

# Improving elementary student writing through mentor texts and minilessons related to the 6+1 traits of writing as aligned with the common core state standards

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IMPROVING ELEMENTARY STUDENT WRITING THROUGH MENTOR  
TEXTS AND MINILESSONS RELATED TO THE 6+1 TRAITS OF WRITING  
AS ALIGNED WITH THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Honors in the Major Program in Elementary Education  
in the College of Education  
and in The Burnett Honors College  
at the University of Central Florida  
Orlando, FL

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Sherron Killingsworth Roberts

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## **ABSTRACT**

During the times we live in, writing has become a very important skill for all young students and adults to have. Whether they are taking a standardized test or putting together a resume, basic writing skills are necessary. In this thesis, I will attempt to prove that teaching the six traits of writing with the use of mentor texts is a great, creative way to help students learn the writing process. I will also explore how to align the concept of the six traits of writing with the new Common Core State Standards. This topic is very important when it comes to education. Huge emphasis is placed on the skill of being able to write, and our students are expected to be proficient in this process. Through writing students can communicate emotions, ideas, and knowledge they have pertaining to different subject areas. As a whole, the writing process can become daunting for young students. By using the six traits of writing through mentor texts, students can learn chunk by chunk and eventually master the skill of writing. Experts in writing

decided that breaking different skills into manageable components might prove helpful to authors of all ages and skill levels (Culham, 2008).

The second component to be addressed is aligning the six traits concept with the Common Core State Standards. All across the nation, states have adopted these new standards and school communities are trying to figure out how to make the switch. By aligning the Common Core State Standards with the six traits of writing, teachers will be able to eliminate this process for the writing portion of the standards. For my own research, I have chosen to create and modify minilessons for each of the six traits of writing with use of mentor texts. Common Core State Standards will be aligned with these minilessons for educators to use as they see fit.

## **DEDICATIONS**

To my mom, Lisa for never giving up on me, pushing me to succeed, and believing in me.

To my dad, Mike for always being the voice of reason and helping me realize my own  
potential.

To my brother, David for always being there for me.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

Teaching the 6+1 traits of writing using mentor texts is a topic in education that has held my interest for a few years now. I decided to write this thesis on the topic because I felt like I was not done learning about it. The 6+1 traits of writing were first introduced to me in the fall of 2011 when I decided to participate in the University of Central Florida's Having Active Participation Prepares You (H.A.P.P.Y Hour) Student Showcase. (The showcase is a professional conference where students in the College of Education present on different topics.)

Having a prior interest in reading and writing, my mentor, Dr. LeeAnne Spalding introduced me to the concept of teaching the 6+1 traits of writing using mentor texts. I immediately became interested in this idea of teaching children all of the components to writing through great examples of children's literature. There are a few different reasons why this idea really struck a chord with me.

First, I thought about the way I learned to write. I remembered the instruction being very dull and dry. It was also quite daunting when the teacher would refer to a poster with all of the components you have to take into consideration all at the same time while writing. The 6+1 traits strategy is basically the complete opposite of this; I liked that it was an interesting way to teach writing that I assumed would be exciting for students as well.

Secondly, I really liked the way that the traits were taught. They are not meant to be taught all at the same time, rather separately. I looked at it like a puzzle; each piece bringing its own quality until the whole picture is in front of you. As I mentioned, when I learned to write it

was an intimidating process. The idea of teaching this process in pieces seemed more manageable for current students.

The final reason this strategy of the 6+1 traits of writing really grabbed my interest is in the way great literature (or mentor texts) is used to demonstrate each concept you want students to learn. I love reading and writing equally and putting these two things together just made sense. What better way for a child to learn than to see what a professional does and try to emulate it? The real genius to this concept is that people such as Ruth Culham and Raymond Coutu have already taken the time to choose great books to teach each of the traits. So, there began my initial research into the 6+1 traits of writing. As fate would have it, on the day of my presentation for the showcase, Dr. Sherron Roberts was in the room to critique my presentation. I had the opportunity to talk to her afterwards and she mentioned that this would be a great topic to write an undergraduate thesis on. The rest is history.

Now, some of you are probably asking, why in the world would anybody have any interest in taking the time to research something like this? Let me tell you. As a pre-professional educator, I have seen that teachers, administrators, researchers, and others are always looking for the “best” way to teach a subject, especially when it comes to reading, language arts, and math. Professionals in the education field are always looking for the next big thing that is going to give their students a leg up on the competition. By this, I simply mean that the educational world is extremely competitive. Students are pressured to do well on all different kinds of tests so schools can receive necessary funding. With the change over to the Common Core State Standards they

will have to perform at a certain level when they take the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exam as well.

I have also experienced the challenges of keeping students attention throughout an entire lesson. This led me to be very interested in finding a strategy of teaching writing that worked. If there is one thing I have learned as a pre-professional it is that you *must* keep your students attention. Even if you lose just one student, a domino effect could ensue and before you know it half of the class is not paying attention.

Finally, with the big switch over to the Common Core State Standards, my interest was piqued to include these standards into my research. That is why I found it appropriate to include these new writing goals with each of the minilessons. Educators are looking to switch over from their old standards to these new standards, which is why I thought it was important to incorporate them into my research.

All of these different components were what drove me to be interested in this subject.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### **The Concept of the 6+1 Traits of Writing Using Mentor Texts**

Ruth Culham originally introduced us to the idea of the six traits of writing; ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions. In the book, *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing With the Traits* each trait is defined, there is a list of mentor texts that exhibit the particular trait, and lessons are included that are available to help teach each trait. This book will be referenced in regards to the definitions and ideas as the 6+1 traits are defined. The first concept of the traits that is usually introduced is ideas. The trait of ideas is defined as “the overall message and meaning...ideas are strong when they are clear and focused, and move from the general to the specific.”(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 10) Mentor texts that exemplify ideas are *The Kissing Hand* by Audrey Penn, and *Tuesday* by David Wiesner.

The second trait in the sequence is usually organization. This is what the internal structure of the piece is. Under this trait students learn that their writing must have a beginning, middle, and end that all connect together logically. Students also learn to give a logical amount of information in each portion of their writing. This way the reader’s interest is always there and never waning. Culham, Coutu more specifically describe organization as “the skeleton that holds the building together.” (Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 24) There are signs that indicate that students may understand the concept of organization if they can implement skills such as “labels, titles, and captions; have a sense of time through a sequence of events; or, have a clear beginning and/or ending.”(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p.25) Mentor texts for this trait are *I Wanna Iguana* by Karen Kaufman Orloff or *Scaredy Squirrel* by Melanie Watt. *Scaredy Squirrel* is a favorite to

use for teaching organization because it shows many different ways in which you can organize a piece of writing.

The third trait usually taught is voice or the “energy of the piece” as Culham, Coutu state. Students come to learn that through their writings they develop a voice, and depending on what they are writing about, they can change the style of how they sound. This is really what separates writers; whether their tone is funny, sarcastic, serious, informative, etc. it is always important for students to find their own unique voice. In standardized tests something that the people who score the writing portion look for is a voice from student writers. An enjoyable mentor text is Doreen Cronin’s *Diary of a Worm*. This book is a great example of how to bring voice to a character. You can really “hear” the worm every time he writes in his diary. Other texts are *The Relatives Came* by Cynthia Rylant and *The Frog Principal* by Stepanahie Calmenson.

After voice, there is word choice. This is an important component to teach, especially in elementary school, because students tend to use a limited vocabulary. While teaching word choice, students are challenged to think outside of the box. It can also really enhance a piece of writing depending on how it is used. Signs that indicate students comprehend the concept of word choice are when they “use the perfect word in the perfect place, try sensory words, use language with precision, or develop a curiosity about language.”(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 58) Great mentor texts to use are *I Lost My Tooth in Africa* by Penda Diakite. This book is especially unique because the author is an 8 year old girl. Students are able to see what a peer has accomplished through the writing process.

