COMMON CORE READING & WRITING WORKSHOP

A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop

GRADE 4

LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

firsthand HEINEMANN
DEDICATED TO TEACHERS™

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This curricular calendar details the Reading and Writing Project's proposal for a Common Core State Standards–aligned writing curriculum in fourth-grade classrooms. This document has been extensively revised since 2010–11. The document will be revised a year from now, in spring 2012, to reflect all the new learn-

ing that this community of practice will do. The Reading and Writing Project's Curricular Calendar outlines for each K–8 grade a yearlong course of study that is part of a K–8 spiral curriculum. Fashioned with input from hundreds of teachers, coaches, and principals, this curriculum is supported by three decades of work in thousands of schools. It especially stands on the shoulders of Calkins' *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* (Heinemann, 2006), a series of books that conveys minilessons that Calkins and coauthors gave while teaching many of these units of study.

This curriculum responds directly to the requirements spelled out in the new Common Core State Standards for fourth grade. It is also based on the New York State ELA exam and standards. If you teach in a different state, you will need to adjust this sequence of work according to your state's assessments.

Comprising units of study that tend to be a month in duration, the fourth-grade curriculum calendar offers instruction in narrative, argument, informational, and poetic writing that fits into a spiral curriculum for work that crosses students' school experience. This instruction enables students to work in each of these fundamental modes with increasing sophistication and with decreasing reliance on scaffolds. For example, first graders write "Small Moment stories" by recalling an event and retelling it "across their fingers," whereas third graders plot narratives against the graphic organizer of a time line or a story mountain, revising the narratives so that beginnings and endings relate to what the story is *really* about. In a similar manner, from kindergarten through eighth grade, students become progressively more capable at writing opinion (or argument) texts. In first grade, for example, children make and substantiate claims in persuasive letters; by third grade, they learn to use expository structures to persuade. By fifth grade, students analyze informational texts to understand conflicting points of view and write argument essays in which they take a stand, drawing on evidence from research. Because the units of study are designed to build upon one another, a teacher at any one grade level can always use the write-ups for preceding and following grades to develop some knowledge for ways to support writers who especially struggle and need enrichment. This sometimes takes a bit of research. Units in, say, writing informational texts will not always bear the same title (these might be called "all-about books" at one grade and research reports at another), nor will these units necessarily be at a consistent time during the year.

While these curricular calendars support units that vary according to grade level, allowing students to work with increasing sophistication and independence over time, it is also true that all of the units aim to teach writers to write with increasing skill. Eudora Welty once said, "Poetry is the school I went to in order to learn to write prose." Indeed, work in any particular genre can advance writing skills that are applicable across genres. Interestingly, the essential skills of great writers remain consistent whether the writer is seven, seventeen, or seventy years old. All of us try again and again to write with focus, detail, grace, structure, clarity, insight, honesty, and increasing control of conventions, and all of us do so by rehearsing, planning, studying exemplar texts, drafting, rereading, revising, re-imagining, and editing.

There is nothing inevitable about this particular way of unrolling a sequence of writing units of study. There are lots of other ways teachers *could* plan their writing

curriculum. We lay out this one course of study for fourth graders because we believe it is a wise trajectory. It stands on the shoulders of the work these children will have done in the preceding year, enabling them to meet the Common Core State Standards for fourth grade and setting them up for fifth grade. The other reason we lay out this single line of work is that the Reading and Writing Project's conference days and coach courses cannot provide close support for hundreds of different iterations of a writing curriculum. For the schools who are working closely with us, the Project's writing-related workshops for fourth-grade teachers will support this particular line of work. Conference days usually precede the units of study by at least a week, if not two weeks.

Many teachers make curricular maps based on these units, often following the *Understanding by Design* format, and, of course, teachers invent minilessons that support these units. During the 2011–12 school year, we will create a website where these and other resources can be shared. You can learn about this resource on our current website, www.readingandwritingproject.com, where you will find a bibliography of books that aligns to these units, most of which are available through Booksource.

Although we're excited about this curricular calendar, we also know that nothing matters more in your teaching than your own personal investment in it. It is critical that you modify this plan as you see fit so that you feel a sense of ownership over your teaching and so that your teaching reflects what you know about your students. We do encourage you, however, to work in sync with colleagues from fourth grade (and perhaps third and fifth grades) so that your teaching can benefit from the group's cumulative knowledge. Ideally, this will mean that your grade-level meetings can be occasions for swapping minilessons, planning lessons in ways that inform your teaching, assessing and glorying in children's work, and planning ways to respond to their needs.

A Quick Guide to the Units—Changes from Last Year to This Year

There has never been more work invested in a curricular calendar than that which has been invested into this year's fourth-grade calendar. The changes between last year and this year are too extensive to detail in this overview. Many of the changes are the result of the adoption of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the new attentiveness this has brought to informational and argument writing.

The first two units support students moving along a progression of narrative work. The revisions in these first two units are fairly restrained. Some of you may question whether undue amounts of attention are being placed on narrative writing, but we do not think so, for a few important reasons. First, the exemplar of narrative writing included in the appendix of the Common Core suggests that expectations for narrative writing are extremely high. Your students (that is, almost all of them) will not reach these ambitious levels unless you teach an ambitious sequence of narrative work. These standards are not for the weak of heart! Then, too, it is during this work with narrative writing that students learn to write with fluency, with a command of conventions, with detail and structure. Later, all these skills can be transferred to other genres.

You will see that after two units that spotlight narrative writing, we recommend a unit on personal and persuasive essays, followed by one on informational writing. The unit descriptions for both of these units are almost completely new, and the units have been carefully designed to take students to the level of expectation described in the CCSS. These two months are then followed by a month on poetry: we've re-imaged this as a chance for students to practice some of the work with themes and perspective from reading workshop through creating thematic anthologies.

We're suggesting a content-area reading and writing unit in May. Students will again write informational texts. Whereas the first time they did this they wrote on topics of individual expertise, now they will write on a whole-class research topic. At the end of the year, we return to lift the level of narrative writing through reflection and new text structures in a unit on memoir.

We are aware that you and your colleagues may well make choices that are different than those we present here, and we welcome those choices. A year from now, we'd love to hear your suggestions for variations on this theme! If you devise a new unit of study that you are willing to share with other teachers, please send it to Lucy Calkins at: contact@readingandwritingproject.com.

Assessment

Who was it who said, "We inspect what we respect?" It will be important for you to assess your students' growth in writing using a number of different lenses to notice what students can do. The Project recommends you use the continua for assessing narrative, informational, and argument writing, three tools we have developed and piloted to track student growth in those modes of writing. These tools are works in progress and the newest versions of them are available on the TCRWP website (www.readingandwritingproject.com). We invite you and your colleagues to tweak and alter these instruments to fit your purposes. We hope they can help clarify the pathways along which developing writers travel. It will certainly help you identify where a student is in a sequence of writing development and imagine realistic, doable next steps for each writer. This can make your conferring much more helpful and your teaching clearer. What began as an *assessment* tool has become an extraordinarily important *teaching* tool!

You will want to exercise caution, however, while assessing a writer against any developmental continuum. If you bypass listening and responding to a writer, using a continuum rather than the writer's intentions as the sole source of your instruction, then the tool will have made your teaching worse, not better. Conferences always need to begin with a teacher pulling alongside a writer and asking, "What are you working on as a writer?" and "What are you trying to do?" and "What are you planning to do next?" Then the teacher needs to help the writer reach toward his or her intentions. We do this drawing not only on our knowledge of good writing but also on our knowledge of how narrative, argument, and informational writers tend to develop. This is where the assessment tool can be a resource.

It is crucial that your first assessments occur at the very start of your year. Your students come to you with competencies and histories as writers. You cannot teach well unless you take the time to learn what they already know and can do. Then, too, if you capture the data representing what writers can do at the very start of the year, you will be in a position to show parents and others all the ways in which they have grown as writers over the course of the year. In autumn parent-teacher conferences, bring the writing a learner did on the first day of school and contrast it with the writing he or she did just before the conference. Having the "before" and "after" comparison makes this conversation productive.

Even if you are not going to use the continua to assess growth in writing, we think you will want to get some baseline data on your writers. At the very beginning of the year, devote one full day's writing workshop—specifically fifty minutes—to an on-demand assessment of narrative writing, another full day to an on-demand assessment of informational writing, and ideally, a third day to a similar assessment of opinion (or argument) writing. We cannot stress enough that you cannot scaffold kids' work during this assessment. Do *not* remind students of the qualities of good narrative writing, do *not* share examples of powerful texts, and definitely do *not* confer with writers. This needs to be a hands-off assessment. The exact words that we suggest you say to your students are available on the TCRWP website. You will want to repeat these on-demand assessments several times across the year, after finishing some work in that mode of writing.

If you worry that saying, "Welcome to a new year. I want to begin by evaluating you," might seem harsh, you might soften this by saying that you can't wait until the end of September before having some of your students' writing to display on bulletin boards. Tell your youngsters that they won't have a chance to work long on the piece because you are so eager to have their writing up in the room. This is why they need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in just one day. The only problem with this approach is that sometimes the idea that these pieces will be displayed has led teachers to coach into the writing, ruining the power of this assessment tool. The alternative is to tell students that this writing is just for you to get to know them and then to store it in their portfolios.

In any case, you will want to study what your students are able to do as writers at the beginning of the year. This will help you establish a baseline understanding of what your students know about the qualities of good writing. Take note of whether students have been taught and are using essential concepts. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing *focused* texts.

Grammar and Conventions in the Writing Curricular Calendar

We recommend that you also take fifteen minutes at the start of the year, and periodically throughout the year, to assess students' growing control of spelling. We recommend administering Donald Bear's spelling inventory detailed in *Words Their Way.* You'll give your whole class what amounts to a spelling test, asking them to spell each

of the twenty-five words. To assess your spellers, you will need to count *not* the words correct but the *features* correct—this can take a few minutes for each child. The result is that you can channel your whole-class spelling and vocabulary instruction so that your teaching is aligned to the main needs you see across your class. It will also help you differentiate that instruction for your struggling and strongest spellers.

You will also want to assess your writers' command over the mechanics of writing and look at their work through the lens of the Common Core State Standards for fourth grade. You will want to understand which conventions of written language your children use with automaticity whenever they write. To understand this, look at their on-demand pieces of writing. For fourth graders, ask yourself:

- Which children do and do not tend to write in paragraphs?
- Which children do and do not include direct dialogue and use quotation marks and other punctuation associated with dialogue?
- Which children do and do not generally control their verb tenses?
- Which children do and do not generally control subject-verb agreement so that the subjects and verbs are either plural or singular?
- Which children are beginning to compose complex sentences?

If you have children who do not use end punctuation correctly, who do not write in paragraphs, who seem to sprinkle uppercase letters randomly throughout their writing, or who don't yet use quotation marks to set off direct dialogue, embed instruction in all these things into your first two units of study. Establishing a long-term inquiry across the months on punctuation, capitalization, and verb usage is another way to support student growth in grammar. The hope is that many more of your students will do all of this (not perfectly, but as a matter of course) by your second on-demand narrative writing assessment, probably at the end of November. You'll first teach any of these skills by embedding them into editing work (though this may be editing just an entry), and then you'll expect the instruction to affect drafting. For example, if some students are not writing with end punctuation, teach them to read over their writing and to put a period where a thought or action ends. This exercise will eliminate a lot of run-on sentences quickly and with a minimum of fuss. Then you can teach them to write by having a complete thought, saying it to themselves, and then writing without pausing until they reach the end of that thought, whereupon they leave a period on the page. Most students speak in sentences; they can write in them.

You will also want to be sure that your young writers are not boxed into simple sentence structures when they write. You may have students whose sentences all seem to go like this: A subject did something (perhaps to someone, with something). "I went to the park. I rode my bike. I got an ice cream. I came home." These children may feel in their bones that the writing lacks something, and they may try to solve the problem by linking simple sentences with conjunctions: "I went to the park *where* I rode my bike. *Then* I got an ice cream *and* I came home." But that doesn't solve the problem. Teach these children that it helps to tell when, how, under what conditions, with what thoughts in mind, the person did the something. The sentences can now

look like this: "One sunny Saturday morning, I went to the park. Not long after that, I got an ice cream. Noticing the time, I hurried home." It can also help to tell *how* one did something and to tell about that activity. "I went to the park, the one down the road from me. I rode my bike quickly, round and round in circles. I got an ice cream, a double-scoop chocolate that melted all over me. . . ."

For those of you wanting to understand syntactical complexity more, you may find it interesting to measure your children's syntactic maturity in writing by looking at the average length (the number of words) of the grammatical sentences your students construct. Hunt calls these the "T-units" (Hunt 1965). For instance, if a student writes: "I went to the store. I bought some candy. I met Lisa." These are three independent T-units (or simple sentences) and each one is short, with just a few words. This is simple syntax. This would still be written in T-units of four or five words if the sentences were linked with the word *and* because a T-unit is the term for a *possible* sentence, whether or not the writer punctuates it as such. On the other hand, the number of T-units would double if the sentence went like this: "When I went to the store, I bought some candy before I met Lisa." Nowhere in that sentence is a place where a period could have been added, so this is all one T-unit composed of fourteen words. More complex syntax has more words within a T-unit. For example, the same sentence could contain yet more words per T-unit (and still be more complex): "Yesterday I went to the store, where I bought some candy and met Lisa, my cousin and best friend." Some writers who struggle with punctuation show complicated syntax, which is terrific. It is important for teachers to realize that correctness is not the only goal. A writer's growing ability to write complex sentences (with many words per T-unit—although don't talk T-units with kids) should be celebrated. Writers with complex syntax will make some errors, but these writers are still far more advanced than those who use correct punctuation but rely only on simple sentences.

Children benefit most from instruction when it helps them become more powerful as they work on projects they care about, rather than studying mechanics in isolation. Usually you will first teach mechanics during editing, after children have drafted and revised a piece and are preparing it for publication. But once you have taught a skill during editing—say, the skill of dividing a piece into paragraphs—then you need to hold your students accountable for using that skill as they draft. For example, during the editing portion of Unit One, you will probably teach all students to write in paragraph structure. You will teach some of the cues for narrative paragraphs such as when a new character enters a scene, the time changes, or the setting changes. So at the start of Unit Two, when youngsters are collecting entries in their notebooks, you will want to act dumbfounded if you notice one child hasn't remembered to use paragraph indentations. Make a big fuss over this as a way to teach children that whatever they learn first during editing needs to become part of their ongoing repertoire, something they rely on all the time. Paragraphing and the punctuation involved in dialogue will fit naturally into narrative units of study. Colons and semicolons will fit into Unit Three as kids will be collecting, listing, and sorting all they know.

One *crucial* point is that students will move through stages of using and confusing new constructs before they master them. This means that getting things slightly

wrong can be a sign of growth. If we only "fix" students' writing or tell them to be "correct," then they may revert to simpler vocabulary and sentence structure that they are sure they know how to punctuate. For instance, when students first start moving into past tense, they may not know all the forms of irregular verbs and may confuse some. If we emphasize only accuracy, they will revert to present tense or to safe verbs they know. In the same way, they may not dare write longer sentences if they're not sure how to punctuate them. Common stages of development include unfamiliarity, familiarity and experimentation, using and confusing, mastery, and control (Bear 2008).

In Unit Three, teach students to recall the conventions you've already taught showing that they apply to non-narrative writing. Plan to revisit paragraph structure in non-narrative writing, teaching students to use it at new sections or where new ideas are introduced. Some of this can be small-group instruction. Always teach students to use all the conventions they have learned until now to be effective editors of their own and others' writing, and to write drafts that are more accurate in terms of conventions. Perhaps you will introduce the use of commas in a list, as writers typically include multiple examples in information books.

Later in the year, when students return to writing stories, this might be a good time for them to write and punctuate more complicated sentences, doing so in an effort to cue readers into how to read their writing with lots of mood and expressiveness. If needed, form small groups around any convention that merits more attention. For example, in a small group you can help students who get confused distinguishing singular and plural pronouns, or apostrophes for possessives and contractions.

UNIT ONE

Raising the Level of Personal Narrative Writing

SEPTEMBER

At the start of the year, you want to get your students writing a tremendous amount. They simply can't get better at writing without writing. Narrative writing is the most effective method for getting students to compose pages each day. Students won't meet the expectations embedded in the Common Core State Standards or required in their lives without a great deal of practice, feedback, and direct instruction. Then, too, narrative writing is an especially important genre. It is important because narratives underlie almost any other genre. For example, what makes an essay have a great deal of persuasive power is the presence of poignant anecdotes and vignettes—in other words, powerful personal narratives. The importance of narrative writing is such that the Common Core State Standards and the National Assessment for Educational Progress both suggest that 35% of the writing that students do in grades 4 and 5 should be narrative writing. Finally, we suggest you start your year by asking students to write the stories of their lives because writers require a community of trust to write well. Thirty years of work in writing classrooms have left us convinced that there is no better way to create such a community than by helping people put the important moments of their lives onto the page.

We've designed this unit with the assumption that your students enter fourth grade having already experienced the units that are described in our third-grade curricular calendars and in *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* (Heinemann, 2006). If your students do not bring that background with them—which is the case for many classes of fourth graders—then we recommend you rely on the third-grade curricular calendar for the first unit and on the book *Launching the Writing Workshop* from *Units of Study,* which provides minilessons and conferring support for that unit. The unit described here leans heavily on the next book in the series, *Raising the Qual-*

ity of Narrative Writing. It provides you an opportunity to teach a class of students the work called for in the Common Core State Standards for narrative writing. However, students will need more than this one narrative unit before they will have reached the ambitious Common Core State Standards skill levels for fourth grade. Because the skills required for narrative writing directly align with the skills required for opinion and informational writing, this unit can bring a class of writers a long distance toward developing not only the skills needed for narrative writing but also those needed for fourth-grade writing across all genres. That is, in fourth grade, writers need to elaborate more. Narrative writers use detail and description; informational writers use quotations and concrete details. But writers of both kinds of texts need to travel more slowly over the terrain of a topic, grounding their writing in a wealth of specificity, and they need to reread to check for elaboration, returning to important sections to stretch those out by telling them in a more bit-by-bit way. This is just one of many skills that is called for in narrative writing that can then be transferred and adapted to other genres of writing. For example, it is also the case that writers of narrative, opinion, and information texts need to learn to write for an external audience that does not necessarily have all the prior knowledge needed to fully understand a text. Therefore writers need to anticipate and respond to an audience's questions.

In this first unit of study, you'll strive toward independence and toward dramatic growth in the level of your students' writing, leading them (and you) to leave this one unit expecting that their writing will continue to improve in obvious, dramatic ways as each new unit unfolds. These two goals are utterly interrelated because essentially, you need to organize a writing workshop within which students work with great investment toward clear goals and within clear structures. That will allow students to hum along, drawing on their growing repertoire of strategies, working with independence. Meanwhile, because the students *can* carry on with at least some independence, you will be free to teach (rather than to hand-hold). The most powerful teaching that you do will come in the form of providing crystal clear feedback, showing students what they are doing that is working, and showing them what they could do next that could take their writing up a whole new level. Research is clear that nothing a teacher can do has a greater effect than this combination: giving students clear goals, opportunities for engaged work, and feedback including compliments and a rallying cry to progress to worthy, significant, concrete next steps.

To institute the routines and structures that will allow writers to work with engagement and some independence, you'll want to think about which structures and routines from the previous year can be reinvigorated. Don't start from scratch and reteach what your writers have learned to do over a whole sequence of years! Maybe you'll want to convene the class and say, "Can we talk about the structures that you already know for a writing workshop, ones we can just brush the dust off and get into right away, and can we talk about what our expectations will be for those structures?" Then you could ask the class, "How did last year's teacher signal to you that it was time to gather for a writing workshop?" Students will presumably have come from different teachers, so there may be several options in the air. You can agree to one way that you all think will work well, and then think about whether there is a way to ratchet up the

level at which students do that one ritual. If they already noted the teacher's signal, gathered their materials without being told, pushed their chairs in, and came quickly and directly to the meeting area, sitting in an assigned rug spot on their bottoms, then perhaps this year writers will open their notebooks to the next blank page, and . . . ? Begin reviewing charts, noting which of the strategies they have been using and which they have yet to try. Reread their work in progress and think, "What might the work be that this piece needs me to do today?" so that the student's memory of his or her work in progress has been activated before the student hears the minilesson.

Of course, there are other rituals to fall into place. What will the system be for homework? Will you draw on the homework assignments on the DVD connected to *Units of Study for Teaching Writing?* For most of the major minilessons in this unit and in many other units, several alternate homework assignments have already been written. Each functions almost as a minilesson, with some teaching points and some inspiration as well as a suggestion for the work that writers could do. What will your system be for collecting and reading student work—will you collect the work from one table of writers every Monday, another table every Tuesday? Will you devote one evening a week to reviewing all student work? Will partners sit beside each other in the meeting area and at their work areas or will you ask partners to choose a meeting space—sometimes, for those who can handle it, on the floor? Where will paper be kept and what will be the system to make sure students can access supplies when they need them without coming to you? In second and third grade, when students were newer to the writing workshop, one day's full minilesson might have been devoted to teaching students to file their completed work in their pocket folders, to then get hold of new paper and begin new work. Back then, another full minilesson was probably devoted to the fact that writers work with partners who know their work well and can give feedback. But those minilessons have already been taught.

Presumably, by this point your students should know most of those systems and rituals. Your job is only to reclaim those as writerly and honorable, to rally writers to care about those structures and to understand that you care about them, and then to ratchet up the work writers do within those systems. If you are not clear about rituals and systems that you will need to put into place, talk with colleagues from previous grades and from your own grade, and read relevant pages of the *Guidebook to Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5.* Do some thinking so that you can start the year by demonstrating a great sense of commitment to the systems that will shape your writing workshop.

We believe you can expect certain things from fourth graders in terms of procedures, although, of course, you can steer them in alternate directions. You can expect that fourth graders keep their writer's notebooks in their backpacks unless you ask to review them, carrying them between home and school without leaving them at home. If a writer leaves his or her notebook at home, that needs to be treated as a crisis: "Could we call your mom and get her to drive it in?" If you treat this in a ho-hum way, half your class will leave their notebooks at home. Your students can be expected to proceed in order through their writer's notebook—not skipping pages in a helter-skelter fashion—and to date each day's work and record H (for home) or S (for

school). This system helps you and your students study their productivity in each place, comparing and contrasting what they get done in each place. You should expect about an equal amount of work done at home and at school, and should expect a page and a half or two pages a day at the start of the year from fourth graders. Obviously some will not write that much yet, but you will need to convey that this is a problem and channel them to produce more. "Keep your hand moving." "Writers should be writing." "Ten more minutes—in that time, you gotta get to the bottom of the page." "That's it—you wrote a *lot* more than you were writing last week. Nice progress. Now see if you can get onto the second page—that can be your new goal, okay?"

