Ask partners to story-tell their Small Moment stories to each other, as well as any fiction story ideas these generate.

Once I felt like a fair number of students had an idea, I continued. “Now can you share your Small Moment story with your partner, making sure to tell it like a small moment with dialogue, action, and thinking? If, as you’re telling your partner your story, you get an idea for a possible fiction story that could be built off of it, go ahead and share that new idea with your partner.”

LINK

Repeat the teaching point, celebrating how fiction writers find story ideas in the moments of their lives.

“Writers, I have always known that fiction writers need imagination to write. But I used to think that most fiction writers found ideas by looking up into the clouds and imagining stories. What you have shown me today is that fiction writers *do* have imaginations. They look into everyday moments of their lives—into moments as ordinary as observing a friend’s troubles or a kid playing basketball—and they see possibilities.

“Today and whenever you want to write fiction, you might gather small, true moments from your lives, or read your notebook once it’s tattered and filled with them. Look at these real moments from your lives with a fiction writer’s eyes. It’s easy to just bury the story about something that happened to you, or trouble that happened to a friend, thinking, ‘That’s not important.’ Don’t do that. Have the imagination to say, ‘Wait. There might be a story here.’ And when you get a story idea, mark it with a sticky note, and then write a new entry based on your original entry, putting the idea it sparks onto your page.”

6

If you have a handful of students who are new to your school or to writing workshop and have never before seen a chart like this, do not fret. Even without the chart, what you are asking of them—to remember something that has happened since school began—is within their reach. Referencing the chart sends two important expectations: first, that they draw from everything they have learned before to help them as writers, and second, that they rely on available resources for guidance, rather than turning to you day in and day out for step-by-step direction.

I typically revisit the teaching point several times throughout a minilesson, including in the link, where I want to remind students before they go off to write to add the day’s teaching to their writer’s toolkit. Often, I also revisit tiny details from the beginning of my minilesson—like I do here when I reference the friend’s trouble. Like the many authors who craft a circular opening and closing, I connect the beginning with the end to pop out an important idea—in this case, that great fiction ideas reside in tiny, surprising details from our lives.

Especially because this is the first minilesson of the year, I want students to be inspired. I want them to believe, as I do, that there is something majestic about finding significance in the small moments of our lives and developing these meaningful moments into stories. I also want to spell out very concrete, doable strategies they can use today, so they can, especially at the start of the year, return to their seats and feel successful as writers.

GRADE 7: WRITING REALISTIC FICTION



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Using Your Imagination to See Promise and Power in Students' Work

IN TODAY'S MINILESSON, I have helped students see that writers need the imagination to look into everyday moments and see possibilities. I have urged adolescent writers to resist flicking away the little bits of life and to instead get used to saying, "Wait. There may be a story here."

Of course, this advice is valuable for students, but it is even more important for *teachers*. Your students will bring you entries and story ideas. You need the imagination to look at what they bring you and to see that these entries hold the potential to become something amazing. Even if you can't quite see what the writer values in his entry, it is important to remember that almost any topic can become a spectacular piece of writing. The secret to finding something of value in all writing is to slow down, to listen

to what the writer is saying, and to be moved by the details of the subject. Teachers, therefore, would be wise to be pushovers. "What a topic!" you might say. "This is going to be a brilliant story! You definitely need to write the details, because this is amazing stuff."

You may find as you move around your classroom, or from your initial on-demand assessment, that there are students who are struggling to come up with Small Moment story ideas or are simply struggling with the focus and control of a Small Moment story. If so, you will likely want to gather those students together into small groups and perhaps, using the sixth-grade *Personal Narrative* unit as a guide, teach these students a few strategies that will help move them along.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Tap Settings as Another Possible Place for Fiction Story Ideas**

I stood in the middle of the classroom and raised my hand, the signal to students to give me their attention.

"Writers, I hate to bother you—especially when so many of you are on fire coming up with tons of ideas for possible fiction stories. I've noticed that so many of them are not just great ideas, but they're also even written well—as if they are the blurb that shows up on the back of a book! But I know some of you are running out of ideas, or you will run out of ideas soon, and I just wanted to throw another possible strategy your way. One that you tried a version of last year when you were in sixth grade working on personal narratives.

"Often fiction writers, just like personal narrative writers, will turn to settings, or places, that can hold a lot of stories. Since you're writing realistic fiction stories, almost any real place will do. The principal's office, a backyard, a grandmother's kitchen, a fast-food restaurant. Each of these places is distinct and can launch a writer's mind into a million different possibilities of stories that could take place there."

Strategies for Generating Personal Narrative Topics

- ✓ *Think of a person who matters to you, list Small Moment stories, choose one, and write the whole story.*
- ✓ *Think of first times or last times you did something, list Small Moment stories you could tell about each, choose one, and write the whole story.*
- ✓ *Think of moments that really mattered because you realized or learned something, list those moments, choose one, and write the whole story.*
- ✓ *Think about a place that matters, use pictures, a map, or quick notes to jot about the small moments that occurred there, choose one, and write the whole story.*



SHARE

Using the Narrative Checklist to Set Goals to Improve Writing

Congratulate students on their work filling up their notebooks with Small Moment stories that lead to fiction ideas.

Once the students had all gathered back in the meeting area, I began. “I am so in awe of you today, writers! I knew our plans for today were ambitious—to remember what we learned about narrative before we came to seventh grade and to come up with possible ideas for fiction stories to boot. But look at you! Your notebooks are already overflowing with Small Moment stories and fiction ideas. I see that some of you have four, five, six pages filled already. Incredible.”

Tell students that they are going to revisit the work they were able to do in sixth grade to see how they have changed (or not changed) and use that knowledge to improve their writing.

“I thought because you have really shown yourselves as having remembered quite a bit from years past, that it might make some sense to look back at what the expectations were for narrative writing in sixth grade, to see how many of those things you remembered to do in your notebook entries today.”

- I projected a copy of the Grade 6 Narrative Writing Checklist. “Some of you might remember using this, or a chart like this, last year or in years past. You’ll notice right away that it has three main categories to think about: structure, development, and language conventions. Underneath each of those categories you’ll see different things that strong writers do when writing a narrative. You’ll also notice that the chart has three different ways for you to describe how you’re doing with each category: ‘Yes!’ (I definitely am doing this), ‘Starting To’ (I do this sometimes), and ‘Not Yet’ (I haven’t done this in my writing).”

“As I pass out a copy of this to each of you, would you flip through your notebooks and star not one, but two or three small moments that you think represent the kind of work you typically do as a writer? By looking across more than one entry, you can get a better sense of what you do, not just once or twice, but consistently. In other words, you can get a sense of not simply how good (or not good) a single scene might be, but of how much you know (or have yet to learn) as a writer.”

Invite students to help you assess your writing first, so you can teach them how to use the checklist effectively.

After passing out the checklists, I said, “Since this is your first time working with the checklist this year, we’re only going to focus on a couple of parts today—elaboration and description. Take a moment to read and discuss those two parts with your partner. Then look up, so we can use the checklist to assess a couple of my entries together.” I projected my entries to show the students.

“There she is,” I heard someone whisper as I stepped up to the crowd gathered around Ms. Wuerer’s door, waiting for the bell to ring. I pulled my backpack up on my shoulder. Then, all of the sudden I heard this soft singing under a few kids’ breath, “Goodie-two shoes . . .” My mouth dried up.

* * * *

Mike looked at me. I looked at him. We both looked at the broken vase. My face burned. I knew mom was going to kill us. She had warned us not to wrestle in the living room. Mike bent down and started to pick up the pieces.

After several seconds I reconvened the group. “I’m going to read aloud two of my entries, and as I do, look for places where I *do* do things on the checklist.” After reading my entries, I said, “One thing I realize is how hard it is to check for everything at once—my brain can’t focus on all the items at the same time, meaning I need to reread, probably several times, moving back and forth between my writing and the checklist.

“I do notice a couple of things I do, though. Do you?” Students nodded and I said, underlining several parts of my entries, “Like here, in both these entries, I develop the actions of my character. And even though I don’t use any dialogue in the second entry, I of course use it a lot in the other, and I feel like I’m pretty good at it. I just didn’t have a real purpose for dialogue, at least not yet, in the second entry. Now I feel like I need to reread the checklist and my writing again to see what else I do and don’t do. Let’s all do that now quickly, but this time, talk with your partner about something I *don’t* do—either not at all or not consistently enough.”

I gave students another minute to assess my writing with a partner while I circulated, gathering their observations and saying things like, “Don’t just look at the one entry. Look for patterns.” And “Look back and forth between each item

Narrative Writing Checklist				
	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
Structure				
Overall	I wrote a story that has tension, resolution, realistic characters, and also conveys an idea, lesson, or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead	I wrote a beginning that not only set the plot/story in motion, but also hinted at the larger meaning the story would convey. It introduced the problem, set the stage for the lesson that would be learned, or showed how the character relates to the setting in a way that matters in the story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitions	I not only used transitional phrases and clauses to signal complicated changes in time, I also used them to alert my reader to changes in the setting, tone, mood, point of view, or the time in the story (such as <i>suddenly, unlike before, if only she had known</i>).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ending	I wrote an ending that connected to what the story is really about. I gave the reader a sense of closure by showing a new realization or insight, or a change in the character/narrator. I might have showed this through dialogue, action, inner thinking, or small actions the character takes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organization	I used paragraphs purposefully, perhaps to show time and setting changes, new parts of the story, or to create suspense for readers. I created a logical, clear sequence of events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development				
Elaboration	I developed realistic characters, and developed the details, action, dialogue, and internal thinking that contribute to the deeper meaning of the story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Craft or Language	I developed some relationship between characters to show <i>why</i> they act and speak as they do. I told the internal, as well as the external story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I wove together precise descriptions and figurative language not only so that readers can picture the setting, characters, and events but also to connect to a larger meaning.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I used language that fit my story’s meaning and context (for example, different characters use different kinds of language).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conventions				
Spelling	I used resources to be sure the words in my writing are spelled correctly.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Punctuation and Sentence Structure	I used punctuation such as dashes, parentheses, colons, and semicolons to help me include extra detail and explanation in some of my sentences.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I used commas and quotation marks or italics or other ways to make clear when characters are speaking.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

on the checklist, and try to point to places where I do that thing. If you only point once, or not at all, I could probably make the technique a goal.

“Okay, writers, eyes back up here. Several of you talked about how I don’t really develop the inner thinking or the setting in either entry. You also talked about how it’s hard to tell some of the other items—like whether I develop my characters’ complexities—since both of these moments are so short. That’s an important observation, though. It’s a reminder to me to work toward doing those other things, which might come naturally when I write longer.”

Set students up to assess their own Small Moment entries.

“Take a couple of minutes now and start to assess your own writing.” As the students looked over their pieces alongside the checklist, I circulated, nodding to writers who were being particularly honest, gently nudging students who were perhaps being less so. I also encouraged students to chat with their partners if there were any particular things they weren’t sure about. Then I brought them back together.

“Writers, I can hear so many of you becoming more and more proud as you look through this checklist. There are so many things you have already done, or were planning to do. And maybe just a few you needed to refresh your memories about. Sometime in the next week or so, I’ll introduce the seventh-grade Narrative Writing Checklist. Until that time, you’ll want to work toward making sure most of your writing is matching up with what you learned in sixth grade.”

SESSION 1 HOMEWORK

GENERATING IDEAS FOR FICTION STORIES

“Carl Hiassen has said that one of the ways he gets ideas for fiction is to read through newspapers to get inspired. He looks for interesting and quirky stories that really happened and then imagines how he might change them. Tonight, for homework, I’d like you to push yourself to get as many possible ideas for fiction stories as possible and jot them down in your notebooks. You could use one of the strategies we talked about today. You might read a newspaper or blog for some current events to inspire you, or you might even invent your own strategy.”

Session 2

Imagining Stories You Wish Existed in the World



TODAY YOU WILL CONVEY AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE to your students. Whereas yesterday you told them that fiction writers often spin stories out of the ordinary moments of their lives, today you announce that fiction writers also create stories they *wish existed in the world*—ones that reflect the sorts of characters and situations and hopes and struggles that are near and dear to them. This is, of course, simply another way of telling students that writers often draw from their own experience to create fiction. What’s important about today’s teaching is the implied lesson that fiction is not just fun but meaningful—that fiction allows writers to give voice to their most personal hopes and struggles, and to give *themselves* a place in the world of books. This notion is particularly important for adolescents, because they often feel as if no one understands them or their experiences. Fiction gives them an opportunity to create a world that reflects their perceived reality.

Meanwhile, you will accomplish another important task on this day. Because students will be asking themselves not “What elaborate story about the most unlikely scenario can I write?” but “What do I, Jerome, wish I could read about? What story don’t I see on the shelf that would really mean something to *me*?” you ensure that your students’ stories, while lively and imaginative, will also be grounded in reality. The end result is that students will write not about a person who saves the world from a terrorist attack or about someone who goes on a mission to Mars, but about a kid who lives on a farm in Kentucky who secretly fears animals, or a girl who uses a wheelchair who also dreams about entering the Roller Derby. That is, kids will tap into their own precise real-life hopes and struggles and experiences to write stories, and in so doing, will give their stories the specificity and honesty that the very best stories have.

Throughout the day, you will want to tuck in tips about how to turn an image or a scrap of an idea into a story, how to put ordinary details onto the page so that they convey significance, and how to be ready to record anything that strikes one’s attention—a detail that feels significant, a flashing moment, an observation, a thought, anything.

IN THIS SESSION, you’ll teach students that writers get ideas for stories by imagining stories they wish existed in the world—stories that uncover and explore truths about their own particular circumstances, longings, and struggles.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Bring your own idea for a story that you wish existed (see Teaching).
- ✓ Use chart paper to make a chart titled “How to Find Ideas for Fiction” (see Link and Mid-Workshop Teaching).
- ✓ Bring your own writer’s notebook with you to use during conferring (see Conferring and Small-Group Work).

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.7.3, W.7.4, W.7.10, RL.7.3, SL.7.1, SL.7.6, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3



MINILESSON

Imagining Stories You Wish Existed in the World

CONNECTION

Explain that in life, when things that we seek aren't there, we need to create them. The same is true with stories.

"As you all know, you don't live in a perfect world. And you all know me well enough to know that I am a big believer in people being problem solvers in their own lives. So if you don't have friends, you should work to make them. If you are unhappy with the privileges that your parents give you (or don't), you should have conversations with them to convince them to see things the way you see them. It's also true when it comes to reading. If you don't see the books you want to read—that reflect your families, your friends, your interests, your lives—you should write them. Believe it or not, sometimes fiction stories, whose facts you can manipulate to make things seem more believable, feel closer to the truth than true stories from your lives."

✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that writers collect ideas for stories not only by discovering tiny details that could blossom into whole stories, but also by thinking about the stories *they believe should exist*. Sometimes they get ideas for stories by thinking, 'How can I write a story for people like me so I can see myself in books?'"

TEACHING

Point out that readers hope to find themselves in the pages of books.

"Often times, when you are looking through the library shelves for a book, you are looking to find yourselves in a story. I may find myself wanting a book about someone like me who is afraid of her parents getting divorced, or a book about a kid who is usually the last one picked for sports because she's not any good at them, or a kid whose mother said, 'You need to be grateful for everything you have because not everyone is as lucky as you are,' exactly when the kid was feeling his lowest.

"Maybe one of you searches library shelves for a kid who lives with his aunt, or a kid who likes to draw anime and dreams of having an anime blog. If you long to find yourself in a book, and no book seems to tell the story that you

◆ COACHING

Always, I want the writing that I ask students to do to be purposeful. I don't want them to write for me, their teacher, I want them to write for themselves. I want them to write because writing matters in the world, and more than anything, I want it to matter to them. Here, I use my connection to frame today's teaching point in a way that I hope will serve this larger, more meaningful goal. I tell them how thinking up story ideas to craft into fiction is, in fact, about empowerment.

Purposeful details are a characteristic of any good writing, because they bring meaning to a piece. Similarly, I often use specific details in my lessons to serve a purpose. Here, I hope to paint a picture of young people who long to find themselves in a story, with the hope that the details will inspire students to reflect on their own longings—and hence, inspire them to generate meaningful fiction ideas.

want told, then you might decide it is important to put your truth onto the page in your own story. The author Thomas Berger once said, "Why do writers write? Because it isn't there."

Demonstrate how to create a story idea from your desire to see books you'd like to read but that don't exist—in this case, books about people like you.

"Let me show you how I use this strategy to come up with a story idea," I said. "The first thing I do is to think about the books I want to read. I always wish there were more books about people like me who are half Mexican—kids whose fathers are Mexican and whose mothers aren't. *And* who are maybe wanting to be more popular than they are. So in my notebook I'll write down my story idea. I don't just write the big outline of my story—girl with Mexican dad and American mom. I want to put the stuff about a Mexican father together with true little details, like the part about myself being afraid of the dark and wanting a night-light. Those had been separate items on my list—the girl who is half Mexican, the girl who wants to be more popular—but in a story plan, I often combine things that were once separate. Watch."

Then I wrote:

A girl who is half Mexican lives with both her parents but she thinks her father works too much. She wishes her father were around more because when he's around she feels less lonely. But his job keeps him far away and the girl tries to put on a brave face so her parents don't worry about her.

Debrief. Point out that you came up with a story idea you wish existed in the world, one that features a character who has desires and difficulties, as all memorable characters do.

"Do you see, writers, that when writing my story idea, I didn't just say, 'I wish there were books on kids who are half Mexican'? I actually jotted a few sentences about how such a story might go. And specifically, I thought about what the character might want and what she might struggle for. Characters in all stories have big longings.