The fifth trait that is learned is sentence fluency. This is crucial to a piece of writing, because as Culham, Coutu states it really sets the “rhythm and flow” to a piece. If a close look is taken at the mentor texts that show great use of sentence fluency, students can see how this concept makes a difference. They can learn that they can utilize sentences in all different ways to evoke a certain message. Two great books to model sentence fluency are *A Chair for my Mother* by Vera B. Williams, and *Homerun* by Robert Burleigh. While both books are different in style, they show how you can convey different pictures and stories through the use of different sentence styles.

The final piece to the original six traits of writing is conventions. This has everything to do with punctuation, spelling, capitalization, grammar/usage, and paragraphing. Something that students learn to do along with this trait is to edit their pieces thoroughly to make sure everything is correct. There are a few different ways that students can edit their writings to check that conventions are correct. They can self-edit their own work, peer-edit with a class mate, or schedule a conference with their teacher. As Culham, Coutu state students should specifically know that “conventions guide the reader through the text, making it easy to read and understand.” *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference!* By Lynne Truss is an awesome example of how important it is to know how to use conventions correctly. The simple misplacement of a comma can make a sentence mean something very different than the writer may have intended.

Last, but not least, there is the *plus one* component to the six traits: presentation. This deals with the actual visual appearance of the piece. “When the writer has finally captured

everything he or she wants to say, then it is time to consider how to put the words and pictures together to make it appealing to the reader.”(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p.100) Students usually want their end product to look nice, and this is an extra step you can take to make sure this happens. Students can make sure that their pieces include “neat, legible print, carefully drawn pictures, letters and words that stay on the lines, or appropriate and simple use of fonts if the child is using a computer.”(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p.101) Mentor texts that are available to teach presentation are, *I Will Never Not Ever Eat a Tomato* by Lauren Child or *Do Not Open This Book!* by Michaela Muntean.

Through Culham and Coutu’s definitions and annotated bibliographies of mentor texts, the six plus one traits have officially been defined. Putting these all together to help the writing process for your students will do wonders for their work. Not only do they get to learn the writing process by breaking it up into easier concepts, but they get to see these ideas in action. Through the use of the mentor texts, students can witness how an author puts ideas into a piece, or uses conventions correctly. This system gives children good examples to refer to as they begin their endeavor into the writing process.

### **Research Behind the 6+1 Traits of Writing**

There has been other research on the 6+1 traits of writing strategy, so we will see what others have had to say about the concept. In one important article Ruth Culham, the creator of the six plus one traits, dispels certain myths and conceptions that people have had in regards to the traits themselves. She states, “We don’t teach students to ‘trait,’ to ‘workshop,’ or to ‘process.’ We teach them to write.” Also in her article *The Trait Lady Speaks Up*, Culham

addresses misconceptions and realities of the six plus one traits. The five myths that she addresses are 1. The traits are a writing curriculum 2. The writing process and the traits are different things 3. You adopt the traits program 4. You teach the traits and writing takes care of itself and 5. The traits are not part of the writing workshop.

Culham specifically says that the 6+1 traits are not a curriculum. Instead, she describes them more as a series of lessons and activities that should enhance an already existing writing curriculum. For example, if students need help with organization, there are lessons specifically tailored for this. The second myth Culham addresses is that the writing process and the traits are two different things. “Actually, they’re two sides of the same coin,” Culham states. The traits are there to help give students a sense of focus. They also provide guidance for the writing process.

The third myth that Culham addresses in this article is that “you adopt the traits program.” “The traits are a model, not a program,” states Culham. By this she means that the traits model can be used however the teacher desires. It is very important to keep in mind that it is just that, a model. She also really stresses the fact that the traits are meant to enhance a curriculum. They were essentially designed to help writers navigate the writing and editing process. Moving on to the fourth myth, Culham addresses, “you teach the traits, and the writing takes care of itself.” Culham explicitly wants readers to know that “the traits are not a replacement for teaching.” Educators should keep in mind that the traits are a part of the writing process, not the whole process itself. Again she re-iterates that these traits are meant to help students focus; they break down the complex process and help the writing process to be learned in smaller pieces. The traits provide an easier way to slowly help your students put everything

together. Finally, the fifth myth Culham addresses is that “the traits are not part of a writing workshop.” Instead, she argues that the traits should actually be used *as* a writing workshop. During certain times, different traits can be the focus of whatever writing piece students are working on.

Culham ends this article by giving great advice on how to use the traits while conferencing with an individual student about their writing. One thing to do is choose a specific trait that a student seems to be struggling with and focus on that. This way all six traits are not being covered and the student has one specific focus while editing their paper. Overall, Culham dispels rumors and leaves readers with a sense of what these traits are really supposed to do in regards to the six plus one traits. They are an aid for teachers to integrate into the curriculum. They are also there to help lay the foundation for the writing process, and let students navigate it with more ease. The traits are meant to be the tools to put together a project with.

### **Does the Trait Model Really Work?**

Now that the idea of teaching the writing process using the 6+1 traits of writing using mentor texts has been introduced, it is important to look at this question: does this trait model really work? Michael Coe, Makoto Hanita, Vicki Nisholka, and Richard Smiley have conducted research asking just that. As a group, they feel that our view on the importance of writing in the United States has been somewhat neglected. This does not add up to them since writing has been cited as one of the most important job skills a person can have. In response to this Coe, Hanita, Nisholka, and Smiley went right into the battlegrounds to see whether implementing the 6+1

traits of writing model would help our students become more efficient writers. Coe, Hanita, et al. found 74 different schools who were currently not using the traits model to use for their research.

First, they chose a control group; this group was instructed to “business as usual.” This meant that these specific schools and teachers would go on teaching the writing process as they would have in the past. They then chose the treatment group; this group was going to use the 6+1 traits writing model to teach the writing process. At all schools, students were pre and post tested on their writing abilities. Data was collected during this to see if there was an improvement made at the schools where the traits model was being used or not. This research took place over one school year, and at the end of the year, Coe, Hanita, et al. found that “using the 6+1 Trait Writing Model significantly increased student writing scores during the year in which it was introduced to schools.”

### **Common Core State Standards**

Common Core (2012) states “Few educators or policymakers would have guessed, even a year or so ago, that nearly all states would jettison their standards and embrace new, largely uniform standards for the teaching of English Language Arts and Math. Fewer still would have expected all of this to happen so quickly” (p. xiv). In the education field, we have a large task that lies ahead of us; implementing the new Common Core State Standards into all of our schools. These new standards are meant to unify us as a nation and keep everyone on the same page. Almost all states across the country have adopted these standards and are working tirelessly to integrate them.

A great resource is the Common Core State Standards website. Here, all of the standards are laid out according to grade level. On this website you can find different sections such as “What is Not Covered by the Standards” and “Key Design Considerations.” These sections are meant to help educators better understand the purpose of the standards, and what they will not find in the standards themselves. They want you to know that these standards are expectations of what students should know by a certain point. They are by no means a guide for how to teach, this creative freedom is meant to be left to the teachers. They also make the important point to inform educators that the specific standards included in no way cover all of the information some teachers may want to teach their students.

Another aspect that they touch on is the fact that there are no guidelines for how to teach your students who are well below grade level. The standards supply you with the goals for each grade, however, if you have struggling students it is up to you to provide them with whatever accommodations they may need. This is where the website becomes useful. You can see what the standards are from the previous grade levels to help students re-learn information that they might not have sustained. The goal for these standards is to help students become “college ready.” This is a term that comes up frequently the website. There is a big push from the Common Core State Standards to have all students college ready by the time they finish the 12<sup>th</sup> grade.