You can expect that at the start of writing time, students reread their writing and think, "What's the work I'm going to do next?" Then they write a self-assignment box at the top of the page, record the strategy or goal they are working on, and get writing. The expectation that students will pause to think, "What will I do today?" nudges students to review the charts of strategies they have learned (one chart will probably list "Strategies for Generating Ideas," one will probably be titled "Strategies for Revising," one, "Qualities of Good Narrative Writing"). The act of setting a goal for oneself is terribly important for writers, making it likely that they will not just be filling up pages in writer's notebooks but that they'll consciously work toward employing strategies they've been taught and reaching toward qualities of good writing. Then, too, you can expect that fourth graders can draw from a variety of suggested ways to work with a partner, deciding on some days to use partnership time as a time to say aloud what each writer plans to do next. On other days, they can use this time for the reader—not the writer—to read aloud the writer's draft, allowing the writer to get enough distance from it to develop some hunches about ways to improve it. Another time, partners can look between an early and a later draft, asking, "Is this getting better or is it getting worse?" and can think and talk about possible next steps. By fourth grade, it will not take a lot of teaching for you to let partnership time become a bit less "under the thumb of the teacher," so that only on some days you tell partners how to share their writing, while on other days you leave this choice to them. The fact that partners will work together with this sort of freedom is in accordance with the Common Core State Standards, which suggest that by now students can develop and strengthen their writing as needed by planning, revising, trying new approaches, and editing.

If one goal is teaching your students to write with independence, the next goal is for students' writing to become dramatically better across the unit. To hold yourself and your students to this goal, it is critically important that you start the year by devoting a day to an on-demand writing assessment. You can make this on-demand writing feel celebratory. Give your students a chance to "show off" what they know about narrative writing. You might say, "I'm really eager to understand what you can do as writers, so before you do anything else, please spend today writing the very best personal narrative, the best Small Moment story, of one particular time in your life. You'll have fifty minutes to write this true story of one small moment. Write in a way that shows me all that you know about how to do this kind of writing." During writing, be sure you do not coach into what they are doing. Don't remind them to write with de-

tails or to focus. You want to see what they do in a hands-off situation, and frankly, you will want to be in a position to show great growth from this starting point.

The next day, you may decide to admire publicly how much they know by bringing in a chart on which you collect some of the qualities of good writing that you saw most students were able to put into action. If many of them enter the school year already knowing the importance of craft moves, such as writing with direct dialogue or writing with details, then you can celebrate this and expect it, after that point. You may want to give children an opportunity to show their on-demand piece to a partner, pointing out what they did as writers. Within two days of being back in school, your students should be acting, thinking, and talking like writers.

The job is not just to give this on-demand assessment but also to take seriously the challenge of making sure that as the unit unfolds, the students' work gets progressively better. That work, done on Day One, can function as your starting gate. After students collect narrative entries for a few days (and we'll describe this work later in the write-up), you will want to ask students to look back at their on-demand piece and at the narrative entries they have written since then. Are the entries they have written since the start of school dramatically better than their on-demand pieces? Frankly, all too often we have seen students' writing go downhill, as if they tried hard on the first day when being assessed, and then just dutifully fill the page every day after that. If students' work is not increasing in palpable ways, you will want to act shocked and say, "This simply can't be! Go back and rewrite this entry, making it your very best. And after this, your writing needs to be getting steadily better as the year progresses." (Of course, no one's work is steadily better—we all try things that don't work, and that is fine. But you do want students to understand that the goal in a writing workshop is to lift the level of one's writing.) With this kind of rapid start, your children will be eager to learn more about how to write and think like a storyteller.

Anticipate the Trajectory of Your Students' Work across the Whole Unit

Have in mind the work you expect your students to produce across the unit. For many classrooms, not enough children enter the grade with skills enough to persevere on one narrative for the entire month of September. Then again, even if students know a lot about writing, sometimes they enter a new grade so fearful of each other and the page that their first piece of writing is wooden, in which case working on this one piece for an entire month is not a great investment of time. If students enter your classroom with no appetite and few skills at rehearsal and revision, or if their writing seems to be especially wooden, then we recommend your emphasis during this first unit be on helping students to write a lot, work productively, and cycle through the writing process with confidence. We believe the best way to do this is to shepherd them through two cycles of narrative writing within this first month. Whirling them along will make them less apt to feel paralyzed, wondering "*How* do you want me to revise?" "What should I do next?" If you choose this path, you will probably channel

them to do only minor revising of their first piece of writing before you get them started on a second piece, and then they will revise whichever one they think is stronger. If you decide to follow this alternate plan for your teaching, rely on our description of September in the third-grade curricular calendar, as well as bits that you like from this write-up, as supports for your teaching.

Assuming that children have been in writing workshop for years, however, they will have come to understand the essentials of narrative writing (which you'll see from their on-demand writing). In this case, we recommend you help children write just *one* effective personal narrative during this month and that you plan from the start that children revise that narrative in very significant ways, including writing at least an entirely new second draft as well as large-scale revisions of that draft. The progression of this unit, then, will match that of *Raising the Quality of Personal Narrative Writing,* the second book in the *Units of Study* series. Assuming you have decided to help children draft and revise one narrative piece across the first month of school, you should plan that during the first week of school the children will gather at least one and sometimes two entries a day in school and one entry a day at home. Most of those entries should be at least a page in length, hopefully longer. If you do not think your children can write this much, consult the third-grade September write-up for a suggested way to study and increase their ability to produce lots of writing.

Before we describe the parts of this unit, let's scan the time line of students' work. You can anticipate that by the end of the second or third day of writing, your fourth graders will be ready to reread all their entries (presumably during a share session) and select one that will function as the seed idea for the narrative they will eventually publish. Then, they'll spend one or two days rehearsing for the draft they'll write outside the notebook. As part of this rehearsal, they should storytell to each other multiple times, producing a few fast-drafts of parts of that story, each time working toward new goals. Then, by very early in the second week, they should devote one intense day to drafting on paper, written outside the notebook.

You'll then want to teach your students to revise. Your goal will be to recruit them to reread, rethink, and re-imagine and envision his or her story and write the unfolding drama, rather than relying on summary. You'll also want writers to decide what meaning they want to put forward and ensure that they deliberately write in ways that allow them to forward those intended meanings. Revisions may be on strips of paper holding new leads or endings, or inserted sections, or parts being rewritten, and so forth. That is, the next round of revisions will probably be piecemeal for most students. A study of a mentor text can inform this work. Eventually students will turn to editing, working on punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and the like.

As children learn about narrative writing, some of the lessons will be *explicit*, taught in minilessons and conferences, and some of the lessons will be *implicit*, gleaned as children study texts that sound like the ones they will soon write. Even just one dearly loved and closely studied text can infuse a writing workshop with new energy and lots of opportunities for implicit learning. You will want to read a few focused narratives aloud and pull your students close to study one or two with tremendous detail. Be sure the mentor texts you use in this unit are not the ones students have

studied previously—you may want to consider Brinkloe's *Fireflies!;* "Eating the World" or "Statue," from Ralph Fletcher's memoir, *Marshfield Dreams*; "Mr. Entwhistle," from Jean Little's *Hey World, Here I Am!*; *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts; "Everything Will Be Okay," by James Howe from Amy Erlich's *When I Was Your Age: Original Stories About Growing Up*; selected pages from Jean Little's memoir *Little by Little*; or the narrative about a red sweater embedded in "Eleven," by Sandra Cisneros. If some or all of these texts are not new for your writers, you might consider using John Coy's *Strong to the Hoop.*

Launch Your Students' Writing by Recruiting Their Ideas for This Year's Workshop and by Collecting What They Know about Narrative Writing

It is impossible to overemphasize the importance of inspiration. As a teacher, think about a time when your work felt really good to you. Sift through all your teaching memories until you arrive at one such time. Now ask yourself, "What made that particular time in your teaching life so good?" My hunch is that it was powerful not because you could arrive late, leave early, no stress, no pressure, no expectations. My hunch is that the time when your work felt good was a time when you believed your input mattered, when you felt called upon to give and give and give some more, and you were willing to do so because you believed your work was adding up to something, because you could tell you were affecting others, because you felt appreciated.

In this world where everyone is overly focused on accountability, on weighing and measuring, it is easy to lose track of our own beliefs about what people need to do good work. Your students are not all that different from you! Like you, they need to know that their ideas matter, that their voices count. They need to feel they are doing work that matters and is important to them. They will work harder if you inspire, rather than micro-control and punish. You will need to decide how you can launch the year in ways that tap children's energies as writers. There is no single answer for how to do this. And we could write up a lot of suggestions that could work or not work, depending on how they are done. The important thing to keep in mind is that your children are not all that different from you and me, and that we treat each other in ways that we hope we'll be treated.

Many teachers have found that one of the ways to recruit student investment in the writing workshop is to invite them to coauthor plans for the year. If you ask children to reflect on times when writing has been good for them and times when it has not been good, chances are that you will end up having an honest and heartfelt talk that could set the stage right for the year. You can invite children to reflect on their lives as writers if you tell a story about a time in your own writing life. Remember, if you want children to bring their self-doubts and vulnerabilities to the community, it helps if *you* tell about such times in *your* life. Take a small moment when writing was hard for you, and tell that story using your narrative writing skills to intensify it. Children will be more apt to respond with their stories. You can tell your students that you used to be all the

things that they may be (afraid, bruised from bad instruction they may have received), and that really deep down, you may still be.

You may ask children to think and jot quickly about a time in their lives when writing was a particularly good thing or a particularly hard thing, and then have them talk in partnerships, tables (two sets of partners), or a whole-class community about what they found. The goal, of course, is to move beyond this to thinking, "How can we make this into the best possible year for us as writers? How can we support each other as writers?" In similar ways, you could lead children to jot, talk, and share about what it is they need from a writing partner. As you do this, let children in on the fact that they are helping you plan how writing will go in your classroom. For example, even if, in fact, you'd already planned to provide time for partnership conversations, you could announce, "Are you saying it really helped you to talk about your writing with a partner? That's giving me the idea that we should have writing partners this year." You might, in similar ways, invite them to think with you about the plans for curricular units in the fall. If you don't mind telling a bit of a tall tale to them, you could go so far as to say, "I was thinking about having two units for personal narrative writing in the fall, then writing fiction in February. Does that make sense to you all, or might you have a different suggestion?" You can pretty much count on children advocating for fiction to be earlier in the year, and if you let children believe the decision was made with their input, they'll be especially motivated (and if they believe it, then in a way it actually was). In any case, in one way or another, you will want to invite your children to join together to think about the question, "What kind of a writing community do we want to form together?"

We also think it is absolutely important that *you* live in the classroom as a passionate writer, as a person who cannot imagine living without a writer's notebook at your side. You will need to bring your own notebook into the class, talk about how the notebook threaded through your life over the summer, and tell children ways in which the fact that you write makes you into a more aware, wide-awake, reflective person. You should try to assume the role of being an avid writer even if this is a bit of a stretch. If you cannot comfortably assume the role of writing mentor in your class, then it will be all the more crucial that you read aloud texts written by other authors and tell stories of the authors' writing lives and identities. You can also read aloud texts that talk about writing and the writing life. We recommend, for example, Reynolds' little picture book, *Ish*; Baylor's *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*; a bit from *Seeing the Blue Between: Advice and Inspiration for Young Poets* by Paul B. Janeczko; excerpts from *Speaking of Journals,* edited by Paula Graham; and poems by William Stafford, Mary Oliver, Billy Collins, and others. Poems can provide intense lessons in the writerly life!

Generating Narrative Writing

As you begin the unit, you will want to rally children around the goal of creating powerful writing. You might say, "Writers, it is important to remember that we are writing

for readers. Rise to the occasion by making your writing as true and as important as it can be, so your words make readers stop in their tracks and go, 'Ahhh.' " Then, you will want to immerse them in strong narrative writing, reading stories that make them go "Ahhh" as readers. As children read and reread beloved texts, you will want to remind them that these are the types of writers we want to be, and, therefore, we might pause and study the craft, thinking of ways that we can incorporate those moves into our own writing. That is, you might teach them that writers study the craft of writers we admire. We read their writing and ask, "What did the author do that I could do also to make my own writing more powerful?" Children may discuss these craft moves with their writing partners, sharing what they noticed in the texts they read and then selecting the work they will tackle as they write. Then, too, you will want to encourage your writers to jot these moves in their self-assignment box so they refer to it as they work in purposeful and meaningful ways. This analysis of the mentor texts' crafts will not only support their writing but connect to the CCSS's for reading as well: reflecting on authors' practice and possible purposes offers children different opportunities to read with deeper comprehension and connect this to higher-level writing with an awareness of audience. This means that even in the beginning of this unit, you will be urging your kids to think in ways that hit Levels 3 and 4 on Norman L. Webb's "depth of knowledge" scale.

After immersing children in narrative writing, you will want to remind them that they already have a repertoire of strategies that they can use to come up with ideas for personal narrative stories. Tell children that this year, you will teach them how to use those familiar strategies *really well*, like professional writers do. Ask your children to share strategies they already know and then compile them on a chart that you can call, "Strategies for Generating Narrative Writing." Please *do not* dust off a chart you used during previous years—children should see their own ideas and words (and yours as well) going onto chart paper and feel like those charts capture the contours of their lived experience in a classroom.

Your job is to lift the level of the work that your students do with those strategies and not simply teach them more strategies. For example, be aware that when you ask children to report on strategies for generating writing, they will be apt to produce "topics," not strategies. A strategy, by definition, involves a step-by-step procedure. So the items on your chart can't be single words (people, places, and so on) but instead need to be procedures. Write these in phrases, separated by commas, as in this example: "Jot down a person you care about, brainstorm several times with the person you recall, select one of these, make a movie in your mind of that time, and storytell on the page."

Although your children will probably already know that writers sometimes think of a person, place, or thing that matters; then list several small moments they've experienced with that person, place, or thing; and choose one of these to write as a story. They may not realize that writers take *no more than five minutes* to complete that process. It's important that writers *quickly* jot down a person, place, or thing that matters, list a few small moments they had with the subject, and select one of these moments and begin writing the "long" story on the page. This process of brainstorming does not encompass one day's writing workshop!

Teach children that when they list small moments they have spent with a person, each moment is best described in a sentence (or a long phrase) and not in a single word. If a child writes "Joe" and under that name writes "baseball," that child is not set up to produce a focused narrative. But if under the name "Joe" the child writes, "Joe taught me how to catch a baseball," then the child is off to a good start toward writing a narrative. You can also teach children that writers do not record every thought that crosses their minds. We instead weigh ideas and record only those we think are promising. Good writers select moments that grip us, that make us feel something intensely because we know the truth of the saying, "No tears for the writer, no tears for the reader."

It is also important to teach children that in a single day of writing each child will produce more than just one entry. The student uses a strategy to generate an idea for writing, writes the entry, and then, fairly often, has time to return to the original brainstorming list and select a second idea, writing another entry. Because your children will have already participated in writing workshops and will already bring with them a repertoire of strategies for generating writing, from the start you can teach children that writers carry a cumulative repertoire of strategies with them, a tool box of sorts, and they draw on these tools as needed. For example, you might say, "You already have a whole repertoire of strategies for generating narrative writing," and then send children off to write using any of the strategies on the list. By referring to all that students already know and inviting them to draw on that full repertoire, you can emphasize that learning to write is *cumulative* and that any new work that writers do will *always* stand on the shoulders of previous work.

You also want to pass along new strategies your children may not seem to know and use, selecting strategies you believe will channel children toward writing pieces especially significant to them. One way to write a powerful personal narrative, for example, is to think about turning points, moments when we feel or learn something important. Often this is the very first (or very last) time we did something. If a writer thinks about a time he or she learned something, this is apt to produce a shapely and powerful story. Another way writers create powerful personal narratives is to think about a strong emotion (hope, worry, sadness, pressure), a feeling that we have a lot of, and think, "When, specifically, did I feel that emotion?" Both of these strategies are in *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*.

We sometimes generate ideas for writing by thinking about major issues in our lives, such as bullying, family pressure, or fitting in at school. Then we think of specific times when we struggled with that issue. We can also think about the social issues that we have encountered and begin to capture moments when our gender, race, or class influenced our lives in complicated ways. As you teach strategies for generating writing, share little bits of the stories those strategies led *you* to write. This will help show children how to write with focus and detail, while simultaneously teaching strategies for generating writing. Finally, teach your class that stories of significance can be found in the smallest and most ordinary occasions.

Although you may teach one particular strategy on a given day, when children go off to write some will draw on strategies from previous days; some will not need any

particular strategy because they'll have been living like writers, coming to the desk ready to write. Still others will be continuing on an entry started on an earlier day. Take a count one day: how many of the kids are using the strategy you taught that day? Believe it or not, hopefully *less than half*. If most of your class routinely does only whatever you talk about in that day's minilesson, you'll want to lend your full weight toward reminding children to draw on their full repertoire of strategies. And you will want to check that you are not inadvertently conveying the message in your minilesson: "Wait until I can get you started on today's piece of writing." Students should not feel the minilesson strategy is one they must use before writing or that they need your approval before settling in to write. It is crucial that children can use and reuse their repertoire of strategies and do so with independence.

You'll also want to be sure you don't overload children with too many strategies. Any one strategy can be used over and over and over, so children do not need many. Of course, it's okay if in just one day you lay out several possible strategies for generating writing. You could, for example, demonstrate one in the minilesson, another in your mid-workshop teaching point, and still another in your share. It is important that over time children rely less and less on strategies for generating writing, coming to regard life itself as one big source of stories! As soon as your children are living like writers, they'll find that true stories come to mind without relying on any particular strategy. Everything and anything that a person sees and does and thinks and feels can remind us of the stories we have to tell.

Lift the Level of the Entries Your Students Collect: Revising Your Children's Knowledge of Narrative Writing Even before They Write Draft One

Remember that you never need to devote more than two—at the most three—days at the start of any unit to the challenge of equipping writers with strategies for generating writing. In no time, children will have plenty of strategies to draw from and then you will want to teach in ways that lift the level of the entries they write. Look at their entries, and think back to all they learned the previous year. More than likely, children will have been taught to write about focused events, to start with dialogue or a small action, and above all, to storytell rather than merely comment on the event. But then, it is likely they will not be doing all of these things that they were taught, so you may need to reteach the essentials of narrative writing. Depending on their previous writing experiences, some will need to be reminded that narratives are just that—stories. In a personal narrative, one character (presumably the writer) experiences one thing, then the next, then the next. Students may also need to be reminded that their narratives will be more effective if they zoom in on a small episode, telling the detailed chronology of that one twenty-minute (or so) episode. With reminders, they can write entries in which they retell not the entire visit to Grandma's farm but rather the portion of their visit when the pigs got loose. The main reason to "zoom in" is that this makes it more likely that the writer will relive an episode with enough detail that the

reader, too, can experience the event. This and subsequent work in this unit will lead students toward the development of real experiences and events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences, skills that are emphasized by the Common Core State Standards.

As you work to remind children of all that they learned in prior years, you might find it helpful to have them reread their own writing and study it as mentor texts. If you have access to pieces the children created the year before, you might choose to take them out now. Children can reread their writing from the prior year and think, "What did I do in this piece that I want to be sure to do as I write this year?" Then, they can study the entries they have generated this year and think, "What have I continued to do as a writer? What did I forget to do?" As they go back into their notebooks to continue writing, they can set their purpose, working to incorporate all that they know about narrative writing from the very start of the writing process.

There will always be reminding students of the importance of making a movie in their minds to write a story. If a student talks "all about" an event, summarizing it with sentences such as, "It was a good baseball game. We won 6 to 2. I got a lot of hits. It was exciting," then the child is *commenting on* the game rather than *telling the story* of it. This child, then, has not grasped the idea of writing in a storyteller's voice. If, on the other hand, this piece begins, "I grabbed a bat and walked up to the plate. I looked at the pitcher and nodded. 'I'm ready,' I said," then the child is writing a story. Most children need to be reminded to make movies in their mind and to write so readers can picture exactly what is happening.

Selecting a Seed Idea and Rehearsing for Writing

After children generate narrative entries for about four days, you will want to teach them to reread these and to choose one entry to develop. Each writer can star the selected entry. Then you'll want to teach writers some strategies for rehearsing for writing. As children become more experienced, they can do more and more rehearsal. Most fourth graders profit from being told that writers often take a few minutes to plan their writing. I tell them, "If we're writing a nonfiction book, we plan by making outlines with main ideas and supportive evidence. But when we are writing narratives, the easiest way to plan a piece is to make alternate time lines or storybooks." Then we use time lines or fold paper into tiny booklets to try telling our story in a concrete way using one beginning, then another. The whole point of this is to try different ways to tell a story, thinking, "Maybe my story will go like this." Then we re-imagine the story, and think, "Or maybe the story will go like this," and try a second starting point, a second ending. If one writes time lines, it is helpful to continuously revise them. Which dot on the time line (or page in the sketch booklet) is not essential to the heart of the story? Which needs to be expanded (by slowing time down) into a series of dots, of pages? But the decision about what to include and what to bypass, what to stress and what to skip, should be informed by the writer's need to put his or her mes-

sage forward. The question, "How do I start my story?" really can't be answered, save in tandem with the question, "What is it I really want my reader to know and to feel?"

Writers also prepare for writing by asking, "What am I trying to show about myself through this story? What do I want readers to know about me? How can I bring that meaning out in this episode?" Children will also need to learn that the same story can be told differently, depending on the *theme* the writer wants to bring out. An episode about falling from the monkey bars could be written to show that the writer was afraid but then conquered her fears. Or it could be written from another perspective to show that peer pressure goaded the writer to act recklessly. If instruction in selecting and highlighting meaning seems too complex for your fourth graders, your instincts are probably on target, and you may decide to follow the write-up for teaching narrative writing for third graders.

If your children are skilled at narrative writing, you may want to teach them that narratives need not stay within the confines of a single twenty-minute episode. Narratives are often made up of two scenes glued together with bits of exposition (or narration) between them. For children who are ready to learn this, then, you can point out a writer who has put together two scenes (or small moments), one after another. For example, the child who has written a Small Moment vignette about getting a bike for his birthday will construct a better story if he sets up the incident by first telling about an earlier time when he begged for the bike. Then, he can jump to the moment he got his bike, which can include within it the fact that the writer then rides away on the bike. Similarly, the child who writes about defending the goal in a soccer game will construct a more effective story if she first backs up to re-create the moment when she put on her goalie pads and worried they might not be thick enough.

Storytelling can be another way to rehearse for writing, and, of course, it is important to raise the level of children's storytelling. You may want to teach children to plan a story with a beginning, middle, and end, and before they tell the story, to think, "What do I want my listener to feel?" You could also teach children that storytellers stretch out the good parts, trying to be sure those parts really capture the listener.

Invite children to rehearse for writing by drafting a bunch of different leads. You may want to remind children that writers often start a story with dialogue, with a small action, or by conveying the setting. Again, the real purpose of this instruction is not just to produce a more dramatic lead; it is also meant to dislodge students from summarizing events and move them toward making movies in their minds.

