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Lessons in a Poetry Unit

Touchstone Texts, Punctuation in Poetry, Characteristics of Poems

Latosha Rowley, Teacher
Third Grade
Cold Spring Elementary, Indianapolis, IN

Background

Early in their poetry genre study, Latosha asked her third graders to compare poetry and prose. The students also brainstormed independently and as a class about the different types of poems and the characteristics of poetry (rhythm, shape, repetition, rhyme, etc.). Their ideas were recorded on chart paper.

Now Latosha is ready to introduce the poems that she will use as “touchstone texts.” (A touchstone text is chosen by the teacher to use for multiple lessons and reasons throughout one or many units of study. Students don’t have to be able to read touchstone texts independently because the text is shared among all the students and the teacher.)

Latosha selects “Mother to Son” by Langston Hughes and *Meet Danitra Brown*, a collection of poetry by Nikki Grimes. She chooses these for several reasons: She wants her students exposed to poems written by both men and women, the poems have many teachable features, and they are especially meaningful to her. Latosha will use these touchstone texts for different purposes throughout the poetry unit; in this lesson, she is pointing out how poets use punctuation to affect the way a poem is read.

Instruction and Activities

Mini-Lesson on Using Punctuation Marks in Poetry

Before Latosha reads “Mother to Son” to the class, she provides some brief background information about Langston Hughes. After the students listen to “Mother to Son,” Latosha shows them the following lines, written on a large sentence strip with the colon in red ink:

Well, son, I’ll tell you:

Life for me ain’t been no crystal stair.

Latosha rereads the lines on the sentence strip aloud, modeling how the reader pauses at certain punctuation marks. She points to the colon and asks the students to identify what it is and what it does. Then she reads the sentence aloud again—with the students—pausing again at the colon.

Next, after giving the students background information about Nikki Grimes, Latosha reads the poem “Purple” to them. She shows them a second sentence strip to highlight Grimes’ use of the colon and the exclamation point:

There’s just no mistake about it: Purple’s what Danitra loves!

She reads the line aloud with the appropriate pacing and expression, points out the punctuation marks, and then repeats it with the students reading along.

After the whole-class lesson, Latosha has the students look at two or three poems from baskets she has filled with poems and poetry books and note how the poets use punctuation marks.

Lessons in a Poetry Unit, cont'd.

Mini-Lesson on Feeling Poems and Seeing Poems

On the following day, Latosha begins her poetry study by reviewing the characteristics of poetry and the different types of poems. Then she introduces two categories of poetry: “feeling” poems (poems that deal primarily with emotions) and “seeing” poems (poems that use words to paint a picture in the reader’s mind).

The third graders sort the poems in the baskets into two piles: feeling and seeing. Next, Latosha asks them to work in small groups to discuss whether “Mother to Son” is a feeling or a seeing poem and why. The groups report back what they have discovered to the whole class.

What’s Next

The poetry unit unfolds over a period of more than two weeks. Further lessons in the unit include “surprising” words, poetry and shape, rhythm, “finding” poems in stories, illustrating poems, introducing metaphors and similes, and close observation of objects and the larger environment as fuel for poetry. The unit culminates with a poetry celebration in which students choose to share at least one poem and create a picture to go with it. The students present their poems to an audience of their parents, the principal, and other classes.

Lesson on Word Choice

Christine Sanchez, Teacher
Third Grade
Tohaali Community School, Toadlena, NM

Background

By the end of the school year, Christine wants her third graders to be familiar with the “six traits of good writing.” Thus far, the students have learned about ideas and organization, and Christine believes the students are ready to learn about a third trait: word choice.

Instruction and Activities

At the beginning of writing workshop, Christine and her students gather on the rug. First, she reviews the previous day’s lesson on effective word choice: using a variety of words in writing.

Next, Christine reads a passage from *Farmer Boy* by Laura Ingalls Wilder that describes a sumptuous Christmas dinner. After reading the passage, she asks the students to name the descriptive words they remember.

Christine shares her own story web in which she uses a variety of words to describe pickles. She has written the web on chart paper so all the students can see it. She then reads her rough draft, which includes many of the descriptive words from her web.

Christine asks the students to return to their desks and do the same exercise using Cheetos instead of pickles. Before they begin, she guides them in developing a story web, encouraging them to describe the way Cheetos smell, sound, and taste and to remember some of the times they have eaten them. The students work in pairs, first developing a story web, and then writing a rough draft. Christine offers individual guidance and help while the students work.

After the students have written their story webs and rough drafts, Christine gathers the class on the rug again and has each pair share what they wrote.

The next day, after a review, Christine has the students repeat the activity from the previous day, but this time, each pair of students writes about a food of their own choosing.

The following day, Christine plans to share a web and draft of a story she is writing about her mother’s cooking, but first she shares where she got the idea for her story—from an entry in her writer’s notebook. She presents her story web to the students, with the addition of two writing considerations: audience and purpose. After sharing her story web, her purpose and audience, and the thinking she did during prewriting, Christine reads her first draft, connecting the words in the draft to the words on the web.

Then Christine asks the students to think of a favorite meal and the people they shared it with and write a story web and draft describing the food and the feelings associated with those memories. Christine makes sure that the students have an idea for a story before they leave the rug, and she provides support for the students who need help choosing a topic. She continues to provide support as needed while the students are writing.

Again, Christine’s writing workshop ends where it began—on the rug—with students sharing what they created during independent writing time.

Introduction to Persuasive Writing

Mark Hansen, Teacher
Third Grade
Clarendon Elementary, Portland, OR

Background

Mark is introducing his third graders to persuasive writing, which is part of Oregon's state writing curriculum. With Mark's support, each student will identify a community problem, determine his or her position on the issue, and write a persuasive letter to an appropriate recipient. To help the students get started, Mark reads a picture book about a community issue. He also shares sample persuasive letters written by other students. Since this is a new concept for most third graders, Mark limits his students to arguments in favor of their particular positions.

Instruction and Activities

Day One

Mark begins the unit on persuasive writing by reading Patricia Zilver's picture book *The Wonderful Towers of Watts*. This book tells the true story of the Watts Towers in Los Angeles: how they were built and how the community saved them from being torn down. Mark stops at the point in the story when the city decides the towers must be removed.

Mark asks the students to imagine that they are the people in the story—the residents of the Watts neighborhood, including neighbors, children who play around the towers, parents, city officials, and so on. Then he asks the students to think of reasons for keeping or tearing down the towers, recording these arguments on a t-chart.

Next, Mark uses an overhead projector to share examples of persuasive letters written by students from previous years. He asks the class what they notice about the language and the arguments in the letters, records their responses, and circles some of the language and techniques the authors of the letters used.