"Here's an idea you should hold onto: when you are collecting ideas for stories in your writer's notebook, you get ideas not only from rereading old entries, but from thinking about books *you wish existed* in the world."

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Set students up to try turning a wish for a certain kind of book into a story idea.

"So let's try it. Maybe you think to yourself, 'I wish there were books about kids who aren't that good at sports.' Remember that to make that wish into a story idea, you need to invent some details. You can do so by asking questions of your story idea. Why isn't the kid in the story good at sports? Which sports? What has happened lately that shows these struggles?

Of course, this is a unit on fiction, but the message you want to get across to students is that by pushing the truth on the page, they can develop ideas for fictional stories. Truth can indeed lead to fiction. Donald Murray once taught that we should write the Truth with a capital T, but not necessarily the exactly true story. "Change things around so that you convey the Truth of your experience," he said.

Before embarking on any unit of study, I identify the qualities of good writing that I especially want to teach, not only so I know what lessons to plan, but so I can refer to and implicitly model those qualities as often as possible—like I do here when I tuck in the fact that characters in all stories have wants and struggles. You'll find these qualities woven throughout this unit, in teaching points and story examples. One important understanding I want students to leave with is that stories are not made of magical happy endings. Rather, they are made of tensions—the kind that build when a character longs for something that she cannot easily attain.

"I can see some of you sports experts shaking your head like you can't imagine this. But this is fiction! Even if this character doesn't resemble you, try putting yourself into the kid's head. Later, you'll have a chance to think about stories with characters that resemble ones you wish existed in the world—ones more like you. This is just a quick exercise to get you warmed up!"

Ask students to turn and talk about the character traits and the struggles the character in the exemplar story might encounter.

"Tell your partner how you could turn this into a story idea. Remember, think about the character, his or her character traits, and the character's very particular struggle. Think about what the character wants, and about what he or she does."

As students talked, I circled the room, listening in to their ideas and taking note of their ease or challenges with this step in the process. I coached in as needed.

After a few minutes, I shared a few kids' story ideas aloud, pointing out how the same seed idea had led to such a variety of story ideas.

Debrief. Share a couple of kids' story ideas aloud, and review the steps your students just followed.

"Looks like I got a roomful of imaginative writers! You took the same simple seed idea for a character who doesn't like sports, and you came up with such different story ideas. Carmen imagined a clumsy girl who's always tripping over her feet. She decided that the girl, whom she named Claudine, particularly struggles at team sports—and that she's always picked last in PE class. Lately, all her friends are trying out for JV teams and she's feeling kind of bad about herself because she's just not athletic. She feels left out. And Peter came up with the idea to write about a boy named Ted who dreams of being a professional basketball player. Ted's got two older brothers and a dad who all played college basketball—but Ted's much shorter and just not inclined toward the sport. To make matters worse, his best friend has recently shown interest in—and a knack for—basketball!"

"These are just two of your ideas, and each one has such promise for making a good story.

"Let's recap what we did so that as you go off today to think of stories you really did wish existed in the world, you can use this same strategy.

"First, you thought, 'I wish a story about—in this case, it was a kid who's no good at sports—existed in the world.' Then you thought, 'Why does he struggle with this thing? What exactly does he struggle with? And what's been happening lately that shows this struggle?'"

My main goal here is to help students come up with story ideas, but I also take the opportunity to tuck a subordinate tip into my teaching. First, I tell kids that writers embellish their ideas with details. Then I go further and ask a sequence of questions that will help them do this. The sequence is important; the questions, asked in this order, scaffold students to think deeply and do some good work. The questions channel a writer to think about the character's traits and related struggles, and then the questions move writers to consider how these struggles play out in an event.

Because you just gave a hypothetical starting point, this is just an exercise. You don't expect students to write about the character from the day's minilesson, but instead to invent their own characters. There will probably be a few students, however, who decide that the story idea you have given them could become their very own idea, and that's okay.

LINK

Remind students of their growing repertoire of strategies for finding fiction ideas, and then send them off to continue collecting ideas.

"So, writers, you played a bit with my idea of wishing there were more stories about kids who aren't good at sports, and then you imagined a character in such a book. You might find it helpful to think not just about who you are in the world, and how you wished you saw that identity represented. You might also consider thinking of some of the issues that matter most to you that you also think should be written into a story that other adolescents might want to read.

"When you are living your life as a fiction writer, you know you won't write about the character I created. You'll invent your own characters. For now, you'll continue collecting story ideas. You can use any of the strategies we've learned, or others that you invent, to do this. Let's start listing these strategies in a chart," I said, gesturing to the list I had started on chart paper.

How to Find Ideas for Fiction

- ✓ Pay attention to the small moments in your life that could be fictionalized.
- ✓ Consider places where stories could take place, and then imagine those stories.
- ✓ Read about current events in newspapers, blogs, magazines, etc. Allow yourself to be inspired by true events that could be fictionalized.
- ✓ Ask, "What stories do I wish existed in the world?" Let this question lead you to invent a character with traits, struggles, actions.

In the early sessions of any unit, we'll offer students a repertoire of strategies for gathering entries that pertain to the work, and genre, of that unit. Notice, however, that when we send students back to their seats, the message is not, "Now do what I just taught you." Rather, the message is, "Add what I just taught to your repertoire of knowledge, and draw from there whenever that makes sense for you." You'll see that this message will appear time and time again in the link section of the minilessons. After today's lesson, for example, I want students to continue to gather fiction ideas—but whether they do that by thinking of stories they wish existed or by some other strategy is up to them.



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Using an Exemplar Text to Respond to Predictable Problems

AS YOU CONFER AND LEAD SMALL GROUPS, you may find that many students have come up with lengthy lists of undeveloped story ideas. Perhaps students are not sure whether they are expected to write actual stories in their notebooks or whether you are asking for lists of story ideas—and actually, you are hoping for something in between. You’ll want to teach kids to stay a little longer with each idea, fleshing it out a bit. You might carry with you the first story idea you wrote in your notebook. For example, I had started with this:

Girl wants to be more popular

Then I revised my initial vague idea to say a bit more.

The girl wants to be more popular. She knows that’s dumb. That popularity isn’t the most important thing in the world. But, she often gets lonely and only has a few friends she can talk to. She has a birthday party coming up and her mom wants her to have a party, but she knows that if she invited only her friends there would just be three people there.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Sharing Struggles with Characters**

“Writers, can I stop you for just a quick minute? I want to teach you one more strategy for collecting ideas for fictional stories: You can write stories in which the character wrestles with issues that are important to you. You can get yourself launched in that work by just quickly brainstorming a few issues that matter to you, then choosing one to write at the top of an empty page in your notebook. You could then spin a bunch of story ideas off that one issue. For example, if you think honesty is an important issue, you could write that at the top of the page, and then think of as many stories as possible that could stem from honesty. Maybe one about a character who lies and gets caught. Maybe another about a parent who always insists on honesty, except one time the kid . . .”

I added the new strategy to the anchor chart so that students would have a reminder of it past today.

How to Find Ideas for Fiction

- ✓ Pay attention to the small moments in your life that could be fictionalized.
- ✓ Consider places where stories could take place, and then imagine those stories.
- ✓ Read about current events in newspapers, blogs, magazines, etc. Allow yourself to be inspired by true events that could be fictionalized.
- ✓ Ask, “What stories do I wish existed in the world?” Let this question lead you to invent a character with traits, struggles, actions.
- ✓ Think about an issue that is important to you, and create a character who struggles with that issue.

I will probably want to carry both versions with me as I make my way through the classroom. When conferring, it helps to carry your own exemplar text around with you so that if you decide to use the teaching method of demonstration, or the “explain and show an example” method, you’ll have the materials to do so. But don’t let the fact that you have materials under your arm propel you into using them. As always, begin your conferences by asking, “What are you working on as a writer?” and by trying to understand what the writer has already done and is trying to do.

It will help if, before this unit begins, you and your colleagues try to predict the conferences you’ll probably need to conduct early in this unit. As I mentioned earlier, you can expect that you’ll often need to help students say more when they write about their story ideas. You may also:

- ◆ Suggest to students that they postpone closure, so they have a chance to explore a wider range of story ideas. Some students will generate a story idea and immediately start writing that story from start to finish. Teach them that writers force themselves to imagine more possibilities before making a commitment to one story idea. And once a student does settle on a particular story idea, the student needs to spend a lot of time rehearsing before she begins a draft. I think of this unit on fiction as a unit also on rehearsal and revision.
- ◆ Remind students that they know a lot about how stories generally “go,” and specifically, remind them that story ideas usually originate from a character

who has motivations and faces a predicament. If a student imagines a story in which an unnamed guy lives through ten daredevil activities, you’ll want to explicitly teach the importance of developing a very particular character. You’ll also want to show that a character’s traits and motivations lead that character to encounter struggles, and in this way a story hangs together.

- ◆ Guide your seventh-graders to use the specific details of their own lives to grow story ideas. It is inevitable that some will want to write over-romanticized adult stories, and you’ll want to channel them toward dramas they know from the inside. Remind students that if they think about it, there’s probably plenty of drama in their own lives, and that personal drama can be mined for story ideas.
- ◆ Anticipate that students will imagine their stories as containing a multitude of events. Teach them that they are writing short stories, and this generally means they’ll be writing two or perhaps three Small Moment stories.

It is helpful to plan for and anticipate conferences, but if you find yourself giving mostly preplanned, almost canned conferences, then you probably need to listen more intently and to expect students to surprise you, to take you to new places. It’s helpful to expect that when you confer with kids, they will stir up new ideas in you. As you draw a chair alongside a student and ask, “What are you working on as a writer?” expect that the kid’s response will be instructive to you.



SHARE

Sharing Story Ideas, Then Choosing One to Develop and Writing Long about It

Engage students in a symphony share, during which they share just one story idea.

“Writers, you have done some fantastic work over the past couple of days coming up with a variety of possible ideas for your short realistic fiction stories. Bravo! I know from walking around and talking with you that you have pages and pages of story ideas at this point, each one more compelling than the last.

“I want to give you a chance to share your ideas, quickly, before writing time is over. When I point to you, give us a short synopsis of just one of your story ideas. Maybe this will be the one you choose to develop for publication. Tell us the name of your character, what his or her struggle or longing is, and the circumstances he or she is in that swings the story into action. Here’s the rule, everyone—as you listen, no commenting. I don’t want to hear suggestions of how to make the story more juicy or the struggle even harder. This is just a chance to share and hear all the story ideas buzzing around the room. Later on in the unit, you’ll have lots of chances to advise one another.

“Okay, let’s start!” I pointed to Samee, who shared his idea about two lifelong friends who end up having a huge fight that tears them apart, and then to Penelope, who shared her idea about a group of friends that starts to unravel when a new girl joins in. I pointed to each student until the whole class had a chance to share.

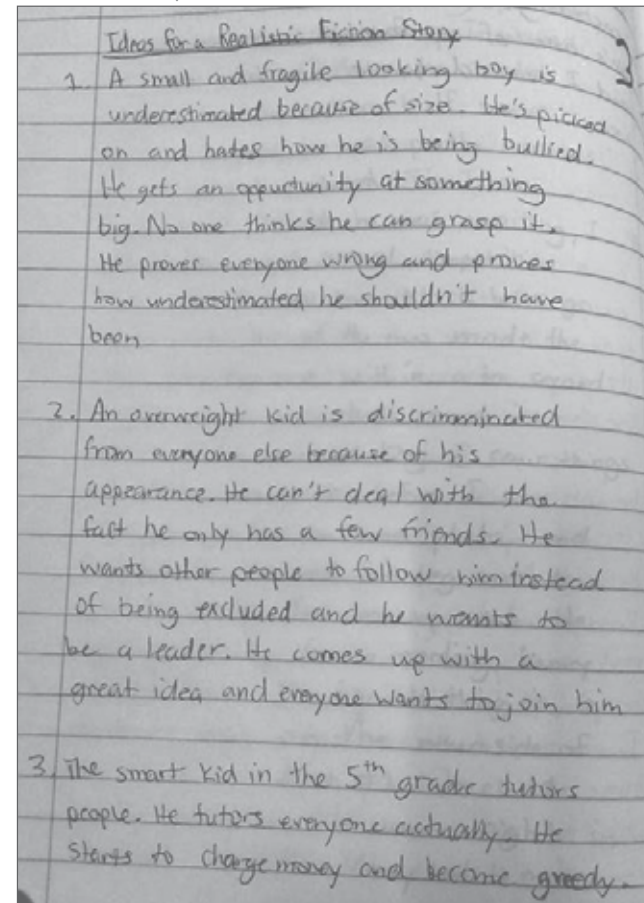


FIG. 2-1 Samee generates ideas for fiction stories based on stories he wished already existed.

SESSION 2 HOMEWORK

CHOOSING A MEANINGFUL STORY IDEA

“Tonight for homework, I want you to think a bit about which story idea you like the best. Which one do you think you want to take all the way to publication? Which of these stories feels the most meaningful to you? Or you might even consider, which one does the world need you to write? You might even decide to write a bit about why *this* story idea. Don’t write the story itself, just something along the lines of, ‘I think this is an important story for me to write because . . .’ Then explain what the story idea does for you and what you imagine it would do for your readers. You might think about what you’re really trying to say to the world and how fiction writing, where you can disguise the characters and other pesky facts, can help push you get to a deeper truth. Then push yourself to write long about your thought process. Sometimes, figuring out the meaning behind the story before even beginning to draft can lead to more powerful work in fiction.”

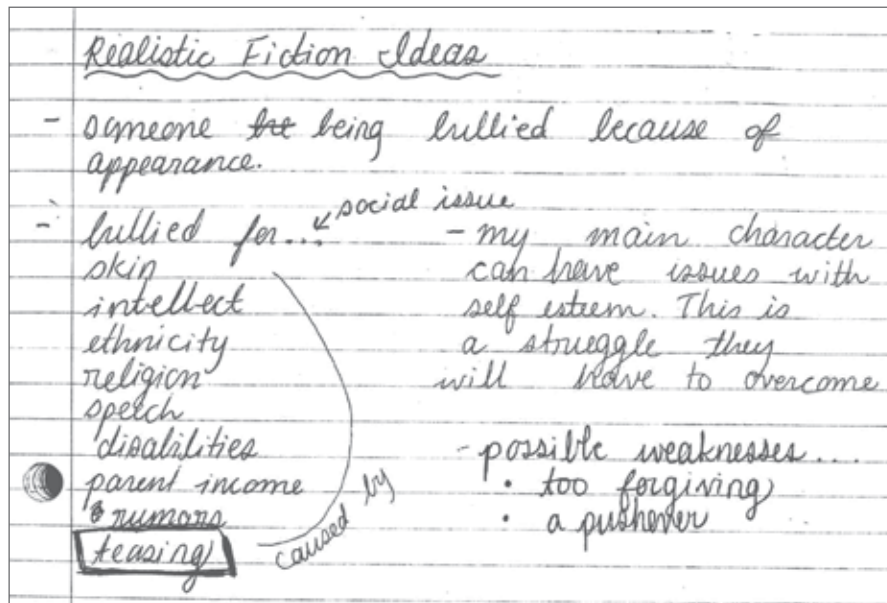


FIG. 2-2 Annabelle thinks of a social issue that matters to her and used it to think of possible fiction ideas.



Session 3

Developing Believable Characters through Scene Boot Camp

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that fiction writers test out their ideas for characters by writing everyday scenes to see how the characters might move, think, and act.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Bring your own writer's notebook with a character and storyline that you will use to model throughout the unit (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Students' writer's notebooks (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ "Scenes" chart (see Teaching and Active Engagement)
- ✓ Anchor chart, "How to Write Compelling Fiction" (see Link) 🌐

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.7.3.b,d; W.7.4, W.7.9.a, W.7.10, RL.7.3, SL.7.1, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.6

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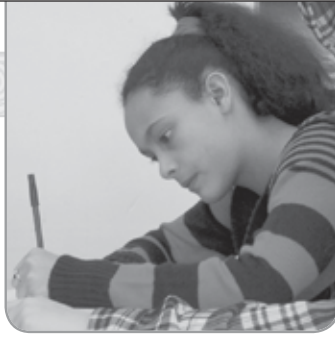
TODAY IS A CRITICAL DAY. It is one of those sessions that hits a lot of key points that will propel students' work forward for the rest of this unit. In this session, students will try their hand at a character development strategy that is probably as old as the novel. I first learned it from my writing teacher, the best-selling novelist Jennifer Belle. She taught me that one of the best ways to get to know a character is not to write pages and pages of notes, but rather to just try the character out in an everyday scene. As the writer develops the scene, it is almost as if she is being introduced to the character—how he moves, speaks, thinks, and most importantly, what he wants.

For many students, the idea of writing a scene can often be more daunting than getting to know one's character. Whether this is because they have not written narrative in a long time, or they do not have a lot of writing workshop experience, this session is designed to support those students who might still have the smell of summer vacation on their skin. You will do this by taking students through a rapid-paced guided practice session that we call "boot camp"—one in which the teaching and active engagement are combined, so you can move back and forth between modeling something and coaching students as they try the work themselves. This is a quick, down-and-dirty way to give students a lot of experience and support when tackling something that would otherwise be very challenging. Today's session is not designed as a typical minilesson. It will certainly take longer than ten minutes.

Of course, if your students have a ton of scene-writing experience, or you know from your on-demand assessments that they have a very high level of mastery of scene writing, you might opt to skip the boot camp method of instruction suggested in this session and instead simply teach it as a more typical demonstration minilesson.

"For many students, the idea of writing a scene can often be more daunting than getting to know one's character."