Writing Rough Draft One

Once a writer has drafted and revised time lines that outline the sequence of the event, written a few possible leads for the story, and told the story a handful of times, it's time to draft the story. Remind students once again to make a movie in their minds. There are minilessons in *Raising the Quality of Personal Narrative Writing* that can help you to teach this tricky and crucial concept. A child is successful at this when he or she tells a story in such a way that the reader can picture exactly what is hap-

pening. The story might sound like this: "I walked toward my bedroom and grabbed the door knob. I opened the door and faced the dark room, and thought, this time I will not be afraid." We strongly suggest children write the whole draft, quickly, nonstop, in a single day's writing workshop. Our experience is that stories tend to be vastly more coherent and powerful when they are written quickly, under pressure and in one sitting. Some teachers may lean toward asking a few students to write their drafts in story booklets. We agree that the booklets may help your strugglers but are convinced that single sheets will be better for helping writers get lost in the rush of the story.

You may need to tell children that the magic of writing will not happen if writers follow their time lines doggedly. Good writing comes with a strong dose of imagination. Writers make movies in their minds and put that whole story onto the page. For example, a writer who is telling the story of going roller-skating with her dad may know that she first wants to tell about the fact that she put on her skates. You'll want her to picture the whole drama of doing that, to almost act it out in her mind, and to write like this: "I arrived early at Skate Key, carrying my roller skates. All the benches were empty so I sat on the first one I saw. I stuck one foot into a roller skate, then the next, and pulled the straps tight around my ankles. The skates felt tight. I wondered if my feet had grown. I wiggled my toes. They felt okay. But something was different."

By this time, the writer should feel as if she is reliving the event, and the goal for writing time will be to let her pen fly, writing on and on and on, recapturing the truth of the experience. Tell children that they will have just one day to write the entire draft, and they are to keep their hands moving all day long as they relive the event. As you move among your children, look for students who are summarizing instead of storytelling. If you can, intervene now and help them get started with an entirely new draft.

Revising Drafts

Another very important reason to ask children to start and finish a single draft all in one day is that hopefully they will not be as wed to this draft as they would be if they'd stretched it out across a week of work. Even if they have not actually completed the draft, suggest that writers pause after a day of drafting and have the courage to imagine that the draft could be written differently. Almost always, despite their best efforts of zooming in, writers stride over too much terrain, walking with big steps. Writers tend to talk about, rather than relive, an event and bypass a huge amount of detail.

Once your children have written these drafts, you'll need to do some assessment to decide the sort of help different small groups of writers will perhaps need. Tell children you know that last year, many of them revised by poking new sentences into a draft, by trying a new lead and sticking it onto the old draft. That was all well and good when they were younger. But *this* year they are older! Teach them that now, after they've made it through a whole first draft, now is the time to step back and ask: is this really saying all that I want it to say? What else can I do to bring out the meaning of

this story to my reader? There will be big work, in every part of the draft—the beginning, the middle, and the end—that they can do to bring this meaning forward.

In the Common Core State Standards for narrative writing in grade four, it says that children should orient the reader. That is, the author needs to establish a situation and introduce the narrator or characters in the story. So, you might take this time to ask children to reread their writing and think, "Is the situation clear to my readers? Do they know not only when and where this is happening, but also why it matters?" For some writers, this will be clear. For others, it will be known to the writer but not the reader. If that's the case, you might want to teach them that they can think about the meaning that they want to convey to the reader, the most important underlying idea of their narrative, and then bring that meaning forward at the start of their piece by creating a larger context for the moment. For example, if a child is writing a story about riding a roller coaster, she can think, "What's important to know about this particular ride on the roller coaster?" She is apt to say that it was the first time she was riding it and was terrified or she was trying to impress a group of friends by facing a hidden fear. Then, she might start her story with, "It was the summer I was going to be popular. It was the summer I was going to show off for my friends. It was the summer I was going to face the roller coaster." The key to this work will be that kids should keep it short and tie it back to meaning. Writers do not put a summary at the start of a text unless it will enhance the quality of that text.

Therefore, we only add this work when it will help to bring forth the internal story or the theme of our writing. Then, too, you will want to caution your writers that we do not throw out all we have learned about creating strong leads. This is one way to begin a text, but not the only way. Encourage your writers to think about the best way to begin their piece and ultimately try to work the information that is needed to orient the reader into it rather than throw out all the strong work they have done and move back toward summarizing.

It will help if you invite students to return to mentor texts now, with an even more analytic eye. You can invite them to simply read (or listen to) the texts, allowing those texts to affect them however they do. Then, afterward, have the students ask themselves, "What has this writer done that has affected me?" You will then guide children to notice some of the important features of the touchstone text you are working with, as well as additional mentor texts that are available to them during independent work time. You may notice that some children's drafts are swamped with dialogue. Often readers can't discern even who is speaking or what is happening. When you see this sort of writing, it is likely the child has made a movie in his mind (a great thing) and simply hasn't mastered this tool yet. Overreliance on dialogue represents a step forward, but it is a problem you'll need to address. Teach these children that writers sometimes realize, after having written a draft, that their writing provides only a soundtrack, and so they revise their writing to show the aspects of the story that they have left out. You can also remind writers that good writing comes from a variety of thought, action, and dialogue. This could be taught in an absurdly mechanical way (no writer thinks about writing as "Now my thought is . . . Now my action is . . ."), but if

writers have a felt sense for the various strands that are woven together in a narrative, their writing will become stronger.

Remind children to draw on all they already know about revision. Students will have learned the year before that writers reread and ask, "Where is the heart of my story?" They stretch that part of the story out, writing it with more detail and enthusiasm. In *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*, you'll see a minilesson that teaches this concept through reference to "Eleven," a story in Sandra Cisneros's *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories.* Rachel puts first one arm, then another, into a red sweater. The process is dragged out in a step-by-step way with the the author accentuating Rachel's abhorrence of the sweater, all itchy and full of germs that weren't even hers. Remind students to tell the external *and* the internal story of what we noticed, remembered, thought. Remind them often that the strategies they learned last year need to be drawn on again and again. That is, explicitly teach transference.

As students continue to rework their drafts, one thing you may teach them is that writer's revisions are always informed by their sense of how stories tend to go. This, then, could become your entry into teaching students that stories are *not*, in fact, chains of equally developed microevents as illustrated by a time line. Rather, stories include problems and solutions and are characterized by rising action and increasing tension. Have your children ask, "What effect do I want to create in my text and how could I create it?"

The DVD *Seeing Possibilities* is another resource you may turn to for support. Watch Mary Chiarella's minilesson on endings, for example, because it can help you teach writers to forward their meaning, thinking, "What is the real thing I want to show in this piece, and how can I start and end the piece in ways that bring out that meaning?" Be sure to emphasize that writers need to reflect on what is working in their writing and to make plans based on their self-reflections. Help writers use each other as critical friends. You may want to use your teaching shares as opportunities for your children to meet with each other and discuss ways to make their writing better. Each writer might approach partnership time with ideas for what they want to work on, and then his or her partner might give suggestions on how to do so. As writing workshop draws to a close, you will likely want to emphasize that writers should set their plan for writing time the next day, so increasingly writers are setting their own agendas rather than expecting you to do so in minilessons.

The real goal is to improve the quality of the writing—and of the writers. Your deeper lesson throughout the unit will be this: writers never stop learning how to write better. It is not enough to learn that an author uses dialogue and then, *presto!*, children add dialogue to their drafts, checking that item off as if on some list. Writers are constantly engaged in the long-term continual study of good writing and good writing habits.

Editing and Word Study: What about Errors in Students' Entries?

When your students are drafting during September, it will be especially important to teach your kids to try their best and *move on*. Many of your children will know full well that they have misspelled a word and will be reluctant to move on from it. You might teach children to circle a word if they are unsure how it is spelled and move on. Another strategy is to write it three different ways on a Post-it or scrap paper and pick the one that seems closest—and move on. This is not the time of year to make a big deal out of spelling perfectly. It is the time of year to emphasize writing with fluency, drafting quickly, and, of course, rereading to edit *as best you can.*

Remind children to take the time to correctly spell the high-frequency words that they should know. You'll no doubt have a word wall or words your students "use and confuse," and you should encourage students to rely on the word wall if need be. Many of them are perfectly able to punctuate on the run as they write, and you'll want to be sure that they know you value this. Convey that independent writers use punctuation, even in a rough draft. We don't organize our punctuation in a draft, but we do use it with automaticity.

Be sure to load on the praise for children's best efforts to edit their spelling independently. Whatever you do, do not mark up the students' entries with corrections. If kids are always going to have an adult around to find the mistakes and, in effect, do the work of fixing their mistakes, this can hurt their sense of independence and their motivation to give editing their best try on their own. Before a student's draft is published, you'll want to help that writer spot and address errors, but do it through your already established systems of instruction and conferring.

Ending the Unit

When you finish this unit, publish children's work. Publishing can happen in a variety of ways, such as publishing celebrations, where the narratives are placed on the tabletops alongside a blank sheet of loose-leaf paper. Allow students to move about, reading and offering positive comments to their peers. Narratives can be posted on bulletin boards or alongside hallways. Classroom anthologies can be assembled and earn a place in the classroom library. These are suggestions. You may imagine and create ways to celebrate and go public with student work. You may now want to devote another day to an on-demand writing assignment. If you do, give your children the very same directions you gave at the start of the year, only this time let them know you want to see what they have learned from the month of studying narrative writing. Then, once again, be sure to insist they work with independence.

Additional Resources

You will want to do an on-demand assessment of your students' abilities to write narrative writing. This will give you a baseline for your expectations. Look at the work that students produce during this assessment, and plan to expect their writing to improve from there. That is, if one student writes a page-long focused, detailed narrative during her on-demand assessment, you should be shocked if a week later, her work during the writing workshop is less voluminous.

Occasionally, students enter fourth grade without a real sense for how to write narratives. They write about an event rather than re-creating the event on the page. An entry will begin, "On Saturday I got my grandmother at the airport. I was excited because I love her. We had to wait because her plane was late but then she came . . ." If students enter the year writing summaries such as these, you'll want to keep a sharp eye out for the day in which their writing begins to change. Celebrate on the day when the writer instead writes, " 'Do you want to go the airport to get Nana?' my Dad asked me one day at breakfast. 'Yes,' I said. We jumped in the car and drove out the driveway." Sometimes the transition from summary to storytelling will lead to a batch of other problems such as runaway dialogue or reports that are tediously detailed. But you will still want to celebrate the progress from summary to storytelling as an important step ahead, and to worry about children who continue summarizing well into this month.

You will want to notice what students can do with ease and independence without relying on you to spoon-feed them strategies. Can students draw on strategies to generate ideas for writing? Can they select an area of life to write about and then zoom in on just a portion of that event to capture on the page? Does the writer automatically try a few leads? If you see writers not doing some of these things, nudge a bit. "I'm surprised you aren't revising your lead—could you try doing that?" If writers seem to expect you to assign the specific strategy of the day, you will want to work toward independence. You can assign students to review charts containing several strategies, to select one and to work with some independence.

Your students' writing should be quite conventional with end punctuation, paragraphs, and high-frequency words spelled correctly. If students struggle with any of these things, let them know they are too old to not be employing all the strategies they've learned in past years. Try to ratchet up their level of work quickly with focused instruction. Expect students to write at least a page a day or more and to be able to revise without needing you to tell them exactly what to do. All of this is within grasp of all your students, so be firm that they can do this work. Of course, if you have some students who have not had any experience in a writing workshop, you'll expect that they will take a bit longer to meet your expectations. You might allow some of these writers to skip lines, so their page a day involves alternate lines, and you might spend extra time outside of class, helping students arrive at a story line so that writing the story becomes less imposing.

The following resource, which offers one possible path for instruction, is based on the book *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*, from the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. Specific references are made to the sessions in this book as well as suggestions for additional teaching points you might incorporate. As with all our units, we encourage you to build on and adapt this work to meet the specific needs of your children.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Lift the Level of the Entries Your Students Collect: Revising Your Children's Knowledge of Narrative Writing Even before They Write Draft One

- "Today I want to teach you that writers get ready to read and write by setting up places and tools that will make it easy. We can think, 'What have I seen or done in other years, in other times, that made reading and writing really work for me?' and then share ideas with others. Together we come up with what we can do to make this year, this time, really work for us as readers and writers."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "I want to remind you of something that is crucial to our writing. You have been writing now for years, accumulating knowledge about writing as you go. As I walk around the room, I notice that some of that knowledge isn't being used! Let's look now at some charts that you have seen in previous years. Remember, the strategies on these charts are things you know and can use to make your writing the strongest it can be."
- "Today, I want to teach that when we want to make powerful writing, one strategy we can use is to study the writing of authors we admire. We can read their writing and ask, 'What did this author do that I could also do to make my own writing more powerful?' "
- "Today, I want to teach you one more strategy that I often use when I want to write personal narratives. This is a strategy that especially helps me write entries that can become powerful stories. Specifically, I find it helps to list moments in my life that have been turning points for me. These are often first times, last times, or times when I realized something important."
- "Today I am going to teach you one more strategy that writers use to generate personal narratives. This one is especially good for generating entries that can be turned into really powerful true stories. We know it is easier to write well if we are writing about small moments that are, for some reason, important ones. So usually, we'll want to recall times when we wanted something badly or felt something strongly. It sometimes works to think first of a strong feeling—worry or hopefulness, embarrassment or sadness. We can write a feeling on the top of a page and then ask ourselves, 'Can I remember one *particular* time when I felt that feeling?' Then we write the story of that time."

- "Today, instead of helping you think about *what* to write, I want to help you think about *how* to write. And specifically, I want to teach you this: everything that you did to revise and edit your last piece of writing can now move forward in your writing process, becoming part of what you naturally do as you write an entry or a first draft. What was at one time a revision and editing strategy ends up becoming part of planning and drafting."
  - *Teaching share:* "Today I want to teach you that once writers have accumulated numerous seed ideas, we search for one that we care about so deeply we can develop it into the best story possible. We choose a seed idea that calls to us because it carries such strong meaning for us, we can't help but develop it to bring out the beauty of the story."

Part Two: Selecting a Seed Idea and Rehearsing for Writing

- "Before you can decide which lead will work best for your story, or whether you want to stretch out one section, you need to decide what you really want to say in your story. You need to ask, 'What is my story *really* about?' and to realize that the same story could be written to show very different things. You could write about going on a Ferris wheel, and your story could show that you conquered your fear of heights. Or you could write about the same ride on the Ferris wheel and show that when you are in a crowd of people, you always find ways to be alone. As a writer, once you have chosen the entry that will be your seed idea, you need to pause and think, 'What am I *really* trying to say in this story?' and then let your answer to that question guide your work as a writer."
  - *Possible small-group work for writers struggling to stretch out and sequence their stories:* "Today I want to teach you that one way we can rehearse for writing is by creating multiple time lines, thinking 'Maybe my story will go like this . . .' and 'Maybe my story will go like that . . .' That is, we consider different starting points and different ways the story might unfold."
  - *Possible small-group work for strong writers:* "Now that you've mastered the art of zooming in on one twenty-minute moment and telling that well, you're ready to try expanding and including more time in your stories. Often, writers put a couple of moments that are close in time together, adding either a clear build-up or follow-up to the heart of the story. Once you've picked a moment you want to write as a story, you can ask, is there another moment, either soon before or soon after this one, that will help my reader see the importance of this moment in my life?"
  - *Teaching share:* "Today I want to teach you to become good teachers for yourselves and for each other, because each of you needs someone who can listen so deeply and so intently that you find yourself saying more than you thought you had to say. Good writing teachers listen and allow writers—the writer in each of us—to uncover layers of an idea. Good writing teachers

help us know we've chosen a good seed idea, and help us continue to find the words to write about that idea."

- "Have any of you tried to do a skateboarding trick? Or a skiing trick? Or a new dance step? If so, I bet you've watched someone who can do these things—maybe in real life, maybe on TV—and then you've tried to imitate that person's prowess. I'm bringing this up because today I want to remind you that in the same way, writers study other writers who we admire. This is how we learn moves that we want to use in our writing. Today I want to teach you to expand your options for writing leads by looking closely at how writers whom we admire begin their stories."

Part Three: Writing a Rough Draft One

- "As you work on your drafts, I have one bit of advice that I think can set you up to write an especially true story. You need to put yourself inside the skin of the main character. (The character is you, of course, just you in a different time and place.) Your job as a writer is to tell the story as you see it unfolding, looking through the narrator's eyes. Then, write on and on, letting your pen fly."

Part Four: Revising Drafts

- "Revision is more than just sticking in a new sentence here or there into a draft. Often, writers just turn over their first drafts on their desks and begin writing a whole new draft, re-creating the story so that it is brand-new and improved."
- "Our stories are not just what happens; they are also our responses to what happens. Specifically, I want to teach you that much of the story will be the internal story and not just the external one."
- "I want to teach you today that revision is about finding and developing the potential in your piece. This means, first of all, that when we revise, we return to drafts that seem promising to us. So today you'll reread both the stories you've written and decide which one has special promise. That will be the piece you revise and publish. And then, once it is time to settle into serious revision, you again need to reread, asking, 'Which section of this do I think works especially well?' That is, after looking for the piece that is good enough to revise, you look for the section that is at the heart of it! Usually in any story, there will be a part where the readers should pull in to listen—the part that really matters, the heart of the story. And one important thing we can do when we revise is find the heart of a story and develop it further. So revision is not about cleaning up messes; it is about finding and developing powerful writing, and one way we develop writing is by adding more to the important parts of the story."
    - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Today I want to teach you that good writing comes from a variety of thought, action, and dialogue. As we reread our drafts, we often realize that we overrely on just one of these components of storytelling. We might realize our writing overrelies on dialogue, providing

just the soundtrack. When we notice this, we revise our writing to show the aspects of the story that we have left out."

- "Today I want to teach you that just as our writing workshops usually follow one general plan or format, so, too, stories usually follow one plan or format; they both have a 'way they usually go.' Writers know how stories usually go, and when we write stories, our stories tend to follow the same general plan. One way to revise our writing is to bring out the story structure that is probably hiding underneath our personal narratives."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Today I want to teach you that characters in personal narratives sometimes travel through time and place. We do this by remembering and fantasizing." (See Session X from *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that writers orient their readers from the very start by establishing the situation and introducing the narrator or characters in the story. When you reread your writing, think, 'Is the situation clear to my reader? Do they know not only when and where this is happening but also why it matters?' "

Part Five: Editing

- "Whenever you want to learn a punctuation mark's secret, when you are ready to add its power to your writing, what you have to do is study that mark. You have to scrutinize it, examine it, study it with both your eyes and your whole mind to figure out what it does. Today, what I want to teach you is this: you can figure out any punctuation mark's secrets by studying it in great writing." (See Session XIII from *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that in this class, we have a great number of resources to strengthen our writing: each other! Our peer editors can look at our work with fresh eyes, helping us to notice ways in which we can improve the mechanics of our writing."
- "As with most situations, when we are looking for something in particular in our writing, we will find it. Today I want to teach you, as you are editing, it is important to look at your work through many different lenses. Read and reread your work, each time focusing on one particular convention. One time, you may look for spelling. Another, you may look for fragments or run-ons. By dedicating each reading to one convention, your mind will be clear and focused, allowing you to clarify your writing bit by bit."

Celebration

- "Today, we'll hear a few stories together as a community. And then we'll disperse to our story corners. It is here where we can have a more intimate audience." (See Session XIV from *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*.)

Sample Minilesson

Connection

"Writers, you have learned so much about writing powerful essays. I look at you and I see writers who have ideas about the world, who know how to support those ideas with evidence, and who are able to communicate their ideas by writing beautiful essays. Now you are ready to do all of these steps almost at the same time and write quick, simple essays in a day. They may not be as well crafted as the essays that we spent weeks working on, but there may be times when we need to write essays quickly, and we can learn a few strategies for doing that pretty well. To write a quick essay we need to remember everything we already know about writing. You know that when you write an essay you put forward an idea you have about the world. You already know about what kinds of things you can collect as evidence. You know that you can write a quick, angled story from your life. You know that you can use lists of moments that show your idea. Today we are going to learn how to do all of these very quickly."

Teaching

"When we were learning to write thesis statements, we learned how to find an entry and tag it with lots of ideas. We chose one of these ideas for the essays we just finished, but there are still lots and lots of ideas waiting to be written about in our notebooks! I'm going to go back into my notebook and choose one of the thesis statements that I think I could quickly write into an essay. I'm looking for one that I think I could write about pretty quickly, so it should be a pretty simple idea." Now, teachers, go back into your notebook, looking at the pages where you collected thesis statements earlier in the unit. "Hmm, well, here in this entry I wrote in the margin, 'Having cats as pets is fun.' It was an entry about my mom, but I described my cat, Hutch, in the story, and it made me think about how much I liked owning cats. And then on the next page I did some writing about how much I missed my dad, and one thing I wrote about was that when you are a kid with divorced parents, sometimes no place feels 100% like home. I have to decide which essay I am going to write today. Now, the idea about my dad is definitely more important to me than being a pet owner. But since I know that today I need to work quickly and simply, I think I might be better off choosing the one about cats. I can always come back to the Dad idea later."

"So now I'm going to try to write this quickly. Instead of making folders and writing out lots of pieces of evidence, I'm going to make a quick plan and then begin drafting right away. Let's see, my thesis says 'Having a cat is fun.' So, I'll need a couple of reasons why cats are fun. I'm going to quickly write one of my supporting ideas at the top of a my chart paper."

I like cats because they are funny to watch.

"I think this might be a good reason."

"So now, instead of writing out all my evidence first, I am going to just start writing. I know I will need to include some examples of times when my cats were fun to play with in the first part. I know that I can talk about the time that Hutch and I played while I was sick with the flu, and he cheered me up. So now I'm going to start writing."

Having a cat is fun because you can play with them.

"Hmm, so I might want to say a little more about that. Let me add on."

When you are lonely or sad they will help cheer you up by batting a ball around or jumping around if you play with them.

"That sounds good. And then I will want to tell a story as evidence really quickly."

One time I was sick with the flu, and my cat, Hutch, stayed with me all day. I threw little fluffy balls around for him, and he would jump around and flip over on his back.

"And then I will just want to close up my paragraph by saying why this story is important."

This is important because playing with your cats can cheer you up when you are sad, and what is more important than that?

"Did you all see how I did that? Did you notice how I quickly went back into my notebook and chose a thesis statement that I have a lot to say about? Then I quickly jotted the parts of my idea on separate sheets of paper. Finally, I got quickly to my writing and began drafting out my essay."

Active Involvement

"Are you ready to give this a quick try? Let's look at my second page. I wrote, 'Having a cat is fun because you can play with them.' Turn and talk with your partner. Remember everything that you know about the kinds of evidence you can collect—retells, lists, author's craft—and decide what pieces of evidence we could use to support this idea." Partners turn and talk to gather evidence quickly.

"Wow, you are just filled with ideas. Lenny and Victor were thinking that I could tell a story about watching my cat fall off of a countertop. Clara and Malisha were saying that I could write about my cat playing in the kitchen sink. They said that I could describe how scared Hutch seems of the water and how he stalks the faucet like it is a bird he wants to eat."