The class brainstorms about people and groups who can help with different issues in their community. Mark introduces a graphic organizer to help students plan a persuasive letter. As a whole-class activity, Mark and the students choose an issue, take a position on the issue, think of arguments supporting the position, and then record the arguments on the graphic organizer. Next, Mark and the students brainstorm a list of possible recipients.

Day Two

Mark takes the students on a short walk around the neighborhood to take notes about problems they observe along the way. Mark asks each student to choose one of the problems observed on this walk as the topic for a persuasive letter.

Once students decide on an issue, Mark asks them to think about who can help with the problem—the audience for their letter. Students begin to write, using the graphic organizer as a pre-writing aid and talking to each other and Mark as they work. Later on, when the students are ready to publish, Mark will mail the letters to their intended recipients.

Handout: Persuasive Letter Planner

—Mark Hansen

Name: _____

Your idea

Use this space to explain what you want the person or group to know about.

The person or group you are writing to

Your arguments

Use these boxes to write down your arguments. Write as many as you can think of that will persuade your audience to do what you want. Later you can decide which ones work best.

Handout: Persuasive Letter Planner, p. 2

[Empty rectangular box for writing]

[Empty rectangular box for writing]

[Empty rectangular box for writing]

[Empty rectangular box for writing]

Handout: Sample Student Letters

—Student Work

Dear Portsmouth Neighborhood Association,

I am a third grader at Clarendon Elementary school and I live in the Portsmouth neighborhood. I am writing to you to tell you about a problem I think our neighborhood should work on together. Every day I walk to school like most of the kids at my school and there are scary dogs that make me worried. Sometimes one of the dogs gets out of the yard and chases some kids. I want people to know that it is not okay for their dogs to get loose. I think the neighborhood association should help this problem by letting people know that they have to keep their dogs in their property.

There are a lot of good reasons to keep dogs in their yards. First, a dog that escapes might run away and then the owner will be sad. Also, a dog that is loose could get hit by a car and get hurt some other way. If the dog is mean then it could attack a kid or someone else's pet, like a smaller dog or cat. The law says that if your dog attacks somebody then you can get in trouble or have to pay them money. Last, if there are mean dogs running around everywhere then people might think our neighborhood is a vicious wild animal park!

I think you will agree with me about these reasons. If you would like to contact me you can write back at the address on the envelope or you can call my teacher at the school. You can also use this letter in your newsletter so people will see what I'm saying.

Thanks for your help,

[Student]

Dear Mayor Katz,

I am writing you to ask you to help our schools. I am a student at Clarendon Elementary in North Portland. My little sister goes to this school, too. My big sister goes to Portsmouth school. I am worried for them and me because schools might close down early. I hope you can help keep the schools open.

If schools close early because there is no money then there will be some big problems. First, how much learning will be lost? Two or three weeks is a lot of time for teachers to teach new stuff. My teacher said that we might not get to do some of our big projects and field trips if schools close down early. The second thing is that my family doesn't know who will take care of us if school is closed. Both of my parents work and they can't take off any time. I don't want to be at home alone with my sisters. Scary! The last thing is that people around the country will think that we are a city that doesn't care about learning. People might think that this city doesn't care about kids or schools. That would be embarrassing for the whole town of Portland.

Thanks for reading my letter. I hope that you agree with my arguments and will help take care of the problem. You are a good mayor.

Sincerely,

[Student]

Handout: Sample Student Letters, p. 2

Dear Housing Authority of Portland,

I am writing to you about the big project you are planning for the Columbia Villa. I am a kid in the neighborhood that is next to the Villa and I have some concerns. I want to make sure that the big trees that are in the neighborhood stay there. I hope you can help me with that.

Trees are important to the neighborhood for a lot of reasons. They look good and make everyone feel relaxed, especially older trees. Little ones are nice, too, but big add a special beauty to the area. Older trees will make people want to come to live in the Villa. Trees are also helpful to houses, because they provide shade that keeps your house cool when it gets hot out. Big trees help the city because they soak up a lot of water that would go into the sewer or the Columbia Slough if the trees did not help.

I know you have a lot of changes to make so you can find a way to save trees. Thanks for reading my letter and feel free to write back.

Sincerely,

[Student]

Introducing the Writing Workshop

Mark Hardy, Teacher
Third Grade
Partnership Elementary, Raleigh, NC

Background

It's the first two days of school, and Mark Hardy is introducing his new third graders to the rituals and routines of the writing workshop in his classroom. At this stage, he doesn't expect his students to produce high-quality writing; his purpose is to help them write their first published piece and learn how to function independently in the workshop setting.

By having his students publish quickly, Mark gives them a chance to gain an experiential understanding of what it's like to have their writing go into the hands of an audience.

To foster independence, Mark encourages students to choose the writing form they "know and love best." This way, they can use what they have learned from reading as the basis for their first writing pieces.

Instruction and Activities

Mark begins by establishing the ritual of gathering on the rug at the start of each day's writing workshop. Since it's the first day, Mark introduces the concept of a workshop. He asks the students to describe a workshop, and he compares a writing workshop to other types of workshops where things are made. He asks students what they think writers do. Mark reinforces the idea that the students will "make things" in their writing workshop, things that can be shared with other people.

Next, Mark generates a discussion about the different types of things writers make, and records the answers on chart paper. The students come up with a wide variety of "things writers make," such as stories (real and "made up"), chapter books, picture books, letters, poems, "how-to" pieces, surveys, cookbooks, plays, etc.

Mark has his students look at the list they have generated and think about what they want to start making. He introduces a quote by writer John Gardner that will help the students decide what to make: "You should write the kind of thing you know and love best." Mark returns to this theme throughout the year, believing that students should have many opportunities to choose their own genres as well as topics.

To demonstrate how his students might approach their first writing task, Mark begins with a picture book he wrote himself, a "story that really happened," and describes how he drew the illustrations first and then waited until the next day to finish the story. Mark reads several other pieces that former students began on their first day of school. His examples include a variety of genres: short stories, picture books, plays, and poems.

Before the students begin writing, Mark instructs them to answer two questions: What kind of thing will I make? and What will I write about? Once the students have answered those questions in their minds, they are free to leave the rug and begin writing. Mark works individually with students who remain on the rug to help them choose a form and topic.

When all the students have started writing, Mark circulates around the room, asking questions and providing input. He confers with some students and encourages others to "unstick" themselves if they can. As he circulates, he uses a notebook to record what each student is writing.

Mark ends the writing workshop by bringing the students back together on the rug to talk about the work they did that day. He collects the students' work to review overnight.