After discovering the expectations from these standards, you can see content and goal expectations educators need to reach by a specific grade. There are certain writing standards for grades K-5 which include different sub headings as well. These sub headings are *Text Types and*

*Purposes, Production and Distribution of Writing, Research to Build and Present Knowledge,* and *Range of Writing*. Under these sub headings you will find the specific standards you want to meet at each grade. For example, under *Text Types and Purposes*, some of the standards a fifth grade student must meet are:

1. Write opinion pieces on topics or texts, supporting a point of view with reasons and information.
  - a. Introduce a topic or text clearly, state an opinion, and create an organizational structure in which ideas are logically grouped to support the writer's purpose.
  - b. Provide logically ordered reasons that are supported by facts and details.
  - c. Link opinion and reasons using words, phrases, and clauses.
  - d. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the opinion presented.

and,

2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
  - a. Introduce a topic clearly, provide a general observation and focus, and group related information logically; include formatting, illustrations, and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
  - b. Develop the topics with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples related to the topic.
  - c. Link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses.

- d. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
- e. Provide a concluding statement or section related to the information or explanation presented.

Finally, it is necessary to point out that there is not a scope and sequence to the standards. This is left up to schools to decide how they want these standards to be met. As educators, we now face the challenges of learning this new set of standards and finding a way to implement them the best we can for our students.

### **CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I will introduce you to the methodology that I used while compiling minilessons for this thesis. After researching the 6+1 traits of writing using mentor texts, I decided to compile a group of three minilessons for each of the traits. I decided to do this because as a pre-professional educator I know that having examples to try out and test is one of the best ways to decide if you like something. More importantly you can decipher if it works for the group of students you are teaching. So, I looked at different books and websites until I found minilessons that I thought helped best teach each trait.

The first book was Ruth Culham and Raymond Coutu's *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing with the Traits*. This is a great resource for anybody looking for an overview of the 6+1 traits. It includes a brief introduction to each trait, a definition to be used with students, a list of mentor texts to use to help teach the trait, and a few different examples of lessons. From this book, I chose one lesson for each trait to include in the series. As I mentioned there were a few different lessons for each of the six plus one traits. I read each lesson and chose a lesson to include based on how I felt about it. Some of the lessons I really gravitated toward more than others, which is why I would end up choosing that particular one. It is important to keep in mind

however, that there are many other great lessons included in this book that some teachers may prefer over the ones that I have included.

The second two books I used were the *Craft Lessons* books by Joann Portalupi and Ralphs Fletcher. These books have a compilation of minilessons to teach writing. Unlike Culham and Coutu's book, these lessons are not directly lined up to each of the traits. The first thing that I had to do was find different craft lessons that lined up with the traits. Once I did this, I thoroughly read each of the craft lessons and chose one for each of the traits. One thing I would like to note here is that not *all* of the minilessons found in these books include mentor texts. This is worth mentioning because the lessons are solidifying information that would have been taught previously using a mentor text. You will see that in the organization of my lessons, I put the *Craft Lesson* minilessons at the end for each trait. This is not to denote an order of importance by any means- however, I listed the lessons this way so that teachers would have two lessons that used the mentor texts and a third to be more of a supplemental lesson.

After choosing lessons for each trait, I decided to create one minilesson of my own. I used the annotated bibliography in Culham and Coutu's book to choose a mentor text and created a lesson from there. It is important to keep in mind that there is a fairly large list of books to choose from. All are great books, but some resonated with me more than others. Since I have been doing research on the six plus one traits for about two years now, I have found books that I have always wanted to create lessons for. This was the perfect opportunity to do this. I would suggest to educators who are interested in implementing the six plus one traits of writing to look at this list on their own and see if there are books that are more relatable to them. Some books

you may find are more appropriate for read alouds and discussions, and others you can turn into great activities.

While I was putting together these lesson plans, there were different things that I took into consideration. I first thought of the second grade class that I am interning in; I thought about all of their needs and how they might respond to the lessons. I thought about their attention span and that the minilessons would have to be interesting and somewhat interactive. Another thought was that these second graders would soon be moving on to third grade. What lessons would be good for them to help make this transition? As you will see, in each of the lessons, there is an intended grade level. However, they can be easily modified or adjusted to teach just about any grade at the elementary level. This led me to consider what my future classes may look like and how different lessons may work for them instead of the current population I am working with. I think this is one of the great things about children's literature. It is something that can translate to all different populations, grade levels, and abilities.

The final portion of the minilessons is the tie in to the Common Core State Standards. Instead of choosing standards to work with and then looking at lessons, I used what is called backwards design. Wiggins and McTighe refer to this method of teaching in their book *Understanding by Design*. This means that I chose or created the lessons I wanted to include first, and then found a standard to match the lesson. It is worth mentioning that I did have an idea of the goals that need to be met in second grade, so I wasn't putting together completely irrelevant lessons. The great thing about the Common Core State Standards for Writing is they are set up as a continuum. This makes it easier to consider multiple grade levels at the same time.

Skills are revisited at each grade level, continuing to build the blocks to learn on which makes these lessons able to transform between the grades.

#### **CHAPTER 4: MINILESSONS CREATED TO SUPPORT THE 6+1 TRAITS OF WRITING AND THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS**

Here are the minilessons created as a result of this project. There are three lessons for each of the six main traits and one lesson for the additional trait of presentation. These lessons have been compiled from different sources. Each of the traits has one lesson from Ruth Culham and Raymond Coutu's book *Using Picture Books to Teach Writing With the Traits*, one lesson from Joann Portalupi and Ralph Fletcher's *Craft Lessons* books, and one lesson that I have created on my own using mentor texts from a recommended list by Ruth Culham. You will find that all lessons are accompanied by correlating Common Core State Standards. Below I have provided a table to navigate this chapter. You can find locate each section by trait, and look for specific minilessons as well.

Trait	Lesson	Thesis Page Number	Source
Ideas	I Spy	19	Leigh Weiler
	If Dogs Were Dinosaurs	21	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu
	Using Supporting Details and Examples	23	JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher
Organization	Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type Scaredy Squirrel	25	Leigh Weiler
		27	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu
	Using a Parallel Story	29	JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher
Voice	Fancy Nancy Says...	31	Leigh Weiler
	Yesterday I Had the Blues	33	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu
	Finding Voice in the World Around Us	35	JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher
Word Choice	I Lost My Tooth in Africa	37	Leigh Weiler
	An Island Grows	39	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu
	“Cracking Open” General Words	42	JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher
Sentence Fluency	Home Run	44	Leigh Weiler
	One Tiny Turtle	46	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu
	Unpacking a “Heavy Sentence”	49	JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher
Conventions	Why Commas Make a Difference	51	Leigh Weiler
	Duck on a Bike	53	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu
	Using Commas to List Multiple Facts	56	JoAnn Portalupi & Ralph Fletcher
Presentation	Alphabet Adventure	58	Ruth Culham & Raymond Coutu

## **Ideas Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson Plan 1: I Spy**

#### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.3 Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2b Develop the topic with facts, definitions, and details.**

*Learning Goal: To use specific details to support a broad idea.*

(Authored by Leigh Weiler)

Intended Grade Level: 2-4

#### **Materials**

- *I Spy Extreme Challenger! A Book of Picture Riddles* (Marzollo, J., 2000)
- pens, pencils
- white board

#### **Introduction**

1. Show the book to the students. Flip through a few different pages and read the riddles.
2. Ask what is important to look for when the students are trying to solve the riddle. Should they look for specific details or broad generalizations? Tell students that when they are writing stories the same technique to figuring out a riddle applies. The more specific details you have to support your idea the better the story will be.
3. After having this discussion, read a few more of the riddles to the students and solve them. Again discuss how detail is important in regards to the riddles.