Link

"As you go off to write today, we are going to be working on writing personal essays quickly. You know that you can glance through your notebook to find a thesis statement that you have a lot to say about and that is important to you. You can then quickly plan your essay by laying out your draft paper and quickly jotting what evidence you can write. Then you're set. You're ready to write! You know that as you write you can keep looking back up to your quick plan to remind yourself of what you want to include in your writing. Let's get started!"

UNIT TWO

Realistic Fiction

OCTOBER

You will probably want to begin this unit by asking students to do some on-demand writing that allows you to assess what they can do. Most teachers are using the narrative continuum to assess kids' work with fiction writing, as with personal narrative writing. They open this unit by suggesting that students write a small moment part of a story within fifty minutes, otherwise known as one scene or one vignette, from a larger fiction story, as an on-demand writing assessment. Teachers, be sure that you do not remind your students of all you hope they remember about writing fictional scenes well. Your goal is to see what they do on their own. The assessment will let you know what they already understand and can do. As students work, notice their strategies and habits as fiction writers. Do they take any time to rehearse, to weigh options? Do they have strategies for getting themselves started? Do they get their pens to paper and write two or three pages within one sitting? You'll look at their work and notice, above all, whether they storytell rather than summarize. That is, notice whether they show rather than tell. Do they seem to make an effort to build tension? You'll notice also whether they reach toward developing compelling characters and detailed settings.

As you look ahead to your unit, this on-demand writing will help you see the path most of your writers are on and to see where your students are on that path. This will help you know pointers that you can remind them of quickly, and skills that will need a sequence of instruction. The assessments will help you tweak your plans (and to think about this write-up) so that your minilessons bring the whole class along a journey of work that you think will be especially essential. Meanwhile, your assessments allow you to think also about meeting needs of students who are more proficient or less proficient by providing them with some additional small-group and one-to-one

instruction. Remember that the narrative continuum can help you imagine a pathway along which your writers can travel. You can find the narrative writing continuum at www.readingandwritingproject.com.

When assessing your students' narrative writing, you will also want to weigh what they can do against the Common Core State Standards for narrative writing at your students' grade level. If some of your students are working at a level that is considerably below the CCSS for fourth grade, then use the ladder-like quality of the CCSS's expectations for narrative writing to help you place your students within the CCSS. If some of your students write narratives that are more aligned to the third than the fourth grade standards, then the standards, in combination with the narrative continuum, can provide you with a pathway along which those students need to travel—with all due speed! This write-up aligns perfectly to the CCSS, but you'll want to be sure that your teaching addresses any specific needs you identify in your students' work.

Envision the Trajectory of the Unit

This write-up assumes that you are leaning on the book central to this work: *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions* from the upper-grade Heinemann *Units of Study* series. We will direct you to additional professional books and websites as well and to new pieces of published fiction and student work that serve as mentor texts. But *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions* has enormous power and is a favorite unit for teachers and kids alike. There are also examples of student work on the DVD connected to that book, as well as letters to parents about the unit, suggested homework assignments for kids, and a wealth of other resources.

If you followed the fiction unit described in the 2010–11 curricular calendar, you will presumably wonder if our suggestions this year differ from those of last year. The main outline of last year's unit worked well, so our suggestions this year are similar. The changes that we have made mostly revolve around an increased effort to help students write with increasing tension across the arc of their stories, as well as work aimed at enabling students to develop and draw from a repertoire of narrative craft moves.

You will find that your students are dying to write fiction, and their zeal is something to behold—they are ready to invest heart and soul in the unit and eager to write more and work harder than before. This energy is a wonderful resource, and it is also a challenge. Youngsters are no sooner out of the starting gate when they are writing stories that are longer than anything they have ever written. As wonderful as this is, conferences can become cumbersome. Partnerships become awkward simply because sharing the stories can take forever. It's pretty common with young writers for their ideas to outstrip their powers, so that they begin to lose the details of their settings or their stories suddenly end—or never end! Don't despair. This is not the only fiction unit they'll write this year. Your writers will tackle fiction again when they study a genre deeply, and you'll see that in their second try, much of what you thought they weren't learning to do now will show up. For this unit, and especially for the start of the unit, you want to see engagement and stamina. You want your writers choosing

what moments from a story they will tell. They should think not only about what happens in those moments but also about how they can write those moments well enough that readers can experience them. The work that your students do may not turn out all that well just yet. Notice what they are trying to do, because it will be important to value their writerly intentions. The fact that many of them will be trying to choose key moments will be important. If some of them are also trying to bring their knowledge as readers of stories over into their work as writers of stories, this, too, will be important. If some of your writers try to not only tell what happens but to write the story well, that will be hugely important. Above all, working with zeal and investment is important.

Because this unit is sure to be an exciting one for kids, it also is a unit that could provide you with a chance to revitalize your own learning community alongside of the kids' learning communities. Many teachers have written personal narratives in summer institutes and not often written fiction. If you and your colleagues could set aside one hour to work together, one of you can teach a totally fast-paced mini-version of this unit to the group of fourth-grade teachers from your school or your district. Everyone could write flash-draft versions of tiny fiction stories, and each teacher in the group would leave that hour with a tiny little fiction story of his or her own that could then be used as a demonstration text, threading its way through that teacher's version of this unit. And each teacher could feel a sense for what the youngsters experience in this unit. Best of all, you and your colleagues would have rekindled a professional learning community, and that cohesiveness could provide not only this unit but all the units across the spring with new energy. If you decide to do this, use the minilessons from *Writing Fiction*, only cut to the chase (you need to learn to crop them down anyhow). Just use the teaching point and a tiny example, then give writers five minutes to write. Usually you can skip the mid-workshop teaching point and the share, but occasionally they will be important. Suggest writers don't bother developing several alternate stories but instead focus on the one story they'll use as their demonstration text. Plan to get through seven or eight sessions in just over an hour of shared writing.

To plan the trajectory of the unit, it is important to know your goals. Kids approach a unit of study on fiction thinking the goal is to write *fiction*, but of course, teachers approach this unit knowing the goal is to teach *writing*. We always approach any unit of study thinking, "What will this unit contribute to my students' overall development as writers?" Certainly one of the goals that you can have for this unit is that it can provide you with an opportunity for teaching students to write with higher volume. Whereas your students' personal narratives probably tended to be two or perhaps three pages in length, their fiction stories will naturally tend to be four or five pages. For youngsters to create a world, bring characters to life, and let a drama unfold, they need to write with volume, fluency, and stamina. Because your students will be writing with terrific volume, it is crucial that you approach the unit planning to encourage writers to spend *more time planning*. As part of this, you can show students how to use mentor short fiction texts to help them revise their first plans and initial efforts.

One goal of this unit, therefore, is to help students do more planning and to use mentor texts and a knowledge of the genre to inform this planning. This unit can

teach students to write longer pieces, producing far more in one sitting, but doing so without those pieces becoming out of control. There is another extremely important goal for this unit. Fiction can also provide you with a time to teach your students to plunge deep into the process of revision. If some of your students have prior to now revised only by doctoring up a draft, this will totally change that. During this unit, your students will write a succession of drafts. They will begin revising when they have just written a lead, not waiting to complete the draft before revising. As you plan the unit, then, remember that it will be important for your students to participate in far more dramatic, large-scale, extensive, and independent revisions than they have experienced prior to now. Because this is a unit that kids approach with tremendous energy, it provides you with gigantic opportunities to contribute to your students' overall writing development.

As you scan this write-up to study the general progression of the unit, note that the unit does not begin with a lot of work developing characters, which was the way that many TCRWP teachers and staff developers launched fiction writing work years ago. More recently, we have found that it is helpful if writers first explore possible ideas for plot, thinking carefully about how to craft a story that adheres to a narrative arc. Only once writers have fashioned at least one possible idea for a storyline are we suggesting they develop the characters who will live in and breathe life into that story arc. They will then spend a bit of time developing the other story elements in their notebooks before coming out of their notebooks to draft and revise.

Teach Strategies and Tips for Generating Powerful Story Blurbs

Even if your young writers have cycled through the lessons in the book in the previous year, most of you will start the unit with a variation of Session I—"Imagining Stories from Ordinary Moments." You may teach your students that writers pay attention to the moments and issues in our lives, letting everything provoke in us ideas for stories that we could write. You might show students how to gather story ideas in their writer's notebook. You might say, "When I was young, I thought fiction writers looked up into the clouds and imagined make-believe stories about castles and puppy dogs. But then I grew up and learned how real fiction writers get their ideas." One of the important things to keep in mind and to convey to kids is that throughout the first few days of the unit, they will be writing *plans* for how their stories might go in their notebooks. Some people call these "story blurbs." A story blurb is a series of short statements, or jots, that tell a story. Think of the blurb on the back cover of a book as an example of a story blurb.

Cynthia Voigt got the idea for *Homecoming* from seeing three children in a car, parked outside the mall, their white, fearful faces pressed against the windows. Author Sharron McElmeel writes, "Kathryn Lasky says that her books always begin with a long-nurtured curiosity about a subject. For her *Beyond the Divide*, Lasky explains how her lifelong interests led her to write fiction. She describes her rehearsal process, saying, 'The idea of doing a book about the Old West and the Gold Rush had

hovered in my mind for years.' Then, just prior to launching the book, Lasky read journal entries of J. Goldsborough Bruff, a man who had left his job to join the Gold Rush. During a family trip to California, Lasky visited Bruff's campsite, a wild area that seemed as rough as it must have been in 1849. Those journal entries, the trip, and her own interest in the theme of survival combined eight years later in the book" (McElmeel, Sharron L., "Where Do Writers Get Their Ideas?" *Book Report*, Sep/Oct 96, Vol. 15, Issue 2).

You might also consider asking your students to revisit their entries from the Personal Narrative unit, looking especially for moments of depth and significance that feel like they might be able to be expand further if they were turned into fiction. You might even point out that, in fact, many writers choose to write fiction precisely because we feel as if we can be more honest about our personal experiences when we can disguise different real people as characters or change little details that were factual. For example, we can change sunny weather at the funeral to details that feel more *true* (it felt like it was a dreary day, so the writer can make the weather rainy). Students who think of fiction as "made-up" stories are often shocked to learn that writers often turn to fiction to write what is deeply true. If your students reread their notebooks to collect story ideas, you can help them to see that any entry can spark scores of story ideas, making it easy for them to fill their notebooks with musings about possible stories. You might demonstrate how you can start with a small moment, perhaps one you wrote about during the previous work on personal narratives, and use that experience to prompt a chain of thoughts. You could say, "When Joe called me names in the art room . . . maybe I could write a story about a boy who also gets called names, but like me he doesn't do anything about it . . . *or maybe* I could write a story about a boy who gets called names but gets the courage to stand up for himself and eventually . . . *or maybe* I could write a story about a boy who is a bully and discovers he is alienating himself . . . *or maybe* it could be about a girl who . . ." Sofiya's example on page 9 in Session I of *Writing Fiction* illustrates this nicely.

As soon as students begin generating story ideas, you will need to be ready to convey to them any constraints that you want to put in place. Many teachers tell students that stories work best if the characters are approximately the age of the writer (this prevents the getting married, having quintuplets stories). Some tell students that short stories work best if there are no more than two or three main characters (this lifts the level of the writing). Some teachers tell students that stories work best if none of the names used (or characters developed) are children within the class, and that stories work best if they can be told within two scenes, three at the most, each involving not more than approximately an hour of time, and often less. Some teachers tell students that stories work best when students are writing about places and events they have direct experience with (this prevents the fiery plane crash or living-on-a-tropical-island stories). Of course, that list is open to debate, and you will need to decide if these make sense for you and your classroom.

Session II of *Writing Fiction,* "Imagining Stories We Wish Existed in the World," can help students glean ideas for fiction stories. Students might imagine writing about characters like themselves, or about situations and troubles they experience daily. An

example from the book tells of a child who recently moved, and she made up a story about a girl who also had recently moved. Then she wrote about giving that girl a companion, perhaps a companion the writer wished she'd had.

You can expect that some students will misunderstand that they are expected to write story blurbs only during these first days of the unit, producing half a dozen or more half-page blurbs in a day, and instead they will end up either collecting mere lists of totally undeveloped story ideas, with each one of these being a sentence or two in length only, or they will go to the opposite extreme and start writing whole stories. If students write simply one-line descriptions of a possible story, you'll want to demonstrate how to flesh out these undeveloped story blurbs. Using your own writing, you can tell students, "When I first wrote, I wrote like this . . ." (and show them a one-sentence version of your own story blurb). Then, you can tell them how you returned to your single sentence to flesh it out, showing them that in your jottings about a possible story, you wrote a bit more about your characters' traits and motivations and how your characters felt. Explain that it was important to be specific. You could give an example like, "My character—let's make him a boy named Michael. And Michael wants . . . he wants to play soccer, but his dad really wants him to play football. So Michael is trying to figure out a way to get out of playing football. But how? Maybe at tryouts he decides to fake being bad? Or maybe . . ."

After your students spend no more than two days collecting blurbs about possible stories that they could write, you'll want to remind them that writers need to reread all their ideas and choose a seed idea from the list (in this unit, you and your students may call seed ideas "story ideas").

Teach Students to Rehearse by Developing Story Elements

After students will have settled upon a story-idea, a miniature plot outline, their instincts will be to dive right into writing the story, getting three pages finished within the next day. Your job will be to prolong rehearsal for a few days, helping your students understand that revision begins during rehearsal.

Half of your students' rehearsal work will revolve around developing their characters—work that could consume a full day of the writing workshop. The other half of their rehearsal will involve thinking about the plotline of their stories. One way to develop characters is to generate a list of external and internal characteristics. Refer to page 27 in *Writing Fiction* for an extended explanation of this strategy. Be aware that just because you refer to this work as rehearsal, this does not mean that writers will not be writing. They will be! But the writing they produce will not yet be the actual story, written out beginning to end. It can be simple thoughts to oneself about a character, or it can be little scenes that capture the character in the act of doing something that he or she will probably do within the eventual story. If the story involves an argument that takes place at the protagonist's locker, for example, the writer might develop the protagonist's character by writing a little scene that shows the character opening her locker, shuffling past the . . . what? What is in there? The character is

reaching into her locker to get the . . . what? The stuff that the writer puts into that locker will reveal the character. The way the character thinks and acts as she opens her locker will reveal her, too. One writer could take his character out for ice cream. With whom? Does he order a cone or a dish? What flavor? What if the service is slow—how does he act?

Colleagues, it will be important for you to plan not only a minilesson (or perhaps two) around ways to develop characters but also the small-group work and conferring you will be apt to do and the homework you'll suggest students do. The *Units of Study* books will help you, for example, teach kids to not only list attributes of a character but also think about how those characteristics create a unified, cohesive portrait of a person. You can anticipate, then, that you might need to pull a small group to remind kids that no individual aspect of a character exists in a vacuum. Instead, characters' internal feelings and thoughts are affected by external traits (and vice versa). On a page of a child's notebook under the heading "External Characteristics," a child might write "overweight," and then jot down how this might have consequences on the character's self-perception. Maybe the character feels that he isn't worth being picked for a sports team or that a classmate he likes won't want to be his friend, and in turn, this will then play into the struggles that the character encounters. Maybe the character, in fact, *doesn't* get picked for a team because he projects that he's not athletic. Or maybe, in fact, the character *doesn't* muster the courage to befriend the classmate he likes because he imagines the classmate won't like him. Encourage children to think about the ways characters' external and internal traits relate to each other, perhaps through a sequence of cause and effect, and help them think about ways these factors intertwine into the events of their lives. One helpful resource in this work is the chart titled "We Can Develop Characters by Thinking About Their . . ." on page 44 in *Writing Fiction*.

The book, too, will help you lead small groups and conferences to help writers think about characters within the structure of stories—this means, for example, that it will be important to think about a character's motivations, about what the character wishes for. Character wants and needs play a huge role in creating a suspenseful and tension-filled story. The more a character wants or needs something, the more the events in the stories matter. This is another perfect place to practice "front-end" revision, by ensuring that students' story ideas include character motivations that drive stories. You might help children think about what the character thinks he or she wants—and what, in fact, the deeper motivations are for those wants. In *Those Shoes*, the main character wants the shoes that are accepted by the peer group—but what the character really wants is friends. In the end, of course, the character does not get the shoes he wants, but he does get a friend. In Mem Fox's *Koala Lou*, the protagonist wants to win the gum tree climbing event, and she comes in second . . . but then she gets what she really wants, which is for her mother to say, "Koala Lou, I do love you." This is one very effective way for a story to progress, and if students think now about characters' motivations as layered, this sets them up nicely to write stories that are not as simple as, "Bob wants to win the prize; Bob does it!" If you are curious as to how this work might look inside a writing conference, refer to pages 50–51 in *Writing Fiction.*

Of course, once students have developed their characters, they need to think again about plotlines. Many of us have, in previous years, suggested children plan their stories by sketching them on story mountains (Session V of *Writing Fiction*). This graphic organizer is in many ways a natural choice because it channels children to think about their rising action, the story's turning point, and so forth. On the other hand, there have been some ways in which the graphic organizer has proved a bit confusing to children. First of all, sometimes children (and us, as teachers, too) have interpreted the story mountain, with its plotline of dots, as suggesting that short story might contain, say, five scenes (or five small moments). One child wanted to tell about her best friend being adopted and moving away, then returning. The young writer plotted a storyline which began with she and the friend meeting each other (first dot), and then becoming fast friends (next dot), and a parent says her friend has to move away (next dot), and so on. Such a story plan for a three- to five-page story almost guarantees that the story will be *summarized* rather than *dramatized*. It is more helpful, I think, to tell children that they can only use two scenes (or vignettes or small moments) to capture the entire story (occasionally this can be three). So this time, the writer begins with a scene in which she walks to the mailbox, finds the letter saying her friend is being adopted, goes into the house to phone her, and in the midst of congratulating her, breaks down in tears. Then the second scene might be a month later, when the narrator is alone and lonely, without her best friend who was adopted earlier, and something or other happens. Such a story could still be told using five or six dots on a timeline, but those dots would represent a progression of micro-events (the mailbox, the return to the kitchen, the breakdown into tears) within just those two scenes.

Another source of confusion has been the fact that a story mountain has an apex. Often a story is shaped more like an arc—a character wants something and over the course of the narrative that motivation is somehow addressed. In the sequence of a story, there is not always one, single turning point. It is helpful to teach children that the story *does* need to show characters changing, so it would not work to simply write a story saying, "Bob got a bike." Instead, if that is the starting idea, the writer needs to consider whether that statement represents the end of the story. If it does, the writer still needs to create the change part, perhaps by starting the story, "Bob did not have a bike and he wanted one very much." Then the story could somehow end, "Bob got a bike." Alternatively does the story begin with Bob, who has long wanted a bike, getting one? If that is the start of the story rather than the end, then the story could perhaps end with Bob realizing that actually, he preferred to walk to school with his friend rather than to ride, and therefore he gave his bike away. That is, the story does need to be shaped like a bobby pin, with a change within it, a hairpin turn. Thinking about the exact turning point of a story may not be crucial, but thinking about the shape of the story before writing most certainly does matter.

A story planning method that has been especially successful as an alternative to the story mountain graphic organizer involves planning a story by folding a piece of paper in half (folding the top to the bottom), then folding again (left edge to touch the right edge) so as to create a simple four-page booklet. Then writers can quickly make a line sketch on the first page of the booklet of the starting bit in their stories, jotting a

word or two beside the sketch, and can turn the pages of the booklet, scrawling quick sketches of what happens second, third, and so on. These are quick line sketches or stick figures, and the value of this comes when a writer holds the booklet in hand and storytells the entire story of what he or she might write on each page.

If your students need a lot of support, it can help apprentice young writers to structure a successful piece of fiction by reminding them how many stories go. "One way I know stories can go is my character will want something but something gets in the way, so my character does something to tackle the trouble and the story ends. There are many other ways that students might use sketching books to imagine how a story might unfurl. The important thing is that after making one set of quick sketches, capturing one possible progression, the writer must touch each page, storytelling the whole story of that page. And the writer must make multiple story booklets, trying out lots of alternate structures."

When students tell the story to a partner, encourage them to use all they know to tell it as a story. The first page, for example, could sound like: "Fred rushed into his apartment building. He leapt up the stairs two at a time. As he shoved the key in the lock, he took a deep breath. He opened the door. The lights were out. 'Wilma, are you home?' he shouted. Nothing. He was alone. He had time to hide her birthday present before she got home!" As kids do this rehearsal, be sure to help them keep their stories brief. The important thing to stress is that students need to actually tell the story as a story, not as a summary. It can't be, "He comes home and goes in, looking for Wilma."

Earlier, we mentioned that it is also important for students to try on successive versions of the story. By now, they will have made a commitment to one story. But they need to understand that the one story could be told in countless different ways—and the story itself will morph through this work. They might change the character, give their character a different problem, change the ending of the story, change the setting, add or remove a secondary character, stretch out an important part, make the problem get worse and worse, and so forth. As the writer imagines his or her story and tells it to a partner, the story will become stronger and the writer will learn about ways to incorporate story structure and voice effectively. No matter which planning method you ultimately decide on, it is crucial that students take the time to plan rather than just leap straight from their story ideas to their drafts. While it is true that many professional adult writers don't fully know how their entire story will go when they start to draft, writers do have a deep sense of story structure and craft that youngsters are still in the midst of developing. The act of actually imagining a few different ways a story can unfold goes a long way toward helping students get story structure into their bones.

Rely on Mentor Texts to Help Students Envision the Sort of Thing They Want to Write—This Sets Them Up to Later Use These Texts to Support Re-Vision

You will find that once kids have an idea for how their story will go, they will be champing at the bit to not only get started but to write the whole story. You won't want to hold them back—but you will want to be sure that before they are out of the starting gate, you have shown them a text or two that resembles those you hope they will write. Try to find a text your students haven't yet read. The challenge is to remember that your students are writing very short stories. Most of the mentor texts you will find will be longer than what your students can write. Try to find texts that are centered around just two or, at the most, three small moments (or episodes). If the texts you use as mentors race through too many events, your children will do so as well, and their stories will very likely become summaries rather than stories. Great sources for mentor texts that have approachable writing for our students include children's magazines such as *Highlights*, anthologies such as *Free to Be You and Me* and *13,* as well as favorite picture books.

One way to approach a study of mentor texts is to first help your students learn to read like a writer. Teach them to find places in the text that move them and to name specifically what the author is doing, and then find other places in the text in which the author replicates that move. The author will have done a bit of craftsmanship to create an effect, and students can become strong in naming the effect. They might decide they want to create the same effect at a particular place in their own text. It is important for students to learn the purpose for specific writing-craft moves. As they discover still more new moves over time, they can try out these things in their drafts.

You might also lean on student writing as mentor texts. Scores of teachers remark that the best resources for them have been the student writing samples from the CD-ROM, included in the *Units of Study* series. Or perhaps you can use some of your past students' writing, the entries from collecting, or minibooklets from planning. Use writing samples that represent different ability levels to differentiate your instruction.