Revising Leads

Lindsay Dibert, Teacher
Fifth Grade
Danville Elementary, Danville, New Hampshire

Background

After reading rough drafts of her students' personal narratives, Lindsay determined that a mini-lesson on leads would benefit the entire class. She created a handout containing examples of excellent introductions from children's literature.

Instruction and Activities

Lindsay begins the lesson by leading her students in a discussion of what makes a lead effective. After the discussion, Lindsay distributes the handout of introductions. She reads the first few aloud to the students, then stops and asks them what they notice about the leads—what they like or don't like, and what they find particularly effective. Lindsay repeats this activity with three or four leads at a time until she has finished reading all the introductions.

In groups of four or five, the students discuss the leads and select the three they like best. A representative from each group reports their choices and reasoning to the whole class.

At the close of the whole-class discussion, Lindsay asks the students to write three new leads for their personal narratives. The students may model their leads on the ones from the handout or on leads from books they select themselves.

After providing time for the students to work on their new leads, Lindsay brings the class back together and asks students to share their new leads and compare them to the original ones.

Handout: Sample Leads

—Lindsay Dibert

Louis the Fish

By Arthur Yorinks, Richard Egielski (Illustrator)

“One day last spring, Louis, a butcher, turned into a fish. Silvery scales. Big lips. A tail. A salmon.”

The Relatives Came

By Cynthia Rylant, Stephen Gammell (Illustrator)

“It was in the summer of the year when the relatives came. They came from Virginia. They left when their grapes were nearly purple enough to pick, but not quite.”

James and the Giant Peach

By Roald Dahl

“Until he was four years old, James Henry Trotter had had a happy life. He lived peacefully with his mother and father in a beautiful house beside the sea. There were always plenty of other children for him to play with, and there was the sandy beach for him to run about on, and the ocean to paddle in. It was the perfect life for a small boy.

“Then, one day, James’s mother and father went to London to do some shopping, and there a terrible thing happened. Both of them suddenly got eaten up (in full daylight, mind you, and on a crowded street) by an enormous angry rhinoceros which had escaped from the London Zoo.”

Miss Maggie

By Cynthia Rylant, Thomas Di Grazia (Illustrator)

“If you are a child who is never told the truth, you begin to make up your own. After my father left and no one mentioned his name again, I simply made things up about him.”

The Bat-Poet

By Randall Jarrell, Maurice Sendak (Illustrator)

“Once upon a time there was a bat—a little light brown bat, the color of coffee with cream in it. He looked like a furry mouse with wings.”

The Iron Giant

By Ted Hughes, Andrew Davidson (Illustrator)

“The Iron Giant came to the top of the cliff. How far had he walked? Nobody knows. Where had he come from? Nobody knows. How was he made? Nobody knows.”

Handout: Sample Leads, p. 2

Shrek!

By William Steig

“His mother was ugly and his father was ugly, but Shrek was uglier than the two of them put together.”

Tar Beach

By Faith Ringgold

“I will always remember when the stars fell down around me and lifted me up above the George Washington Bridge.”

Midnight for Charlie Bone (The Children of the Red King, Book 1)

By Jenny Nimmo

“On Thursday afternoon, just after tea, Charlie Bone saw smoke. He happened to be looking out his window when a dark cloud lifted above the autumn trees. The wind blew it south and it moved through the sky like a great, floating whale.”

Project Mulberry

By Linda Sue Park

“Patrick and I became friends because of a vegetable.”

Chasing Vermeer

By Blue Balliett, Brett Helquist (Illustrator)

“On a warm October night in Chicago, three deliveries were made in the same neighborhood. A plump tangerine moon had just risen over Lake Michigan. The doorbell had been rung at each place, and an envelope left propped outside.”

Teaching a Revision Strategy: Zooming In

Silvia Edgerton, Teacher
Fifth Grade
Herrera School for the Fine Arts, Phoenix, AZ

Background

The revision strategy Silvia is teaching her students goes by many names: Barry Lane, author of *After THE END*, calls it “exploding the moment” and “snapshots”; other sources refer to it as “adding detail” or “slowing the action.” Silvia intentionally declines to name the strategy, preferring to allow her students to do so. Silvia believes that once the students have come up with their own name for a strategy, it becomes part of the culture of the class, and the students are more likely to use it in their own writing and suggest it to each other during conferences. In previous years, Silvia’s students have named the strategy “zooming in.”

In introducing the strategy to her students, Silvia uses authentic examples from children’s literature, her own writing, and writing by her former students. She also provides opportunities for students to learn in different modalities—by drawing, talking to peers, moving their bodies, etc.

Instruction and Activities

Day One

Silvia introduces the strategy on the first day using excerpts from familiar children’s books and her own writing to illustrate how a writer can move closer in on the action. Each student has a handout with the passages on it, and Silvia also has it up on the overhead projector. As she reads the passages, Silvia asks the students to visualize what the characters are doing and then discuss with their neighbors what they see. She specifically asks them not to think of the illustrations from the books.

Silvia begins with an excerpt from *The Polar Express* by Chris Van Allsburg. After the students talk among themselves, Silvia has some of them share what their group saw in their minds while reading the passages. Silvia asks questions about how much action they could see from the beginning of the passage to the point where the conductor removes a watch from his pocket. She asks one student to stand and demonstrate which part of the conductor’s body he was able to see when the conductor was holding his pocket watch.

As Silvia repeats the exercise with other passages, she reinforces what the students are describing: that the author keeps moving closer and closer to what is being described. (The additional excerpts are from *Esperanza Rising* by Pam Muñoz Ryan, and a piece of Silvia’s writing.) Silvia then shares several illustrations a student has drawn of the scene from her own story. The illustrations clearly show how the scene starts far away and then moves closer in.

Next, Silvia has the students divide a blank piece of paper into three sections. On the overhead projector, Silvia shows the students an illustration from the familiar children’s book *Too Many Tamales* by Gary Soto. (In the illustration, a mother and daughter are sitting next to each other in front of a Christmas tree.) Silvia starts with the full illustration, and the students write a description in the first section. Then Silvia covers half of the illustration, and the students write a description of what they see. Finally, Silvia covers all but the mother’s hand, and the students write their descriptions. The lesson ends with the students sharing their descriptions with their neighbors.

Teaching a Revision Strategy: Zooming In, cont'd.

Day Two

After reviewing what the students learned the previous day, Silvia begins with an excerpt from the book *Charlotte's Web* by E. B. White. She provides students with another handout to use to illustrate the passage. The passage is divided into three stages, starting with a view of the barn door and moving in to a close-up of Charlotte. She asks students to draw a picture of each stage.