GRADE 7: WRITING REALISTIC FICTION



MINILESSON

Developing Believable Characters through Scene Boot Camp

CONNECTION

Congratulate writers on how much thought they have given to choosing story ideas, and tell them that they are ready to take these out for a “test-drive.”

“Yesterday, for homework, I asked you to choose your story idea. I could tell from the talk this morning that that was still happening as you started to get settled in, that some of you are still torn: ‘Did I pick the right idea? Maybe I should have picked the other one.’ Believe it or not, I think it’s great that you are still very much thinking about your decision. It tells me that your story ideas really matter to you, which means they will really matter to your readers. It also tells me that you are ready to take your stories—your characters, to be more exact—out for a test-drive.”

✿ Name the teaching point.

“Today I want to teach you that, just as people take a car for a test-drive before buying it, writers take their characters from a possible story out for a test scene. They place their characters in everyday scenes, outside of the storylines, and then see how their characters move, think, and act.”

TEACHING AND ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Tell a story about writing advice someone gave you about getting to know your main characters by writing everyday scenes.

“A few years ago, I was working on a book, a fiction story, and I was just at the beginning. I wasn’t exactly sure how my story would go or what my character was really like. But then my writing teacher made a suggestion. She said I should take out my notebook, set aside the story I was thinking about, and just place my main character in an everyday scene. You know, like washing dishes, or getting up in the morning, or having dinner. Something the character does almost every day, as a way to get to know who the character really was, what the character thought about, wanted. So I tried it. I actually tried just getting my character ready for bed. But as I wrote the scene, something really interesting started to happen—not only did I get to know the character better, but it almost felt like the character was coming to life, almost as if she was writing the story.”

◆ COACHING

It is true that students’ story ideas matter very much to them, just as famous fiction writers’ story ideas matter enormously to them. The characters and storylines may be fictional, but the writers behind them are putting bits of themselves and their lives—and certainly their imaginations—onto the page. The chance to test-drive their characters is not just a fun writing exercise, but is a way for students to grow more knowledgeable of—and confident in—their creations.

Your chance of engaging students and drawing them in to the work of the day increases exponentially when you link the work you are teaching them to do with anecdotes about yourself. Your seventh-graders will be excited to try something that you, too, have done, and this particular exercise also offers a really fun, concrete way to get to know the characters they are creating.

Review what a scene is composed of.

“Right now, we’re going to try this as a class, using my story idea. I think for this to really work as a strategy for understanding character, though, we can’t write in summary. We need to write in scene. So can we just quickly look over this chart that mentions some of the things I know many of you learned in years past about what makes a scene.”

Scenes

- ✓ *Are small moments or mini-stories*
- ✓ *Include a clear setting that is woven throughout the moment*
- ✓ *Have characters who are thinking, talking, acting, or perhaps doing all of those things*
- ✓ *Contain a character motivation and obstacle of some sort*

Explain the procedure for scene boot camp.

“What we’re going to do is a scene boot camp. I’m going to lead you through a writing exercise where you write fast and furiously, getting as much writing down as possible, while you also practice your scene writing skills. I will give you a little tip, then I will model it with my own writing. Then you will give it a go. Then it will come back to me, and I’ll model something different, and then it will be your turn to try.

“Here’s the thing about this, though. Not everything I teach you will be something you will be able to do or will work for your scene right now. That’s okay. Just keep working on the last thing you were working on and then catch up with me on the next move.”

Demonstrate how to come up with traits for a character whose story you plan to write.

“First, I need to think about the character and story idea I chose: the girl who knows it’s silly to feel this way, but she wants to be popular—mainly because she has a birthday party coming up and wants people to come to it. Now, I have to think a bit about who she is as a person, jot a few notes.”

I picked up my pen and jotted as I talked, making it very clear these were notes by writing in abbreviations and phrases. “I know her parents are old-fashioned, so they would give her sort of a traditional name, like . . .” I made a point to show that I was really considering the options. “I’ll call her Esmerelda, which is a beautiful name, but not exactly the cute little names people sometimes associate with popular people. And I also know that she is actually very friendly, but because she’s a bit strange, sometimes when she tries to be friendly, it just comes off as almost annoying.” I jotted the following list:

- ✓ *Parents are old-fashioned*
- ✓ *Name: Esmerelda*
- ✓ *Strange*
- ✓ *Wants friends and is friendly*
- ✓ *Tries too hard and comes off weird*

This is important to emphasize. What you are offering students today is just one way to get to know a character better. This doesn’t mean that the exact steps you follow during the demonstration will be the exact steps that each kid in the class follows. Instead, you present this strategy—and others on other days—so that students have a growing repertoire of strategies that they can draw on, anytime they write fiction, as needed.

Give students a chance to try this first step.

"Now, writers, go ahead and try this right now with your story idea. If you're not completely committed to your idea, just pick the one you think you are most likely to go with. Think a bit about that main character, then jot your thoughts really quickly in your notebook." As students got to work, I moved around the meeting area, looking over shoulders and giving gentle nudges when needed.

Lead students through the next step of placing a character in an everyday scene and writing the start of it.

When it looked like most students had at least gotten started, I said, "Now that most of you have an idea about your character, let's try them on for size. Let's try them in an everyday scene. The goal here is to think of possible scenes that will give us a stronger understanding of what kind of person this character is. The more ordinary the moment, the more our character can be himself or herself. So, I think I'm going to start with Esmerelda having lunch at school. While that doesn't directly link to the party, it should give me some insights into what she's like socially. I'm going to start this scene by jumping into the moment, so I'm not tempted to summarize." I wrote quickly, and then read aloud:

Esmerelda walked into the lunch room, holding her lunch bag in her hands. Even though everyone else in the school, it felt like, bought school lunch, Esmerelda was a picky eater.

The goal here is that students do this work quickly, not perfectly, so the encouragement to just pick the idea they are most likely to go with (even if they aren't yet committed to one) is wise. This guided practice will move quickly, and kids need to be on the same page with you, ready to follow each step.

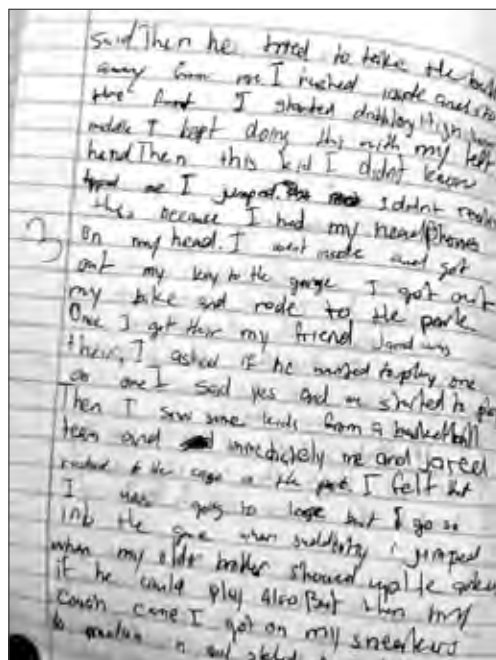
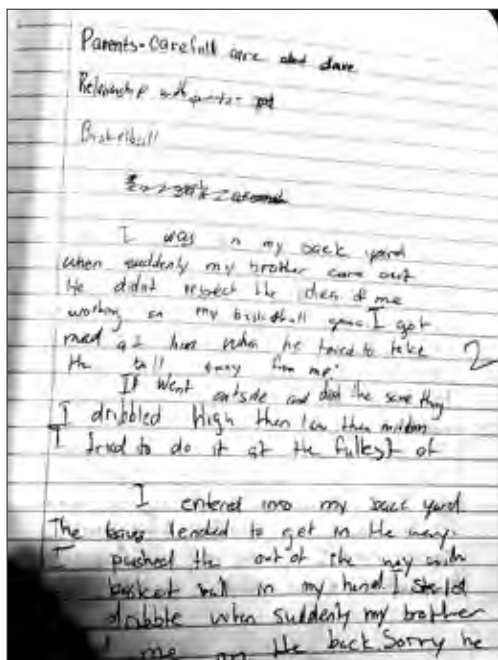


FIG. 3-1 Immersed in scene boot camp, Ryan pushes his pen across pages.

Debrief. Share what you are learning about your character and about writing, from this process, and try writing the scene another way—in first person.

I stopped myself. “You know what? As I’m writing this little bit of a setup, I’m learning something about Esmerelda—that she’s a picky eater. That she’s different even when it comes to lunch. *But I’m also learning something about my writing.* I wrote in third person, but I’m wondering, since in realistic fiction you can do either, if the scene might flow better—if I might be able to get into the character better—if I wrote in first person. I’m going to draw a line under my third-person try and then start my first person try right below it.”

I stood in the doorway of the lunchroom, half hiding behind the vending machines, clutching my lunchbag. There were a few kids who also brought their lunch from home, but almost everybody else bought from the cafeteria. I waited for Tilly to come through the kitchen doors. Then waved to her as she headed to our table, the one closest to the janitor’s closet.

“Oh, I like that better. I think I’m going to stick with first person for a while. At least in this scene.”

Debrief. Reiterate the steps you just followed, and set up students to do the same with their own stories.

I looked over my writing for a bit and then turned back to the class. “Did you see how I developed the setting a bit more and started to work in a little bit of information about Esmerelda as I wrote? I tried to show what she was feeling—that she was a little nervous—by having her hide behind the vending machine and wait until she saw her friend before she headed to her table. Can you try some scene writing? Can you just jump into your everyday scene, right in the action, being very aware of the setting, and also trying to show the character’s feelings?”

Circulate as students work, offering tips and prompts about how to give characters movement.

The students opened up their notebooks and started writing. Again I circulated as they wrote, giving nods and thumbs up to students who were getting into it, and quick reminders to folks who were not writing or were slowing up. After a few minutes, I brought the class back.

“Nice work. I saw that some of you already have written a page in just a few minutes, and as I read over your shoulders, it’s pretty clear that for many of you, your characters are really springing to life. Now I think you’re ready for more. Whenever you write scenes, you want to make sure your characters are doing things. These can be small things, like folding a piece of paper, or big things, like getting into an argument. Your characters might be talking or thinking. But it’s important that you *show* them doing something, that you don’t just *tell* about it. If you’re getting stuck on something for your character to do, ask yourself, ‘What does my character want? What’s his (or her) motivation?’”

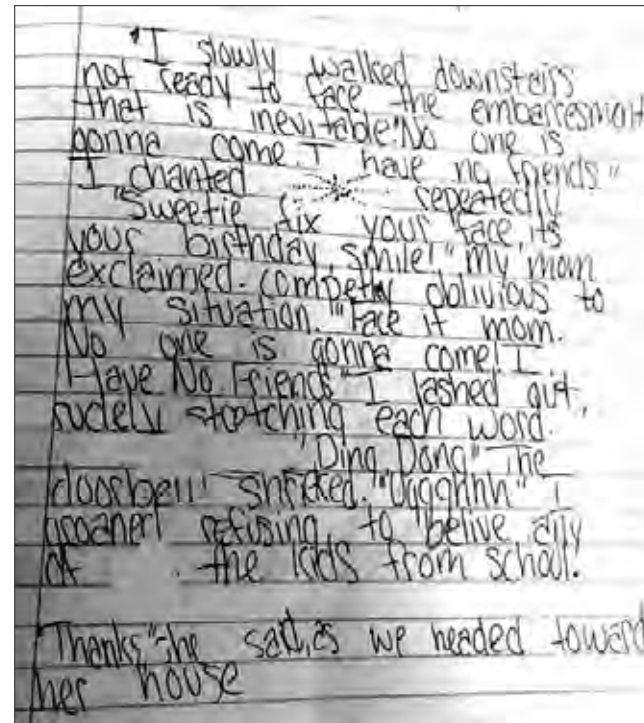


FIG. 3–2 Yasmin tries to incorporate everything she knows about scene writing during scene boot camp.

The “realization” that first person works best for your story is, of course, intentional. Here you convey a stylistic choice that fiction writers must all make—and in the process, you offer a tucked tip about voice while in the midst of discovering something, too, about your character, and about revision on the go.

This is an important coaching tip for students. So many novice fiction writers (and seasoned ones, too!) struggle to make their characters active. Yet active characters seem more alive and fully realized and are key to engaging fiction. You may find yourself offering your writers this tip again and again.

This time, as the students bent their heads to their task, rather than just quietly whispering or nudging a student here or there, I called out a few reminders, or prompts, to keep them on track as they wrote. I chose what to say based on what I was reading over students' shoulders.

"Remember to include what the character is feeling. But don't tell us. Think of small actions that can show us."

"It helps to include some dialogue."

"Describe what the character wants in this scene and what obstacles are getting in his or her way."

Interrupt students to announce that as they continue working, you will call out tips about ways to add depth to their characters and scenes, some of which they should try.

After students had been writing for a few minutes, I interrupted them again. "Writers, you are crafting some fantastic scenes. I can tell by how fast your pens are going down the page and the looks on many of your faces that you are really getting to know your characters, and you are coming up with great scenes while you're at it. You'll continue to write, but this time, while you're writing I'm going to call out some things, some tips and reminders that can help you explore your character more deeply, as well as make a stronger scene. If what I'm saying is something that will lift the level of your writing, please try it. If it just doesn't work for where you're at right then, let it go, maybe jot it in the margin, but try at some point during the next few minutes to try a couple of things I suggest."

The students nodded and returned to their work. As they wrote, I peeked over their shoulders, looking to see how their scenes were shaping up. Occasionally I would call out a prompt, such as:

"Show the setting. Where is the character right now? What little detail of the setting can you mention?"

"Describe what the character is thinking right now."

"Make sure someone says something in this scene."

"Show your character's actions. They can be big or small. Stepping into a room full of strangers. Kicking a soccer ball. Taking a sip of soda."

"Have your character make a decision. It can be big or small, just make sure your character is being active in the movement of the scene."

When most students had more than a page of writing, I pulled them all back. "Congratulations, writers, looking over your shoulders I see that you've gotten started on some strong scenes, and you're getting a sense of who your characters are."

SESSION 3: DEVELOPING BELIEVABLE CHARACTERS THROUGH SCENE BOOT CAMP

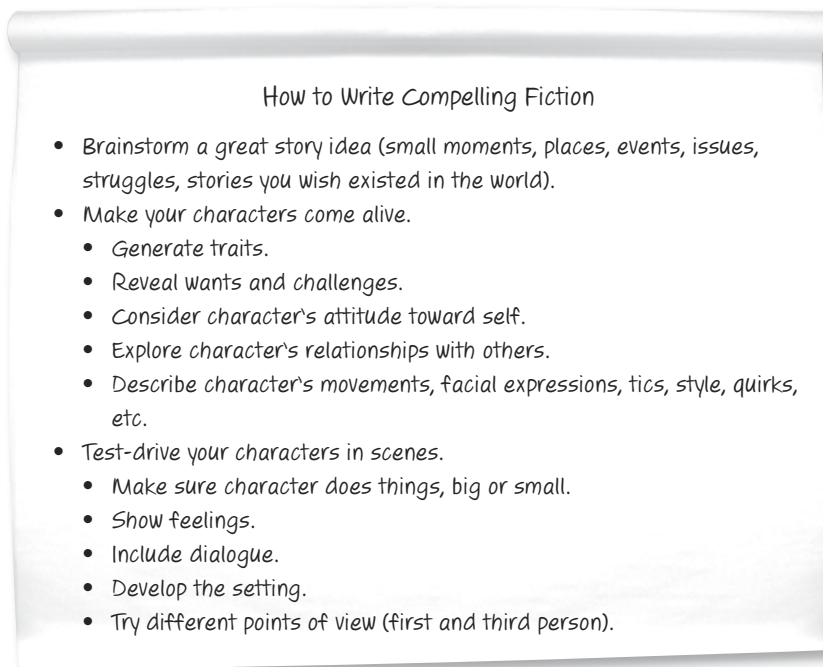
Notice, again, the emphasis on choosing from a list of possible tips based on what students determine their writing needs to be. This conveys the important message that writing is not a "one-size-fits-all" process, and it builds independence and agency in your seventh-grade writers.

LINK

Remind students of the many ways to develop a character, and introduce an anchor chart on how to write compelling fiction.

“Writers, as you know, there are lots of different ways to develop characters. You can try writing characters in scenes, you can create graphic organizers to explore their personalities, you can spend some time just writing long about them and their relationships to secondary characters.

“I’ve begun a chart to describe the work you’ve learned to do so far to write compelling fiction—including developing characters. We’ll add to this throughout this unit. And of course, you may come up with things that we can include, so let me know if you do.”



Remind students of their options for working today.

“I’m assuming a lot of you will be ready to work on your characters today. However, if you find that you are not ready, that maybe you haven’t yet landed on the perfect story idea yet, you can always use today to finish up that work before you move on to character development.”



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Helping Students to Figure Out Ways to Develop Characters

IN YOUR WORK IN INDIVIDUAL CONFERENCES or with small groups, you may see that many students start by just listing phrases to describe a character, in spite of what you have just taught. Perhaps this will surprise you, but this happens more often than not. When conferring with students, help them realize that their lists can be more specific and more elaborated. Pay attention to places where a writer provides a bit more detail, and celebrate these. You might also want to direct students toward fancier lists—or graphic organizers. Many of your students might have tried developing their characters using a T-chart back when they were in elementary school. They can use this tool again now, dividing the T-chart into internal and external characteristics as a way to make sure not all the character development is cosmetic.

As you confer, you will also probably notice that many of the characters your students create seem like stereotypes, something like, “Esmerelda is shy but wants to fit in.” This is natural. It would be tempting to teach students to think critically about the work they’ve done developing characters by putting their characters on trial: “Is your character a stereotype? Is your character simplistic?” I don’t recommend this. For now, it is very important for students to connect with their characters, and therefore you are wise to avoid treating the character or the character development work too critically. If a character seems generic, stereotypical, or underdeveloped, instead of saying so, simply help the writer outgrow this surface-level character development.