Writing Leads—and Revising Those Leads: Don't Let Them Write the Longest Drafts Ever before Revising

Pumped up with the language and structure of published stories, youngsters will now definitely need to draft lots of leads and realize each of those leads actually sets up a different version of the same story. As you work with students on their leads, help them think about which scenes will be told and not told (and the latter is the harder challenge). Often there are lots of scenes that can become backstory and can be implied in the drama that unfolds on the stage of the story but that needn't be actually shown. You will want to teach writers that when the Common Core State Standards suggest that students should be able to orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing the narrator or the characters, this needn't (and usually shouldn't) in-

volve summary statements that explicitly do this work. Instead, skillful storytellers show who characters are and what their relationships are to each other by embedding this into the opening action. The *Units of Study* book can again help you teach both minilessons and small-group work to support this, but literature itself can teach students the variety of ways in which they can launch a story. You will want to hold many small-group conferences during this time, so you are seeing—and pushing—more students to get off to a strong start. You will need to help many students incorporate back-information into their storyline (so that the story can stand on the shoulders of previous events).

Above all, you'll work to be sure they are storytelling and not summarizing. Refer to page 99 of *Writing Fiction.* To do this, remember that as soon as students begin writing their drafts, you'll confer with them, working to draw on all they learned during personal narrative units of study. Suggest children get their published piece from Unit One and lay it beside them as they write more entries. "Your published piece should remind you of what you can do as a writer," you might say. Plan to show utter incomprehension if writers' early drafts or plans for their stories suggest they have forgotten all they have just learned about writing Small Moment stories. It is impossible to overemphasize the need to make sure that your writers write about focused events, using dialogue and small actions and internal thoughts to carry the storyline. In fact, many wise teachers actually bring out old charts from previous narrative units and, using a different color marker, alter them to show students how these strategies apply to fiction as well. Everything they learned then must be transferred to the fiction unit, only now they will write two or perhaps three scenes (or small moments) rather than just one, and they will need to use those scenes to capture an entire storyline.

As soon as students start writing their leads, one lead will capture each student's imagination and he or she will begin writing a draft. Expect that a day in which you teach children to try on different leads (each consisting of perhaps three-fourths of a page) will become a day in which students settle on, and begin to draft, their first drafts. By the end of that day, you will probably find that half or two-thirds of your class is already a page into his or her draft of the final story. That is fine—as it should be. But the problem is that very soon, each student will have invested so much energy into this draft you will find there is almost no stopping them. I strongly encourage you to plan a minilesson in which you tell writers that when working on a big project such as these stories, it is vastly more efficient to revise at the start of the writing rather than at the end. Help writers draw a line under all they have already written and to essentially start again. In a sense, they are revising their lead yet again, only this time the lead will have been a page or more in length. Use all you know to help writers lift the level of their work so the next draft is vastly better than the first. The revision you will be expecting is large-scale. It involves writing draft one, draft two, draft three. And these revisions are not insertions of little codes into an existing draft.

As you help writers progress from one possible lead to another, you might at some point encourage writers to think about the importance of developing tension in a story. It would be helpful for you to teach students a few quick and easy ways to revise their leads and their plans so as to increase tension. For example, writers might add an

obstacle that the character must overcome as a way of drawing out the action and making the resolution to the story matter more. Perhaps you can teach students that creating an element of risk or danger also increases tension (winning the basketball tournament matters so much more if the character's disapproving father is in the stands). You can also teach students that the inciting incident in a story—the action that gets the ball rolling—will always be more intriguing if the main character is active rather than passive. In other words, students often craft stories where bad things just happen to their innocent main characters. However, you can teach them to fight that instinct in the name of tension. Rather than have a story where Michael trips and breaks his mother's vase, the writer can choose to instead have Michael going against house rules and running in the living room, which results in Michael breaking the vase—a much more compelling option!

Crafting and Revising Stories: Developing the Heart, Considering Endings

As your children work on drafting the story, you can teach them strategies that fiction writers rely on to control time, to animate every scene with action and setting. To gain a deeper understanding of teaching setting, refer to page 115 of *Writing Fiction*. Page 133 unpacks the work of student writing and explores a variety of ways they could end their stories. It will be important for children to see that the plot of a story builds and that their main characters make harder and harder climbs toward their goals. It is helpful to have students draft their stories across several pages, with the first two or three pages telling one Small Moment story, and the next two or three pages telling the story of a second scene.

During this phase, remind children that in all narrative writing, we focus our pieces not only by narrowing the time frame in which we write but also by deciding on the meaning that we want to highlight across the story. We ask ourselves, "What is this story really, *really* about? What do I want my reader to take away?" and then we craft every part of our stories (the beginning, the middle, the end) to spotlight what it is we are especially trying to convey. A story about a boy who is learning to swim will unfold very differently if it's angled to be about a boy overcoming his fear of water, versus a boy whose goal is to be an Olympic swimmer one day. As suggested by the Common Core State Standards, you may want to teach students to use concrete words and phrases, sensory details, or verbs to convey these experiences and events in a way that precisely conveys the true message of the story.

Once writers have a sense of what they are trying to say and have begun drafting their two or three main scenes, we will then want to teach them to find and develop the section that they believe is the heart of the story. A minilesson in Session VII of *Writing Fiction* covers this in more detail. We will teach students to ask themselves, "What is the heart of my story?" and then scissor the draft apart and tape a whole blank page into the section that had once contained an abbreviated version of that section of the story we determine is the heart. This time, when writers write that one

section, they'll stretch it out so the key moment is almost a full page. The Common Core State Standards remind us to help students use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, description, and pacing, to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations. Weaving in these narrative techniques will help students to expand the heart of their stories. If writers struggle to stretch out a scene, invite them to first dramatize it.

You can also help writers revise by helping them develop more of the tension in a story. You can teach students to build up a character's motivation and then, later, increase the difficulty of the obstacles the character must face. Another simple way to increase suspense and tension in stories is to teach writers how to raise the stakes for what their characters want. For example, they could create a time limit for when something needs to be finished (think Cinderella's midnight deadline), they can make the consequences for doing or not doing something matter more, they can make it challenging for their characters to act (laryngitis, untied shoelace), to name just a few. Writers might also revise by giving more details about time or place and how those progress. We might teach them that between the two (or three) scenes, there is often a passage of time. For some writers, the transition between the two scenes might be carried off by a phrase such as, "Later that day . . ." whereas for other writers, the work of showing the passage of time might be more subtle. A writer could have the sun move across the sky or a different meal being served—"Dad pulled the chicken out of the oven and began slicing off pieces for everyone," would be a subtle way to show the passage of time from an early morning scene.

Some of your writers will struggle with time in their stories. We see this in their reading work as well as their writing. Show them how to use verb tense and transitional sentences to let the reader know if time is passing rapidly, if it has moved backward, and so forth. As suggested by the Common Core State Standards, students should use a variety of transitional words, phrases, and clauses to manage the sequence of events. Teach them to summarize parts of their stories and then to stretch out others. They may situate important moments in a summary that sounds something like, "In the middle of his eleventh summer, Sean had finally organized his life the way he wanted it. He was going to the school he wanted to. He made the basketball team. He was in with the popular crowd. Things were good for Sean. And then . . ."

Oftentimes in student drafts, the character magically receives his or her fondest dream in the form of a solution that flies in out of nowhere like Superman. Likewise, usually when kids embark on a story, they plan for the main character to win the award, to be invited to the party, to find the missing item. All you need to do is to ask kids whether life always turns out that way. Do people always win the awards? Do people always receive the wanted gift? When life doesn't turn out as we hoped, *that's* when people dig down inside and surprise and outgrow themselves. That's when the real inner action occurs. If teachers encourage kids to rethink past easy endings, those kids will not only learn about writing-to-discover, they will also learn that people grow through times of difficulty and that whenever a door closes, often there is a window somewhere that remains open.

With your help, children can see that the solutions writers find in fiction—as in life—are generally those that we find ourselves. For some students, the solutions tend to be more of an emotional realization than of a major surprise action. We could demonstrate, "You know, right now in my story the problem is solved because Janelle's dad sees her crying and surprises her with a puppy, but it seems almost like Superman landed and saved the day! Janelle didn't really get the chance to do anything! Instead, maybe Janelle doesn't get a dog, but instead realizes that helping her neighbor, Ms. Johnson, take care of *her* dog gives her not just one friend, but two." For more ideas on how to teach endings, see Session X in *Writing Fiction.*

Editing and Word Study to Support Writing Workshop

Last month, we suggested that you emphasize the importance of teaching writers to give spelling their best try *and move on*. We praised children who used fancy vocabulary, even when they were unsure of exactly how to spell the words, and we taught children to reread their own writing and edit it *on their own.*

This month you should expect children to continue doing this work throughout the whole unit, not just at the end. Now, you can add to their growing knowledge of strategies for spelling words in writing workshop by teaching them to rely on the use of word analogies, something you may well have taught during your separate word study time of day. You can teach kids to use the strategy, "If I know _____ then I can spell _____." "If I know *light*, then I can spell *bright*, or *fight,* or *sight.*" You can demonstrate this strategy across the day, pretending to get stuck on words, and then calling upon familiar words to help you out. Encourage kids to remind each other of this strategy as well. You could say to your kids, "Instead of just spelling words for your partner when he or she asks for help, remind your partner of the strategies we know." To help kids out, you'll probably want a chart in the room that lists the main spelling strategies you've emphasized so far this year. You'll also want to make sure that you maintain that what matters is *giving it your best try* and writing independently, not necessarily spelling perfectly. Refer to Session XIV of *Writing Fiction* for more information regarding this stage of the unit.

Publishing

Finally, at the conclusion of the unit, you'll want to create opportunities for your youngsters to publish their writing! Some ideas for publishing include: publishing our stories as picture books or illustrated versions; collecting stories into short-story anthologies, by topic or theme; making a series or "publishing house" that incorporates several stories that seem related; doing an author's reading with a buddy classroom. Children, as they get ready to publish, often love to create a "meet the author" page and work on the blurb on the back cover. They may also write acknowledgments and dedications.

Additional Resources

As with prior units, you will want to begin this unit by asking students to do some on-demand writing. We suggest you ask students to write a small moment part of a story within fifty minutes, as an on-demand writing assessment. This can be one scene or one vignette from a larger fiction story. You'll want to resist the urge to remind your students of what you hope they remember about writing fictional scenes. Instead, let them show you what they have carried from previous learning in narrative writing.

Expect students to write at least a page a day or more and for their writing volume and stamina to be steadily increasing from September. If this is not the case, you will want to address the class (or a particular group of students) to discuss the importance of setting goals that help them outgrow themselves as writers.

The following resource, which offers one possible path for instruction, is based on the book *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions* from *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. Specific references are made to the sessions in this book as well as suggestions for additional paths you might take throughout the unit. We encourage you to build on and adapt this work to meet the specific needs of your children.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Collecting Ideas, Rehearsing Our Writing, and Learning to Live inside the World of Our Story as It Develops

- "Today is an important day because we're going to begin collecting ideas for fictional stories in our writer's notebooks, and I want to teach you where writers look to find those ideas. The most important thing I can teach you is this: we get ideas for fiction, just as we get ideas for personal narratives and essays, by paying attention to the moments and issues in our own lives!" (See Session I of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Almost every writer I've ever known has also considered himself or herself a reader. This is because, as writers, we can learn a lot from books. Today I want to teach you one way books can help you develop your own story ideas. Specifically, writers know they can look at the blurbs on the back of books and let those story ideas spark their own by changing characters, setting, and even parts of the problem the blurb describes."
- "Today, I want to teach you that writers collect ideas for stories not only by finding bits of life or entries that could grow into whole stories but also by paying attention to the stories *we wish existed* in the world. Sometimes we get ideas for stories by thinking, 'How can I write a story for people like me, so we can see ourselves in books?' " (See Session II of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "I am going to teach you that fiction writers don't just go from choosing a story idea to writing a draft. Instead a fiction writer *lives with* a story idea for a time.

Specifically, I will teach you thinking-on-the-page strategies that fiction writers use to live with our characters and to rehearse for our drafts." (See Session III of *Writing Fiction*.)

- "Today I want to teach you that although there are oodles of things we can think about as we develop our characters, there are just one or two things that we must think. Specifically, I want to teach you that every fiction writer needs to know what his or her characters want, what they yearn for, and what keeps these characters from getting what they want. I also want to teach you that when we know what our characters yearn for, we don't just come right out and say it. We show what our characters want by putting examples of this into little small moments, into what fiction writers call scenes." (See Session IV of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that after we develop our characters, we draft possible story mountains. And I want to teach you something new about plotting your story, something that will help you whenever you write fiction from now on. It is the fiction writer's job to make every part so interesting that the reader can't wait to turn the page. We make the problem worse and worse through the story. Story mountains can help you do that because they remind you that you have to keep giving the characters something that makes it harder and harder to climb toward their goal." (See Session V of *Writing Fiction*.)

Part Two: Drafting That Leads Quickly to Revising, and Revising Using All We Know to Bring Out the Heart of Our Stories

- "I want to remind you today that when we want to create a scene, we are creating drama. We sometimes use a line of dialogue—we make a character talk. Or we describe a small action—we make the character move or react physically to what is going on in the scene." (See Session VI of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that just when a writer is most fired up to write, most ready to charge into page after page of writing, we force ourselves to pause. We pause, rewind, listen to what we've written. And we revise it. We revise our lead because by doing so, we revise our entire story. Sometimes, we do this with help from a pro." (See Session VIII of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today what I want to teach you is this: before writers actually get going on a draft, we think a lot about ways to make a draft into a really good story. But once we're actually in the midst of the story, most of us try, above all, to lose ourselves in the story. We become the characters, and writing is a bit like a drama, happening to us." (See Session VII of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today I want to show you that writers can add scenes from the past and future . . ." (See Session X of *Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that we need to be sure to 'turn on the lights' in our stories. We need to show the place and time, so that our readers don't have a

disoriented feeling, asking, 'Wait, where is this? What's going on?' " (See Session IX of *Writing Fiction*.)

- "Writers imagine ways the physical setting can reflect the internal setting (feelings) of the character. If our character is feeling agitated and distraught we may describe the physical setting in the same way. Writing details can create a chaotic environment."
- "Today I want to teach you that writers take their time with endings, weighing and considering, drafting and revising until they find one that fits. We know that a just-right ending will feel as if it is tailored exactly to fit our particular story. We know this ending will tie up loose ends, resolve the unresolved difficulties, and bring home the story's meaning." (See Session X of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today I want to remind you that even when we move heaven and earth to write our drafts really well, we will each shift from drafting to revision. And specifically, I want to teach you that revision means just what the words says—re-vision: to see again. We can put on special lenses, lenses that allow us to reread our writing with one particular question or concern in mind. We might, for example, reread looking specifically to see if our character development satisfies us, or to see if we've shown the passage of time effectively, or to study the way we've used varied sentence lengths and punctuation to create rhythm and suspense in a story." (See Session X of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today as you continue drafting your story, you'll want to draw on everything you've ever learned about how to write stories well to make your new draft as spectacular as it can be. Specifically, I want to teach you that most writers set up spaces in which we can do our best work. We can put items and words into those spaces that remind us of all we resolve to do and be as writers." (See Session XII of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Today I want to be sure you realize that there is a place that we, as writers, can go to get new lenses with which to view our drafts. And this is the place: we can go to stories that resemble the ones we hope to write. We can let specific parts (or aspects) of a story matter to us. We can feel the lump in our throat, see ourselves pull in close at a favorite part, or sense ourselves getting hooked by the story. Then we can ask, 'What did this author do that seems to work so well?' We can reread our own draft, asking, 'Are there places in my draft where I could use that same technique?' This rereading can lead us to effective rewriting." (See Session XIII of *Writing Fiction*.)
- "Writers choose emblematic details to reveal characters . . ." (See Session X of *Memoir*.)
- "Writers use metaphors to bring out characters' feelings . . ." (See Session XIII of *Memoir*.)

Part Three: Editing and Getting Ready for Publication

- "Today I am going to teach you that before or after you edit your draft for other concerns—paragraphing, punctuation, and so forth—you will want to check your spelling. Usually this means eyeing each word and thinking, 'Does this look right?' It also means rereading the letters in each word to double-check that those letters actually do spell the word you have in mind. When a writer is uncertain whether a word is correctly spelled, we generally mark that word and then we try spelling the word again and again. We draw on all we know and on the help we can locate to assist us with those spellings." (See Session XII of *Writing Fiction*.)
- Publishing Anthologies: A Celebration. (See Session XV of *Writing Fiction*.)

UNIT THREE

The Personal and Persuasive Essay

Boxes-and-Bullets and Argument Structures for Essay Writing

NOVEMBER

The Common Core State Standards have helped to ignite new interest in a kind of writing that goes by various names: opinion, review, essay, editorial, persuasive, expository. Writers who have grown up in TCRWP writing workshops will have progressed through a spiral curriculum in opinion writing, and when this unit begins, these writers will be poised to work toward the Common Core requirements for this grade level (and beyond). Students who have just this year embarked on their first course of study in writing will be less ready for this unit and will find it very new and very demanding. Either way, by the end of fourth grade, writers should be able to provide support for a claim in ways that chunk the supportive evidence into logically grouped categories. Writers will use transitional words, such as the ones suggested in the Common Core State Standards like *for instance*, *in order to*, *consequently*, and *specifically*. Writers will also use phrases that convey the relationship between the chunks of the text and the main claim—transitional phrases such as *One reason that . . . is . . .* and *An even more important reason for . . . is . . .* Writers at this level should also be able to draw on detailed specifics to support their claims. Depending on the topic and the available resources, a writer might embed quotations, anecdotes, statistics, or observations into his or her body paragraphs. The writer will not only stitch his or her tapestry of supporting specifics together but will elaborate on some of the information in ways that illuminate the relationship between the information and the writer's claim.

You will probably want to begin the unit by setting aside one day for an on-demand opinion writing assessment. The TCRWP's Common Core–aligned *Continuum for Assessing Opinion Writing* is available to you. You can say to your students, "Think of an idea or topic that you have strong feelings about. Write your opinion and

give reasons that tell why you feel this way. Use everything you know about essay writing, letter writing, speeches, and reviews." When you tell your students about the task, don't set them up for it by quickly reviewing the characteristics of opinion writing or by otherwise trying to scaffold them to be successful with opinion writing. This is the pretest and your hope will be that your students see themselves making giant strides during the interval between this preliminary assessment and the end-of-the-unit culminating assessment. Of course, after your students do a quick on-demand opinion essay, you will want to study what they have done so as to adjust your plans for this unit accordingly.

This curricular calendar unit largely relies on the book, *Breathing Life into Essays*, although there are some new spins. It is fun to consolidate some work and extend other work, and that is what we are suggesting in this year's version of the essay unit. The revisions especially align the unit to the Common Core State Standards, although *Breathing Life into Essays* is already closely aligned. The revisions have also been made with an eye toward students being primed to write on-demand, structured, thesis-driven, flash-draft essays on standardized tests. The current iteration of the unit also sets the stage for quick-writing that students will be doing across the curriculum, including in their response to reading and during a later unit on literary essays.

The overarching plan is that the unit begins by supporting personal essays that are structured in a main-claim/supportive examples or reasons fashion, which is one of the most common ways in which essays are structured. Then the unit moves toward persuasive essays, which are structured similarly save for the presence of a counter-argument. The unit begins with students writing two flash-draft essays, done in conjunction with on-demand performance assessments, and then the unit devotes a week and a half to helping students slow down and learn the moves that are required for writing essays well, doing this as they work on a single personal essay across a week and a half. Then students write and revise another flash-draft personal essay. After less than three weeks of work on four personal essays, the focus of the unit will shift to persuasive essays, probably written around the same topic as the personal essay. The work with persuasive essays proceeds more quickly, with students writing and revising a small collection of persuasive essays during the final week of the unit. All told, then, students write seven or eight essays within this month-long unit, so things progress quickly.

It is important to note here that the personal essay unit is now specific to fourth grade, which means that we can't stress enough how crucial it is that your students develop their confidence as essay writers and seriously strengthen their expository writing muscles by the end of it. Your students will be writing about personal topics, but that does not necessarily mean that they will be writing about topics of great personal significance. What it does mean, however, is that they will be choosing topics that they know well and can write about well. In this way, the focus of this unit becomes about powerful expository writing, not about research or collecting information about unfamiliar topics. This unit as it is written is jam-packed and intensely loaded. We encourage you to read it over and make some decisions about how to best teach it to your students. If your students are fairly new to expository structures, or if they

struggle with writing in general, you could decide to stick more closely to the shores of the unit as it is outlined in *Breathing Life into Essays*, which is a more supportive way for this unit to go. Or, if your students have had some experience with essay writing and they are fairly proficient writers, you could study the fifth-grade Interpretive Essay write-up, pushing your students toward more sophisticated essay work.

Launching the Unit

If your students have grown up in writing workshops, it is likely that you'll find, when you review students' on-demand writing, that their on-demand essays do not demonstrate what the students were taught about opinion writing during previous years' work with reviews, persuasive letters, and essays. If this is the case for your students, we recommend you start this unit by devoting a day to helping them remember the three or four most important things about this kind of writing that they should already know, and by then giving them the chance to spend one quick day working furiously to revise their on-demand essays (including scissoring them into paragraphs and adding transitions or rewriting them altogether). Be sure you keep the originals and give them duplicate copies to work on in this way because you'll want to preserve the baseline data against which you can show them their growth across the month. To remind students of some of the things they already know about this kind of writing, you may want to glance ahead in this write-up and notice the points that we coach you to teach students. Which of these points do you feel sure your students already know? Instead of waiting to teach these for the first time once students are deep within the unit, you may decide to remind writers now that they already know these tips and then see if, with just some reminders, they can demonstrate the ability to do that work. After revising their first essays, with lots of coaching from you but quickly—all in one day—give students a second on-demand opinion-writing assessment, this time reminding them before they start to work that they'll want to state a claim, to indent, to use transitions and topic sentences, and to write an introduction and conclusion. Reminding students to do these things will not mean that they do, in fact, do them. You and your students will learn a lot about their abilities in opinion writing when you then study each student's second on-demand draft as well as the original one. This will show you whether a student can, in fact, do this work and simply forgot about doing it at the start of the unit. Of course, that may not prove to be the case at all, which will be important for you to know.

By the end of Day Three, you will probably see that every student's work already shows dramatic improvement, which will then be a powerful way to start a unit. You can help students notice the amount of improvement there has been in their essays just from the first three days of the unit, and you can use this as a way to teach students that throughout the unit, they should expect their work to grow in leaps and bounds. That is, if students make dramatic progress between Day One and Day Three, you can teach them to expect this kind of progress from themselves. Remind them that they'll have another chance to write an on-demand opinion piece before long.

Imagine how amazing their essays will be three weeks from now if they have already improved so much!

Starting Work toward the Personal Essays That Students Will Draft and Revise across Almost Two Weeks: Essayists Grow Compelling Ideas in Writer's Notebooks

If this is your students' first experience in expository/essay writing, you probably will not have done the revision work described earlier, although you will hopefully have still devoted a day to an on-demand assessment of students' opinion writing. Ask students to do this even if you know they will fail miserably because this will allow them (and you) to later look back and see the amount of progress that they have made over the course of the unit.