After the students have finished, Silvia has them move around the classroom to look at each other's drawings, noticing how the pictures "zoom in" from one stage to the next.

Next, Silvia reads a story written by a sixth-grade student she had the previous year. After reading the story, Silvia displays a paragraph on the overhead projector, in which the author "zoomed in" on the action. Silvia describes a writing conference she had with the student about the piece. The student said she wanted to use a "zoom in," and they brainstormed places in the story where this technique would add interest.

Silvia asks the students to go to a story in their writer's notebooks and find a place where they can "zoom in." (The students have been instructed to write on only the right-hand page of their notebooks so that they have room on the facing page to add revisions or try new strategies.) She suggests that the students talk to a partner about where they might "zoom in" before they start writing.

After the students have tried the strategy, Silvia asks some of them to read their revised work. Then the class discusses how the writer "zoomed in" on the action.

Finally, the students begin to think about what they will name the strategy. They make several suggestions, but Silvia tables the discussion until later in the week, giving the students more time to think about it and practice using the strategy.

Handout: Excerpts Used To Illustrate Zooming In

—Silvia Edgerton

The Polar Express

By Chris Van Allsburg

“A conductor stood at the open door of one of the cars. He took a large pocket watch from his vest, then looked up at the window.”

Esperanza Rising

By Pam Muñoz Ryan

“I looked out the window to see six men, their faces covered with handkerchiefs, and they all held rifles.”

“Josephina spread a blanket on the ground then unwrapped a bundle of burritos, avocado, and grapes.”

“The Bees”

By Silvia Edgerton

“Poncho stood in the open alfalfa field next to the 16 white wooden boxes. The boxes were stacked in pyramid form. Slowly Poncho opened one box and pulled a long column. The honey slid gently down the side of the column like molten lava until it landed on the ground.”

Handout: Charlotte's Web Graphic Organizer

—Silvia Edgerton

Charlotte's Web, by E. B. White

<p>"Stretched across the upper part of the doorway was a big spider web,</p>	<p>and hanging down from the top of the web, head down, was a large grey spider. She was about the size of a gumdrop.</p>	<p>She had eight legs, and she was waving one of them at Wilbur in friendly greeting."</p>

Introducing Personal Narrative

Sheryl Block, Teacher
Fourth Grade
Simpsonville Elementary, Simpsonville, KY

Background

In Kentucky, students are required to write personal narratives as part of the fourth-grade writing curriculum. Sheryl uses professional and student examples to help her fourth graders build on their knowledge of the characteristics of personal narratives before they begin to write their own.

Instruction and Activities

Sheryl introduces some of the characteristics of personal writing and reads “Gift from the Storm” by Kathy Milhoff, a personal narrative from *Highlights for Children* (April 1989). As she reads, Sheryl asks the students to think about what makes this a personal story.

After reading the story, Sheryl asks the students to share their ideas about the distinctive characteristics of personal narratives. She records these characteristics on a large piece of chart paper.

To share another example of a personal narrative, Sheryl invites an older student to their classroom to read a personal narrative written the previous year when she was in fourth grade. After the piece is read, Sheryl asks the author to reflect on the experience of writing this personal narrative.

When the student leaves, Sheryl distributes copies of the personal narrative. She asks the class to identify any additional characteristics of personal narratives they have observed in the older student’s piece. Sheryl adds these characteristics to the list on the chart paper.

Sheryl shares a list of characteristics of personal narratives from the Kentucky writing curriculum, and she and the students compare their list to the state’s in order to create a master list of the characteristics of personal narratives.

Finally, the students begin brainstorming and/or looking through their writer’s notebooks to find ideas for their own personal narratives. Sheryl provides many additional examples of published personal narratives for them to read and consult as they write.

Sheryl’s Follow-up Lesson

When the genre study is almost over and students are ready to publish their pieces, Sheryl introduces a reflection piece. She uses a graphic organizer to help her students think and write about the experience of creating a personal narrative.

Handout: Reflecting on My Writing

—Sheryl Block

Think about the top three writing criteria:

Purpose/Audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• why I wrote the piece• the most important part or focus
Idea Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ideas I used to develop my piece• ideas answering HOW? WHY? And WHAT? to help reader visualize• ideas that show action so reader can create a movie in his or her mind
Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• the order in which I tell my story• the way I grouped my ideas into paragraphs

What have you learned as a writer from developing a personal narrative? Give examples.

Using Picture Books To Teach Writing to Intermediate Students

Cristina Tijerina, Teacher
Fourth Grade
Sharp Elementary, Brownsville, TX

Background

From the very first day of school and throughout the year, Cristina reads picture books written for younger children to her fourth graders. She chooses children’s literature with universal themes and rich illustrations, and uses the books for a variety of purposes.

Cristina’s objectives include establishing community through shared experiences; choosing books that will prompt and inspire writing; building literacy in students with emergent reading skills, including those who are learning English; and teaching writing craft. Cristina has created a list of books she recommends for writing craft lessons.

In this lesson, Cristina uses a picture book to teach how detail and word choice can create “mental pictures” for readers in the absence of illustrations. She also uses the book’s subject matter as a writing prompt.

Instruction and Activities

Cristina introduces *The Day Jimmy’s Boa Ate the Wash* by Trinka Hakes Noble and Steven Kellogg (illustrator). She reads from a “big book” often used in primary grades. Cristina selected this book because the text is simple and the illustrations give all the details. The book’s universal subject matter—a school field trip—makes it an effective writing prompt.

As Cristina reads the book, she asks the students to describe the setting, characters, and action and explain the reasoning behind their inferences, all of which are derived from the illustrations: It takes place after school, a little girl and her mother live in an apartment in the city, the mom works at home, the girl went on a field trip to a farm, etc.

Cristina covers the illustration on each page and asks the students to imagine they are writing the story with no pictures. She asks them what details they would need to add to the text to replace the information about setting, characters, and action provided by the illustrations.

She continues this exercise throughout the book, and also points out some techniques such as using an ellipsis in the dialogue to indicate a pause, or capitalizing the dialogue to imply surprise or shouting.

At the end of the book, Cristina leads the students in a discussion of the characteristics of fantasy-based stories. As a writing prompt, Cristina asks the students to think of a memorable field trip and to add a twist that takes the story out of the realm of reality and into the world of fantasy. She reminds the students that they are not illustrating their stories and therefore must use words to create detailed mental images.