Here’s an example. If a student is writing about a character’s internal qualities in a generic way, I can often help the student open up those generic terms by probing a bit and asking the right questions. If the character is “good at cheerleading,” then I can point out that people can be good at cheerleading in different ways. “What is your character’s *specific* way of being good at cheerleading?” I can even press further and ask, “What is going on inside the character that makes her so good at cheerleading?” Once the writer has answered these questions and goes on to create some revealing details about this dimension of the character’s life, I might ask, “How does that connect to other things the character does?” It also helps to ask, “What’s the downside of

this?” The character who is always practicing cheers may not know when to relax, or maybe the character is struggling with the competitive aspects of cheerleading.

In a conference, after I’ve asked these questions, I will pull back and talk about the importance of asking (as well as answering) questions such as these. That is, I will pause in a conference and say, “Notice, for a moment, the questions I’ve asked you about your character, because these are questions that you, as a writer, need to be able to ask yourself and each other.” It helps to chart these questions. My goal, of course, is
(continues)

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING

Developing the Character’s Self-View

“Writers, it’s wonderful to see you writing so furiously, but please look up for a minute. As you work on creating the insides of your characters, it’s important to remember one really important thing: You need to think about how your characters feel about themselves. As real people, you know that how you feel about yourselves is really important—to your sense of well-being, how you react to problems, how others perceive you. It only makes sense, then, that your characters would think something about themselves too. Does your character like herself? Does your character think he is funny? If your character is weird, does she know she’s weird? Is your character weighed down by self-doubt? Or does he think he is the best thing since sliced bread?”

“One thing you might consider doing is spending some time brainstorming, maybe in a quick list or paragraph, about your character’s attitude toward him or herself and your character’s attitude toward others—toward the secondary characters in the story.”

for the young writer to learn that another time, she can ask these same questions while writing. Partners can also ask these questions about each other's characters.

Sometimes I run into a character that seems wooden, lifeless. In that case, I often find the student has been trying to make up the character out of thin air. I try to guide the student to lend his own life experience to the character. A young writer can do this even if the character is in many ways very different from himself, especially by exploring deeper internal states and feelings, rather than surface activities or reactions to events.

Occasionally when I confer, I find that the writer feels as if she has hit a dead end with a character. I sometimes let the student know that problems with a character's development can be early warning signals that the story idea itself doesn't fit the writer or that the story idea has problems that need to be addressed. As a result, then, I may encourage the writer to rethink the entire story idea.

This may also present an early opportunity for the student to make a connection to her reading work, especially if she has been studying characters in reading workshop. Guide the student to open up her independent reading book, and have her point to some of the places where she learned about the characters. What did the author include? What did the author leave out? Why does the student think the author made those decisions? By guiding the student to look back at her reading, you not only include the student in the company of authors, but you also make clear and explicit connections between what the student is learning as a reader and applying that to her own writing. This is something the Common Core Standards explicitly calls students to do (CCSS W.7.9.a).

Finally, I always keep in mind that secondary characters need to be developed too! Everything that the writer has done with the main character needs to be done with the secondary characters as well.





SHARE

Seeing through the Eyes of a Character

Compliment students on their hard work, and share an example of a student who has developed a strong character based in reality.

"I just wanted to compliment you on doing some impressive work today. The characters you are creating for your stories are becoming increasingly developed, and probably more importantly, increasingly believable. So many of you are using what you know about your friends and family members to help create these three-dimensional characters that are realistic, yet we know are fictional. Jada, for example, is basing her character on a neighbor who lives in her building, who has big troubles in her life. Jada has always sort of wondered what her life was like behind the doors of her apartment, and in writing the realistic fiction story, Jada is crafting a realistic character based on the persona of her neighbor."

Make a connection between the character work students are doing in reading and writing workshop.

"Many of you know from reading workshop, that one of the best ways to understand the characters in the books you read is to 'walk in the shoes of the character.' You try to imagine what the character is feeling, thinking, even the things he or she might be seeing or doing that aren't described in the story. This is exactly the type of work you can also do when you are writing characters."

Ask students to share with their neighbor their process for fleshing out a realistic character.

"Right now, quickly share your process for doing this—and maybe a detail or two about the character you are developing—with the person sitting next to you."

SESSION 3 HOMEWORK

SEEING THE WORLD THROUGH YOUR CHARACTER'S EYES

"Tonight for homework I'd like you to try to see the world through the eyes of your character as a way to get to know your character even better. Think to yourself, 'What would my character be thinking in this situation? What would he or she be doing?' And then take a few minutes before you go to bed tonight to jot those thoughts down. Then maybe you'll even start dreaming your character's dreams as you drift off to sleep."



Session 4

Giving Characters Struggles and Motivations that Mirror Real Life

Dear Teachers,

Today, rather than including a minilesson, I offer a letter of suggestions and ideas for additional ways to help your students develop believable characters, thereby creating sturdier and more believable stories. This session should be personalized to meet the needs of your students. You should feel free to opt in or out of any of the suggestions in this letter, knowing that the most important thing is to help students put the finishing touches on their characters and story ideas, so they will be in a good place to begin plotting the actual structure of their stories in the next session. We include these letters throughout these units of study, with the hopes that doing so will give you a welcome opportunity to begin writing your own minilessons, tailoring them to the students in your classroom.

Up until today, you have likely seen your students moving toward fiction writing with varying degrees of facility and interest. This variety is not only due to the fact that students enter a new year at a range of writing levels—and with a range of writing preferences. It is also due to students' affinity (or lack of affinity) for fiction, or simply to the fact that they are still warming up to you at the beginning of the year. That said, there is no reason to worry if, while reading over your students' work, you see a wide range of quality and skills. Today is a great opportunity to accelerate students' growth no matter where their narrative skills lie.

It is incredibly common for young writers, or for that matter amateur adult writers, to struggle with creating a character who is culpable in the trouble that exists in the plot. This could be because in the act of creating a character, the writer gets so attached, she can't imagine the character possibly doing anything wrong. Or it may be that the character is, in fact, a fictionalized version of the author, so having the character make poor choices may feel like a reflection on the writer. There are, of course, oodles of other reasons a writer opts for a character who doesn't do much and to whom nothing much happens—or alternatively, a perfect character that bad things happen *to*. She broke her leg on the way

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.7.3, W.7.5, RL.7.3, SL.7.1, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.6

to the skateboard tournament because there was a rock in the road. He got in trouble because a bully picked on him. All of this passivity leads to very dull and often unrealistic stories, indeed.

Clearly, one of the most dramatic ways to develop characters—and concurrently improve a dull plot—is to make characters more active. A great way for young writers to do this is to explore their characters' motivations or desires, as well as the obstacles that get in the way of what their characters want most. Ideally, the intersections between motivation and obstacle will result in a conflict that propels both the plot and the development of the character.

To prepare for this work, you will want to gather a few mentor texts whose characters have struggles and desires that you will showcase. These can be texts that the students know from reading workshop or from read-alouds, or texts that you have studied together to prepare for this unit. You might spend some time during a class meeting or during reading time talking about how these texts have characters who have motivations, as well as obstacles that get in the way of them achieving their hearts' desires. If it is too early in the year to rely on a short stack of texts that your students all know, you can always consider tapping their knowledge of pop culture, such as current hit movies, television shows, or even popular music videos. Some teachers even show short clips of these "texts" so that students who are unfamiliar with them can have at least a thumbnail sketch of how they go.

MINILESSON

The minilesson could go a variety of ways. If your students came to you with lots of writing and reading workshop experience, you could use today's session to remind them of what they already know about how characters work. You could even set up an inquiry of sorts in which they look through the texts they've read recently and list some of the motivations and obstacles that drive the characters in these stories. Students can then mentor themselves using those motivations and obstacles, looking to see what sorts of ideas they can develop that fit with the characters they've created.

If, on the other hand, your students have less experience, you might need to teach an explicit lesson in which you return to your demonstration text and explore your character's motivations, as well as the obstacles that might get in that character's way. You will want to point out that since they are writing short stories, the ideal motivations and obstacles are ones that can be addressed in a relatively short number of pages. Wanting to be a doctor, for example, for the confines of a short story focused on the life of a seventh-grader, will likely not have the sort of satisfying arc that they are hoping for. They can, however, explore one slice, one smaller desire connected to that larger desire, such as wanting to become president of the science club or applying to be a junior hospital volunteer. You will then want to show them how to craft manageable and realistic obstacles that might get in the way of the character's path to achieving his desire.

SESSION 4: GIVING CHARACTERS STRUGGLES AND MOTIVATIONS THAT MIRROR REAL LIFE

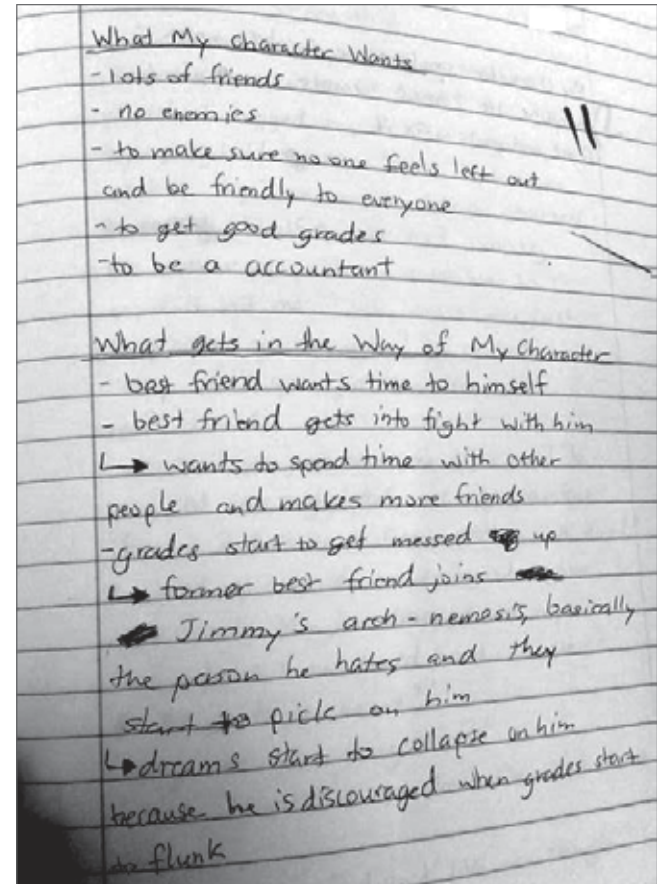


FIG. 4-1 Samee explores his character's motivations and obstacles.

Encourage students to continue to explore these things in a variety of ways. Quick jots and short conversations with partners are great ways to begin. Students might also try exploring the motivations and obstacles in short scenes in their notebooks.

It is important that no matter what your students' experience level with writing fiction, you highlight the value of both motivations and obstacles of not just the external, but also the internal variety. In other words, if the character wants to win the skateboard tournament, the trophy might be one thing the skater

1 Johnny ~~was~~ ~~self~~ serving himself break fast. He grabbed his toast and ~~draw~~ pictures of birds. He was nibbling on his toast.

2 Grabbing my toast, I walked into the sunroom, drawing birds in my sketchbook while ~~was~~ nibbling on my toast. ~~I don't~~ I enjoyed this until

3 Grabbing my toast, I casually walked into the attic, where ~~there~~ it was peace and quiet. Nibbling on my toast, I began to draw birds. The attic was a dark place where I can think.

4 Grabbing my toast happily, I ~~grabbed~~ casually walked into the attic, where it was peaceful and quiet. Nibbling on my toast, I began to draw birds. The attic was a dark place where I can think. I enjoyed the sense of independence, I then chose to write poetry, my other passion. ~~It was all nice until~~ I enjoyed writing about ~~the~~ birds too. Bird represent independence. They are ~~so~~ strong. Unlike me, I thought, "I wish I was a ~~to~~ bird."

FIG. 4-2 Perspective, voice, and inner thoughts are highlighted as Gabriel experiments with character.

focuses on, but meanwhile, he might also be focusing on pleasing his dad or feeling more confident in other areas. The obstacle can be another, bigger, older skater or a particularly challenging trick. But it can also be overcoming his lack of confidence. Seventh-graders are ready to examine and balance the intersection of the internal and external, and because they are so often turning inward in their own adolescent lives, they are well positioned to explore those segments of character development.

CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Many of your students might find all of this rehearsal work confusing. All of this scene writing and character exploration can sometimes feel and sound like the writer is drafting in her notebook. You might decide to pull aside students who appear to be writing fully fleshed-out drafts in their notebooks to explain the value of a lot of rehearsal before drafting. You might also point out that anything that seems like a gem in their notebook can be transferred later to a draft if it feels like it belongs there.

Alternatively, you might find that some students are champing at the bit to get drafting already and are wondering if they will ever get a chance to do the “real” work of writing. For these students it might help to have them work together and workshop their characters with other writers. That is, teach those students a protocol for giving and receiving feedback. For example, you could teach them to start the conversation with a specific compliment. Then move on to one specific suggestion or tip, possibly based on something they have learned in class, from the class charts or mentor texts. From there, they might want to leave room for questions or discussion between the writer and the reader.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING

An apocryphal tale about the importance of getting to know your characters well, often told in college-level writing programs, goes like this: once a writer was several hundred pages into his novel. He was drafting one of the last scenes of his book when he placed his main character at a cocktail party. A tray of food was being passed around, and the writer realized he had no idea what hors d’oeuvre the character would pick. Suddenly, the writer realized that if he doesn’t know that, he hadn’t yet done the work of developing that character, and if he continued to write, he would have holes in his story. He decided to stop writing that version of his novel and start over from scratch, throwing away hundreds of pages.

You might want to share that story, or another, about the importance of dedicating time and energy to getting to know one’s characters with great specificity and intimacy. Meanwhile, point out the importance of developing not just the main character, but *all* of the characters that will appear in a story. Encourage students to introduce their characters to partners, imagine their characters in scenarios that won’t appear in the story, even mock-interview their characters to ensure that they know them as well as they know themselves.

SHARE

Make sure students understand that today is the last official day to develop characters. During the share, then, you may want to suggest to your writers that they take whatever steps they need to finish fleshing out their characters. Some may want to make a character list in their notebooks and then review each one's descriptions, words, and actions throughout the story itself, making sure there is enough detail to bring the cast to life. Others might instead engage in character introductions with a partner, after which the listening partner can share any insights, asking questions to clarify things about the characters or offering little tips of ways to bring out the characters even more. Here, though, you'll want to caution students not to get so carried away by their own fiction-writing imaginations (which are growing livelier by the day!) that they end up taking over the creative process of a classmate's character development. If students are still unsatisfied with their characters, they will want to set some writing time aside tonight to fix any issues they see. You might also want to have students read or reread a class mentor text if they haven't already done so. Tomorrow that mentor text will be used as part of the work around plotting.

Enjoy!
Colleen

Zack	
Internal	external
Shy	Made He doesn't talk and he doesn't talk in class
nevers	Made he bits his nails and he stutters.
Happy	He is talkative he is smiley and talks to everyone
Upsit	Yells and gets an attitude with people
anxious	can't do anything, feels like he is going to throw up
feels good	When he feels good he dress good and has a good attitude
feels bad Feels bad	When he feels bad maybe he has a guilty conscience
	It looks like he is keeping over is shoulders

FIG. 4-3 Using a T-chart helps Taylor expand on internal and external aspects of his main character.

Session 5

Plotting with Tools

Story Arcs, Timelines, Lists, Mentor Texts



BECAUSE AS READERS we typically see just an author's finished product, it is easy to imagine that when writers sit down to work, they think up a story and then, poof! Out it comes! When students generate “on and on stories,” it is often because they believed they were doing exactly what professional writers do: they thought up a story, sat down to write it, and then, poof! Unfortunately, as we know, that's not how professional writers, or any successful writers of fiction, work. So we shouldn't be surprised when our students work in this way and out comes a meandering string of somewhat meaningless, disconnected events.

In this session, you will remind students of what they know from past years—that writers *plan* stories before they tackle the blank page. You will remind students—and emphasize the fact—that most stories follow a predictable pattern, one in which a character wants something and faces increasingly challenging obstacles as he works to attain those wants. Tensions rise and fall as characters move along this trajectory, which is what keeps readers turning the page, eager to find out what will happen next. A character faces an obstacle and readers hold their breath, wondering, “However will she respond to *this* hurdle?” A character overcomes a challenge, and readers breathe a sigh of relief.

Before you send the class off to write, you will give them the option of drawing from the many planning tools at their disposal—from timelines to story mountains to storyboards. Meanwhile, you will teach them that regardless of the tool that best fits them as writers, they need to be guided by how stories go. Rather than planning a sequence of equally weighted events, they need to ask themselves, “How will my character reach for her desire? What obstacles will she face—and how will those obstacles get more challenging as my story progresses? When and how might my character overcome those obstacles—or else experience a shift in perspective that yields new clarity?”

Similarly, students need to ask themselves, “Is this event, this scene, central to my character's course of wants and struggles and success?” Tell students that more is not better. It is better to have just two or three well-developed, purposeful scenes than a clutter of events, especially since the more numerous the events, the more likely students will

IN THIS SESSION, you'll teach students that writers sketch out possible plotlines for stories, often using tools such as story arcs, timelines, lists, or mentor texts that can help ensure their stories are built with traditional story structure in mind.