## **Activity**

1. Instruct students to brainstorm a few general ideas (you may model an example for them by writing a few different ideas on the board). Some examples may include things like baseball, school, outer space, etc. These are all very broad topics.
2. Have students choose one of the broad topics that they brainstormed.
3. Have students make a thinking map including specifics of the topic. You can model this easily for your students. Choose a broad topic and make a thinking map on the board for them. You can use something simple such as school to brainstorm. Include all of the specifics of school (math, reading, lunch, recess, specials, homework, etc.).
4. Give students anywhere from 10-15 minutes to break down their general idea into specific topics.
5. From here, tell students that they will be writing a short story on their chosen topic. Instruct them that the point of this writing assignment is to use as many supporting details as they can about the specific topic that they chose.

## **Lesson Plan 2: If Dogs Were Dinosaurs**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.**

*Learning Goal: To create ideas for a story by posing different questions or possibilities.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 22)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

### **Materials**

- A copy of *If Dogs Were Dinosaurs* (Schwartz, D., 2005)
- overhead and markers
- drawing paper
- pencils, pens, markers, crayons

### **What to Do**

1. Read the book to students, stopping to show the pictures as you go. Notice which examples from the book draw the biggest response from students and go back and look at them more closely on a second read.
2. Ask students to tell you what this author's "big idea" is in the book. Discuss with them that he asks the questions "What if?" and answers it in a way that shows usual size relationships. Go back to favorite examples to reinforce how this idea comes through in the book.
3. Tell students they are going to write their own "What if?" statements, but they will use color instead of size in the answer. Using the overhead, show them one or two examples:

- a. What if trees were pink and leaves were rainbow striped?
  - b. What if the ocean was orange and fish had black and white polka dots?
4. Ask students to work in pairs and talk through “What if?” statements on their own.
5. After groups have discussed for a while, ask them to share their favorite examples and record them on the overhead.
6. Give pairs of students paper, colored markers, and crayons. Ask them to fold their paper into a book by folding it in half, and then in half again.
7. On the front of the book, have them write “What if?”
8. On the inside two pages, have them write out their two favorite examples and illustrate them.
9. On the back of the book, have them write their names and the date.

### **Follow-Up Activities**

1. Encourage students to think of other ways to show extreme pairs, such as tallest to shortest, widest to thinnest, and heaviest to lightest, as possible ideas for writing.
2. Share *Biggest, Strongest, Fastest* by Steve Jenkins, which depicts another way to find ideas for writing.

## **Lesson Plan 3: Using Supporting Details and Examples**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.1b Provide reasons that support the opinion.**

*Learning Goal: To be able to add detail or facts to support a claim.*

(Portalupi, Fletcher, 2001, p.62)

Intended Grade Level: 3-4

### **Materials**

- *Animal Dads* (Collard, S., 2000)

### **Discussion**

Students too often make unsupported claims in their nonfiction writing: *The computer saves us time.* (How?) *Hockey is the most challenging sport.* (In what respect?) We need to impress upon students that in the “food chain of ideas,” big ideas are nourished by specifics: smaller details and concrete examples. By providing supporting details, students ground their writing in the real world. This gives it authority. It is also a good way to help students flesh out skimpy or underdeveloped writing.

### **How to Teach It**

When you write nonfiction, beware that you don’t make statements without backing them up with evidence. Let’s say that your subject is World War II and you write

*World War II was the most destructive war in the history of the planet. Today, we must do whatever we can to make sure that nothing like that ever happens again.*

That’s a noble idea, but the author didn’t give us a single fact or bit of evidence to support the statement that World War II was the most destructive war in history. What about the First World

War? What about Vietnam? Those kinds of unsupported statements weaken a piece of nonfiction writing.

Today let's take a look at *Animal Dads*. This book does many things well, but today as I reread it to you, I'd like you to pay attention to how the author backs up his statements with examples and concrete details.

(Read. Discuss.)

Today I want you to consider this idea as you revisit your writing. Have you done what Sneed B. Collard does? If you are just beginning to write, remember to back up your ideas with enough examples, details, and facts.

## **Organization Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson Plan 1: Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type**

#### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)**

*Learning Goal: To use different organizational techniques in a piece of writing.*

(Authored by Leigh Weiler)

Intended Grade Level: 2-4

#### **Materials**

- *Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type* (Cronin, D., 2011)
- Examples of other text: *Diary of a Worm* (Cronin, D., 2003), *Dear Mr. Blueberry* (James, S., 1997)

#### **Introduction**

Read *Click Clack Moo, Cows That Type*. While you are reading, stop and show students how the story is set up. Point out that notes are being written back and forth between the animals and the farmer.

#### **Post Reading Activity**

1. Have students pair up and discuss how the organization of this story differs from other stories that they have read. Take a few answers.
2. Ask students what other styles of organization they have seen in different books.

- a. Possible Answers: *Diary of a Worm* (diary entries), *Dear Mr. Blueberry* (letter writing), comic books.

### **Writing Activity**

1. Have students choose a different organizational structure that they would like to try writing a story with. Good options to give are diary entries, letters, or comic book style.
2. Have students brainstorm characters, a plot, setting, etc. for their story.
3. Have students begin to write their story using the chosen organizational structure.

## **Lesson Plan 2: Scaredy Squirrel**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)**

*Learning Goal: To practice incorporating different organizational styles into writing.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p.39)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

### **Materials**

- a copy of *Scaredy Squirrel* (Watt, M., 2008)
- slips of paper
- a box or hat
- chart paper, pens, and markers

### **What to Do**

1. Read *Scaredy Squirrel* to the class.
2. Brainstorm with the class a list of things Scaredy Squirrel writes about that show his personality: a) his greatest fears, b) advantages and disadvantages of change (leaving the nut tree), c) his daily routine, d) contents of an emergency kit, and e) an exit plan for an emergency.
3. Discuss the ways each type of writing in the book is organized:
  - a. a list of items on a common topic
  - b. a chart comparing two items to show differences or similarities

- c. a schedule or timeline
  - d. a step-by-step plan to solve a problem
4. Write each type of organization on a slip of paper and put into a box or hat.
  5. Put students into small groups and have one person from each group draw a slip and read it to the group. This will be the organization for their group writing to come next. Put the slips of paper back in the box before the next group draws so all groups have the same options.
  6. Ask each group to come up with a new list, chart, schedule, or plan, depending on what their slip says: a) things they do well in school, b) things they like and don't like about going to school, c) a schedule of their school day, or d) a step-by-step plan to get out of the classroom in case of an emergency. Give students time to record their writing on chart paper and ask them to draw pictures to illustrate their ideas.
  7. Share what each group wrote and how members organized their ideas. Compare the differences and similarities of how each piece is organized.

### **Follow-Up Activities**

1. Discuss with students what makes the organization of writing as that found in *Scaredy Squirrel* different from a story or good information book. Emphasize the different ways to organize for different purposes to make the ideas stand out.
2. Share the sequel to *Scaredy Squirrel*, *Scaredy Squirrel Makes a Friend* by Melanie Watt, and discuss how it is organized.

## **Lesson Plan 3: Using a Parallel Story**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)**

*Learning Goal: To understand the concept of a parallel story and to incorporate it into their writing.*

(Portalupi, Fletcher, 2007, p. 76)

Intended Grade Level: 3-4

### **Materials**

- *The Paperboy* (Pilkey, D., 1999)

### **Discussion**

This writing technique sounds sophisticated, and it may be a stretch for some third or fourth graders. But this strategy is easy to explain, and there are many accessible texts available to model it. There's no reason why students can't study how professional writers use this strategy, and experiment with it themselves in their own writing. (Of course, not all students will do so.) In the text that follows we discuss how you can use a picture book as well as a short story to model this craft lesson.