Teaching a Peer Conference Protocol: Receiving the Piece

Jeanne Boiarsky, Teacher
Third Grade
Zaharis Elementary, Mesa, AZ

Background

Community building starts on the first day of school in Jeanne Boiarsky's classroom, so her students are already comfortable sharing their work and talking about writing. However, up to this point, they have not participated in formal peer conferences.

Jeanne's lesson is an introduction to Receiving the Piece, a protocol for writing conferences developed by Donald Graves and described in his book, *Writing: Teachers and Children at Work* (Heinemann). In Receiving the Piece, the writer reads his or her story to a partner, who listens carefully. The listener repeats what he or she has heard back to the author; asks a question about the writing; makes a suggestion, which is usually related to the question; and offers specific praise. Then the partners switch roles.

Jeanne has used Receiving the Piece as a peer conference protocol for several years. She believes that it is a critical part of the writing process in her classroom because it helps students have an audience for their writing beyond the teacher. Jeanne has created an inviting display that illustrates each step of the process.

For their first experience with Receiving the Piece, the students share drafts of personal narratives with each other.

Instruction and Activities

Jeanne begins by gathering her third graders on the rug in front of an easel with a display illustrating the steps of Receiving the Piece. She leads a discussion of what it means to listen and pay attention, using a personal anecdote to demonstrate what good listening is and isn't.

Jeanne introduces Receiving the Piece as a way the students can listen to each other's stories and help make them even better. She describes each step of the process, and then answers questions the students have about how each step works.

Jeanne has invited two former students, now fourth graders, to model Receiving the Piece in a "fishbowl" demonstration. After the demonstration and further questions, the students pair up to practice Receiving the Piece. Jeanne moves around the room, listening in on conferences and guiding when necessary. The older students also walk around the classroom, answering questions and offering guidance. Jeanne feels that using the older students as models and mentors reinforces to her students that the teacher is not always the expert.

After they practice Receiving the Piece, Jeanne asks her students to talk about what they liked and didn't like about the process. She also describes how Receiving the Piece will now be a regular part of the writing workshop.

Talking Revision

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

Background

Lindsay introduces a new revision strategy in which her students talk to each other about the pieces they are currently writing—personal narratives—rather than read the pieces verbatim. Lindsay believes this strategy makes students feel part of a supportive writing community. She also thinks it helps them recognize places where they might add information and dialogue to their narratives.

Instruction and Activities

Lindsay asks her fifth graders to pair up, with each student taking a turn telling his or her story. The other student listens, takes notes, and—when the writer is through talking—asks questions about the story. The author jots down the questions and decides later whether to use them to revise the piece.

Revising Writing To Show Action

Sheryl Block, Teacher
Fourth Grade
Simpsonville Elementary, Simpsonville, KY

Background

After reading the first drafts of her fourth graders' personal narratives, Sheryl saw a general need for students to expand their ideas by using their senses and describing action.

Instruction and Activities

At the beginning of writing workshop, Sheryl gathers the students on the rug in front of an easel with chart paper. She tells a very bland story and then asks the students how well they understood what happened. Sheryl guides the students in a discussion of a questioning strategy that helps writers develop ideas: answering the "How," the "Why," and the "What" in a story.

Next, Sheryl introduces an excerpt from a personal narrative written by a student from the previous year. She has written the passage on the chart paper so the class can read it. Sheryl solicits responses that will help identify sentences in the piece that need elaboration. Together, Sheryl and the students choose one sentence to elaborate. Sheryl writes the sentence on another piece of chart paper that has been formatted the same way as the graphic organizer the students will be using in the next part of the lesson. In a box underneath the sentence, Sheryl and the students revise the sentence to add detail and expand the action.

The students return to their desks. Working in pairs, they help each other find sentences in their personal narratives that need elaboration. When each student has chosen a sentence, they use the graphic organizer to revise the sentence by adding detail and action.

After working on their revisions, the students gather again on the rug, where they are invited to share their revised work in the "share chair." When a few students have shared, Sheryl asks all the students to answer on the back of their graphic organizer a reflective question about the lesson. Sheryl collects the handouts at the end of the lesson so she can review the students' work. Afterwards, she will return the revisions to the students so they can add them to their drafts in their writer's notebooks.

Writing Newspaper Articles From Research Notes

Nicole Outsen, Teacher
Fifth Grade
North Hampton Elementary, North Hampton, NH

Background

Nicole's fifth graders have been researching Lewis and Clark's Western expedition for a multigenre project, and each student has chosen a single, narrow focus for his or her research. The multigenre project includes a map, an expedition application, journal entries written from the perspective of a member of the expedition, a poem, a newspaper article detailing an aspect of the journey, a bibliography, a presentation, and two other genres chosen by the students.

The lessons featured in the videos focus on writing newspaper articles using notes the students have gathered in their research. Prior to the two days featured in the videos, the students looked at several newspaper articles to understand their purpose and structure. Together, Nicole and the students developed a basic template for newspaper articles that the students will follow as they write.

Instruction and Activities

Nicole begins her writing workshop with a mini-lesson on organizing research notes to fit into the structure of a newspaper article. On the overhead projector, she shows her students a list of facts she has gathered for her article on Lewis and Clark. After cutting her notes into strips, she briefly demonstrates how to organize notes by grouping them into categories. Then she distributes copies of her notes to the class. In pairs and small groups, students cut the notes into strips, organize them into categories, and place them in separate envelopes.

Nicole allows the students to work on this task for about 10 minutes and then gathers the class to discuss the process and share their organizational approaches. The students spend the rest of writing workshop organizing their own research notes using the strategies they have just discovered.

The next day, Nicole teaches a mini-lesson on writing informational text with "voice." On a large piece of chart paper, Nicole has written a bland introduction to her newspaper article. She asks students what they think of the introduction. After a few responses ("boring," "doesn't grab the reader," etc.), Nicole rewrites the introduction with the students' help, adding voice and interest.

Following the mini-lesson, students finish organizing their notes and begin to write their articles. Nicole moves around the room for informal check-ins. At the end of individual writing time, Nicole has the whole class talk about their problems and successes.

Handout: Multigenre Research Project Requirements

—Nicole Outsen

Name: _____

For the next five weeks, we will investigate Lewis and Clark's Westward Expedition, *and* we will explore and celebrate the multitude of genres in literature.

Here are the basic requirements for this project:

Map including...

- A chart of Lewis and Clark's westward path
- Important bodies of water used on their journey
- Labels of states that existed in 1804
- Note four important places along the journey
- Inset map with a picture (drawn) and caption for each important location

Expedition Application

Journals (written from the perspective of one of the members of the expedition)

Poem

Newspaper Article (detailing some aspect of the journey)

Choice Piece #1

Choice Piece #2

Bibliography written in the following format:

- Book...