GETTING READY

- ✓ Two predictable story arcs created by writer Kurt Vonnegut
- ✓ Copy of the mentor text, “Thirteen and a Half” (or another mentor text you have selected for the class) (see Teaching) 📄
- ✓ “Story Arc” chart for the mentor text, “Thirteen and a Half” (see Teaching)
- ✓ Story arc of the shared class story, to be developed with students on chart paper (see Active Engagement)
- ✓ Revised anchor chart, “How to Write Compelling Fiction” (see Link) 📄
- ✓ Grade 7 Narrative Writing Checklist (see Share) 📄

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS: W.7.3, W.7.5, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.10, SL.7.1, SL.7.2, L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3



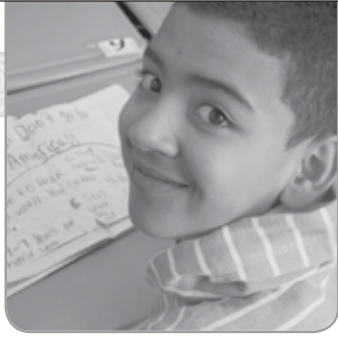
resort to summarizing rather than elaborating. Being thoughtful about each and every scene students plan to include in their stories will allow them to craft stories that are focused, meaningful, and engaging for their readers.

This session emphasizes that because writers use planning tools to envision the big picture, they often generate *multiple* plans before settling on the one they will implement. Similarly, writers often use planning tools to aid with revision—to *re- envision* how else a story might unfold. Remind students, then,

“Remind students that writers plan stories before they tackle the blank page.”

that planning tools should take a central place in their writing toolkits, so they can draw on them for different purposes as they move through the writing process and a unit of study.

Finally, some students might balk at the idea of creating their own planning tools, instead preferring the comfort of a teacher-made and provided worksheet. Help those students to understand that your goal is for them to learn to write with independence. When they write in the future, they won’t have a freshly photocopied worksheet. Instead, they should embrace the notion that they can create their tools in exactly the ways that best fit their purposes.



MINILESSON

Plotting with Tools

Story Arcs, Timelines, Lists, Mentor Texts

CONNECTION

Remind students that once fiction writers have brought their characters to life, they use an understanding of the characters' wants and struggles to develop a possible plotline.

"Students, you may remember a few days ago, I told you that fiction writers don't just choose a story idea and go straight to writing a draft. Instead, fiction writers use strategies for bringing characters to life, strategies like imagining their characters in everyday scenes, considering the internal and the external characteristics of the main character, the protagonist. Writers go through their lives, thinking, 'What would my character do in this situation?' They give special attention to what motivates a character and the obstacles that get in the character's way.

"Writers postpone thinking about the details of what happens in a story, about the plot of a story, until they've done this other work. They postpone thinking about the sequence of events because eventually they take all they know about their characters—especially their understanding of their characters' motivations and obstacles—and they use this information to create a plan for their stories."

✿ Name the teaching point.

"Today I want to teach you that after you develop your characters, you draft possible plots for your stories. Fiction writers plan by plotting the arc of the story—and *specifically*, by aiming to intensify the problem. They do this by using what they know about plotting and then choosing from a variety of tools to help them plan."

TEACHING

Share an anecdote of a famous writer—Kurt Vonnegut—who plotted and explained two predictable story arcs.

"Many famous writers rely on story arcs to think through the plots of their stories. And, of course, there isn't just one way a story can go. Kurt Vonnegut once laid out five common story arcs that stories follow. One, for example, he calls 'man in hole,' and I revealed this arc (<http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/voices-in-time/kurt-vonnegut-at-the-blackboard.php?page=all>). "He described it this way: 'You will see this story over and over again. People love it and it

◆ COACHING

Before this point, perhaps students have drafted scenes that placed their characters in motion and revealed them as living, breathing people, but those scenes will probably not comprise the start of their story. Before a fiction writer can write her lead, the writer needs to know the character, to imagine him in action, and to have drafted, chosen between, and revised multiple plotlines for the story. Today then, after all their preliminary thinking and drafting, students will consider a variety of ways their stories could unroll.

Teachers, you can see how I teach story arcs within the context of a bigger focus—thinking about how the story will flow in general, across the pages. Only after stressing that the character will get herself into a growing tangle of trouble do I mention that this can be signified by the rising slope of the story arc. I'm trying to ensure that students understand how this graphic organizer functions as a symbolic representation for the story itself.

is not copyrighted. The story is “Man in Hole,” but the story needn’t be about a man or a hole. It’s this: somebody gets into trouble, gets out of it again. It is not accidental that the line ends up higher than where it began. This is encouraging to readers.’

“Here’s another one,” I said, as I revealed a second arc (<http://www.laphamsquarterly.org/voices-in-time/kurt-vonnegut-at-the-blackboard.php?page=all>). “See if you can guess what story this describes. It’s a famous one. The arc begins way down here, with a truly despondent girl whose mother died and whose dad remarried a horrible woman with two horrible daughters who treat this girl like a servant. Things are about as bad as they can get for this girl.” Some students registered looks of recognition on their faces.

“And then there’s an invitation to a party, and everyone gets to go except the narrator! But then, a fairy godmother appears, and she sends the narrator off to the party, dressed to the hilt!” By now, most kids were nodding or whispering “Cinderella!” to each other.

“Things shoot way up from there, because Cinderella (yes, you guessed it!) attracts the prince’s attention. And, of course, as you all know, when she leaves the party and drops her shoe, things go back to being rotten for her, except . . . they aren’t as bad as they used to be because Cinderella now has memories of a perfect evening. And when the prince locates the girl who fits the shoe, things spiral to infinite amounts of ‘happily ever after’ for Cinderella.” And I traced the line of the story arc pointing to infinity.

“Notice that these two arcs look very different from each other, but what overlaps is that things go up and down. Both arcs rise and fall as the plot rises and falls.”

Explain why a writer would use a story arc to plan a plot.

“Story arcs can help you figure out the rises and falls of your own plot, because they remind you that it’s not just one event after another, with no real change or climb. It’s like each scene in the arc is a whole new movement for your character. That’s what makes readers want to keep reading, to find out how the character will get to the other side of this arc.

“The story arc also shows you that something is going to happen, and things are getting tough, and then something happens as the story curves, or arcs, that changes things or that solves your character’s problem. After that, things change, your character is different, and there isn’t a feeling of anticipation anymore.”

Remind students of what they learned about how stories tend to go, and share your arc of the mentor class story.

“Writers, earlier this year, in reading workshop, we discussed how stories usually go—that usually the main character has wants, and something gets in the way of him or her getting these. So the character encounters trouble, or a problem. And today, we learned that usually after encountering the problem, the character has to deal with that problem somehow, which gives movement to the story. Often, the problem intensifies before getting resolved, with the character experiencing several challenges along the way. Or it gets resolved in a different way than the character

You may be wondering how this emphasis on story arcs will help those students who write stories with just two or three scenes. In fact, even the shortest of stories follows a rising/falling action. It is the arc that grips the reader and keeps him wanting to read on. The arc is what invests the reader in a character, and in a story, and what gives the reader that big “Aha!” or “Phew!” moment at the end. It is by creating this rising/falling action that your students will begin to understand the rhythm of story.

Here, my goal is not only to describe the predictable way that stories tend to go—their arc—but to also tuck in the fact that even though the story arc follows a clear shape, a character’s journey through the arc may not. Things are often messy in stories; characters don’t always get the things they want or solve problems as they set out to do. This messiness sounds a lot like real life—which adds richness, depth, dimension, and believability to characters.

imagined or hoped for. In this way, the story doesn't just go from one event to another in a flat way, but rather, each scene builds on the one before it.

"Students, you may recall that when we read 'Thirteen and a Half' together recently, we talked about how the story went, how the events fit together, what its shape was. If it were to be written up as an arc, it might look something like this," I said, turning to a chart where I had recorded the main events of the story on an arc.

The narrator goes to Ashley's big, fancy house.

Ashley gives the narrator a tour and makes up a lot of rules.

The narrator feels uncomfortable.

Ashley talks a lot about her getting older and also her exotic bird.

Ashley and the narrator find the bird dead.

The mother explains that the bird is not what Ashley thought it was.

The narrator wants to leave, but stays.

Ashley and the narrator hold a funeral.

Narrator is kinder to Ashley and more appreciative of her life.

Point out that when the author began writing this story, she probably didn't know exactly which choices the character would make—only that there would be some trouble—so she tried out different scenarios. Liken this process to the plotting of the shared class story.

"When Rachel Vail wrote this story, she probably knew that it would be about two kids having a bad play date. But she probably didn't know, when she started to write the story, exactly what would happen on every page. I bet she imagined one way the story might go, and another, and another.

You may want to use "Thirteen and a Half" as your class mentor text for this unit, or you may wish to choose another text. In either case, it's important to choose a story that your students have read several times, analyzed, and know very well.

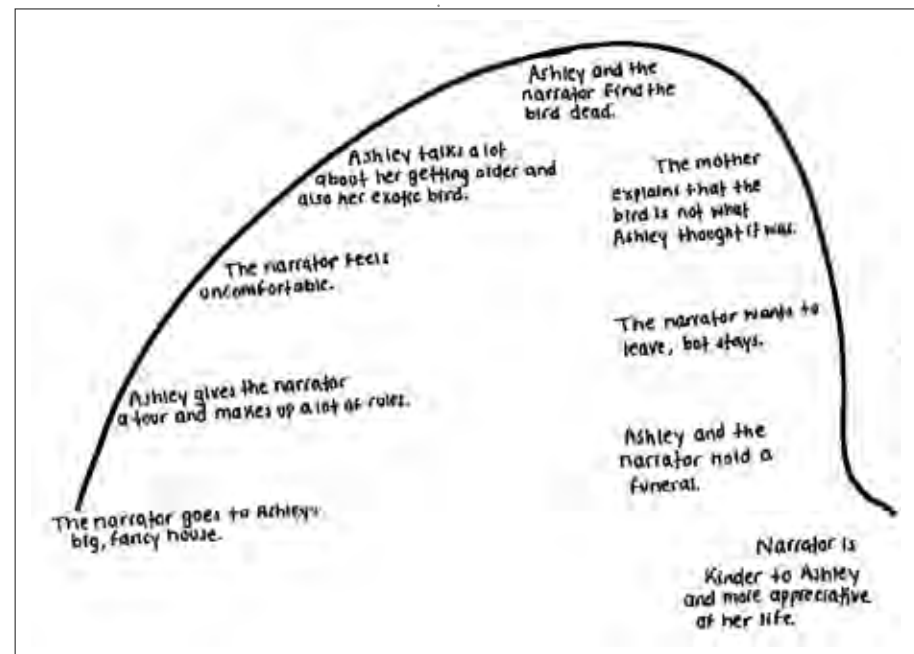


FIG 5-1 Story Arc of "Thirteen and a Half"

“Authors always know that the trouble will grow and that characters will make choices—some of which probably won’t work out. And authors also know that *somehow*, in the midst of all the trouble, *somehow* there will be *something* that makes a difference. I bet Rachel Vail didn’t start her book realizing all the little details—she probably didn’t know before she started writing that Ashley would be someone the narrator feels just a little bit sorry for, or that the narrator would turn out to be the stronger, more put together one.

“When we plot our Esmerelda story, I know that our character will struggle to achieve what she yearns for, that our character will make choices. Some of these choices may not work out. Right now, we don’t know which ones, exactly. But we *do* know that something will happen that makes a difference. Our character will find a way to resolve the struggle or she will change her sense of what she wants.

“And we know that just as a story arc climbs and then changes, Esmerelda will take actions, and things will happen that will result in a change.”

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Challenge students to work in partnerships to create a possible plotline for the first scene of the shared class story.

“Writers, let’s plan the Esmerelda story together, keeping the story arc in mind. In the draft we’ve already begun, we have Esmerelda sitting on the steps of the school waiting for her bus to come and hearing everyone talk about this big party. She’s wishing she could get invited, because everyone is going, but she also doesn’t know what to do about it. Do we still want to start the story that way? Make it all about her wanting to go to the party and trying to figure out a way to go without being someone she’s not?”

“Talk with your partner and think what the first scene in our arc should be. The starting scene must bring Esmerelda to life, show what she yearns for, and show the trouble (which we already know will be her conflicting feelings of wanting to be popular but not wanting to change who she is to become more well liked). And remember, things need to escalate and become more difficult before they change, so think about how we’ll make Esmerelda’s problem get worse. Turn and plan the start of our story arc.”

Everyone started to talk. I moved among the partners.

“I think we should start with Esmerelda getting dressed in the morning, having a tough time deciding what she could wear to look cool,” Jada said.

“Or,” Annabelle added, “we could have her in the lunchroom, waiting for her friends and listening to the popular kids talk about the party that was coming up.”

E. L. Doctorow once said, “Writing a novel is like driving a car at night. You can see only as far as your headlights, but you can make the whole trip that way. You don’t have to see where you’re going, you don’t have to see your destination or everything you will pass along the way. You just have to see two or three feet ahead of you.” Likewise, you’ll convey to students that they don’t need to have figured out the exact details of their characters’ pathways. Rather, knowing that a little bit of trouble or yearning is coming, and then writing that, and then perhaps imagining it another way, and then writing that, is part of the process of crafting a story. The arc is a tool that can help guide students through this exploratory stage of writing.

This, perhaps more than anything else you teach during this unit, will make the difference between flat stories and robust ones. By asking students, “What’s at stake for your character?” you remind them that in fiction, characters must struggle with something big, something deep, to change, to grow, to give the reader payoff. For Esmerelda, the protagonist of the shared class story, what’s at stake is her image, her closest friendship, perhaps her own sense of identity—all very important things.

Convene the class. Report on overheard ideas for how the story could begin.

"Writers, I heard some great ideas. Some of you suggested we alter the start so that Esmerelda's already been invited to the party, and instead of her pining to go, she knows she's going, but maybe we show her having a hard time deciding what to wear as a way to show how torn she is between wanting to be well liked and wanting to be true to herself."

Set students up to imagine what might come next. Then have them convene and add their ideas to the story arc.

"What do you think could come next? Keep in mind—you need to *show* (not summarize) her struggle, and the problems need to get worse. Turn to your partner and plan."

Again I listened in, and after a bit I again paraphrased what I'd heard a student suggest. Soon the story arc contained these scenes:

- ✓ *Esmerelda receives an invitation to a party.*
- ✓ *She struggles to choose what to wear—something she likes, or something that she thinks will make people like her.*
- ✓ *Esmerelda's mom buys her a new outfit for the party—one that is decidedly not cool.*
- ✓ *Esmerelda hears that there may be a fashion "show" at the party where everyone walks down the catwalk.*

Model for students that the story might also go another way.

"Great work! You now have one terrific story arc. But since you're familiar with the writing process, you know that, for sure, you'll need to give the story arc a few tries before deciding on the perfect arc. I heard a few other ways the story could go too. I heard Miriam and her partner saying that the story could start right at the party," I drew a line under our first story arc and created a new arc with these points:

- ✓ *Esmerelda sees some kids doing some dangerous stunts.*
- ✓ *She goes into another room only to hear a few people gossiping about one of her friends, Tilly.*
- ✓ *One of the kids tries to bring her into the gossip conversation.*
- ✓ *She has to decide whether to join in or stand up for Tilly and not be popular.*

"The first job of a story's beginning is to start at the right time. It should not start when things are quiet, when nothing's happening, when things are much the same as they always have been. After all, the whole reason we tell the story is because something about life is new and different, something's happening that stands out—and your responsibility, as the writer, is to begin the work at that point of change" (The Artist's Torah, Ebenbach, 60).

Philip Gerard, in his chapter "An Architecture of Light: Structuring the Novel and Story Collection," suggests that stories have a "signature that can be stated in a single sentence. The signature for Moby Dick is "Madman goes hunting for a white whale." This line defines what Gerard refers to as the "structural arc" of the story. He writes, "Think of the signature as the cable that hauls the rollercoaster cars up the long hill of suspense, round the hairpin turn of reversal, down the stomach-clenching fall" (Julie Checkoway, Creating Fiction, 152).

Most importantly, Gerard says that although writers begin with their structural arc and their characters clearly in mind, "almost everything will change" (153).

LINK

Remind writers that as fiction writers plot story arcs, they understand that problems need to get worse before they get better.

“So, writers, remember that fiction writers plot their stories. They may not be sure exactly what will happen next, but they plan the start of the story against the shape of an arc, remembering that they can’t just write anything that pops into their minds next. So in our Esmerelda story, after she finds out she’s going to the party, we can’t have her decide she doesn’t care about being popular anymore and then just go to the party and have a great time. Instead, we need to think, ‘Once she gets to the party, what will happen next?’ We already know that Esmerelda’s struggle to be both popular and true to herself will have to grow in intensity. Her struggle will have to get worse before it gets better.”

Encourage students to explore and build multiple story arcs, each one better than the one before.

“Writers, I know many of you are pretty sure that you know exactly how your story should go. Still, it’s important that you try a few different story arcs, just to make sure you have the best one possible—the one that you believe will make the most compelling story. Push yourself to come up with two or three different ones, each one an improvement over the one before it.”