### **How to Teach It**

Dav Pilkey uses a parallel story in his picture book *The Paperboy*. All through this book we see the boy doing one thing and the dog doing something similar. They don't do exactly the

same things—a dog can't ride a bike or put rubber bands on folded newspapers—but there are enough similarities to make the point. Pilkey is an author/illustrator, so he can show the parallel stories in both the illustrations and the texts, for example, when he shows both boy and dog eating breakfast from their different bowls.

*The Paperboy* reveals some interesting truths about books with parallel stories. Two characters are being compared, but they don't do exactly the same things. The characters' parallel stories are different enough to make the story interesting.

“Slower Than the Rest” is a short story by Cynthia Rylant. The main character is Leo, who is a “slow” kid in school. He takes a long time understanding his subjects, so he has been placed in a special class. While driving with his family, Leo finds a turtle and names him Charlie. Leo brings Charlie to school and gives a wonderful report on turtles. In this way, he finally gets appreciated.

(After students reread this story, talk with them about all the ways that Cynthia Rylant compares the boy with the turtle. There are a number of concrete references in the text. Invite them to try a parallel story in their own writing.)

## Voice Lesson Plans

### Lesson Plan 1: Fancy Nancy Says...

#### Common Core State Standards

#### CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3a Choose words and phrases for effect.

*Learning Goal: To use an extended vocabulary to enhance one's "voice" in a piece of writing.*

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

(Authored by Leigh Weiler)

#### Materials

- *Fancy Nancy* (O'Connor, J., 2009)
- Chart Paper

#### Introduction

1. Read *Fancy Nancy* to your students.
2. As you are reading, stop to point out all of the "fancy" words Nancy uses in the story.
3. Keep a running chart of the words that you stop to point out.
4. When you are finished reading the story have students think to themselves how the different words (vocabulary) made the story better. Take ideas.
5. Explain to students that using a wide vocabulary can make their stories more interesting and can give them their own personalized voice.

#### Activity: "Said Is Dead"

1. Explain to students that many times in stories we have characters that talk (or have dialogue). The most common word that we use when this is happening is *said* (Gary said this, Susie said that). Tell students that even changing something as small as the word *said* in their writing can give them more of a voice.

2. Pair students up and have them brainstorm different words that they could use instead of said. Have them come back together as a whole group and create a chart with all of the different answers they give you.
3. If you need to scaffold for your students, get the ball rolling with a few of your own ideas (shouted, whispered, exclaimed).

Keep the chart posted throughout the year so students always have a reference point on words they can use other than said.

## **Lesson Plan 2: Yesterday I Had the Blues**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.4a Use sentence-level context as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.**

*Learning Goal: To express voice through different emotions.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 52)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

### **Materials**

- a copy of *Yesterday I Had the Blues* (Frame, J., 2008)
- paper
- pencils, crayons, markers
- optional: magazines as a source of pictures

### **What to Do**

1. Ask students to think about their mood when they woke up. Were they in a good mood, looking forward to going to school? Or were they in a bad mood, wishing they could roll over and go back to sleep? Perhaps they were feeling yet another way?
2. Tell them to talk to a partner about their mood and select a color that matches it. If they were happy, for instance, they might pick bright green or yellow. If they were sad, they might choose gray, brown, or black. Encourage them to match their mood to a color as closely as they can.
3. Read *Yesterday I Had the Blues* to the class, showing the pictures as you go.

4. Ask students to name the mood of each character and how they identified it. Their answers should include the color the author used as well as his description of the character.
5. Ask students to talk to their partner again about the mood they were in when they got ready for school and to refine their thoughts based on *Yesterday I Had the Blues*.
6. Ask the students to write about and illustrate on paper their mood, explaining the color they think best reflects that mood and why they chose it.
7. Share the mood pieces with the class and discuss them. Explain to students that writing should capture mood, or voice, to help the reader feel what the writer is feeling.

### **Follow-Up Activities**

1. Help students create a book of colors and moods. Print lists of colors from the Internet and ask students to attach a mood to each one. Then bind the lists as a book for students to consult when they write.
2. Share *The Sound of Colors: A Journey of the Imagination* by Jimmy Liao and discuss how the author describes colors. Ask students to discuss the book's voice and how color helped them to identify that voice.

## **Lesson Plan 3: Finding Voice in the World Around Us**

### **Common Core State Standards**

#### **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.5b Identify real-life connections between words and their use**

*Learning Goal: To teach voice through example, and have students observe voice in everyday things.*

(Portalupi, Fletcher, 2007, p. 63)

Intended Grades: 3-4

### **Materials**

- chart paper with different signs listed to be discussed
- blank chart paper
- forms for students to fill out with things they find around the school

### **Discussion**

Teaching third and fourth graders to breathe voice into their writing can be a challenge. Not to mention that it's no small task finding words to define this elusive quality. An easy first step is simply making students aware of the sound of voice in writing. Before turning to examples in literature, try this lesson, which uses examples from a comfortable and familiar kind of writing – signs – to help tune your students' ears to voice.

### **How to Teach It**

I was sitting at a table eating my lunch when my eye caught a sign taped to the front of a trash container. It read:

*Toss it in. Drop it in.*

*Slide it in off your tray.*

*Just get your trash*

*in here some way.*

The sign surprised me and made me smile. How different than simply saying: Put Trash Here. (Write the voiceless alternative next to or below the sign filled with voice.) This sign got me to clear my table. How could it not? I could practically hear the clean-up crew pleading with me.

This is an example of the writer's voice. Listening for voice in writing-- even simple writing such as signs – will make it easier to bring voice into your own work.

Here's another sign I saw taped to a garage door at my car mechanic's shop:

*No Parking*

*at anytime.*

*Don't even*

*think about it.*

The sign might have simply said, No Parking. (Again, write this alternative next to the printed sign so students can compare the two.) The sign really made me take notice. When something has strong voice it sticks in your brain and makes you think more about it. Voice does that for readers.

Be on the lookout for samples of voice, not just in the stories and books we read, but in the writing you see in all kinds of places: signs, cereal boxes, instructions, letters, newspaper or magazine headlines. When you find one, jot it down and bring it to class to share.

### **Activity**

As a class, walk around the school looking for different signs that are posted, generic or creative. Are they generic signs? Do they have voice? Have students write down all signs that they see.

When you return to the class ask students what they wrote down and make a classroom list. Once this list is made have students brainstorm creative signs that they would post instead of the generic signs they observed. After students have time to do this, post the new signs along with the generic signs they go with; this will create a nice visual chart to hang in the class.

## **Word Choice Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson Plan 1: I Lost My Tooth in Africa**

#### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.**

*Learning Goal: To be able to use a variety of vocabulary words to create a unique voice based on culture or personal context.*

(Authored by Leigh Weiler)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

#### **Materials**

- *I Lost My Tooth in Africa* (Diakite, P., 2006)
- chart paper
- pencils, pen, marker
- paper

#### **Introduction**

1. Before reading *I Lost My Tooth in Africa*, discuss with the students that this book was written by someone their own age. This is a fun fact to share to show the students that they can achieve things they may have never thought of.
2. Read *I Lost My Tooth in Africa*. Throughout this book the author uses words that are relative to her. They are words she uses to call her grandma, or words from her African heritage. Make a list of some of the different words the author used.

3. Ask students if they can think of any words they use that are special to themselves or their families. You can use the example of the author calling her grandma *N'na*.

### **Activity**

1. Have students brainstorm different words that have meaning to them, like you have previously discussed.
2. Instruct them to try to write a story using different words that they have brainstormed.
3. The story should relate to the students since they are using words that are unique to their families.