For students who are new to this kind of writing, once the on-demand writing activity is over, you will probably want to teach them that some people divide the world of texts into two categories: narrative and expository writing. You may give each of those kinds of writing multiple names so that the students understand that the writing they will be doing during this unit is also called opinion or essay writing. It is important for kids to grow up with a felt sense for the ways narrative and expository (essay/opinion/persuasive) writing are different from each other. They should be able to hear a piece of writing that sounds like this: "One day I woke up early, looked at my clock, and leaped out of bed. I wolfed down a quick bowl of Cheerios . . ." and say to themselves, "That's a narrative." And they should be able to hear a piece of writing that starts like this, "There are many kinds of cereals, and even many kinds of Cheerios. There are, for example, regular Cheerios, Honey Oat Cheerios . . ." and say to themselves, "That's expository." And writers should be able to write-in-the-air a list of differences between the two kinds of writing. Narratives are organized by time, telling what happened first, next, and next. Expository pieces are organized by subtopics, telling all about this category, that one, and that one. Narratives are written so that a reader can experience something, living in the shoes of the character. Expository pieces are written to teach or to get a big idea across to readers. (Teachers, be careful that you use the domain-specific language correctly yourself, guarding against referring to the writing your students do in this unit as "stories." They will not be writing stories, and it is important that they and you become clear that there are different conventions to different genres of writing. Of course, all of this is very complicated because, in fact, essay writing almost always includes anecdotes, which are small stories.)

If your students are proficient enough that they have been taught to read stories (both true stories and fiction) interpretively, are aware that stories are not just about characters engaged in a plot but are also about ideas, and if they are accustomed to reading stories and thinking, "What ideas is this author wanting me to think about?" then you can help students realize that although there are differences between the two kinds of writing, there are also similarities. Both pieces of writing are made from ideas and from stories. In narrative writing, the story comes forward, and in essay

writing, the idea is forwarded. But a writer could take a topic of personal importance—say, the writer's struggles to fit into his or her peer group—and the writer could write either an essay or a narrative about that topic. Each of those pieces of writing could actually convey the same idea and contain the same story—but in the narrative, the story would be 95% of the text; in the essay, that one story would probably be closer to 20% of the text (although it could be a lot more) and there would probably be other stories as well. Students could be shown that many topics could be fertile ground for a personal essay or a personal narrative. For example, the first day of school this year could be a perfect subject for a story—or an essay. Getting one's hair cut: a perfect subject for a story—or an essay. Trick-or-treating, watching cartoons last Saturday morning, the day the moving truck came—these could all be grist for the narrative mill, or the essay mill.

This can be the drumroll for the portion of the unit in which you support writers to work with great investment for two weeks on one single personal essay. This is the portion of the unit that relies on the minilessons in *Breathing Life into Essays.* The book, however, allows this work to stretch across three weeks, and teachers relying on the book have often extended that time. In the year ahead, we are suggesting that instead of extending the time, you consolidate it. To do this consolidation, start by deciding that you will only be able to devote the first three days (and evenings and the weekend, hopefully) to helping your students experience what it means to be the sorts of people who grow compelling, provocative ideas, through using their writer's notebooks. You can draw on the first few sessions in *Breathing Life into Essays* or on this write-up to help you do this teaching.

In *Breathing Life into Essays,* the minilessons encourage students to take a few days and roam about through their lives and their thinking, generating lots of entries (often three or four in one day's writing workshop) about a whole host of topics. Then, at the end of the week, students zoom in on one sentence-long idea, which becomes their thesis statement for an essay. In that version of this unit, all the early entry writing ends up being valuable only as a way for writers to practice living as the kind of people who grow compelling ideas in writer's notebooks because all that a given writer takes from the generating-entry phase of the unit is a sentence or two.

Recently, when helping a group of teachers work through this unit themselves, Calkins found that if students begin the unit with a general sense of the terrain they want to mine in their personal essays and then use all the generating-entry strategies that will be mentioned within this write-up to mine that one preselected area, the entry-writing phase allows writers to generate insights and anecdotes that stand a chance of becoming part of the essay they eventually write. It is not all that hard for students to recognize the big topics of their lives: tensions between the student and a sibling, the months spent at summer camp, the joy and pressure of soccer, the lure of a particular video game.

You will probably want to take a day to teach students a strategy that often helps them find the areas in their lives that matter. This strategy is equally helpful once students have found the terrain in their lives that matter and found an earlier entry in their writer's notebook in which they wrote about that terrain. Either way, you can

show students that it is powerful to reread their entries and their published narratives, asking, "What bigger idea might this entry be about?" In your minilesson, for example, you might reread an entry of your own writing. Perhaps at first you just reread it and mutter, "I don't see an idea here—it is just about (whatever)." Then show students that instead of just flicking the page of your notebook to another entry, hoping that next one has ideas right on the surface, you instead do some work to generate ideas. The work is really writing to learn or free-writing. To teach students how to do this, after looking somewhat blankly at an entry you have written, pick up your pen and shrug as if you are totally unsure if this is going to yield something, because as you start writing, you have nothing in mind to say. Then reread the entry, muttering it to yourself, and when you come to the end, write, "The thought I have about this is . . ." and then keep writing, unsure what the thought is that you have about the entry. Show students that thoughts surface as you keep your pen moving. You may be writing "off from" the entry, writing a paragraph at the end of the entry, or you may be jotting notes in the margins of your entry, annotating it. Either way, this is fast note-taking writing where the goal is not good writing; instead the goal is simply to find the terrain and the insights that can become an umbrella idea/topic for your upcoming work on a personal essay. You may, for example, reread an entry you wrote about the time when you really, really wanted a bike (after all, everyone else had one) and finally got one. In the margin of this entry, you might write "not having as much money as my friends" and "peer pressure" and "gifts that I have really liked" and "adventures on my bike." You'll want to show students that one of the topics/terrain/global ideas matters to you, and so you settle on that as the area in which you'll be writing your essays during the upcoming unit. For example, you may circle, "adventure" to jot notes about that terrain, that topic. By the end of this one day—it may be your fourth day in the essay unit—your students should all have decided on the terrain they'll explore in their personal and persuasive essays. This is a far cry from having settled on their thesis statement. You'll want the thesis to emerge after another two days (and evenings) exploring this chosen terrain.

The first three sessions of *Breathing Life into Essays* can help you teach writers strategies for generating thoughtful entries about their chosen terrain. One of these minilessons reminds writers that just as earlier in the year, when they were writing *personal narrative*, they generated content for their writing by jotting down a person who mattered to them and then listing *small moments* they spent with that person. Suggest that writers become accustomed to taking strategies they have used in other contexts and tweaking them to fit into whatever new work they are doing. In the essay unit, writers could now record the big terrain in which they're writing, and they could jot *big ideas* they have about that terrain. You could illustrate this by taking our topic—say it is "adventures with my bike" and jotting big ideas you have about that topic: a new bike can let a kid get away from home, growing up and leaving home, fitting in with a pack of kids, parents controlling their kids. Of course, essays contain embedded stories, and so you could also show students that you can take any one of the ideas that you are growing about the topic and jot Small Moment stories to that idea. That is, after circling the jotted note "a new bike can let a kid get away from home," you

could list "the time when my parents thought I'd been kidnapped because I didn't come home for supper," "the time I snuck out of the house to get to D's house . . ." Your goal is not just to channel students to write about ideas; it is also to help them move fluidly back and forth between collecting small moments that demonstrate ideas and elaborating on those ideas.

If a student's grandmother has been growing elderly before her eyes, she might jot "Nana" and then list big ideas she has about her: "It is hard to watch the strongest person in your life become needy," "my grandmother is teaching me that few things matter more than family ties . . ." After listing ideas in such a manner, writers can either shift to collecting Small Moment stories related to one of those ideas or they can take one of those ideas and generate new thinking around it.

Of course, if you teach a particular strategy for generating essay entries, this doesn't mean the entire class needs to use the strategy you have just taught! Students by now should be accustomed to selecting the strategy that works best for that student on any given occasion, drawing on his or her growing repertoire. That is, the strategy you introduce in a minilesson on a particular day must not be that day's assignment for all students.

Another strategy that might appeal to some writers is that of taking an object related to the terrain (a backpack, say, for a writer writing about homework) and then the writer jots ideas he or she has about that object. If you demonstrate this strategy, show writers they can again write before they have an idea of what they will say, using free-writing to generate ideas, and show them they can use phrases such as "The thought I have about this is . . ." or "This makes me realize . . ." For the student who has decided to write about homework and who focuses on his backpack, the writer might write that he is overwhelmed by the weight of it. Then his writing might take a turn and address the way that homework is now overwhelming his life. This then can lead to yet more related thoughts in a stream-of-consciousness sort of way. Once a writer gets started writing about an idea, he needs to take that idea and roll it out in his mind and on the page. The goal, for now, is not especially wonderful writing; it's writing to learn, it's yabbering on the paper.

It is important to emphasize that during this phase of the writing process, when students are writing entries to grow ideas, their entries will not look like miniature essays. That is, the student writing about the weight of his backpack will not have written one paragraph about the books that are in it, one about the papers that are in it, and one about whatever else is in there. Instead, this writer may have rambled from writing about the weight of the backpack to remembering olden days when life was easier, to jotting topics about free time. During this phase of the unit, your emphasis will instead be on teaching writers to free-write in their notebooks. The goal is to help kids realize the value of writing at length without a preconceived content, trusting that ideas will surface as they go along. You will be helping them write ideas that are original, provocative, interesting, fresh, insightful. You will also help them reach for the precise words to capture their thoughts and, for your most advanced students, to use metaphors for thoughts that don't easily fit into ordinary words. If some students seem to struggle to grasp what it means to write about ideas not facts, the teaching

share in Session III of *Breathing Life into Essays* can help you clarify the difference between a fact and an idea.

As students write entries in which they attempt to grow ideas around their chosen topic, you'll want to watch the problems they encounter and be ready to help them with those problems. You are apt to find that students struggle to write at any length when they are writing about their ideas. A student writes, "I feel like homework is taking over all my free time. I don't have time to play outside any more. I miss the evenings when I used to play basketball in the park." But then, the writer stops. What else is there to say? It's far easier to write at length when one is chronicling what one did first, next, next, next . . . but when one is writing what one thinks, one needs to have the thought in order to record it, and the well of thoughts on any one topic can go dry. For writers who struggle to elaborate when they are writing about ideas, it will help if you are ready to give them tools to push past their first thoughts. Many teachers have found it incredibly helpful to teach these students to use thought prompts to prime the pump of their ideas. Once a student records an idea, the student can use a thought prompt to get himself or herself saying more. Earlier in this write-up, we mentioned the power of the sentence starter, "The thought I have about this is . . ." It is equally powerful to equip students with follow-up sentence starters, such as, "In other words . . ." or "That is . . ." or "The surprising thing about this is . . ." or "This makes me realize . . ." or "To add on . . ." You'll notice students extend their first ideas and use writing as a way of thinking. In *Breathing Life into Essays*, Session IV, you'll find a list of these thought prompts (set within a minilesson), which you can adapt to teach writers to use these prompts.

The trick is to push students to *truly* develop their thinking on the page. It is helpful to tell students that thought prompts are not just ways to keep them putting words on the page, but that they are prompts to actually push writers to *think new things*. We have found that in our minilessons it helps if we demonstrate explicitly how these thought prompts ask us to think. And so we might position ourselves as "the thinkers" and the students as "the prompters." For example, if you started with an idea like "My bike let me get away from home," you'd begin by thinking aloud whatever thoughts you already had about that idea. "My bike let me get away from home. It made me feel older, like I was a teenager even when I was just a kid." The trick here is that whenever you get stuck and can't think of anything else to say (to write-in-the-air), then another person almost hands you a thought prompt, a sentence starter such as, "In other words . . ." You repeat that sentence starter, and keep talking (about the original idea). "My bike let me get away from home. It made me feel older, like I was a teenager even when I was just a kid. In other words, getting a bike was part of growing up and of growing away from my family." If you again pause, as if your well of thoughts is temporarily dry, someone might help you prime your thinking with another thought prompt. "The surprising thing about this is . . ."

You can set up writers to do this work with partners, where one partner is "the thinker" and one is "the prompter," and they mimic your demonstration. Of course, then students will need to go on to do this work on their own in their notebooks, and they will need to be their own "prompter," taking thought prompts (or sentence

starters) from a list and using them to keep themselves thinking and writing. All of this work will help later on in the unit when you ask kids to elaborate their thinking as they draft.

Remember, this work on elaborating and the strategies for generating thinking will all be shoehorned into just a small number of days, early in the unit. This means that the work on thought prompts may, for example, end up as small-group work for those students needing this help. And it means that you will probably only teach one or, at the most, two strategies for generating ideas and anecdotes. Your students, of course, can also think of their own wonderful ways to collect ideas and anecdotes.

Teach Writers to Choose an Idea, to Write It as a Thesis, and to Build the Structure for the Essay

By the fourth or fifth day of this unit, you'll want to teach kids to choose a seed idea, also known in this instance as a thesis statement, and to plan their essay, designing their infrastructure. This is Common Core–aligned work, as your fourth-grade writers will "create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose." The bulk of your work at this stage is to coach students into selecting a structure that will work for their thesis. You'll try to do that work within a day, but it will no doubt spill beyond that time. (Just to help you orient yourself, after students draft and revise their thesis statements, they'll collect ingredients to combine into essays, devoting a day or so to each of the kinds of things that they'll probably write. By Day Nine or so, you'll remind writers about endings, beginnings, and transitional phrases, and help them select their most powerful material to tack together into a draft.)

But we are getting ahead of ourselves. For now, young essayists will select a seed idea. You can refer to Session VI in *Breathing Life into Essays* for support in this. Encourage students to select an idea that seems especially important, fresh, and worth developing. The lesson in Session VIII teaches students how to revise possible thesis statements with the purpose of matching more specifically what the writer wants to say in the essay. Students will reread all they have written and box out a claim, an idea. You may suggest they rewrite this claim six or eight times, trying to consolidate it, to clarify it. To do this, however, they also need to be imagining a plan for the essay as a whole, because the plan for the essay often influences the claim. To help students plan the essay, you can remind them that when they wrote narratives, they used timelines, story mountains, or minibooks to plan out the sequence of what they would write. When writing essays, it is equally important to plan out the sequence, but this time planning the sequence will involve categories or sections or reasons. Once students have selected and articulated an idea ("Getting a bike helped me grow up," for example), you will want to teach them to think about the categories they'll include in their essays.

The most accessible and common way to do this is for the writer to make a claim ("Getting a bike helped me grow up") and then list reasons for that claim, with each reason as a bullet, a topic sentence for another portion of the essay. When teaching

writers to write in this way, it works best if you encourage writers to restate the claim over and over, each time adding the transitional word *because* followed by a reason:

> Getting a bike helped me grow up because it allowed me to leave home;
> Getting a bike helped me grow up because it allowed me to see myself as "one of the gang";
> Getting a bike helped me grow up because it gave me independence.

Repeating the stem of the thesis over and over results in a list that is full of redundancy, but this can eventually be eliminated: "Getting a bike helped me grow up because it allowed me to leave home, to see myself as one of the gang, and because it gave me independence." Don't fret if writers don't have three bullets; two are just as good.

You will decide if you want to teach the whole class or a subset of the class another possible way to organize an essay. The most popular alternative in TCRWP workshops' classrooms during recent years has been a structure in which the writer writes first his or her initial thought on a subject, and then his or her later thought on the subject, creating an essay organized as a journey of thought. There are a few templates that writers have adopted and adapted when working within this frame. Try using a template like this one, for example, to capture your ideas about getting a bike, or your mother, or summers, or going to bed or anything else: "I used to think . . . but now I think . . ." "I used to think that playing with toy guns was awesome, but now I think it's scary." "I used to think that going to bed was boring, but now it is heavenly." "I used to think that a dog was just a pet, but now I realize that a dog can be part of the family." "I used to think that a bike was just a toy, but now I realize it's part of growing up." There are, of course, adaptations on that template."If you have never . . . you probably think it is . . . but after you . . . you realize it is . . ." "When I started to write about . . . I wanted to say . . . but after thinking more deeply about it, I realize what I really want to say is . . ."

Another way to help writers write an essay that deals with multiple angles on one idea (which correlates to Level 4 work in Webb's "depth of knowledge") is to suggest that writers can build the essay around the idea, "My thoughts about _____are complicated." This essay, then, can proceed to say, "On the one hand, I think . . ." and "On the other hand, I think . . ." That will work best if the two sides of the idea are parallel to each other.

> My thoughts about video games are complicated.
> - On the one hand, they distract me from other work.
> - On the other hand, they help me make friends.

During this planning day, your students will each craft a main idea (a claim or a thesis) and several parallel supporting ideas. Teachers sometimes refer to the main idea and supporting statements as "boxes-and-bullets."

If essay writing is new for students, we have found it helps if students take their thesis and record it on the outside of a folder, then make smaller internal folders for each of their bullets (topic sentences), and proceed to collect a small pile of papers

within each folder. After a few days of collecting and revising the small pile, a student will spread the contents of each small folder out, select the best material for that body paragraph, and rewrite the selected material into that body paragraph. This is described in Session IX of *Breathing Life into Essays*. This work can be done in a fashion that detours around the folders, with writers essentially developing each of their "bullets" on a different sheet of paper. The main problem with bypassing the folders is that such a plan generally means that writers postpone revision until they are revising large swatches of text, which often leads them to do little revision and, therefore, not ratchet up their skills as much as they otherwise would do.

Gathering Material for an Essay, Then Selecting the Most Compelling and Appropriate Material and Constructing a Draft

When it is time to teach students to collect materials to support their topic sentences, you will probably want to keep showing them that they can first collect microstories that illustrate their ideas. As part of this instruction, you'll want to also teach students to angle these stories so they highlight and support the idea the writer wants to advance, and for them to learn to "unpack" those stories, just as a teacher debriefs after a demonstration in a minilesson. *Breathing Life into Essays* Sessions IX and X are minilessons that will help you teach this. After teaching students that writers sometimes collect angled stories, they will have a lot of opportunities to practice this technique and become proficient at it because they will collect angled stories within each of their folders, substantiating each of their topic sentences. They also, of course, may revise these to bring out the point they want to make. Keep in mind that during one day of a writing workshop, a student will need to collect (and ideally revise) at least three angled stories in a day's writing workshop, filing these in the appropriate folder. It would most certainly not be considered a day's work for a student to write one tiny anecdote supporting one of the student's three topic sentences! Furthermore, if students take a day to write an anecdote illustrating one of their topic sentences, chances are good that the narrative will overwhelm the rest of the essay. Generally, within essays, writers write with tight, small anecdotes.

Essayists "unpack" their microstories by adding a sentence or two after the story in which they discuss how the story illustrates the main idea. A little boy wrote about how glad he was that his father taught him skating tricks. Then he wrote a story about watching his father do a 360-degree turn and then trying it himself. The boy's story ended, "I came to the boys' bathroom with blood on my head." The story was totally transformed when this young writer added the line, "But even though I got hurt, I'm still thinking about how glad I was my father had taught me to do the 360-degree turns."

Writers can also collect lists to support their topic sentences, or quotes, or statistics, or other students' stories. Many teachers use Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech as a model text for these lists. This is specifically described in Session XI of *Breathing Life into Essays*. Although you will probably not have time to teach

a full minilesson on this, in a small group or during a mid-workshop teaching point, you might show students how statistics, observations, citations, quotations, and so forth can enrich their work. When you coach students, you will want to help them select *compelling* evidence from the material they collect in these folders, and also help them ensure that the evidence closely supports their claim.

Eventually, you will need to teach writers to sort through the materials in each folder, thinking about whether they have enough evidence to support each point. Teach them to ask themselves questions such as, "Is all of my information here? How will this part look in the end?"As you coach your writers, push them to think about whether the evidence they have collected fits with each point and whether they have some variety in the evidence they have collected.

After a few sessions of gathering evidence, and when you deem the time is right, you can teach your writers to compile all of the diverse material they have collected to compose a draft. If you are familiar with the personal essay unit, you know that this session is a real treat. Expect your classroom to be filled with a flurry of scissors, tape, and excitement. Teach your fourth graders that writers put materials together first by arranging the material in an order that would make the most sense to the reader, and then they use transitional words and key words from their thesis to put the material together. Once writers have selected the most powerful and pertinent support material for each of their topic sentences, they can staple or tape or recopy this information into a paragraph or two that supports each topic sentence, and in this manner construct the rough draft of an essay.

If your students are especially on target and you want to add some complications to the unit, either in your whole-class teaching or perhaps in a small group, you can teach that writers look over their material to decide what they have and figure out the best way to use evidence to support the main point of the essay. For example, if a writer has a single story that makes her point in an especially powerful way, she may decide to let the essay revolve mostly around that one story. She will then write (or rewrite) the story to be sure it carries the idea, and will then mine that one story for insights and big ideas. That is, if your students are proficient enough that you want them to understand the breadth and flexibility of essays, and if they are not under any compulsion to create thesis-driven five-paragraph essays, then you'll probably want to show them that as they draft and revise their essays, they make decisions based on the material that they have on hand. But if you want to help writers produce competent, well-structured essays quickly, you may decide to not introduce the full range of options and choices just yet.

Building Expository Writing Muscles: Revising for Structure and Elaboration

Because of the two-part structure of this unit and its fairly rapid pace, this part will be fairly short. For that reason, we have outlined here some of the most powerful revision moves essay writers can make. These are the moves that writers would want to make

if they had limited time to revise, because these kinds of revisions will have a big payoff in the final product.

First, teach into the structure of your students' essays. Important structural moves that essay writers should make are outlined in the Common Core State Standards. Opinion writers should introduce a topic and create an organizational structure in which related ideas are grouped to support the writer's purpose. This standard really has two teaching points. In one session, you can teach your writers that essayists use introductions and conclusions as a way to pop out for readers what the essay will be about and why it is important. (See Session XVI in *Breathing Life into Essays* for specific ways to help readers structure their introductions and conclusions.) In another session (or perhaps tucked into the previous session if you are short on time or if your students' writing is fairly proficient structurally), teach your writers that one way essay writers revise is to read through each section, making sure the information in that section all goes together and all supports that part of the essay. This would be a good time for your fourth graders to rely on their writing partnerships, studying each others' drafts to make sure all of the information fits together in each section.

Another lens through which we can study essays is elaboration. The Common Core State Standards assert that well-supported opinion writing in fourth grade has facts and details. We know that to support a thesis well, a writer should include a variety of details. Because your writers spent time gathering various support material—anecdotes, quotes, facts, possibly some text-based evidence and the like—each section should be fairly well elaborated, and you can certainly gather small groups if some of your students need more support collecting adequate evidence. Teaching them to say more may not be the best revision lesson here. Instead, you can do some craft work with your students, teaching them that writers include not just facts and details, they also say how those facts and details are connected to the thesis or to the supporting point. Writers can use phrases such as "This goes to show . . ." or "This supports the idea that . . . because . . ." to draw those connections.