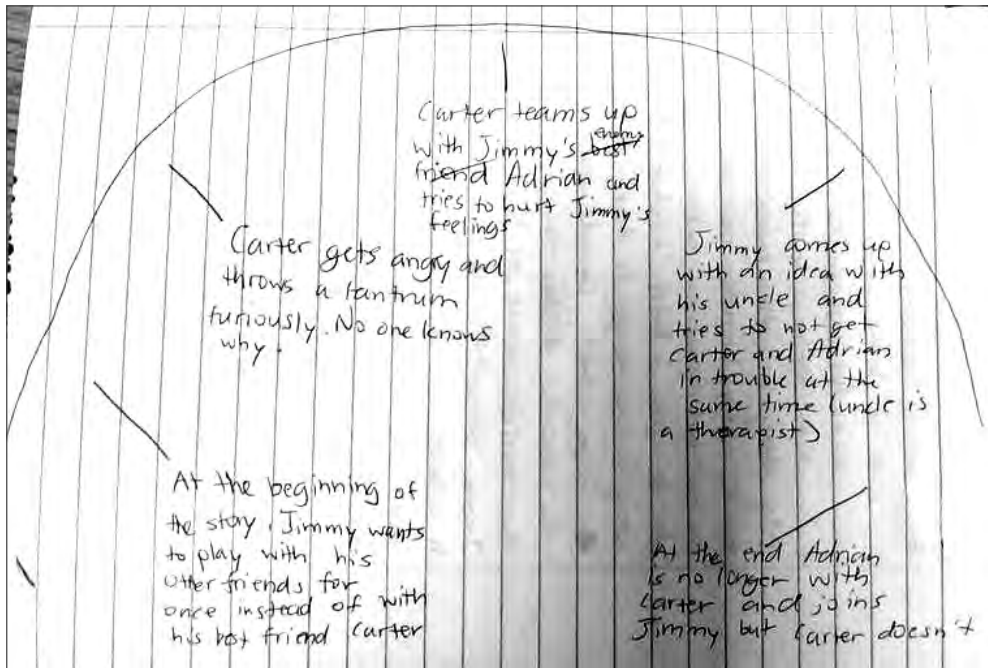


FIG. 5-2 Samee tries using a story arc to plan.

My story arc does many things for my story. It sets out my story for me and shows me what I can do to make it better. What my story arc portrays is that the issue that stands out the most in the story, is the social issue of bullying. Jimmy doesn't hang out with his best friend Carter for one day. Carter is no longer his best friend anymore and he joins Jimmy's "arch nemesis" and them to both start to pick on Jimmy instead of just Adrian ("arch nemesis"). What stands out about my story is that Jimmy doesn't just begin with a bully that has never liked him, but, he deals

with two bullies instead of one and one of them used to be his best friend which is what makes the story a little bit more interesting than it already is. However, no matter how good my story is there's always room for improvement. I think I can improve upon more tension in the story. Tension is a strategy that I don't ~~want~~ ^{want} to walk away from. I can create tension while building up to the climax not knowing why Carter is made and find out at the climax. On the way down I can build tension on the resolution. This is what I think about my story.

FIG. 5-3 As he reflects on his story arc, Samee decides to revise his original plan.

Invite students to try other story-planning tools, in addition to an arc, and to draw on other resources to plan, too.

"It's also important to point out that you don't have to draw an actual arc to plan if you don't want to. The arc helps us to remember that the story needs to change and develop, but it's not the only way to do this kind of planning. Some writers prefer to use timelines. Others like to storyboard. Still others use different planning methods. What is important is that you choose a planning method that works for you.

"I've added today's teaching along with these planning options to our chart," I said, gesturing to our anchor chart. "You may notice a couple of points on the chart that look a bit shorter now, like 'Make your characters come alive.' I've summarized these points so our anchor chart won't grow too long to manage, but you still have 'clues' in the parentheses, and I think you'll remember what to do from earlier sessions."

SESSION 5: PLOTTING WITH TOOLS

43

How to Write Compelling Fiction

- Brainstorm a great story idea (think of small moments, places, events, issues, struggles, stories you wish existed in the world).
- Make your characters come alive (with traits, wants, and challenges, self-attitude, relationships).
- Test-drive your character in scenes (envision and write actions, feelings, dialogue, setting, point of view).
- Plot several versions of your story, aiming to intensify the problem (use arcs, timelines, storyboards).

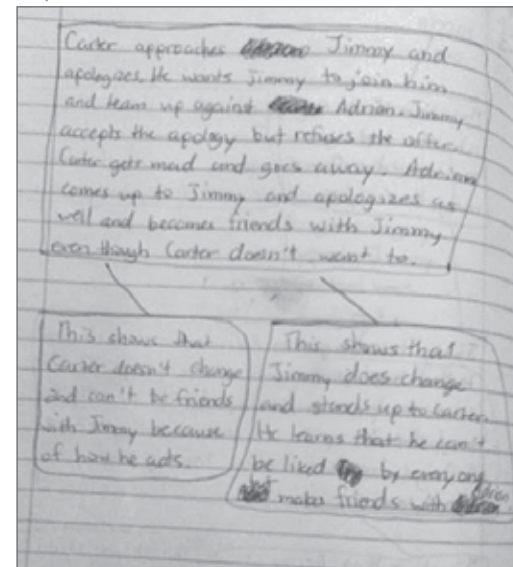
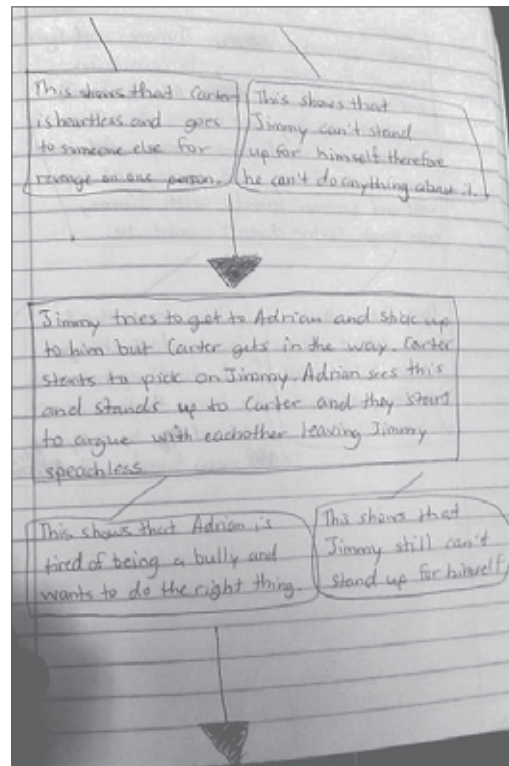
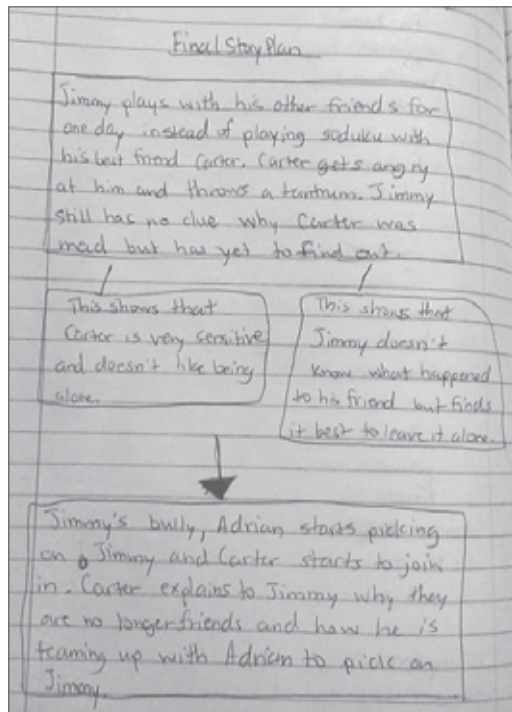


FIG. 5-4 After reflecting and a few more tries, Samee decides on a final story plan, this time using a flowchart style graphic organizer.

"I also want to remind you that you have other tools at your disposal for planning your plot. You can refer to our class mentor text, 'Thirteen and a Half,' for ideas. You can also think, as I asked you to do last night for homework, about the plots in your independent reading books or perhaps some short stories you've read in the past. And of course, touching base with your partner is always a good strategy to ensure that you're on the right track and that you are writing at your highest levels.

"You have lots of choices, strategies, and tools to help you create the best possible plot for your stories. Off you go!"



I cannot stress enough just how important it is to remind your students of the various tools and resources they have at their disposal—not only the ones in your classroom, but ones they've used in past years. By now, seventh-graders should understand that learning is cumulative, and they should be able to draw on all the skills and tools they have acquired across their lives. Remind them of this again and again. And try checking in with students occasionally, to ask them which tools they are using specifically and how they are using these tools to develop and refine their writing.



CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

Predictable Problems with Story Arcs

WHEN STUDENTS ARE WORKING ON THEIR STORY ARCS, I have discovered over the years that there are some very predictable problems that come up, each and every time students reach this part of the process. I find that in my teaching I have a much lighter touch and am much less likely to get frustrated when I am expecting and prepared for those predictable problems. Depending on your students, you might find today's work session made up of mostly small-group work as you move about groups of students with similar issues. It is also possible that you will find yourself spending the first half of workshop time conferring almost exclusively with the squeaky wheels, while the rest of the students are working and giving you a sense of what they are doing. If your time with your students each day for writing is particularly short, you might find it better still to collect their work, make groups based on patterns you are seeing, and then teach into those groups the next day.

No matter which way you go, one predictable thing you will likely see is that many students will create story arcs that could very well be the plotting of a novel. Whether the length of time is a week or a year, there are so many characters and major events

that it would not be possible for the students to complete these stories with anything less than hundreds of pages—or all summary! Depending on your students, you might approach this problem as one of time. Let them know they have ambitious plans, and perhaps these will work out into a novel. But for right now, perhaps they can choose one event on their arc that they can build into its own stand-alone story—perhaps one that could morph into a chapter in their novel, if that should come to pass.

Another predictable problem is common not just for seventh-graders, but for many amateur adult fiction writers: the plot hangs on a character who is passive; everything just happens to the character. The character plays no role in motoring his story along. These story arcs are rife with accidents and events befalling the characters. For this group, you might want to show them how a tweak here and there, making the character somewhat responsible for his fate, makes the story more interesting. For example, perhaps the marathon runner does hurt his ankle. But instead of it just happening, it happens because in his excitement to get started on the race, he went against his coach's advice and began running without a warm-up.

(continues)

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **The Shape of the Story Can Be Part of Its Truth**

I drew an arc on the board. As I did so, most of the students looked up to watch me. When I had most of their eyes, I started speaking. "While I know many of you have already moved past planning your stories and onto drafting, I know some of you are still working on your plans. No matter where you're at though, I think it's worth me sharing this one little tip I got from a writing teacher many years ago.

"That is, the shape of a story, where it starts and where it ends, says a lot about what matters to the author. If the story is about the importance of fitting in—or how much it really doesn't matter as long as you're true to yourself—then it makes sense

to have the beginning of the story with the character grappling with fitting in, and the last scene showing some sort of nod, maybe even a scene that explicitly shows how the character feels *now* about fitting in. If the story is in part about growing up, learning to fly, it might begin and end with scenes that include that.

"While you're plotting your stories or revising your plots, you might want to stop and ask yourself, what is my story *really* about? What is the truth in what I am trying to say in this fictional story? How can the shape of my story—where it stops, where it ends, maybe even the peak of the arc—showcase the truth of what I am saying?"

Another common, predictable problem is when the story arc itself doesn't seem to hold up. The events don't seem to build, or the main conflict or crisis is just not in the right place in the story. In these instances, it is tempting to want to give students a formula. "A setup, a mix-up, and then a fix-up," I've heard well-meaning teachers instruct. However, while this might be helpful for some students if their story idea fits into the formula, it won't fit all story ideas. Moreover, it will also only fix today's problem and won't teach a student how to plot narratives for the rest of his life. So instead, I might opt for returning to a mentor text or two to study options for plotting. Have students plot alongside a published story, see how that author organized her story, then try similar plotting moves on their own.

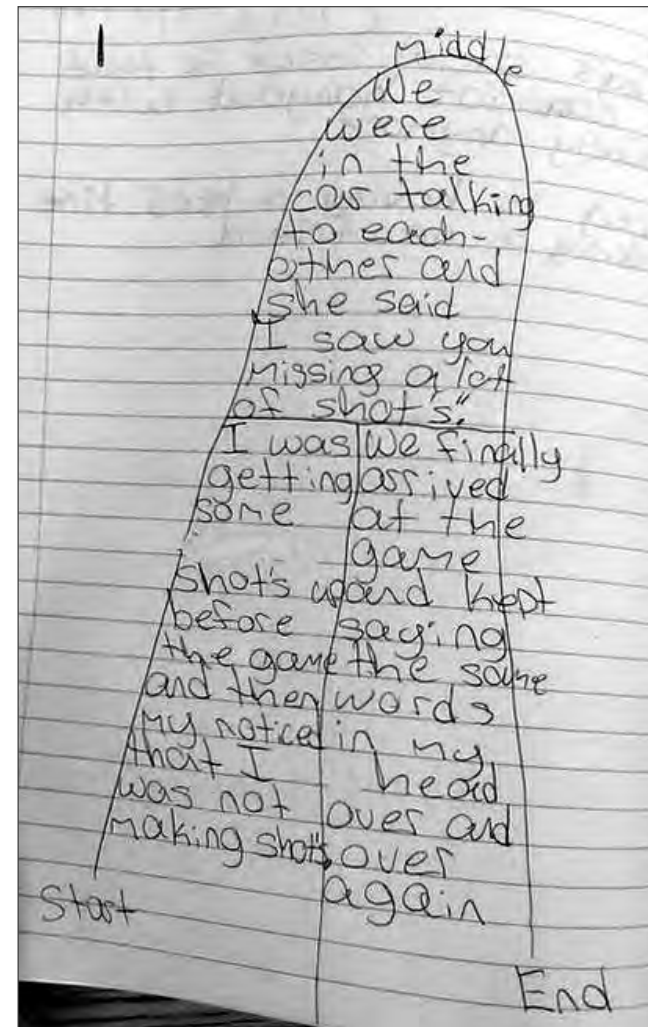


FIG. 5-5 A student tries a simplified story arc.



SHARE

Taking Stock of What Students Are Doing Well—and Can Do Better

Celebrate the work students have been doing and tell them they are ready for the Grade 7 Narrative Writing Checklist.

“Writers, it’s only been a handful of days since we started on this journey together of writing fiction, and already, you have grown leaps and bounds as writers! On the first day of this unit, I gave each of you a copy of the Grade 6 Narrative Writing Checklist, to remind you of all you learned in sixth grade and to remind you to use that knowledge. Since then, you have churned out pages and pages of fictional scenes, and I know from reading many of those pages that you are ready to use the Grade 7 Narrative Writing Checklist.”

I projected a copy of the grade 7 checklist alongside the grade 6 checklist and continued, “You will see right away that these checklists look very similar, in that they have the same categories. Of course what the grade 7 checklist asks you to do within each of those categories will be a little different—a little more sophisticated.”

Narrative Writing Checklist

	Grade 6	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
	Structure				Structure			
Overall	I wrote a story that has tension, resolution, realistic characters, and also conveys an idea, lesson, or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I created a narrative that has realistic characters, tension, and change; and that not only conveys, but also develops an idea, lesson, or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead	I wrote a beginning that not only set the plot/story in motion, but also hinted at the larger meaning the story would convey. It introduced the problem, set the stage for the lesson that would be learned, or showed how the character relates to the setting in a way that matters in the story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I wrote a beginning that not only sets the story in motion, it also grounds it in a place or situation. It included details that will later be important to the story. These details might point to the central issue or conflict, show how story elements connect, or hint at key character traits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitions	I not only used transitional phrases and clauses to signal complicated changes in time, I also used them to alert my reader to changes in the setting, tone, mood, point of view, or the time in the story (such as <i>suddenly, unlike before, if only she had known</i>).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitional phrases and clauses to connect what happened to why it happened (<i>If he hadn't... he might not have, because of, although, little did she know that</i>).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ending	I wrote an ending that connected to what the story is really about. I gave the reader a sense of closure by showing a new realization or insight, or a change in the character/narrator. I might have showed this through dialogue, action, inner thinking, or small actions the character takes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I gave the reader a sense of closure by showing clearly how the character or place has changed or the problem has been resolved. If there wasn't resolution, I gave details to leave the reader thinking about a central idea or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organization	I used paragraphs purposefully, perhaps to show time and setting changes, new parts of the story, or to create suspense for readers. I created a logical, clear sequence of events.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used a traditional—or slightly modified—story structure (rising action, conflict, falling action) to best bring out the meaning of my story and reach my audience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

As students assess their writing, scaffold their work with the checklist and encourage them to set goals for themselves.

"As I pass out copies of these side-by-side checklists, look through your notebooks and find a couple of scenes you want to assess. Since you already know how to use these checklists from the work we did several days ago, you can get started right away. Remember to look back and forth between your writing and the items on the checklist, being honest with yourself about what you already do well, what you could better, and what you don't yet do at all." I circulated while students worked, prompting them.

"Move back and forth between your writing and the checklist."

"If you do something only once, consider whether you might work on it more."

"Remember to look for patterns. Think about what you do and don't know how to do as a writer, not what you do or don't do in just one place."

After a few minutes, I reconvened the class and said, "Tomorrow, most of you will start drafting your stories, and you'll want to be sure to use some techniques that you are not yet using or are just starting to use. Take a moment to star two or three goals for yourself."

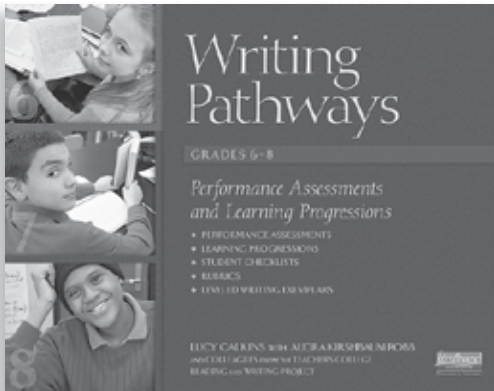
Explain to students how to describe a story in one sentence.