## **Lesson Plan 2: An Island Grows**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.**

*Learning Goal: To be able to convey ideas of a different concept through word choice.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 73)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

### **Materials**

- a copy of *An Island Grows* (Schaefer, L., 2006)
- drawing paper
- pens, pencils, markers, crayons
- scissors
- glue

### **What to Do**

1. Read aloud *An Island Grows*.
2. Write a few sentences from the book on the whiteboard or overhead, such as “Stones break.” “Water quakes.” “Lava flows.”
3. Put students into small groups and assign each group a sentence to act out. Ask the other students to guess the sentence after each performance.
4. Discuss the purpose of the subject and verb in each sentence. The verb contains the action. The subject is doing the action. Explain that verbs and subjects are essential to making sentences. Go back through the book and show students how each page contains a verb and a subject.

5. Ask students to think of other processes in nature, such as the water cycle, the life cycle of a leaf on a tree, or a hurricane.
6. Pick one process and brainstorm steps in that process with the class:
  - a. Leaves sprout.
  - b. Branches fill.
  - c. Sun shines.
  - d. Wind rustles.
  - e. Shade soothes.
  - f. Days shorten.
  - g. Colors change.
  - h. Leaves blow.
  - i. And blow and blow.
  - j. The tree sheds
7. Tell students to get into pairs and to create a book about the process. Or, have them pick a different process and brainstorm steps.
8. Show students how to fold the drawing paper into book format. If you want to make an accordion book, here are some directions:

#### Accordion Folded Book

1. Fold a 12 x 18 sheet of newsprint in half lengthwise (hot dog fold).
2. Open in and fold it in half widthwise (hamburger fold).
3. Fold it again while in the hamburger stage.
4. Open hamburger once.
5. Folded part should be positioned closest to students' body.
6. Cut on the middle fold going only so slightly past the next fold.
7. Open it back to the hot dog.
8. Accordion it to make a folded book. You should have about 7-8 pages to use for individual pages.

9. Ask students to write a sentence on each page. Have them title the book and color the cover, then illustrate the books with their own drawings or cutouts from magazines. Set the books out in the library next to *An Island Grows* for all to enjoy.

### **Follow-Up Activities**

1. Encourage practice using subjects and verbs by having students create a schedule of activities. Each half hour, or as you change activities, ask one student to write it on the board: students pledge; math begins; reading challenges; P.E. energizes; writing relaxes; and so on. Title the schedules with a sentence students feel captures the range of what they do during the day, such as “Students Learn.”
2. Read aloud *Bullfrog Pops!* And point out how the author, Rick Walton, literally highlights many of the verbs in the story. Compare Schaefer’s book to Walton’s, one nonfiction and one fiction, and discuss how the verbs the authors use make the text lively and distinctive.

## **Lesson Plan 3: “Cracking Open” General Words**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.**

*Learning Goal: To expand on general ideas through choice of words.*

(Portalupi, Fletcher, 2007, p. 59)

Intended Grade Level: 3-4

### **Materials**

- whiteboard
- markers
- copies of “*My Stepfather Rowdy*”
- pencils

### **Discussion**

Vague writing is filled with generalities: “We were goofing around with my dad’s stuff.” Sharp writing contains precise nouns and specific verbs: “My cousin and I were sword-fighting with Dad’s hacksaws.” At certain times, a writer needs to use a general word, but young writers typically overdo it. Here’s a craft lesson that can immediately improve students’ writing by showing them how to replace generalities with more concrete words and phrases.

### **How to Teach It**

Consider the following words: *good, nice, things, stuff, fun*. These are general words. Maybe we can think of other words like them. There’s nothing wrong with these words. They

have their place, but in writing they don't paint much of a picture. When we read, "My uncle is really fun," we have trouble seeing an image.

As a writer, you can "crack open" a general word like *fun* by using a more specific word. Look what happens when we change the sentence so that it reads, "I had a blast when my uncle took me to a deserted parking lot and let me drive his Jaguar convertible." This sentence creates an image we can see. It tells a great deal about the uncle and exactly what kind of fun took place.

Let's look at this story beginning.

### **My Stepfather, Rowdy**

My stepfather's name is Rowdy (actually it's his nickname) and he's the best. He's real nice to me. I always have a blast when I go over to his house.

Food is one big difference between my dad and Rowdy. At my dad's house there's nothing but healthy snacks in the fridge. I bet the FBI could search his house and still not find one speck of chocolate. Rowdy's got nothing against junk food. In every room there are bowls of delicious treats. Our favorite thing to do at night is watch videos and PIG OUT!

Like I said, Rowdy is a good guy. Whenever I ask my dad if I can do stuff, or borrow something from the garage, he's like, no way. But at Rowdy's house he lets me do all kinds of things, almost anything I want. If I want to use some tool or piece of equipment in his garage, he's like: "Go for it." Rowdy's got lots of cool stuff in his basement, too, mostly things he doesn't need. He lets me go down there and poke around. I've found some great junk in the boxes down there.

Rowdy was in the Marines. He keeps bunches of army collectibles and war antiques in two chests up in his attic. Rowdy lets me go up there and play with that stuff whenever I want. He says he's going to give me some when I'm older.

My dad is Mr. Serious all the time. Rowdy likes to goof around with me and Mom when we're cooking supper or just hanging out. He brings me lots of fun places, too. And sometimes he does funny tricks that really crack me up. Like I said, Rowdy is the best.

You will find that this story contains a number of vague, general words. Read it over and circle the general words in this piece of writing. You might do this with a friend. How could this

writer have “cracked open” these general words to be more specific? Try the same thing with the story you are working on. Reread it carefully looking for vague, general words. Circle those words. See if you can crack them open and use more precise words to tell the reader exactly what is going on.

## Sentence Fluency Lesson Plans

### Lesson Plan 1: Home Run

#### Common Core State Standards

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1i Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.**

*Learning Goal: To observe the different types of sentence structures and how they affect the story.*

Intended Grade Level: 2-4

(Authored by Leigh Weiler)

#### Materials

- *Home Run: The Story of Babe Ruth* (Burleigh, R., 2003)

#### Introduction

1. Read *Home Run: The Story of Babe Ruth*. Throughout the story you can choose different passages as examples of different types of sentence structure.
2. Read this passage:

*He has always loved this game.  
This baseball.  
But what he does not know yet is this:  
He will change this game he loves.  
Forever.*

3. Show this page to the students when you have finished reading. This will show visually how the length of the sentences differs as well.
4. Tell students that they can convey certain messages by changing the sentence structure of their sentences. You can use the example of the short, poignant sentences Robert Burleigh uses throughout this book.

**Instruction**

1. Have students work in pairs. Have them look through different books and observe the differences in sentence structure. You can use books from Culham's annotated bibliography, or from your own library.
2. Bring students back together as a group to discuss the difference in sentence structures that they found and how they enhanced the stories.

## **Lesson Plan 2: One Tiny Turtle**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.**

*Learning Goals: 1) To determine the differences in sentence structure and how they change the tone of the story. 2) To determine the difference between a complete sentence and a sentence fragment.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2007, p. 85)

### **Materials**

- A copy of *One Tiny Turtle* (Davies, N., 2005)
- Paper
- Pens, pencils, markers, crayons
- Chart paper

### **Introduction**

1. Ask students if they have ever heard of loggerhead sea turtles and, if so, to explain what they know.
2. Tell them you are going to read a book about loggerhead sea turtles and, as you read, you'd like them to not only listen for fascinating pieces of information, but also for the author's sentence fluency—how she makes the text easy to listen to.

### **Whole Group Instruction**

1. Read *One Tiny Turtle*. Pause and show the pictures as you are reading. Some of the pages have informational notes or “factlets.” When you come upon these, show students how

the author sets factlets apart from the running text. Ask them if they hear any difference in the sentence fluency of factlets versus the running text.