Author's last name, first initial. *Title of book*. Date of Publication.

Isaacs, S. *America in the Time of Lewis and Clark*. 1988.

- Internet site...

Site name

www.lewisandclark.org/bio/york

- Encyclopedia or textbook

Title, pages used.

World Book Encyclopedia, 37-40.

Presentation

Handout: Possible Pieces for a Multigenre Project

—Nicole Outsen

Announcements	Insert Magazines (<i>Parade</i> , etc.)
Articles	Inserts
Biographies	Interviews
Birth Announcements	Letters to the Editor
Bonus Offers	Lottery Results
Book Reviews	Manuals
Cheat Sheets	Marriage/Engagement Announcements
Classifieds	Movie Reviews
Animals	News Summaries/News in Brief
Boats/Cars	Obituaries
Deals/Offer	Opinions
Job Listings	Pamphlets/Brochures
Lost/Found	Plays
Personals	Poems
Real Estate	Police Logs
Commercials	Posters
Concert Listings	Previews
Coupons	Sports
Directories	Stock Market/Money
Games	TV Listings
Acrostics	Upcoming Events
Art	Volunteer Opportunities
Brain Teasers	Weather
Comics	Forecast
Crosswords	Graphs of Averages/Records
Horoscopes	Maps
Jumbles	
Tongue Twisters	

Handout: Elements of a Newspaper Article

—Nicole Outsen

Purpose: To share information about what's currently going on in the town, state, and country and in other countries. Answers the question "Why is this event important?"

As readers, what do we expect to find in a newspaper article?	As writers of newspaper articles, how do we meet the expectations of our readers?
<p>Headline: What's the article about?</p> <p>Who wrote it?</p> <p>Pictures with captions</p> <p>Who are the important people?</p> <p>Who was affected by the event?</p> <p>What happened?</p> <p>Where, specifically, did the event take place?</p> <p>Why did the event take place?</p> <p>Facts, not opinions</p> <p>Opinions can be shared if quoted or attributed to the people who said them.</p> <p>Interesting statistics</p>	<p>Include a headline.</p> <p>Include one or more subheadings.</p> <p>First paragraph should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where• Lead that makes you want to read on• Brief summary of what the article will be about <p>Answer "Who," "What," "When," "Where," and "Why" towards the beginning.</p> <p>Give reactions and opinions toward the end.</p> <p>Pictures sometimes have captions.</p> <p>Article doesn't always say who wrote it.</p>

Integrating Other Subject Content Into Writing

Sheryl Block, Teacher
Fourth Grade
Simpsonville Elementary, Simpsonville, KY

Background

Sheryl's fourth graders are studying the Food Guide Pyramid and healthy eating as part of the state health curriculum. Sheryl decides to weave the health curriculum content into her reading and writing.

Over two days, Sheryl presents multiple mini-lessons to introduce the students to two genres (plays and "how-to" pieces) and to help them identify main ideas in writing and learn about language choices.

All the fourth graders are required to write about a subject related to what they are studying in health. However, the students are allowed to decide what their topic, purpose, genre, and audience will be.

Instruction and Activities

Day One

The first mini-lesson is in reading—building fluency and identifying the main idea—but it provides a writing model as well. The fourth graders read a play about healthy eating aloud, acting out the different roles. Reading the play develops reading fluency and shows the students how a play looks in written form. The class discusses the play's main idea and how it relates to the writer's decisions about focus. In a writing-to-learn exercise, the students reflect on what they have learned.

The second mini-lesson is on writing step-by-step instructions, with an emphasis on recipes. To help students think and plan, Sheryl often uses a graphic organizer in the form of planning boxes. The more time students spend filling in the boxes, Sheryl believes, the better chance they have of remembering all the parts of a specific writing form. After looking at sample recipes—the students are entertained by some from *Roald Dahl's Revolting Recipes*—Sheryl has the class identify the writing criteria and characteristics of recipes and create the planning boxes themselves.

The third mini-lesson involves the unique characteristics of language in recipes and other step-by-step instructions: imperative sentences and well-chosen verbs. The students play a game in which they look through recipe books to find the most unusual verbs. Sheryl believes this activity reinforces the importance of accurate, interesting word choice and introduces students to words they might never have thought of using, like *garnish* and *thread*.

Integrating Other Subject Content Into Writing, cont'd.

Day Two

Writing workshop begins at the rug with a discussion and author's "share chair," a place where students read their work to their classmates. Sheryl reads a feature newspaper article about junk food in schools and leads a discussion of the reporter's writing decisions, the same decisions the students will be making. These include identifying a topic, a purpose, and an audience. Sheryl invites students to come to the share chair to discuss what they are thinking of writing—their possible topics, forms, audiences, etc. Sheryl hopes this sharing helps students in their own thinking processes.

Sheryl distributes a Slicing the Pie graphic organizer, part of a packet to help students plan their writing. She draws a circle (the pie) on chart paper to model how to use the organizer. First, she leads the students in a discussion of ideas for topics, or slices, for their pies on the overall subject of healthy eating. Some of the students' suggestions include "why overeating is unhealthy," "healthy eating with the five food groups," "making healthy snacks," "food allergies," etc.