You can wrap up this first part of the unit by supporting your students in polishing their essays, editing for mechanics and spelling, and perhaps with a small celebration that might be a longer share session one day. You might wrap up this part with a tip that is angled toward transference, reminding your writers that you are teaching them critical moves that they will use as essay writers not just today, but always. As you reach the final part of this unit—teaching your students to angle their essays to persuade—maintain the expectation that they will bring forward all that you have taught them about quality essay writing in the first parts of this unit.

The Final Part: Persuasive (or Opinion) Essay

When students are writing what we call "personal essays," for the most part they are writing about ideas that no one can really argue with. Because the source of most material for this essay comes from the writer's experience, a classmate or reader cannot really say "That's not true." In other words, if I write an essay driven by a thesis that

says, "Being an only child can be lonely," and I support that idea with stories of my own loneliness, I remove the possibility for argument, because it would be bizarre for someone to tell me my experience is mistaken.

This is important, because as you are teaching your students the root moves of essay writing you want to make sure that they are focused primarily on the writing work—the logical progression of support for a thesis—rather than the art of argument. However, once you have reached a point where the foundations of essay are in place, it is important that you then carry the work forward into argument-driven essays that strive to not only name your own experience and ideas but also try to convince the reader that something is true, and to write to try to make a real difference in the world.

The Founding Fathers changed the course of history by creating a country based on an idea: An idea of a nation where sound argument, not bloodiness or brute force, would rule the day. In this country, therefore, the power to speak one's mind, to speak it clearly and persuasively, is more than a right: it is a necessity. Every day, we are called upon to explain ourselves and our beliefs—to noisy neighbors, to intransigent insurance companies, to education politicians. We defend against false accusations, we atone for mistakes, we plea for change, we stand up for what's right. Or, we don't do these things, and our lives are a little darker, a little more guilt-ridden, a little lonelier. The art of articulation, of making ourselves understood, takes practice. One of the best ways to practice speaking up is by speaking out in writing. The Common Core State Standards remind us that students need opportunities to craft logical, fluent arguments that hit home. This part offers them chances to speak out to make a difference in their lives. Students are invited to write persuasive arguments for particular audiences and to make those arguments as strong as possible.

To begin this work, you might want to gather your students in the meeting area, refocusing their attention on this slightly new part and building their enthusiasm for the new work ahead. You might tell your class that because they have done such a stellar job of writing personal essays, they are ready now to learn something that every citizen of the world must learn—the power of argument. "Children," you might say, "today we are going to begin to be very brave. Yesterday we were content to write essays where we simply told the world what we thought or how we felt. You have become writers of ideas, and you have learned to find stories that back up your ideas. Today we are going to learn how to find the things that we not only believe in ourselves but that we think other people should believe, too—things that other people—people in this class even—might disagree with. This takes bravery, and I know that you are all very brave indeed."

You might then want to show your students that when you look at some of the ideas you had during the personal essay unit, ideas like "Being an only child is difficult," that you see how no one could really argue about that issue because it is so personal to you. You can model for them how you begin to collect more persuasive ideas by asking yourself some questions, such as, "How could the world change for the better?" or "Is there anything that people do that I think is wrong or unfair?" or "Some people think . . . but I think . . ." Your students will see your ideas transform from clear

but personal statements into bold, persuasive mottos, like "People should stop putting only children down," or "Parents of only children should make sure that their kids are involved in lots of groups" or "Some people think that being an only child is bad for you, but I think that it is the best way to grow up, even if it is hard sometimes." You will want to encourage your students to branch off into other directions from their original idea as well, using these persuasive questions to help them generate a long list of things they wish they could change in the world.

Before long, notebook pages will be spilling over with strong opinions: "No one should be mean to people," "Cats are better than dogs," "Some people think video games are bad for you but I think they can be good, too." Inevitably as your students share these ideas with the class you will hear grumbles of disagreement. You might even be surprised at the vehemence with which your children voice their disagreement. "No, they are not!" and "That's not true!" will be common refrains, and when you hear these words, you can quiet your class and let them know that they have arrived in the land of argument.

Once this buzz is in the air, you will most likely want to fuel the fire with talk. As students have ideas they now see as arguments to be fought for, you may want to teach them that one way writers prepare to argue their point is to make sure they have thought carefully about both the reasons they think they are right as well as the reasons other people may disagree with them. This means that you will be teaching your students to debate as a way to begin planning their essays. For the first part of the day, then, you will want to teach your students that sometimes a good writing partner is your fiercest critic. As your writers propose their ideas, their writing partners can take the stance of their opponent in a debate. You can model this for your class, asking a strongly verbal student or colleague to play the role of opponent. "People should stop putting only children down," you might begin, to which your writing partner will respond immediately, "Why do you say that?" "Well, because people say that only children are selfish, but that isn't always true." You have just drafted one bullet in your plan, but your writing partner is not satisfied. "Well, but sometimes they are." Now you will have to think hard about what your response will be. "*That may be true*," you might say, "*but* it's not like calling only children selfish helps them. *So I guess what I am saying* is you shouldn't put them down because it doesn't help them and only hurts them."

Set your students up for debate with a strong demonstration and send them off. You will, of course, need to coach some of your more reticent students. Many children will back down at the first sign of disagreement, and you will need to pump them up to assert their ideas. Remind them that the point of debate is to come up with new and better ideas, and that when we debate we are not afraid to be wrong or to change our thinking, but we must push forth our ideas.

After your students have debated their ideas with their writing partners, send them off immediately to flash-draft essays. You may want to quickly help them see how their essays may go. For many students the familiar boxes-and-bullets will still be the best form of an essay for their argument, and the debate has simply helped them to make their reasoning more persuasive. For other students, however, it may make

more sense for their essays to directly argue with those who may disagree, by writing four-ish paragraph essays that follow a structure as follows:

Gold miners faced many hardships.

- I think . . .
- You may think . . . but . . .

As students begin to draft, you will want to largely reinforce what you taught them during the personal essay unit. You will also want to teach your students to be especially careful when choosing their language, because much of persuasion rests not so much on what we say as in how we say it. Make sure that your students know that they should be extra sure to choose words that mean exactly what they are trying to say, and that they are careful not to either exaggerate or underwhelm their ideas. Students can always use their writing partners to help find the words they are searching for. Acting out what you are trying to say persuasively can help students feel their conviction, and from this conviction comes their voice.

This part of the essay unit is about writing drafts fast and furious, tucking in strategies as we go, so many teachers are choosing to have their students write a few of these flash-drafts before moving on to revision. This has made essay writing an energetic and productive time of the year, and many of us feel that this is the right direction to go. If your students are writing flash-drafts each day, then, you will want to help them make each draft better than the one before. Brief, vivid anecdotes that bear on the issue will help make their essays alive, full of voice, and very convincing. You could remind your class that in the personal essay unit they learned to write other people's stories as well as their own, and that in persuasive writing these stories become great backup for our own thinking. Mentor texts provide inspiration for other types of material kids will want to collect. For example, many well-written pieces of persuasive writing rely on an image that functions as a central metaphor. You could also teach the children that nothing is more persuasive than facts. Writers who want to hit home use precise information to do so, and this could mean that, as part of this unit, a teacher will teach students how to use the Internet to search for precise evidence such as statistics or a quotation to illustrate a topic sentence. Your decision will depend on several factors, including time and access to technology.

Any of these strategies can help your students lift the level of their writing as they flash-draft essays or you can use them as revision strategies later on. Some may work as whole-class lessons, whereas others can serve as your small-group instruction or conference work.

After a few days of drafting many essays, you will most likely see your students producing well-structured, well backed-up, somewhat persuasive essays. When you teach them to revise one or two of their essays for publication, you might want to focus on the somewhat persuasive part, helping them to make their essays as persuasive as possible. You may gather your students around you again, congratulating them on the work they have done so far, and then saying something like, "Writers, you are at a critical point in your writing. You have good arguments about great ideas. The

problem is that a *good* argument may not win the debate. We need *great* arguments. And the way to make our arguments great is to make sure there are no holes in them." Certainly here you could weave a connection to the times children have argued with their parents over a late night or new toy, pointing out that to convince a parent to bend, your argument needs to be air tight, not just good enough.

Sending your writers back to their writing partners is a good way to help them find any counterarguments that need addressing in their essays. They can read their essays to their writing partners. And their writing partners will take the stance once again as the opponent to their argument, looking for places to disagree. If the essayist reads, "One reason why cats are better than dogs is that cats don't need to be taken on long walks in the cold," the writing partner will jump in with, "Yeah, but you have to change their litter box and that is totally gross." We will want to teach our writers to address this counterargument using phrases like, "While some people argue . . . in fact . . ." or "Some people think . . . but I think . . ." For example, our writer will revise her essay by adding in, "Some people think that cleaning out the litter box is worse than taking dogs out for walks, but I think that walking dogs in the winter or in the rain is worse because it lasts for much longer." By writing directly to the possible disagreements our writers will strengthen their arguments and their essay writing.

Along the way you will want to highlight a few revision goals. Most important, teach students that writers reread and revise, taking our readers into account. Teach them that writers pretend to be our own readers. We step outside of ourselves, pick up the text as if we have never seen it before, and we read it. We notice the sections that are convincing, and those that make us flick the paper away. We notice where the draft loses energy, and where it makes the reader feel skeptical. Of course, revision is another time for studying mentor texts. Teach students to go back to their pieces and try out the kinds of rhetorical gestures that their mentors have made, including the use of purposeful repetition (as in Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech) and the use of zingers that drive home the point in a quotable way. If your students have done outside research, you can teach them to paraphrase that information here, being sure to show them how to either cite their source inside of the text or as a separate works cited page.

Celebrating Persuasive Writing: Finding a Place for Our Opinions in the World

Many teachers have chosen to make this publication a bigger deal than other essay celebrations: leaning on the persuasive elements and holding debates, filming essays as speeches, or having students create podcasts around their work. If we have been pushing our students to write as persuasively as possible, we will also want to help them try to make a difference in the world by making sure their writing gets into the hands of people who could be changed by it. However you celebrate, be sure to remind your students of all they have learned in this weighty unit. They will have, in their rigor and stamina, found that their essay-writing muscles have developed exponentially.

Editing and Word Study to Support Writing Workshop

During the editing phase of this unit, you may want to teach your kids explicitly that when they use the word wall, they should look up at the whole word and take a pretend "photograph" of the whole word, then write the *entire* word as best they can without peeking, and check it one more time against the word wall after they've given it their best try. They should try to *not* look at the word one letter at a time, copying one letter at a time—words are learned by practicing the whole word. This time of year is also a good time to do a quick informal assessment by looking across kids' independent writing to see which high-frequency words many kids continue to misspell. Even if you already introduced those words as word wall words, you may revisit them again and again until most of your children have begun to spell them correctly in their independent writing.

Now that your year is well underway, it is a good time to raise the bar on your students' grammar expectations. In the exploration of essay writing you will want to have students revisit sentence types as a jumping-off point to work on sentence combining. Students have a difficult time recognizing that a sentence can be simple: "The cat *ate* the fish"; compound: "The cat *took* the fish and *buried* it in the garden"; or complex: "The cat *ate* the fish because he *could not dig* a hole in the concrete." The work begun in this unit will lay the foundation for more challenging work, such as fragments, later in the year.

This is also the perfect time to revisit paragraphing of new ideas. Informational writing provides an opportunity to remind children about when and where to use paragraphs to signal a new idea. In addition, students are ready to investigate abstract vocabulary that signals connections: *and*, *thus*, *furthermore*, *rather*; compares or contrasts a viewpoint: *however*, *on the other hand*; or interjections: *or*, *yet*, used to advance an idea. This inquiry work might begin in read-aloud where you might begin to tune your students' ears to hear the words that signal agreement, viewpoint, or interjection and the words are collected on a chart by category. Children can use the resource tool when writing notebook entries or drafts.

Additional Resources

Teachers, before embarking on this unit and deciding on the trajectory you will follow, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to better understand your students' level of competency with informational writing. You will probably want to use the TCRWP *Continuum for Assessing Opinion Writing*. Please see the write-up for the exact prompt that will get your kids writing and give you a sense of where their skills are already strong and where they need more support.

In Part One of the unit, the goal is for students to generate a lot of writing about ideas that matter to them. Sometimes during this initial stage, students get the im-

pression that they should merely list possible topics as their work for workshop time, but you will want to quickly give them a very different vision. The goal is that students write productively, move from entry to entry with independence, and use a variety of strategies to get down the page with writing. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voice-overs such as, "By now, your hand should be flying down the page" or "By now you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to coach them into writing more quickly, and do some diagnostic work to understand what is slowing them down. It's also likely that you will have some students who are still writing story entries at this juncture, and although you will soon want them gathering anecdotes as possible evidence for their ideas, you will want to pull small groups right away to make sure that all your fourth graders are understanding the shift in genre from narrative to non-narrative writing.

In the second part of the unit, you will be supporting students as they plan their thesis statement and supports. The goal here is structure, structure, structure, and it's likely that you will need to reteach some of the lessons around boxes-and-bullets in different ways, either to the whole class or to small groups. You may want to work with colleagues to develop your own ways of talking about this work of ordering a topic and subtopics. One teacher brought in food storage containers: a big one and three little ones that fit inside to show that the "box," or thesis, should be big enough to contain all the "bullets," or smaller ideas or examples, but that they all go together. However you decide to talk about it, you will need to spend time here because it's the turning point of the unit: drafting and revision will not go well if the backbone of the essays is not strong.

In the third and fourth parts of the unit, your students will gather evidence and draft, revise, and edit their essays. They will come out of the notebook for this work, and the organization of the resulting pieces of paper will no doubt need support. You will need to add in small-group lessons and conferences to help students negotiate and keep track of which evidence belongs in which body paragraph.

The way you support your students through the revision process will very much depend on what you observe in your students' drafts. We recommend that you once again call on the *Continuum for Assessing Opinion Writing* as a tool with which to study your students' drafts. Study the work with the lenses of structure, elaboration, and craft, deciding what are the most crucial lessons within each of those categories to teach right away.

As you head into the final part of this unit, take note of how you can support your students in being effective editors for themselves. Because paragraphing is key to this genre, you might make special efforts to ensure that students are internalizing the purposes and conventions of paragraphs in expository writing. Notice common punctuation errors and teach into these, possibly through mid-workshop teaching points or minilessons as needed.

Part One: Starting Work toward the Personal Essays That Students Will Draft and Revise across Almost Two Weeks: Essayists Grow Compelling Ideas in Writer's Notebooks

- "Today I want to remind you that we write not just to tell stories but also to teach and share big ideas. While sometimes we write narrative stories, which take us on beautiful journeys, living in the shoes of a character, other times we write expository pieces, which are clear, organized writing that explains ideas by telling all about this category, then another, then another. Today, think of an idea or topic that you have strong feelings about. Write your opinion and give reasons that tell why you feel this way. Use everything you know about essay writing, letter writing, speeches, and reviews."
- "Today I want to teach you that essayists don't just write about any old topic. We write about the things that really and truly matter to us. One way we discover our terrain, the topics that pull at our hearts and our minds, is by mining our writer's notebooks and discovering what ideas lie between the lines of our stories. As we read through our stories, we think, 'What bigger idea might this be about?' Then we annotate our stories, circling words, and writing quick notes about the ideas, and in those notes, find our terrain."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers, you have infinite resources to which you can turn as you are coming up with ideas for essays. We can find ideas by living wide-awake lives, giving thoughtful attention to the stuff, the grit, that others might walk past. We listen to the purr of our cat, we notice how each person in our family reads the newspaper differently, we study the stuff that accumulates in desk drawers, we overhear arguments—and we let all this sink into our minds and our notebooks. Then we write, 'This makes me think . . .' or 'I'm realizing that . . .' " (Taken from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that once writers have discovered our terrain, our work as essayists has just begun. The thing about topics that is really important to us is that we will have a ton of ideas about that topic. One thing we can do to grow our ideas around that topic is jotting all the big thoughts around the topic in our notebooks."

The following teaching points may be used for small groups, conferring, mid-workshop teaching points, or teaching shares, depending on the needs of your students:

- "Readers sometimes fully develop thoughts by collecting small moments that demonstrate big ideas then elaborating on those ideas. As we jot our ideas, we can jot a small moment that connects."
  - "Sometimes to grow big ideas, you may want to think of an object related to your terrain. Writers sometimes jot ideas about that object, which can lead to even more ideas about our terrain."

- "When we write, we don't just stop after stating an idea. We push ourselves further to fully flesh out that idea. One way we can do this is by using thought prompts that grow our ideas. We might write an idea, then continue by writing, 'The thought I have about this is . . .' or 'In other words . . .' or 'That is . . .' or 'This makes me realize. . . .' "
- "Sometimes writers need a little push from a partner to really allow their idea to flourish. One way writers can help one another is by allowing our partners to write-in-the-air as we provide them with thought prompts to push their thinking."

Part Two: Writers Choose an Idea, Write It as a Thesis, and Build the Structure for the Essay

- "Writers, we have spent the last days journeying through one terrain that is really important to us. We are kind of like tourists visiting a city for the first time, strolling through the streets, noticing one thing, then another, then another. Today, I want to teach you that we don't just continue through our writing like tourists. Eventually, we settle in on one idea, one that truly jumps out to us as important, and live in that idea. When we settle into an idea, we don't want it to be just any idea, so we go back and reread all our entries, pulling out the one that is most important. Then we write it again and again in different ways, until it truly expresses what we are trying to say."
- "Today I am going to teach you that essay writers, unlike narrative writers, do not make a timeline or a story mountain and then progress straight into drafting. Instead we often pause at this point to plan (or frame) the main sections of our essay. We plan the sections of our essay by deciding how we will support our main idea. One way we may organize our ideas is by writing our claim over and over, following each time with the word *because* and a reason why that claim is true."
  - *Small groups:* "Sometimes writers adopt a different structure for our essays. Rather than stating a claim, then supporting it with one reason, then another, then another, we might follow a journey of thought. We may use the structure: 'I used to think . . . but now I think . . .' and then write to develop how our thinking has changed over time."
  - *Small groups:* "Yet another way to write about an essay is by considering multiple angles on one idea. Writers sometimes build an essay by using the structure: 'My thoughts about _____ are complicated. On the one hand, I think . . . On the other hand, I think . . .' "
  - *Tip:* Teachers, you may want to provide the additional support of actually creating files and folders for students to organize their ideas. They can record their thesis on the outside of a folder, then make smaller internal files for each of their bullets or topic sentences. Then, they will collect small piles of

paper with ideas and small moments that pertain to the topic sentence within each folder.

Part Three: Gathering Material for an Essay, Then Selecting the Most Compelling and Appropriate Materials and Constructing a Draft

- "Today what I want to teach you is that the most important materials writers collect when writing essays are stories! One way we can support our topic sentences is to collect microstories, stories that are angled so they highlight and support our ideas." (Adapted from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Students, remember, revision is a process that doesn't just come at the end of writing. It is something you do constantly. You are collecting so many stories! That means you are also going to be doing a lot of revision, taking time to consider, 'How can I say this more clearly?' and 'How can I angle this to better support my ideas?' "
- "Don't you find sometimes that you tell a story that really illustrates something, but the person you are talking to looks at you, completely puzzled and just says, 'Huh?' What I want to teach you today is that sometimes writers can add a sentence or two at the end that clearly explains how the story illustrates the main idea, so that our audience will much more readily see the point of our stories. You might say, 'This shows . . .' or 'This made me realize . . .' or 'This made me think . . .' and link it back to your thesis."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Today I want to teach you that writers of essays are collectors, collecting not only our stories but also stories of others, as long as these stories illustrate our main ideas." (Taken from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
- "Today I want to teach you that as we prepare ourselves to draft our essays, we sort through the materials in each folder, thinking, 'Is all of my information here? How will this part look in the end?' We consider whether our evidence fits with each point and whether we have enough variety of evidence to support each point. Then, we can develop, add, or take away points as needed."
- "Today I want to teach you that after writers plan and collect for their essays (as you have done), the day comes to put everything together. Once a writer has planned and collected, then presto! The pieces of the essay can rise into place. It won't be finished—writers revise essays just like we revise any other kind of writing. But in the space of a single day, you can go from a bunch of entries in some folders to a rough draft of an essay. Today I will teach you how to carry your entries from folders into essay form." (Taken from *Breathing Life into Essays*.)
- *Small groups/conferring for writers in need of a challenge:* "Today I want to teach you that sometimes writers look over their materials to decide what they have to figure out the best way to use their evidence to support the main point of the essay."

Part Four: Building Expository-Writing Muscles: Revising for Structure and Elaboration

- "Today you'll continue to cement your selected material into paragraphs, but I know you will also want to learn a bit about how essayists write introductions and closings for their essays. Specifically, I want to teach you that essay writers often use the beginning of an essay as a place to convey to readers that the ideas in the essay are important. The lead briefly places the essay into context."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Introductions are so important because they both draw the reader in and set them up to know what ideas they will find in the essays. I want to teach you something else that will also pump up your writing. It is this: we don't just start our essays powerfully, we end them powerfully, too. We leave our readers with a strong sense of our argument and the feeling that they have just read something really important and heartfelt."
- "As with most situations, when we are looking for something in particular in our writing, we will find it. Today I want to teach you, as you are editing, it is important to look at your work through many different lenses. Read and reread your work, each time focusing on one particular convention. One time, you may look for spelling. Another, you may look for fragments or run-on sentences. By dedicating each reading to one convention, your mind will be clear and focused, allowing you to clarify your writing bit by bit."

A Final Part: Persuasive (or Opinion) Essay

- "Today we are going to start a brave endeavor. Yesterday we were content to write essays where we simply told the world what we thought or how we felt. You have become writers of ideas, and you have learned to find stories that back up your ideas. Today we are going to learn how to find the things that we not only believe in ourselves but what we think other people should believe, too—things that other people—people in this class even—might disagree with. This takes bravery, and I know that you are all very brave indeed. First things first, persuasive essayists collect ideas. You may come up with ideas by asking yourself, 'How could the world change for the better?' or 'Is there anything that people do that I think is wrong or unfair?' or 'Some people think . . . but I think . . .' Then, collect these ideas in your notebooks."
- "Today I want to teach you that one way writers prepare to argue their point is to make sure they have thought carefully about both the reasons they think they are right as well as the reasons other people may disagree with them. Writers often enter debates with their writing partner, who will take the opposite stance, to practice standing up for their own beliefs."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers, you are now prepared to flash-draft an essay. Remember, one way to structure your essay is in boxes-and-bullets form, stating an argument, then backing it up with elaborated supports."

- *Small groups/conferring:* "You have now thought about your own argument as well as the way someone could counter your idea. Today I want to teach you another possible way writers structure persuasive essays. It is this: persuasive essays may start with a thesis followed by the elaboration of the writer's opinion. Then, the writer might state the counterargument and the reasons why we feel it isn't true."