"My writing teacher once said that one of the ways a writer know he's on the right track is if he can say what his story is in one sentence. Sort of like a one-sentence summary. It sounds easy at first, until you try it. If I were to try it with the Esmerelda story, I might say something like, 'Esmerelda is a girl who likes being different, but part of her wants to be popular, so one day she goes to a party and finds herself having to decide whether it is more important to be popular or to be true to herself.'"

SESSION 5 HOMEWORK

WRITING A ONE-SENTENCE SUMMARY

"Tonight for homework, I want you to finish up your story arcs. When you've landed on the one you think describes how your story goes, I want you to try your hand at writing a one-sentence summary of your story. It will likely be a bit challenging, and you might have to have a few tries. But in the end, I think you'll find that it will help you hone in on what your story is *really* about. When you think you've got it, write it on an index card and then bring that index card with you tomorrow. With your story arc, your single sentence, and your goals in hand, you'll be all set to draft away tomorrow!"



Writing Pathways is designed to help you provide your students with continuous assessment, feedback, and goal setting. Organized around a 6–8 continuum of learning progressions for argument, information, and narrative writing, this practical guide includes **benchmark student texts, writing checklists, learning progressions, and rubrics** that will help you evaluate your students’ work and establish where students are in their writing development.

“ The assessment system that undergirds this curriculum is meant as an instructional tool. It makes progress in writing as transparent, concrete, and obtainable as possible and puts ownership for this progress into the hands of learners. This system of assessment demystifies the Common Core State Standards, allowing students and teachers to work toward a very clear image of what good work entails.”

A benchmark piece of writing for each writing genre shows how one piece of writing could develop according to the learning progressions established by the Common Core State Standards.

Grade 7

Specific details not only set the story in motion but grounded it in a particular place and time.

The writer made some attempt to control time and pacing, by stepping outside of the central moment to give glimpses of the character’s past, or other important moments.

The writer made comparisons effectively.

When comparisons were made, the writer repeated them to increase their significance and related them to the meaning of the story.

The central scene, where the problem and action were strongest, were slowed down and elaborated—the action wasn’t over in two sentences, but was slowed down and released in parts. The writer attempted to bring out what was important in the story and reach the audience.

Sara woke up to the sound of her sister’s voice. Sunlight streamed in, lighting up her posters of Taylor Swift performing at Madison Garden and Shaun White flying upside down on his snowboard at the X-Games. Someday Sara wanted to be just like them. She loved the way they were so strong, so fierce, and proud. Her life seemed so ordinary though—living on a quiet street in a quiet town. Would things ever change?

Julie was shaking her. “Wake up, Sara!!” Suddenly Sara remembered. It was her little sister Julie’s first day of kindergarten, and Sara was going to walk her to school. This was Sara’s small chance to prove herself. Her parents just didn’t seem to realize she was grown up.

Sara lay in bed for a moment, dreaming of how dinner might go that night. Mom would lean in and ruffle her hair, saying, “I’m proud of you, Sara.” With work, Mom didn’t always seem to have a lot of time for Sara anymore.

When they got to the kitchen, Mom was pouring Cheerios in their bowls. “Eat up, kittens,” she said. “And I’ll drive you to school. We don’t want anything to happen on Julie’s first day of kindergarten.”

Sara’s jaw clenched. First, she was not a kitten. Maybe Julie was a kitten, but she was a lioness. Why wouldn’t her mother notice that she was grown up? Second, they had already decided—she was taking Julie to school. It was her job to get her there safely.

“Mom, you said Julie could walk with me. I’ll keep her safe.” Sara tried to keep her voice calm. If she cried, her mom would think she was a baby, a kitten. She stood tall, trying to look as strong as confident as Taylor Swift was when she first performed onstage at twelve.

“I want to walk with Sara, Mommy.” Julie said. “She’ll keep me safe. She’s brave like a lion.” Julie put her hand in Sara’s, and Sara felt bigger instantly. Sara glowed with pride. In her mind, she thought of how her mom would praise her that night.

Mom looked at the girls. Then she shrugged her shoulders. “Ok,” she said. “But if anything happens, you’re in big trouble, kittens.”

As the girls left the house, the sun lit up the flowers in the yard. It was a quick walk to school—but there was one dangerous block. Sara’s mind was filled with thoughts of how proud her mom would be, and she forgot to circle around the block where the big dog lived. Fang. You didn’t want to go anywhere near Fang.

“GRRRR!” First, they heard it. “GROWLLL!” Then they felt its breath. Then they saw its red eyes. Fang was huge. Fang was fierce. Fang was ferocious. That’s why Sara always skipped this block. Now here she was, alone with Fang and her five-year-old sister.

Sara didn’t feel like a lioness anymore. She felt like a kitten. Fang crept closer. Inside, Sara thought about running. She was a much faster runner than Julie. She could get away.

Then Sara felt Julie’s hand in hers. “Don’t leave me,” Julie whispered. She began to cry.

The writer used compound sentences, and punctuated them accurately.

The specific language that characters use in dialogue revealed their character traits and/or emotions.

The writer included details that pointed to the central issue or conflict that would be developed later. Additionally, the writer set up complex relationships between characters.

Again, the writer stepped outside the central moment, controlling the story by introducing small scenes that linked the bigger scenes.

Crystal-clear checklists that spell out the genre-specific benchmarks students should be working toward help students set goals and self-assess their work.

Narrative Writing Checklist (continued)

	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 8	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
Punctuation and Sentence Structure	I varied my sentence structure, sometimes using simple and sometimes using complex sentence structure.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used different sentence structures to achieve different purposes throughout my piece.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I punctuated dialogue sections accurately.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used verb tenses that shift when needed (such	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Narrative Writing Checklist (continued)

	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 8	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
Development					Development			
Elaboration	I developed the action, dialogue, details, and	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I developed complicated story elements; I may have	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name: _____ Date: _____

Narrative Writing Checklist

	Grade 7	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!	Grade 8	NOT YET	STARTING TO	YES!
Structure					Structure			
Overall	I created a narrative that has realistic characters, tension, and change; and that not only conveys, but also develops an idea, lesson, or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I not only created a narrative with well-developed characters who change, I used the story to comment on a social issue, teach a lesson, and/or develop a point of view.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lead	I wrote a beginning that not only sets the story in motion, it also grounds it in a place or situation. It included details that will later be important to the story. These details might point to the central issue or conflict, show how story elements connect, or hint at key character traits.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	In establishing the situation and place, I hinted at a bigger context for the story (revealing issues that have been brewing, showing how the setting affects the character, contextualizing a time in history, and/or developing one out of many points of view).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Transitions	I used transitional phrases and clauses to connect what happened to why it happened (<i>If he hadn't ... he might not have, because of, although, little did she know that</i>).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I used transitional phrases and clauses, grammatical structures (for example, paragraphing, descriptive phrases, and clauses) and text structures (such as chapter divisions and extended italics) to alert my reader to changes in the setting, the mood, the point of view, or the time in the story.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ending	I gave the reader a sense of closure by showing clearly how the character or place has changed or the problem has been resolved. If there wasn't resolution, I gave details to leave the reader thinking about a central idea or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I gave the reader a sense of closure by revealing character change(s) that follow(s) from events in the story, or perhaps a resolution. If there wasn't resolution, I wrote to convey how the events of the story affected the characters, and to circle back to a central idea, issue, or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Organization	I used a traditional—or slightly modified—story structure (rising action, conflict, falling action) to best bring out the meaning of my story and reach my audience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	I modified a traditional story structure, dealing with time in purposeful ways, to best suit my genre, bring out the meaning of my story, and reach my audience.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

character's thinking with his or her ogue.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
the central character's relationship to rs. I showed character flaws as well to add complexity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
veyed meaning and related to or sson or theme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
pressures characters feel and the old. I related those to their actions. I npllicated characters who change and/ e others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
od as well as a physical setting, and he place changed, or its relationships ers changed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ve to bring out different perspectives y, or to show a gap between the t of view and that of other characters.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
S			
met and other sources to check the ary, historical, and geographical	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Narrative Writing, Grade 7 (firsthand, Portsmouth, NH).

May be photocopied for classroom use. © 2014 by Lucy Calkins and Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project from Units of Study in Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grade 7 (firsthand, Portsmouth, NH).

Assessment checklists for each kind of writing establish clear learning benchmarks and help teachers monitor student progress throughout the stages of development.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Rubric for Narrative Writing—Seventh Grade						
	Grade 6 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 7 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 8	SCORE
STRUCTURE						
Overall	The writer wrote a story that has tension, resolution, and realistic characters, and also conveys an idea, lesson, or theme.	Mid-Level	The writer created a narrative that has realistic characters, tension, and change, and that not only conveys, but also develops an idea, lesson, or theme.	Mid-Level	The writer not only created a narrative with well-developed characters who change, he used the story to comment on a social issue, teach a lesson, and/or develop a point of view.	
Lead	The writer wrote a beginning that not only sets the plot/story in motion, but also hints at the larger meaning the story will convey. It introduces the problem, sets the stage for the lesson that will be learned, or shows how the character relates to the setting in a way that will matter in the story.	Mid-Level	The writer wrote a beginning that not only sets the story in motion, it also grounds it in a place or situation. It includes details that will later be important to the story. These details might point to the central issue or conflict, show how story elements connect, or hint at key character traits.	Mid-Level	The writer wrote a beginning that establishes the situation and place, hinting at a bigger context for the story (revealing issues that have been brewing, showing how the setting affects the character, contextualizing a time in history, developing one out of many points of view).	
Transitions	The writer not only used transitional phrases and clauses to signal complicated changes in time, she also used them to alert her readers to changes in the setting, tone, mood, point of view, or time in the story. (<i>Suddenly, unlike before, if only she had known</i>)	Mid-Level	The writer used transitional phrases and clauses to connect what happened to why it happened (<i>If he hadn't . . . he might not have, because of, although, little did she know that</i>).	Mid-Level	The writer used transitional phrases and clauses, grammatical structures (paragraphing, descriptive phrases, and clauses) and text structures (chapter divisions, extended italics) to alert his reader to changes in the setting, the mood, the point of view, or the time in the story.	
Ending	The writer wrote an ending that connects to what the story is really about. She gave the reader a sense of closure by showing a new realization or insight or a change in the character/narrator. The writer showed this through dialogue, action, inner thinking, or small actions the character takes.	Mid-Level	The writer gave the reader a sense of closure by showing clearly how the character or place changed or the problem was resolved. If there was no resolution, he gave details to leave the reader thinking about a central idea or theme.	Mid-Level	The writer gave the reader a sense of closure by revealing character change(s) that followed from events in the story, or a resolution. If there was no resolution, she wrote to convey how the events of the story affected the characters, and to circle back to a central idea, issue, or theme.	
Organization	The writer used paragraphs purposefully, perhaps to show time and setting changes, new parts of the story, or to create suspense for readers. She created a logical, clear sequence of events.	Mid-Level	The writer used a traditional—or slightly modified—story structure (<i>rising action, conflict, falling action</i>) to best bring out the meaning of his story and reach his audience.	Mid-Level	The writer modified a traditional story structure, dealing with time in purposeful ways, to best suit her genre, bring out the meaning of her story, and reach her audience.	
						TOTAL:

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	Grade 6 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 7 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 8	SCORE
DEVELOPMENT						
Elaboration*	The writer developed realistic characters, and developed the details, action, dialogue and internal thinking that contribute to the deeper meaning of the story.	Mid-Level	The writer developed the action, dialogue, details, and inner thinking to convey an issue, idea, or lesson. He showed what is specific about the central character. The writer developed the setting and the characters' relationship to the setting.	Mid-Level	The writer developed complicated story elements: she may have contrasted the character's thinking with his or her actions or dialogue. The writer developed the central character's relationship to other characters. She showed character flaws as well as strengths to add complexity. The writer used details that relate to and convey meaning or develop a lesson or theme.	(x2)
Craft*	The writer developed some relationship between characters to show <i>why</i> they act and speak as they do. He told the internal, as well as the external story. The writer wove together precise descriptions and figurative language not only so that	Mid-Level	The writer developed contradictions and change in characters and situations. The writer used specific details and figurative language to help the reader understand the place and the mood (making an object symbolic, using the weather, using	Mid-Level	The writer conveyed the pressures characters feel and the dreams they hold. He related those to their actions. The writer developed complicated characters who change and/or who change others. The writer created a mood as well as a	(x2)

	Grade 6 (2 POINTS)	2.5 PTS	Grade 7 (3 POINTS)	3.5 PTS	Grade 8	SCORE
LANGUAGE CONVENTIONS						
Spelling	The writer used resources to be sure the words in her writing are spelled correctly.	Mid-Level	The writer used the Internet and other sources at hand to check spelling of literary and high-frequency words.	Mid-Level	The writer used the Internet and other sources to check the spelling of literary, historical, and geographical words.	
Punctuation and Sentence Structure	The writer used punctuation such as dashes, parentheses, colons, and semicolons to help him include extra detail and explanation in some of his sentences. The writer used commas and quotation marks or italics or some other way to make clear when characters are speaking.	Mid-Level	The writer varied her sentence structure, sometimes using simple and sometimes using complex sentence structure. The writer punctuated dialogue sections accurately.	Mid-Level	The writer used different sentence structures to achieve different purposes throughout his piece. The writer used verb tenses that shift when needed, (as in when moving from a flashback back into the present tense of the story), deciding between active and passive voice where appropriate.	
						TOTAL:

Teachers, we created these rubrics so you will have your own place to pull together scores of student work. You can use these assessments immediately after giving the on-demands and also for self-assessment and setting goals.

Scoring Guide

In each row, circle the descriptor in the column that matches the student work. Scores in the categories of Elaboration and Craft are worth double the point value (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, or 8 instead of 1, 1.5, 2, 2.5, 3, 3.5, or 4).

Total the number of points and then track students' progress by seeing when the total points increase.

Total score: _____

If you want to translate this score into a grade, you can use the provided table to score each student on a scale of 0–4.

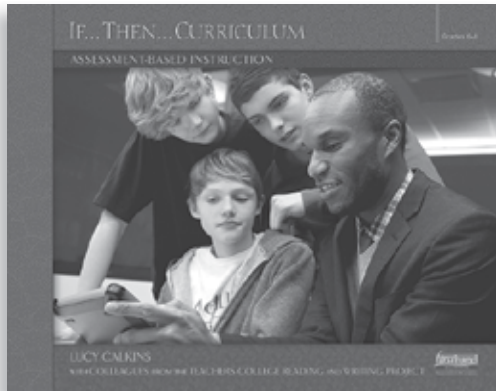
Number of Points	Scaled Score
1–11	1
11.5–16.5	1.5
17–22	2
22.5–27.5	2.5
28–33	3
33.5–38.5	3.5
39–44	4

how the
hips to the

ring out
the story, or to
stor's point of
ers.

points instead of 4 points. If a student

portsmouth, NH).



“The quality of writing instruction will rise dramatically not only when teachers study the teaching of writing but also when teachers study their own children’s intentions and progress as writers. Strong writing is always tailored for and responsive to the writer.”

ALTERNATE UNIT

Historical Fiction: Weaving Together Fact and Fiction

IF your students have already experienced a realistic fiction writing unit and display a solid understanding of personal narrative writing, THEN this unit will especially appeal to your budding historians as it calls on them to weave historically accurate details through well-crafted, fictional narratives.

In addition to the three units of study, the Grade 7 series provides a book of if... then... curricular plans. *If... Then... Curriculum: Assessment-Based Instruction, Grades 6–8* supports targeted instruction and differentiation with nine alternative units of study for you to strategically teach before, after, or in between the core curriculum based on your students’ needs. This resource also includes If... Then... Conferring Scenarios that help you customize your curriculum through individual and small-group instruction.

Historical Fiction

Weaving Together Fact and Fiction



RATIONALE/INTRODUCTION

This unit of study is not a beginner unit. It’s highly engaging and challenging. If your students have experience with narrative writing, this unit will certainly help them hone and extend those skills. There are three possible ways to approach this unit. First, you might choose to teach this unit in collaboration with students’ instruction in social studies or history. Students would first spend several weeks researching a time period in social studies, and then would bring their knowledge to their work in this unit. Another option would be to teach this unit alongside a reading unit on historical fiction and informational reading about history. A third option is to teach this as an isolated writing unit, in which case you could either allow students to choose time periods about which they have some prior knowledge, or you could support their work by engaging them in a class study of a time period of your choosing.

This unit particularly addresses Common Core Writing Standard 3, the narrative writing standard, including its sub-standards. The standards for narrative writing are particularly high, and your students will need to draw upon and extend their prior narrative skills to engage the reader, provide an organizational structure that sequences events, develop characters, and provide closure. In this unit, we ask students to do even more: we ask them to focus on pivotal moments in the characters’ lives, and to apply the same close reading strategies to their own narratives that they do to reading literature (Reading Standard 2 in particular; discerning central ideas, lessons, and themes). In some sessions, students are channeled to compose snippets of informational writing, so this unit also supports work toward Writing Standard 2.

If possible, we encourage you to teach historical fiction as a collaborative social studies unit, one in which students are immersed in research about a time period for at least a week before they begin to develop their own stories. Doing so will further strengthen students’ reading and writing skills, plus add an air of authenticity to their stories. In this scenario, students would ideally have access to a variety of research materials. In social

HISTORICAL FICTION

3

Argument Writing



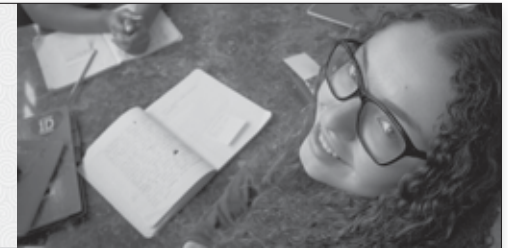
These charts will help you to anticipate, spot, and teach into the challenges your writers face during the independent work portion of your writing workshop. They lay out the specific strategy you might teach and the way you might contextualize the work for your writers.