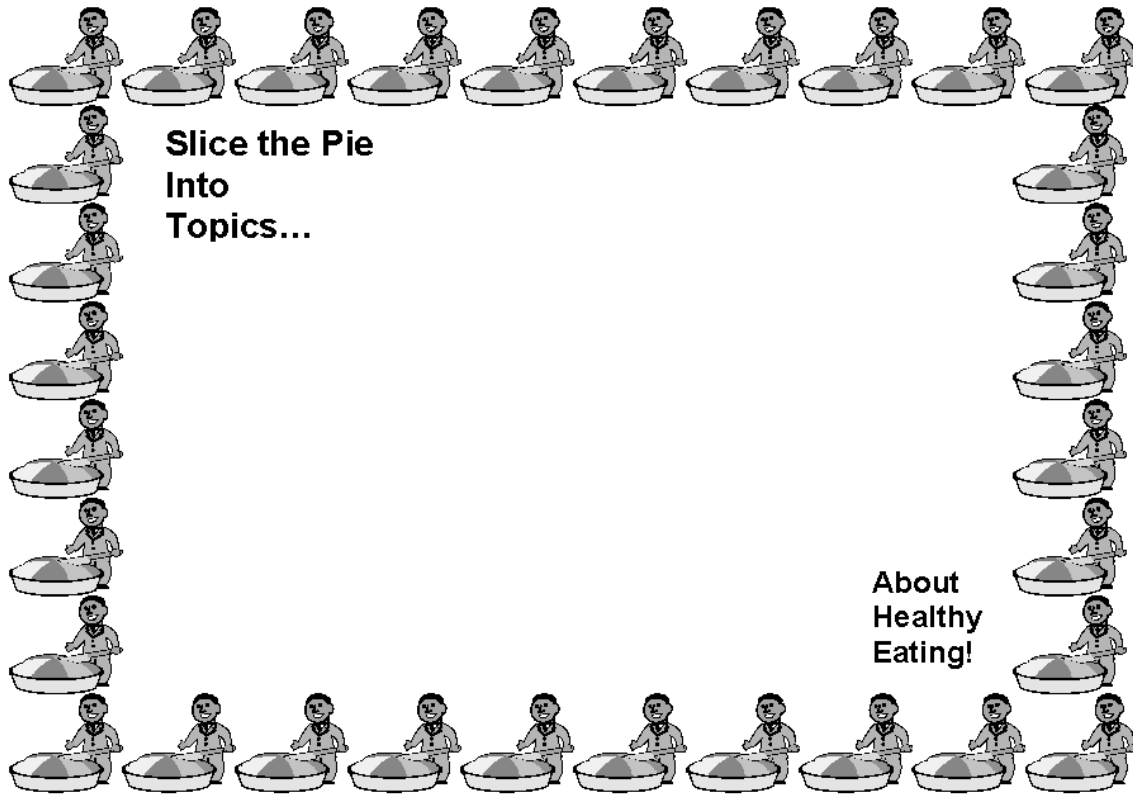
Next, Sheryl has the students record the main focus of their writing pieces—the big idea they want their readers to understand. Students then select a genre for their pieces, choosing from forms they have studied, including articles, recipes, letters, plays or scripts, short stories, poems, and brochures. The students make a list of questions they have to answer and identify possible audiences for their pieces.

Sheryl reinforces that students should answer these questions about topic, form, and audience before they begin to write their pieces. The students work in pairs to answer the questions on their graphic organizers while Sheryl circulates among them.

Writing workshop ends with students sharing what they have accomplished so far.

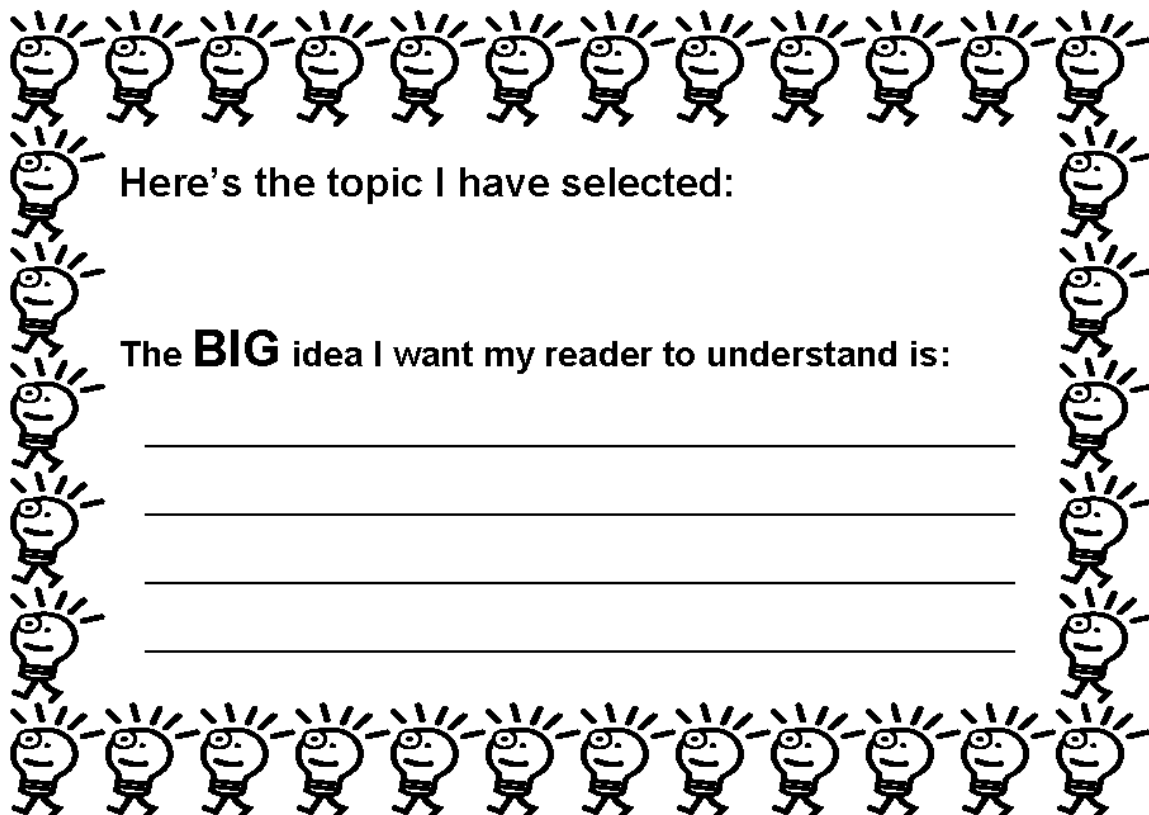
Handout: Slicing the Pie Graphic Organizer