2. Explain to students that complete sentences have a subject and a verb. Fragments are only parts of sentences. Tell students that writers use complete sentences most often, but occasionally they use a fragment to change the way a passage sounds. Fragments can change the rhythm and tempo of the writing to make it pleasing to the ear. They can also be used to make important ideas stand out in the text.
3. Tell students you are going to reread some sentences from the book, and they are going to determine whether they are complete or not by listening to them carefully.
4. Read the following sentences aloud to the students. Have them put their thumb up if they think it is a complete sentence and their thumb down if they think it is not. You may write these sentences on the board or show them on an overhead after they have made their decision to show the correct answer.
  - She's a baby, so her shell is soft as old leather. (Complete)
  - Safe in her world of weed. (Fragment)
  - Fish breathe underwater, but turtles are reptiles. (Complete)
  - She pokes her pinprick nostrils through the silver surface to take a quick breath, so fast, blink and you'd miss it! (Complete)
  - When you look for her. (Fragment)
  - Rides out the storm. (Fragment)
  - Her head is tough as a helmet. (Complete)
  - A glimpse of her (Fragment)

- Left behind, under the sand, her eggs stay deep and safe. (Complete)
  - And before the summers over they wriggle from their shells. (Complete)
  - Swims and swims! (Fragment)
  - One day, she'll remember this beach and come back. (Complete)
5. Tell students they are going to try writing complete and incomplete sentences of their own. Ask them to recall a fact about loggerhead turtles from the text and write it out in a complete sentence.
  6. Ask students to draw a picture to go along with their sentence and write a short caption underneath it that is a fragment.
  7. Compare the two pieces of writing, pointing out for students what makes one a complete sentence and the other not. Discuss how students can use fragments in their writing to change how the fluency sounds to the reader.

## **Lesson Plan 3: Unpacking a “Heavy Sentence”**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships and nuances in word meanings.**

*Learning Goal: To be able to give more details to a sentence so that a reader is not asking for more.*

(Portalupi, Fletcher, 2007, p. 61)

Intended Grade Level: 3-4

### **Materials**

- Large chart
- *The Hello, Goodbye Window* (Juster, N., 2005)

### **Discussion**

Third and fourth graders are notorious for giving equal weight to every aspect of their writing: I woke up in the morning. My sister was being a real pain. I went downstairs. I had the worst day of my life in school. The good thing was that I got to have baseball practice after school.”

Only the writer knows which part of the story deserves extra attention. But we can help children identify those sentences that are laden with hidden meaning. Then the writer can return to those sentences, unpack them, and flesh them out.

### **How to Teach It**

Have you ever noticed how sometimes when you read a story you come to a sentence that makes you eager to know more? Some sentences have many ideas packed inside them. You just

know that if you were able to open them like a suitcase there would be lots of interesting things inside.

In his book *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, Norton Juster introduces the window with this sentence: “It looks like a regular window, but it’s not.” That’s a heavy sentence because you just know there are lots of ideas inside it. Later the author writes that Poppy can play only one song on his harmonica, but then adds another heavy sentence: “But he can play it a lot of different ways.” This time Norton doesn’t make you guess about what is inside that sentence. He opens it up and shows you:

(Draw a vertical line down a chart. On the left side write the heavy sentences. On the other, write the unpacked sentences. For example:

But he can play it a lot of different ways.	He can play it slow or fast or he can play it sitting down or standing up. He says he can even play it and drink a glass of water at the same time, but I’ve never seen him do that.
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Go back and read something you have written. Put a star next to a sentence that feels heavy, where you feel you might have more to say. How can you unpack it for the reader? What details and examples can you give?

## Conventions Lesson Plans

### Lesson Plan 1: Why Commas Make a Difference

#### Common Core State Standards

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.**

*Learning Goal: To be able to decipher the difference in meaning of a sentence due to placement of a comma.*

(Authored by Leigh Weiler)

#### Materials

- *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference!* (Truss, L., 2006)
- paper
- pencils
- white board
- marker

#### Introduction

1. Write these sentences from the book on the board.
  - Slow, children crossing.
  - Slow children crossing.

Have students discuss in pairs how the meaning changes in these sentences with the placement of the comma. Have students share a few of their ideas. After you discuss this, explain to students that it is very important to be mindful of where they place commas. It can change to whole meaning of a sentence if they are not careful.

2. Read *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* to the class. The book is written with pairs of sentences that have different meanings depending on the location of the comma. Take time to discuss different pairs of sentences and how the comma changed the meaning of either sentence.

The book also has great illustrations of the meaning of each sentence, show these to students as part of the discussion.

### **Group Work**

1. After reading, have students practice writing sentences using commas to change the meaning. You can refer back to the original example you used to get students started.
2. When they have had some time to practice using commas, have them partner up and read their sentences to each other.
3. While they are in pairs, they can also write new sentences as pairs.

## **Lesson Plan 2: Duck on a Bike**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.**

*Learning Goal: To be able to understand the difference in capitalizing proper nouns, but not common nouns.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2007, p. 97-98)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

### **Materials**

- A copy of *Duck on a Bike* (Shannon, D., 2006)
- paper
- pencils, pens
- a visual of the last page of the book

### **Introduction**

1. Ask students to write their first name on a piece of paper, capitalizing the first letter.  
Then ask them to write a descriptor of some sort next to the name: a boy, a girl, a student, a friend, a soccer player, a pizza-eater, for example. Point out that they do not capitalize the descriptor, only their actual name.
2. Explain the difference between a proper noun (a specific person, place, or thing\_ and a common noun (a generic person, place, or thing). Remind them to capitalize proper nouns, but not common ones unless they come at the beginning of a sentence.
3. Tell them that you are going to read a book that uses common nouns as names and shows how the author makes this clear by using capitalization.

### Whole Group Instruction

1. Read *Duck on a Bike*, pausing to show pages where *Duck* is capitalized because it's his name, not just his species. Do the same for Dog, Cat, Horse, Chicken, Goat, Pig and Pig, and Mouse.
2. On an overhead or Interactive White Board, show the text from the last page.

“Then they put the bikes back by the house. And no one knew that on that afternoon, there had been a cow, a sheep, a dog, a cat, a horse, a chicken, a goat, two pigs, a mouse, and a duck on a bike.”

3. Ask students why the author did not capitalize the names of the animals on this page. See if they notice that the article *a* or a number in front of the animal name signals a common noun. Tell students that, typically, three articles signal a common noun is coming: *a*, *an*, *the*.
4. Once they grasp this concept, ask students to rewrite the last page to make the animal names into proper nouns. It should read like this:

“Then they put the bikes back by the house. And no one knew that on that afternoon, there had been Cow, Sheep, Dog, Cat, Horse, Chicken, Goat, Pig and Pig, Mouse, and Duck on a bike.”

### Follow-Up Activities

1. Ask students to write the beginning to a story, using proper nouns as Shannon does in *Duck on a Bike*. A *mother* would change to *Mother*; a *child* would change to *Child*; a *dog*

would change to *Dog*. Encourage them to have some fun experimenting with proper and common nouns.

2. Read the book *My Duck* by Tanya Linch, pointing out how frequently the term *my duck* is used. Copy two pages from the text that contain *my duck*, and ask students to read them with you and change *my duck* to the proper noun, *Duck*. Now ask students to help read the rest of the book with you, replacing *my duck* with *Duck*. Ask students if they found any other terms in the book that could be changed to a proper noun, such as *my teacher*.

## **Lesson Plan 3: Using Commas to List Multiple Facts**

### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 3 here.)**

*Learning Goal: To be able to combine sentences to make lists using commas.*

(Portaplupi, Fletcher, 2001, p. 64)

Intended Grade Level: 3-4

### **Materials**

- chart paper
- markers

### **Discussion**

Because a nonfiction text involves combining details and drawing relationships between various facts, it offers young writers the opportunity to stretch their abilities to write more complex sentences. Showing students how to use commas to list facts gives them a way to avoid simple, repetitive sentences.