If . . .	After acknowledging what the student is doing well, you might say . . .	Leave the writer with . . .
Structure and Cohesion		
<p>The introduction does not forecast the structure of the essay.</p> <p>The writer has made a claim and supported it with reasons, but there is no forecasting statement early on in the essay that foreshadows the reasons to come. Instead, it seems as if the writer thought of and wrote about one reason, then, when reaching the end of the first body paragraph, thought, "What's another reason?" and then raised and elaborated upon that reason. He would benefit from learning to plan for the overarching structure of his argument and forecast that structure in the introduction.</p>	<p>You have learned to make a claim in your essay and to support that claim with reasons. As essayists, though, it's important to pre-plan how our essay will go, and to let the reader know how our writing will be organized from the very beginning. This is called forecasting. Today, I want to teach you that opinion writers forecast how their writing will go. They do this by stating their claim in the introduction and then adding on, "I think this because . . ." Then they list the reasons that they will write about in the body of their piece.</p>	<p>Writers use the introduction to forecast how their opinion pieces will go.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. State your claim. 2. Tell your reader why your claim is true. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "One reason this is true is because . . ." • "Another reason this is true is because . . ." • "A third reason this is true is because . . ."
<p>The writer's introduction and/or conclusion feel formulaic.</p> <p>The writer has stated her thesis upfront and forecasted the reasons to come in the essay. She has probably done something similar in her conclusion—wrapping up the essay by recapping her opinion and reasons. Though there is nothing wrong with this, the essay feels formulaic and dull. This writer would benefit from learning a few techniques to make her introduction and conclusion a place where she can grab a reader's attention, shed light on important issues, and appeal to her audience.</p>	<p>You have done everything that a teacher when writing an introduction and conclusion and told the reasons you have for it. Essay writers have mastered the basics, the step. That next step often means asking the readers take away from this essay? What do I want to leave them with?" Then, or questions, they know there are a few specific to get their message across.</p>	

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: IF . . . THEN . . . CONFERRING

“Despite the uniqueness of each child, there are particular ways they struggle, and predictable ways you can help. We can use all we know about child development, learning progressions, writing craft, and grade-specific standards to anticipate and plan for the individualized instruction our students are apt to need.”

Narrative Writing

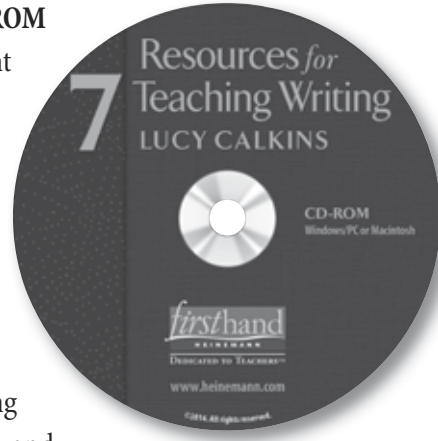


If . . .	After acknowledging what the student is doing well, you might say . . .	Leave the writer with . . .
Structure and Cohesion		
<p>The writer is new to the writing workshop or this particular genre of writing.</p> <p>This writer struggles because narrative is a new genre for her—or she has been taught to write in ways that are different than those you are teaching. She may display certain skill sets (i.e., the ability to craft a strong plot line or to write with elaborate descriptive details) but lacks the vision of what she is being asked to produce. Most often, this means that she has not yet come to understanding the concept of a small, focused moment that is then elaborated upon. Her story is probably long and unfocused and is usually dominated by summary, not storytelling.</p>	<p>Someone famously once said, "You can't hit a target if you don't know what that target is." This is especially true for writers. They can't write well if they don't have a vision, a mental picture, of what they hope to produce. Today I want to teach you that one way writers learn about the kinds of writing they hope to produce is by studying mentor texts. They read a mentor text once, enjoying it as a story. Then, they read it again, this time asking, "How does this kind of story seem to go?" They label what they notice and then try it in their own writing.</p>	<p>Writers use mentor texts to help them imagine what they hope to write. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Read the text and enjoy it as a good story. • Reread the text and ask, "How does this kind of story seem to go?" • Annotate what they notice. (It can be helpful to do this right on the text with arrows pointing to the various things you see!) • Try to do some of what they noticed in their own writing.
<p>The student seems to paragraph randomly or not much at all.</p> <p>When you read this writer's piece, you are struck by the paragraphing. It may be that he seems to be paragraphing in haphazard ways, as if he knows he should be creating paragraphs but does not know why or when. Alternatively, this writer may not paragraph often enough, making the piece of writing difficult to follow. Regardless of the issue, it is likely that this student would benefit from learning about some of the reasons narrative writers paragraph and then trying out a few different alternatives in his own writing.</p>	<p>When I first read your piece, I was struck by all the beautiful writing you have. Once in a while, though, I felt like I couldn't enjoy what you were attempting to do as a writer (perhaps point to a particular place where the writer tried to create tension or show a time change), because you didn't use paragraphs. It can be hard for a reader to take in all that we do as writers, and paragraphs act like signals that say, "Pause. Take this in. Something just happened or is about to happen."</p> <p>Today I want to teach you a few of the main reasons story writers use paragraphs. Specifically, writers often start new paragraphs when a new event is starting, when their story is switching to a new time or place, when a new character speaks, or when a very important part needs to be emphasized.</p>	<p>Make a new paragraph here:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very important part needs emphasis • New event • New time • New place • New character speaks

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: IF . . . THEN . . . CONFERRING SCENARIOS

Resources for Teaching Writing CD-ROM

The *Resources for Teaching Writing* CD-ROM for Grade 7 provides unit-specific print resources to support your teaching throughout the year. You'll find a rich assortment of instructional tools including **learning progressions, checklists and rubrics, correlations to the CCSS, and teaching charts.** Offering daily support, these resources will help you establish a structured learning environment that fosters independence and self-direction.



Student writing samples illustrate different ways different students have exemplified the standard and highlight essential features of each writing genre.

cried and we all had a cheesy group hug.

We has already told Rose (Ruby's mom) of our plan so we tiptoed up to Ruby's

of the hallway for Ruby.

Helping Ruby
By Miriam

Ruby has been my best friend since were in diapers, as my mom would say. She is the most tenderhearted person you could ever know, and is scared of many things: spiders, disappointing anyone in any way shape or form, and Ms. Gulch.

Ms. Gulch was our science teacher. Even her name was terrible. Ms. Gulch has eyes like a vulture waiting for someone to give the wrong answer, fingers like a eagle, waiting to give out detention slips, and feet the size of snowshoes, ready to crush anyone who does or even implies they did something wrong.

"Come on. Get in. I don't have all day!" she snapped at me.

"Could you get any slower?" she yelled at Ruby.

"Why are you starting at my forehead?!" she bellowed at our two closest, but not best, friends.

What a kind person.

She yelled at the whole class for dropping stuff, going slowly and even looking in the wrong direction. She even scares out principal. She's taller than him too!

Once we had checked the agenda board, we knew we were done for; we had a test the next day! I think the clock broke during that period, seconds turned into days, minutes turned into centuries, and 45 minutes turned into a millennium.

But right before the bell rang Ms. Gulch called out "Ruby, after class, five minutes!" We all exchanged nervous glances, when Ms. Gulch called you after school

"The writing workshop needs to be simple and predictable enough that your youngsters can learn to carry on within it independently. The materials and teaching tools you provide students will help you establish such a predictable, structured learning environment."

Common Core Standards Aligning with Grade 7 Unit 1: Writing Realistic Fiction

Session	Writing Standards	Reading Standards	Speaking & Listening Standards	Language Standards
1	W.7.3.a,b ; W.7.5, W.7.10	RL.7.3	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
2	W.7.3, W.7.4, W.7.10	RL.7.3	SL.7.1, SL.7.6	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
3	W.7.3.b,d ; W.7.4, W.7.9.a, W.7.10	RL.7.3	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.6
4	W.7.3, W.7.5	RL.7.3	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
5	W.7.3, W.7.5	RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.10	SL.7.1, SL.7.2	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
6	W.7.3.b,c,d ; W.7.5	RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3	SL.7.1, SL.7.2, SL.7.3	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
7	W.7.3.a, W.7.5, W.7.10	RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.10	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.6
8	W.7.3.a,d; W.7.4, W.7.7	RL.7.3, RL.7.4, RL.7.10	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.6
9	W.7.3.b,d ; W.7.4, W.7.5	RL.7.2, RL.7.3	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
10	W.7.3.d,e; W.7.5	RL.7.2	SL.7.1, SL.7.2	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3, L.7.5, L.7.6
11	W.7.3, W.7.5	RL.7.10	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
12	W.7.3, W.7.5	RL.7.4, RL.7.5	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
13	W.7.3, W.7.4, W.7.5	RL.7.4, RL.7.5	SL.7.1, SL.7.4	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
14	W.7.3, W.7.7	RL.7.1, RL.7.2, RL.7.3, RL.7.10	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
15	W.7.3.d, W.7.5	RL.7.1, RL.7.3	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
16	W.7.3, W.7.5	RL.7.10	SL.7.1	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3
17	W.7.3	RL.7.10	SL.7.1, SL.7.6	L.7.1, L.7.2, L.7.3

*Bold indicates major emphasis

Because writing workshop instruction involves students in writing, reading, speaking and listening, and language development, each session in each unit of study is correlated to the full Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts.

Ways of Visualizing Relationships Between Story Elements



How do they interact?

1. Cause and Effect



Compare and Contrast



Narrative Writers Aim Toward Goals Such As...



A wide range of fresh-from-the-classroom instructional charts model proven teaching artifacts that are easy to copy and customize.

Implementation and Professional Development Options

The *Units of Study* books are a curriculum—and more. Lucy Calkins has embedded professional development into the curriculum, teaching teachers the “why” and “how” of effective reading instruction. Through regular coaching tips and detailed descriptions of teaching moves, essential aspects of reading instruction are underscored and explained at every turn. The professional development embedded in this series can be further enhanced through the following opportunities.

IN YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT

Units of Study Days

Through a one-day intensive session, teachers can get started unpacking the series’ components, grasping the big picture of effective workshop teaching, and gaining an understanding of how to integrate assessment into the curriculum.

Contact Judith Chin, Coordinator of Strategic Development
judith.chin@readingandwritingproject.org
Phone: 212-678-3104

Multi-Day Institute for 40–300 educators

Invite a Reading and Writing Project Staff Developer to work in your school or district, helping a cohort of educators to teach reading and/or writing well. Host a “Homegrown Institute” for writing instruction, reading instruction, or content literacy. Tailored to your district’s needs, the instruction and materials are specialized for K–2, 3–5 or 6–8 sections.

Contact Kathy Neville, Executive Administrator
kathy@readingandwritingproject.org
Phone: 917-484-1482

Leadership Support

Topics include planning for large-scale implementation, establishing assessments across the school or district, learning from walk-throughs, designing in-house staff development, and instituting cross-grade alignment.

ONLINE FROM TCRWP

Classroom Videos

Dozens of live-from-the classroom videos let you eavesdrop on Lucy and her colleagues’ instruction in literacy workshop classrooms. These clips model the minilessons, conferences, and shares you will engage in as you teach the units of study.

View these videos at:

readingandwritingproject.org/resources/units-of-study

Resources

The Project posts important and useful resources throughout the year, including examples of student work.

Visit readingandwritingproject.org/resources

Twitter Chats

On Wednesdays from 7:30–8:30 P.M. EST join TCRWP and our colleagues for live chat sessions on topics supporting literacy instruction.

Follow them at @TCRWP or search #TCRWP.
[Twitter.com/tcrwp](https://twitter.com/tcrwp)

Distance Learning Teacher-Leader Groups in Reading and Writing

TCRWP’s online Teacher-Leader Groups bring together potential teacher-leaders from schools across the nation. Led by Senior Staff Developers, each grade-specific group convenes for five two-hour sessions at crucial times throughout the year. These sessions enable teacher-leaders to think across the units of study and to explore methods of facilitating student transfer of skills from one unit to the next.

Visit readingandwritingproject.org for full support.

AT TEACHERS COLLEGE

Multi-Day Institutes at Teachers College

Teachers College offers eight institutes each year. Each of these is led by teacher-educators from the project, with other world-renowned experts joining as well. Institutes include keynotes, small- and large-group sections, and sometimes work in exemplar schools.

- Summer Institutes on the Teaching of Reading and Writing
- Literacy Coaching Institutes on the Teaching of Reading and Writing
- Content Area Institute
- Argumentation Institute

For registration and application information go to:

readingandwritingproject.org/services/institutes

ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Each year, the Reading and Writing Project and Heinemann offer several one-day workshops for teachers and administrators. These off-site seminars are held in selected locations across the country and focus on units of study for teaching reading and writing. The workshops are delivered by TCRWP leaders and are open enrollment events.

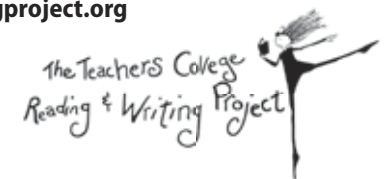
For dates, locations, and registration information go to:

readingandwritingproject.org/services/one-day-events/conferences and heinemann.com/PD/workshops

Teachers College Reading and Writing Project

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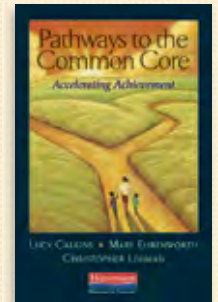
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Designed for teachers, school leaders, and professional learning communities looking to navigate the gap between their current literacy practices and the ideals of the Common Core, *Pathways to the Common Core*:

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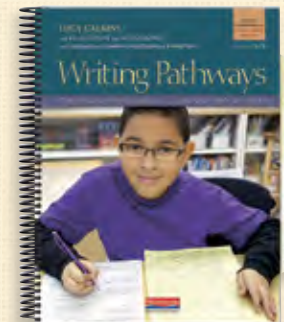


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ABOUT THE GRADE 7 AUTHORS

Lucy Calkins is the Founding Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, a New York City-based organization that has influenced literacy instruction around the globe. In that role, Lucy's greatest accomplishment has been to develop a learning community of teacher educators whose brilliance and dedication shines through in the Units of Study books, which are quickly becoming an essential part of classroom life in tens of thousands of schools around the world. The power of the Units of Study and TCRWP can be felt, too, in the schools that bear their distinctive mark: a combination of joy and rigor in the classrooms, and entire school communities—teachers, principals, parents, kids—who wear a love of reading and writing on their sleeves.

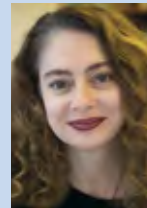


Lucy is the Robinson Professor of Children's Literature at Teachers College, Columbia University where she co-directs the Literacy Specialist Program—a masters and doctoral program that brings brilliant teachers and coaches to TCRWP schools everywhere and to the Project itself. She is the author or coauthor of scores of books, including *Pathways to the Common Core: Accelerating Achievement* (Heinemann 2012), which was on the *New York Times* education bestseller list, *Units of Study in Opinion/Argument, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grades K–8* (Heinemann 2013–14), and *Units of Study for Teaching Reading, Grades K–5* (Heinemann 2015).

In addition to being a coauthor of one book in the Reading Units of Study series and three books in the Writing Units of Study series, **M. Colleen Cruz** is the author of several other titles for teachers, including *The Unstoppable Writing Teacher* (Heinemann 2015), *Independent Writing* (Heinemann 2004), and *A Quick Guide to Reaching Struggling Writers, K–5* (Heinemann 2008). She is also the author of the young adult novel *Border Crossing*, a Tomás Rivera Mexican American Children's Book Award Finalist. Colleen was a classroom teacher in general education and inclusive settings before joining TCRWP, where she is a Senior Lead Staff Developer. She presently supports schools, teachers, and their students nationally and internationally.



Audra Kirshbaum Robb is the Director of Performance Assessments at TCRWP. Audra has degrees in Comparative Literature and English Education, and taught middle school English Language Arts in New York City before joining the Project as a staff developer. Since then, she has become the resident expert on assessment at the Project. Audra led TCRWP's participation in pilot studies with the New York City Department of Education on the design, implementation, and instructional use of Common Core-aligned reading–writing performance assessments. She has worked closely with the Stanford Center for Assessment, Learning, and Equity (SCALE) on several projects. Audra also frequently leads workshops on incorporating poetry into ELA and content-area curriculum.



Kelly Boland Hohne, EdD, is a Writer-in-Residence and Senior Research Associate at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Kelly is part of the leadership team for a think tank sponsored by the Council of Chief School Officers, in which researchers from both CBAL (the research arm of Educational Testing Service) and TCRWP studied learning progressions in argument writing. Kelly is the author of several books in the units of study for reading and writing series, among them, *Changing the World* (Grade 3), *Boxes and Bullets* (Grade 4), and *Argument and Advocacy* (Grade 5). In all of her work, Kelly draws on her experience as a classroom teacher at PS 6, a TCRWP mentor school.



Annie Taranto is a Lead Staff Developer at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, and a graduate of the Literacy Specialty Program at Teachers College. Annie works with teachers, coaches, and principals in a score of schools in New York City and across the nation, as well as in Asia. She has a deep interest in helping teachers tap into their powers as readers and writers, and is especially known for her summer institute sessions and conference days. Annie is co-author of *The Research-Based Argument Essay* (Grade 5) and *The Art of Argument: Research Based Essays* (Grade 7) in the Writing Units of Study series.