—Sheryl Block



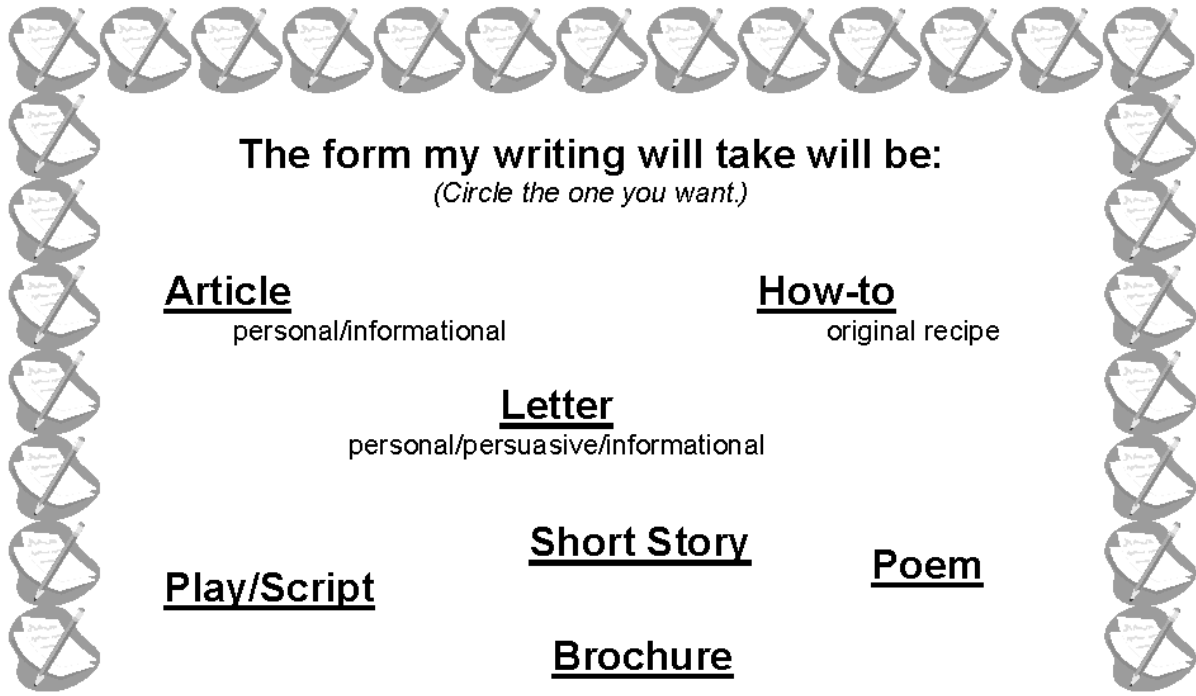
**Slice the Pie
Into
Topics...**

**About
Healthy
Eating!**



Here's the topic I have selected:

The **BIG idea I want my reader to understand is:**



The form my writing will take will be:
(Circle the one you want.)

Article
personal/informational

How-to
original recipe

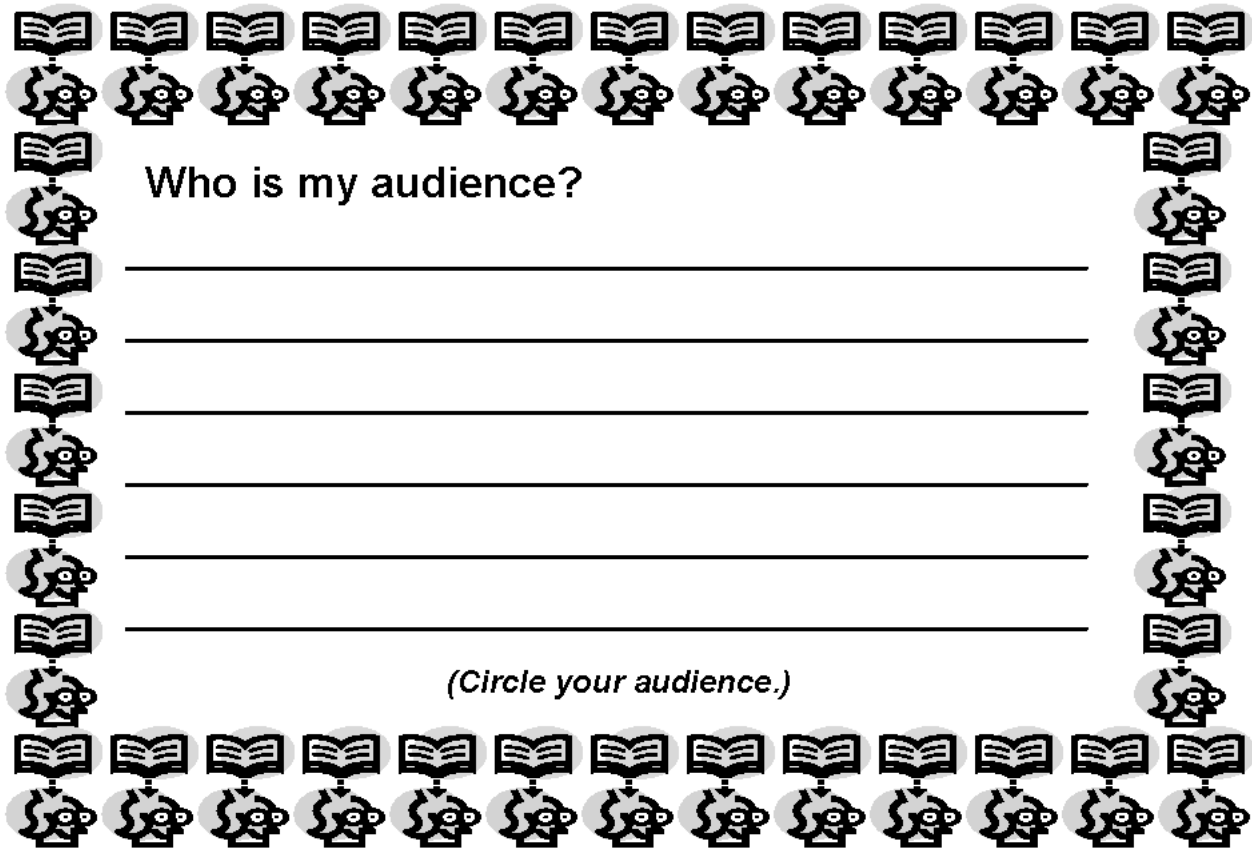
Letter
personal/persuasive/informational

Play/Script Short Story Poem

Brochure



Questions I'll Have To Answer:



Who is my audience?

(Circle your audience.)

Writing in Math

Christine Sanchez, Teacher
Third Grade
Tohaali Community School, Toadlena, NM

Background

Christine's third graders are studying how to collect, analyze, and report survey data. The students have created reindeer glyphs as a visual way to record data about themselves. Each reindeer reflects characteristics of the student who made it: The number of prongs on the antlers represents the student's age, the color of the reindeer's nose identifies the student's gender, bells and ribbons added to the reindeer tell whether the student is going home for the holidays or staying on campus, the position of the tail indicates the student's favorite season of the year, the position of the legs signifies the student's birth order in the family, and the direction in which the reindeer's eyes are pointing indicates whether the student likes reading or math best. All the reindeer are posted together on the wall.

Instruction and Activities

After reviewing what the reindeer parts represent, Christine distributes a tally sheet that includes all the categories of data being collected. Together, Christine and the students tally the results in each category, and then record the class totals at the bottom. Once all the categories have been tallied, Christine has the students write sentences to describe their findings, using words like *most*, *few*, *some*, *all*, etc. Christine and the students do the first one together: "Most of the students in the class are eight years old." The students write the sentences for the remaining categories on their own, although Christine continues to support them in analyzing the data and expressing their findings in writing. When they finish, Christine has the students read their sentences to a partner.

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.

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