### **How to Teach It**

Does anyone know what the word *efficient* means? If something is efficient it means that it does the job quickly and well. For instance, we have been working on learning how to move

quickly and quietly from our desks to the carpet area. I could say we have found an efficient way to do that job.

I want to talk today about efficient sentences. An efficient sentence is a sentence that conveys information quickly and well. Consider the following facts about bats:

(These sentences and the one to follow should be printed on a chart.)

*Bats live in tropical rain forests. They can also live in mountains. Bats live in deserts, too. They probably live right in your neighborhood.*

I have used four sentences to teach that information. But because all the sentences teach about where bats live, there is a more efficient way to combine the information. Laurence Pringle wrote a sentence that combines all these facts.

*Bats live in tropical rain forests, in mountains, in deserts, and probably right in your neighborhood.*

What differences do you notice? (You could point out the fact that he uses only one sentence instead of four and that the commas allow him to list the information. We find it better to invite students to share their own discoveries. This does not mean you let go of what you plan to teach. If students do not discover Pringle's use of commas to list facts, share that observation with them as described below.)

Notice how this author uses commas to list the four places where bats may be. When you have more than two facts that group together around one idea, you can combine them by using commas like this author does. Notice that you put a comma after each fact. Just before you get to the last fact, you also use the word *and* to let the reader know the list is complete. Let's try it a

couple of times to see how easy it is. Below are clusters of simple, repetitive sentences you can use to rewrite into single sentences using commas as a class.

1. Bats are gentle. Bats are intelligent. Bats are fascinating.
2. Bats can hibernate in caves. They can hibernate in mines, too. Sometimes they hibernate in other shelters.
3. Bats roost in caves. Sometimes they roost in mines, too. Buildings are a place they roost. Bats can roost in hollow trees.

## **Presentation Lesson Plans**

### **Lesson Plan 1: Alphabet Adventure**

#### **Common Core State Standards**

**CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.2.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers.**

*Learning Goal: To observe the difference in presentation through different texts.*

(Culham, Coutu, 2008, p. 107)

Intended Grade Level: 2-3

#### **Materials**

- Books from this bibliography or from your own library that represent a range of styles
- chart paper
- markers
- stars or other shapes to create the “Mrs. Smithy” award for the strongest presentation in a category.

#### **What to Do**

1. Ask students why they enjoy looking at picture books. Chances are they will say they like the variety of styles, colors, and type treatments that illustrators use. Let them know that it is not always important to agree on what is attractive or interesting, but it is important to be able to talk about why they find a book attractive or interesting.
2. Tell students that when authors and illustrators apply the presentation trait, they think about how to make the book readable, understandable, and pleasing to the reader’s eye.
3. Ask students to work with a partner and to look closely at the presentation style of a least ten books.

4. Ask students to tell you some of the key features of books with strong presentation: easy to read, colorful, imaginative, stand-out lettering, realistic, beautiful, bold, and so on. Create a chart with a heading for each of the categories the students come up with.
5. Ask students to categorize each picture book from their set. If, as you work, they find some that don't fit existing categories, create new ones. Write the book's title under the most appropriate heading.
6. Organize the books by category, then divide the class into small groups. Give each group a set of books and ask members to select the strongest book in each category. Tell them that, like the Caldecott award presented annually by the Association for Library Service to Children (a division of the American Library Association) to the artist of the most distinguished American picture book for children, they will be selecting books they admire most and awarding them special honors, with award names to be selected by the groups.
7. Allow time for each group to announce their decisions. Hang the award sticker by the book to show it has been chosen above the others. Ask each group to explain the name and significance of their award.
8. Let students read the books selected by other groups and enjoy the fine presentation in each.

### **Follow-Up Activities**

1. Ask students to make a book of their own, applying the style of one of their favorite picture books. Assure them that their finished copies do not need to be as polished as

those of a published book, but they should try to make their books as readable and interesting as possible. Share their books with the class.

2. Go to the library to find additional books that fit the categories you create. Expand the categories as you discover new presentation styles.

## **CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this has been an extremely beneficial experience as a researcher, student, and an educator. I have learned and grown through this process and am more prepared to further my education and become an educator. Through this process, I now understand the time, dedication, and the different aspects that are involved in creating a thesis.

From the perspective of an educator I have learned valuable information about the 6+1 traits of writing. I now know how they are intended to be used, and how you can use them in classroom. With all of this knowledge I will be able to benefit my future students with a creative way to learn to be a writer. I have also been able to explore the concept of backward design and creating original minilessons. With this experience I know that I can translate these acquired skills throughout all subject areas. Studying the Common Core State Standards, their design, and looking at the different standards throughout the elementary grade levels has helped me to stay current with what is going on in the field. During this process, I realized how important it is to always be aware and to do your own research so you can be as prepared as possible.

There are a few things from this work that I anticipate will benefit educators and students. I also for see some obstacles as these different lessons or concepts are trying to be implemented. As far as the benefits, I think that students will really enjoy learning through this process. It is an engaging, fun way to learn, and I believe students will really comprehend the concepts. I also hope that educators will find enjoyment in implementing this process as well. Another benefit that I believe will come from these minilessons is that students will learn to recognize quality children's literature. By doing this, they will not only be able to choose good books to read, but emulate the techniques in their writing as well. I did not have the opportunity to test all of these

lesson plans on a group of actual students. In this sense, I cannot be sure how they will play out. However, I did receive good responses from my class with the lesson plans I did use. Students seemed to really enjoy and benefit from *Fancy Nancy Says...*, *If Dogs Were Dinosaurs*, and *An Island Grows*. The lessons were extremely engaging and kept the students attention throughout. I also felt that they were learning important concepts from these minilessons. In *Fancy Nancy Says...* students learned how to change their voice by using a different selection of vocabulary. Brainstorming different words to use instead of “said” was a very popular component of the lesson. In *An Island Grows* students loved the opportunity to act out different sentences and learn more about subjects and verbs. What was special about this lesson is that students who normally do not volunteer answers had the opportunity to be very creative with acting. Finally, in *If Dogs Were Dinosaurs* students not only enjoyed the story, but really got creative with their “What If” questions. This was a time when they really had the opportunity to let their imaginations go crazy.

Even though all of these benefits are predicted for these minilessons, I do for see some obstacles that educators may face. The first thing that needs to be taken into consideration is the makeup of different classes. It is hard to predict if all classes will respond in a positive way or benefit from the different minilessons. The one thing that I would like to note, is that even though these minilessons have been created to be implemented as is, they *should* be altered to fit different types of classes and different needs students may have. In my class in particular, I have many diverse needs and it is necessary to scaffold for many of my students. If educators face this same challenge, it is important to keep in mind there are skills that you may have to demonstrate. Some of the directions may need to be given more explicitly or with more specifics. Another

obstacle that comes to mind is time. Time is a very valuable thing in the classroom, and some of these lessons may take longer than expected the first time around. My recommendation is to allot more time than may be necessary, and to look over the lesson plans in advance. This way, a reasonable stopping point can be determined if need be.

Another thing that I have considered is future research that I will conduct from this thesis. The main thing that I would like to do is implement all of the minilessons chosen for this project. After implementing the lessons I would add modifications that needed to be made to the lesson. I could also include reactions to the lessons from students. Aside from this, another idea I have considered would be creating lesson plans through different subject areas based on a chosen quality children's literature book. I would like to find books that not only teach the traits of writing but have other topics such as science or social studies intertwined as well.

In conclusion, I have learned about myself as an educator, student, and researcher. I am happy with the outcome of the minilessons, and am looking forward to the day where I can continue my research on this topic. I hope that even with the obstacles discussed, educators will be able to implement these lessons into their classrooms. With the universality of the Common Core State Standards, educators all over the country have the opportunity to use the strategy of teaching the 6+1 traits of writing through mentor texts. Educators from Florida to California could use these minilessons to meet the standards.

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