

Writing in Science

Lindsay Dibert, Teacher
Fifth Grade
Danville Elementary, Danville, NH

Background

Lindsay's fifth-graders write in every subject area. She wants her students to learn about the specific types of writing that occur in different disciplines and to practice that writing.

The students use their writer's notebooks in subjects outside of writing. Lindsay models this for her students by taking her writer's notebook to meetings and field trips — her students see her carry it around all the time.

In this lesson, the students are learning to observe like a scientist and to describe what they see.

Instruction and Activities

Lindsay leads the students in a discussion of scientific observation — what it means and the ways a scientist might observe. She passes out a variety of chicken bones to groups of students, and leads a discussion on the different ways scientists might observe the bones. Lindsay introduces the idea that scientists draw as a way to observe an item very closely.

Each student selects one bone to observe. In their writer's notebooks, the students write a detailed description, referring when necessary to a handout Lindsay provided with information and vocabulary related to bones. After the students have completed a written description, they draw the bone, using as much detail as possible. As students write and draw, they have multiple questions about their bones, such as what kind of bone it is, what other bones connect to it, etc. Lindsay encourages the students to record their questions to answer later.

Next, Lindsay has the students do a second observation, repeating the process with a cross-section of a cow bone. Before passing out the cow bones, she asks the students to predict what the inside of a bone looks like.

After they have written about and drawn the cow bone dissections, Lindsay asks the students to share descriptive words they used to write about both bones.