- "Writers, don't you find that when you are arguing a point with someone, your opinion is most easily swayed when they use undeniable facts to support their claim? Well, I want to teach you something: this is absolutely true of persuasive writing. Writers, we can make our written arguments very difficult to speak against when we use truths about our world to support them."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "I want to remind you that we don't let go of all the strategies we learned to boost up the level of our personal essays. You have learned so much about how to craft gorgeous essays: using vivid, to-the-point anecdotes; adding in other people's stories; supporting ideas with quotes. All of those strategies that helped you in personal essays will also make your arguments in persuasive writing powerful."
  - *Small groups/conferring:* "Writers sometimes rely on an image or object that functions as a central metaphor to support their argument in persuasive essay."
- "Writers, you are at a critical point in your writing. You have good arguments about great ideas. The problem is that a *good* argument may not win the debate. We need *great* arguments. And the way to make our arguments great is to make sure there are no holes in it. One way we can check for gaps in our argument is by turning to our writing partners again, allowing them to search for places they can disagree."
- "Today I want to teach you that as we revise our essays, sometimes we pretend to be our own readers. We step outside of ourselves, pick up the text as if we have never seen it before, and we read it. We notice the sections that are convincing and those that make us flick the paper away. We notice where the draft loses energy, and where it makes the reader feel skeptical. Then rewrite or take away parts that aren't powerful and add pieces we feel are missing."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Remember, as we revise, one way we can improve our own essay is by studying mentor texts. Writers might go back into our pieces and try some of the moves that our mentors have made. We might use purposeful repetition, like Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I have a dream' speech, or we might use zingers that drive home the point in a quotable way, like President Obama's 'Yes, we can' speech."

UNIT FOUR

Informational Writing

Building on Expository Structures to Write Lively, Voice-Filled Nonfiction Picture Books

DECEMBER

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of information (or explanatory) writing, describing it as writing that is designed to "examine a topic and convey information and ideas clearly." At the highest levels, informational writing and persuasive writing (as defined by the CCSS) blend. That is, many informational texts, especially some well-written adult texts, teach information while also aiming to persuade readers to think certain ideas. The Common Core, however, differentiates these two kinds of writing, suggesting that if the overall purpose of a text is to teach important information, then one idea will probably not dominate the entire text, nor will the driving structure of the writing be claim/evidence. Instead, in informational writing, the driving structure is apt to be categories and subcategories. It's also somewhat helpful to think of the features of argument versus informational writing—which are also described in the Common Core State Standards. Whether an argument is written in essays or in persuasive reviews or editorials, these texts are generally marked by a thesis or opinion and evidence that is parceled into paragraphs. Informational writing is often marked by topics and subtopics that are signaled with headings and subheadings, and with accompanying portals for information, including glossaries and text boxes or sidebars, and diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visuals.

The fundamental thing to remember about informational writing is that the writer aims to teach readers about a topic. Just as we help students think about information reading as a way of engaging in a course in which they are learning all about a topic, we need to help them think about informational writing as engaging in a course in which they teach all about a topic. An informational writer's purpose, then, is to help readers become informed on a topic that feels very important to the writer. That's the kind of writing your students will tackle in this unit. It's the kind of writing that kids

will encounter in much of their nonfiction reading, such as the DK Readers, the Gail Gibbons and Seymour Simon books, the current event articles in *Time for Kids,* and their social studies and science texts. It's also the kind of writing for which it is easy to find lots of accessible mentor texts for kids.

Because informational texts are usually composites of smaller texts/chapters, often written in different text structures and genre, any unit on informational writing is bound to stand on the shoulders of units on narrative, opinion, and procedural writing as well as on units on nonfiction reading. This unit aims to help students harness all they know about all of these kinds of writing, using all of this in the service of creating texts that teach readers. The unit has the specific, added goal of teaching youngsters about qualities of good writing as these pertain to information texts. Students learn that focus is as important in informational writing as it is in narrative writing. Students progress, with experience and instruction, from writing rather cursorily about very broad, generic topics toward being able to zoom in on more specific topics and therefore write with a greater density of relevant information. Eventually, experienced writers learn that they can focus not just on a smaller subject but on a particular angle on (or aspect of) that subject. That is, for young people writing a four- or five-page book, usually those writing on the topic of tigers will work with less sophistication than those writing on the topic of the hunting patterns of the Bengal tiger. Students also learn to group their information into categories and, in time, into subcategories. With experience and instruction, students progress from grouping information into categories that appear to have been developed on the fly, based on the writer simply thinking, "Hmmm, what else do I have to say?" and then producing another chapter title, toward categories that are planned from the start and previewed early in the text, with the categories of information mirroring the logic of the text. That is, if the writer's goal is to compare the hunting habits of the Bengal tiger at different times of day, the text might be organized by time. Then, too, the unit supports writers' growing ability to substantiate claims with information and to elaborate on and analyze that information. Students come to learn that when informational writing is explanatory, the information that is included tends to be facts that explain a process, and when the informational text is anecdotal, the information is apt to include examples that are sometimes in the form of a story or vignette.

In addition to teaching students to progress along these continua, the unit channels students to work toward creating lively, voice-filled, engaging information books about topics of expertise. One of the rules of thumb in writing is that writers can make readers engaged in a topic only if the writer is engaged in and knowledgeable about that topic. It is likely, then, that during this first nonfiction writing experience of the year, many students will feel most knowledgeable about topics of individual expertise. The unit assumes that students are writing about self-chosen topics of great personal interest. It might be the case, for example, that they will be writing about topics such as skateboards, Facebook, and Arabian horses.

There are a couple of alternative ways you might decide to teach this unit. One is to draw on a study you have done in a content area. In classrooms that have brought to life units such as "Early American Leaders Teach Lessons in Leadership: The Making

of a Nation," it might well be that students care about and know about subtopics they've studied within that unit, and they can write with engagement and authority on a subtopic that falls under the purview of their social studies curriculum. However, if students are just embarking on a social studies unit and know only the barest outline about that topic, they would not be apt to write well on that topic. A second possible way you could teach this unit is by drawing on the work students are doing in reading workshop. In reading workshop, your students will be embarking on research projects, delving deeply into topics and reading across texts to learn more. It could be, then, that your students will make information books based on these topics. If this is the case, you may want to begin this unit with three or four days of a double reading period, in which you will support your students' reading and note-taking so that they begin work on information books with a bevy of knowledge on their chosen topics.

Teachers wanting to learn more about the sources for this unit should refer to the Common Core State Standards and the samples collected within their appendix, to the TCRWP's *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing*, and to the rich tradition of work in nonfiction writing done by leaders in the field of writing such as Don Murray, E. B. White, Roy Peter Clark, and William Zinsser.

Getting Ready: Imagining the Texts That Writers Will Create and Choosing Touchstone Texts That Align with Nonfiction Reading

It is crucial that you select captivating, well-written mentor texts to support your students in this work. Choose just a small number of texts that resemble those you hope your children will write in this unit, making the choice not by the topic of the texts but rather with an eye to the structures within which you hope your students will write. For example, a book about the human body with clear sections, varying formats, and writing that fourth graders could potentially see themselves emulating would be more supportive than one about pets that is very complex and far different from the kinds of writing your students will do. Consider whether you want to choose several mentor texts that are structured differently so as to expand students' sense of options, or whether you want to channel students toward a particular structure so that you can provide more scaffolding by holding the class more closely together and ensuring that the text you write as an exemplar matches the ones they will write. When selecting texts, you will likely find that some texts are narrative nonfiction texts. These might, for example, take readers through a timeline within the life of someone or something (people, animals, plants, rivers, wars, events). Some texts will be expository informational texts that teach all about a topic. Some texts will be nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish something such as a scientific experiment. Some texts, of course, will be a composite of all of these and other kinds of informational writing.

You'll need to decide which features you'll want to highlight in your minilessons and make sure the touchstone texts you select illustrate those features. For example, given that you'll probably emphasize the importance of categorizing information, you'll want to find model texts that have clear subcategories. You may want to empha-

size that informational writers write in sections or chapters, and you may want to use the very concrete example of writing that begins with a table of contents and is divided into chapters to illustrate this concept—in which case you will need books that contain a table of contents. Whether that is important to you or not, you will almost certainly want to show writers that information pertaining to one subtopic falls under one heading, and information pertaining to another subtopic falls under a second heading, and so you will want to select mentor texts that have headings and subheadings, if not chapters and a table of contents. You may decide to highlight the fact that writers integrate facts with opinions and ideas, in which case you'll want to select mentor texts that illustrate this clearly. You may also search for exemplar texts that blend clear, straightforward informational writing with voice. If so, you'll want to look for books that engage the reader and sound as if the author is speaking straight to the reader, with sentences embedded among the factual information in which the author relates that information to something more personal.

In the past month's nonfiction reading workshop, you emphasized the differences between narrative and expository nonfiction reading. You can build on this work by choosing mentor texts that contain some sections that sound more storylike (but are still informational) and some that are more courselike. For example, an information book that deals with the life cycle of a butterfly may contain sections that sound more like a chronological narrative while still incorporating facts, as well as other sections that sound like a lecture.

Once you've chosen an exemplar text or two, you're ready to begin. You'll want to provide a unit overview for your youngsters. This will be easy to do because in the reading workshop, your children will also be reading texts in which writers become teachers, laying out a course of study for readers. You might, therefore, say: "The authors that you are reading are functioning like your teachers. Well, you, too, can become a teacher, writing in such a way that you teach other people about the topics on which you are an expert."

Assessing Informational Writing

You will probably decide to launch the unit with an on-demand informational writing assessment. If you make this decision, we recommend using the same prompt and same conditions as other Reading and Writing Project teachers have used so that you will be in a position to analyze the writing your students produce under the same conditions, referring to the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing* (www.readingandwritingproject.com). This means that on the day before the assessment, you say to your students, "Think of a topic that you've studied or know. Tomorrow, you will have an hour to write an informational (or all-about) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you'll have an hour to complete this." Then,

the following day, provide them with sixty minutes, or one writing workshop, to show what they know about informational writing.

Many teachers find that after they copy what students have done during this informational writing and note where the work falls along the continuum, it can be helpful to give students a fast course on the topic and then allow them to spend a single day rewriting what they have written, from top to bottom, because this can allow you to assess what they know how to do without any instruction and what is easily within their grasp with just a brief amount of reminders.

This on-demand writing will help you know where your students fall in a trajectory of writing development and help you set your sights on very clear next steps. It will also help students realize that informational writing is well within their grasp and not something that requires days and weeks of preparation. Most classrooms of students who have done the on-demand assessment have been pleasantly surprised by how much students bring into this unit of study and by the volume of writing students are able to produce in just one day's writing workshop. The work that students produce in the on-demand situation becomes the baseline, and you can increase expectations as the unit progresses.

Part One: Launching the Unit: Information Writers Try on Topics, Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye toward Greater Focus

Your first goal will be to inspire kids to regard information books as inspiring and compelling. You will want to enter the unit with a class of writers who are dying to do this work. Show students some of your favorite published nonfiction books, including those you have selected as mentors, and tell them what you love about those books—or let students browse and mark and talk about favorite pages and parts. Sometimes, kids will turn first to the illustrations or interesting text features. If so, you can explain that there is an art to writing books that entice a reader into learning a lot. Writers do sometimes include illustrations or text boxes or grabber-leads that are intended as ways to collar the reader and bring that reader's attention to the rest of the page. You can help your students, too, to go from those initially appealing sections to the rest of the page—to the compelling anecdotes and descriptions that are as interesting, if not as eye-catching, as the passages. The DK readers and the Seymour Simon books in particular include a lot of vivid writing.

One way to recruit young writers to write with intensity is to share a vision with them right from the start of what will happen to their published pieces. Are you making a library of books about the solar system that will grace the shelves of the science classroom, be available for all young scientists, and be read to a younger grade or to students the following year? Are you adding to the nonfiction books you have available for independent reading in your classroom, so that students can find expert books on training for soccer, the history of the woolly mammoth, and how coyotes are beginning to live in cities? Or you may even decide to make nonfiction books you will send to schools where students are eager for beautiful texts in English, such as small

schools in Africa where classes are taught in English. One thing is for sure—kids knowing that their books will be handled and read by other readers (not just read aloud to other readers, but that individual, interested readers will turn the pages themselves, lingering over the words and images) really increases the intensity, and thus their stamina and zeal for doing high-level work. You may have on hand a few terrific information books that kids have made in prior years—if so, share them with students to inspire them.

After teaching your writers that information books can be compelling, your next goal will be to teach writers that one of the first things that an informational writer does is select a topic and focus that topic, narrowing it to the most interesting aspects of the topic. Your goal will not be to help writers come up with a topic for their writing—remember that if you catch someone a fish, they eat for a day; if you teach them to fish, they eat for a lifetime. Your goal, then, at the very start of the unit is to equip your students with a small repertoire of strategies that they can use again and again in life whenever they want to select a topic for informational writing. You'll probably want students to explore several possible topics (this makes it more likely that they will settle on a topic on which they have information and it gives you some time to cycle through the classroom, conferring with writers to edge them toward topics in which they seem especially knowledgeable and invested). Most teachers encourage writers to use their writer's notebooks as a place for recording ideas for informational writing. Some teachers suggest it helps to think, "If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what might I teach?" That question, for some children, can be a more supportive one than the more generic: "What am I an expert in?" Thinking "What would I teach this class?" leads a writer to consider not only his or her expertise but also the interests of a likely audience.

You could teach your students that some nonfiction writers try on ideas by writing potential back-of-the-book blurbs as a way to imagine how their books might go and why those books would interest readers. As writers collect ideas in their writer's notebooks, you'll want to make sure that rehearsal does not mean just writing a few words onto the page and calling it a day. You could suggest that writers record not just possible topics but possible subtopics within each topic. Writers could go further and think about subtopics within whatever subtopic interests them especially. Students will need conferences and small-group help to shift from writing about sharks to writing about sharks' eyes, and they might balk a bit at the idea of revising their topics. Keep in mind, however, that front-end revision during these early days will prove much more acceptable to students than later revisions that require them to discard many pages of work. Of course, some less proficient writers may have more success with broader topics—sharks, not shark eyes—and some more proficient writers may be able to handle a topic that is an idea, not just a subject (sharks' eyes are very different than ours).

Some teachers suggest writers engage in a bit of research to try on possible topics, and there may be some value in ascertaining whether there are any readily available and accessible texts on a topic. But remind your fourth graders that, in general, writers don't generally start from scratch. It would be much more of a challenge for someone

to write a book about training for basketball if he or she didn't play basketball or even watch it. For someone else, it would be a snap to get started with that—he or she could imagine the whole book and could thus focus on learning to organize information and write well.

Once your writers have spent a session or two trying on topics, you can teach your more advanced writers in a small-group session to begin thinking about a focus or perspective for their topics. Perspective does not necessarily mean that children will be writing opinions. But by grade five, the Common Core State Standards specify that information writers introduce a topic clearly and provide a general observation and focus. You may have some fourth graders in your class who are ready to do this work. For example, the topic "Cheetahs Are Endangered" suggests that the writer has a perspective or an angle on the topic and presumably the writer will go forward with this. Such a topic may seem at first to readers to be an opinion, making the text into opinion writing, but actually this is just the aspect of the topic that the writer has decided to highlight. To help your students make similar choices, each with his or her own individual topic, you'll probably want to help writers ask questions such as, "What do I want to say to my readers?" and "What do I feel is important for someone to know and feel after reading my piece?"

Probably by the share session at the end of the fourth day, you'll want each child to have chosen his or her topic with the stronger writers selecting more focused topics. The subject of "Soccer Goalie" or better yet, "The Challenges of the Soccer Goalie," will make for better writing than "Soccer." The less experienced writer, on the other hand, will have more success with the broader, more general topic, such as "Soccer." Keep in mind that because the focus of this unit is on good writing, not on research, you'll want to encourage students to choose subtopics or perspectives (as well as topics) on which they have expertise. Some of these topics emerge from nonfiction reading students have done, and sometimes students will want to choose different topics. In general, the more specific and focused your writers' topics are, the more sophisticated their writing will be. Just as choosing a focused, zoomed-in, small moment enables a personal narrative writer to write with greater specificity and elaboration, choosing a focused topic enables an information writer to do the same.

Once writers have chosen a topic, you can move them toward planning the parts or categories for their topic. Teach them some of the different ways that writers plan for how their information texts will go. One way writers plan is to think of a table of contents for their work, determining the chapters that they could put in their book. Writers also might use boxes and bullets to plan, with their boxes containing topics and subtopics rather than claims (as in essay writing). If you have opportunities to do some small-group work to support this, writers will certainly profit from some close-in feedback. You can help writers understand that when breaking a topic into parts, the parts need to cover the entire topic. One can't write a book on the United States and write just about four randomly selected states—but one could write about the Eastern, Southern, Western, and Central United States. If that list of component parts of the United States included New York City in it, that would be odd, because usually component parts need to be of equal weight and parallel. It is helpful to teach stu-

dents ways that information pieces are typically divided. For example, information writers often use parts, kinds, or times. If some of your students struggle to think of categories or subtopics, you could teach them in a small group that writers can always go back and revise their topics, perhaps making them broader. That is to say, perhaps their original topic choice is really a subtopic under a broader category about which they have more to say. Additionally, you'll want to coach writers into creating categories that feel parallel in weight.

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

Just as your writers gathered a variety of information in their notebooks to support their essay claims, they will gather a variety of information to support their information books. After a few days of collecting ideas in notebooks, you will want to shift your writers into gathering the information that will fill up the pages of their books. First, you will need to teach that writers gather information for their books and make decisions about how much and what kind of research they will need to conduct.

You will want to remind your young writers of the importance of gathering a variety of information and information that comes from more than one source. This is a good time to teach them to bring forward all they know from the nonfiction reading and content-area units about growing ideas through note-taking and writing long about a topic. You can teach your fourth graders different ways to collect in their notebooks: sometimes they might make bullet points of facts; sometimes they might write long, growing some ideas about the facts they are collecting; and sometimes they also might keep a running list of difficult vocabulary words for a glossary. They might make summaries of what they are reading and organize those summaries in different ways depending on what they are reading. If you have been following the content-area units of study, your students will have a repertoire of strategies on which they can draw to use note-taking as a way to grow their thinking about a topic.

Because the information will need to be sorted into categories and subcategories, you may want the research to be collected in folders, with one folder for each subtopic. In this case, encourage children to collect notes on single sheets of paper, stored in the appropriate folder. Help children avoid collecting hodgepodges of disparate information stuck together into gigantic blobs.

You will need to decide whether you want part of this unit to include students doing short, focused, on-the-run research in which they locate and print online sources to supplement the information they already have. This probably should not become a unit where research overwhelms everything else, with students spending the majority of their time collecting rather than *writing*. Still, you will no doubt encourage writers to use sources to verify and extend their known information. For example, a writer creating an information book on "Great Artists of the Harlem Renaissance" might not know the exact years in which some artists were born and might feel that information would be useful. She could conduct an Internet search looking for this

specific information. Writers should also be encouraged to use more than one source to support their writing. The amount of research your writers do will, of course, be dependent on the amount you feel able to support.

Part Three: Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

At this point in the unit, your students will have a sense of the categories, or subtopics, they'll be covering in their information book, and along the way they will have been gathering information in their notebooks. You can teach your writers that one way to rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner, taking care to teach the information in subsections. Your writers will be accustomed to teaching each other information from the nonfiction reading units. In this session, a possible mid-workshop teaching point is to teach that informational writing is intended for a specific purpose and audience, as the Common Core State Standards for informational writing suggest, and that the purpose of this kind of writing is often to teach others about a topic. Teach your writers to note areas where their information seems weak and to make a plan to shore up weak areas by finding out more about that particular subtopic. Focus your coaching during this session on students having adequate information for each subtopic, because this will be key when you are later teaching your students to elaborate well. Remind your students, perhaps in a mid-workshop teaching point or a share, that writers revise during all stages of the writing process, and as they collect information in categories they might also revise their subtopics. If they find they have too much information for one subtopic, they might consider breaking it into two. Conversely, if they don't have enough information for a subtopic, they will need to either collect more information or perhaps eliminate the subtopic altogether.

After collecting information for a few days, your students will most likely be more than ready to put together the pieces of their essays and draft long and strong. You can teach your writers that as they begin planning for their drafts, it is important they look carefully at the texts that serve as mentors for this unit. You may highlight the texts that include a table of contents that contain different chapters, each of which takes up a different aspect of the topic.

You may want to lay out multiple paper choice options for your fourth graders to choose from as they draft. For example, if a student decides to write a then-and-now page they might look for paper with two side-by-side options with lines underneath. The paper structure supports the organization of the information on each page. It is important to note that young writers *can* create their own paper choice option if what they need or envision for their book is not in your room.

In one session, you could teach that information writers often start with the pages they are most fired-up about. You could teach your students different ways to approach drafting these initial pages. Teach them that when information writers draft, they keep in mind that they are writing in such a way to set up readers to be experts.

Teach your writers that information writers then draft one subsection at a time, remembering everything they want to teach the reader about that particular subtopic.

As an alternative, either in a minilesson or in a small group for writers who struggle with drafting, you could teach that one possible way students could draft is by starting with more visual texts (labeled diagrams with captions).

In the following session—or tucked into session one if your writers are more experienced—teach your writers that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. Often an effective way to organize information is to move from the general to the specific, giving first big ideas that the reader needs to know about the topic and then moving to the smaller details, like interesting facts. This is an excellent time to draw on partnerships. Partners can work together to share sections of text and to ask each other, "Did I answer all of your questions as a reader? Did I set you up to be an expert in this topic? Did I tell you enough in the beginning so that you could understand all of the parts at the end? Did you have any questions about specific ideas, parts, or even words after reading the whole section?" You may want to collect other questions or prompts partners can use to support each other and compile them on a chart with the questions listed here.

During this stage of the writing process, it is often tempting to teach your students to draft the entire book from start to finish, starting with the introduction. We encourage you to resist this temptation! One reason is that the introduction and concluding sections of an information piece have a different format and purpose than the body sections. Your students will need you to teach right away the format of the body sections, the parts of the piece that have a common structure and that will make up the bulk of the writing. Also, drafting an introduction before writing the sections of a book can limit the writer to stick closely to the shores of what he or she originally imagined in the introduction, which can lead to few revisions and potentially formulaic writing. It is important to leave room for your writers to make huge revisions to their original plans as they draft.

In another drafting session, you can teach your writers to make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and sidebar definitions. You'll want to keep an eye on volume during this session, reminding your writers to continue drafting body text along with planning text features and to incorporate all they know about quality expository writing into their drafts. You'll want to refer to any of the charts you used during the essay unit that might support qualities of good informational writing, for example, charts that support elaboration prompts, transition words, or kinds of evidence to include in essays.

Part Four: Information Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

Plan to devote ample time to the revision portion of this unit. As in any unit of study, some, if not all, of your students will still be drafting as you begin your revision lessons.

Writers can incorporate the revision strategies you teach right away into their drafts, remembering that writers continually revise; they don't wait until "revision week" to use all they are learning about informational writing to re-see and re-work what they have already written. There are many powerful revision moves that information writers can make that fall into predictable categories. Most of the powerful revision strategies for informational writing fall into the categories of structure, elaboration, and craft. We encourage you to study the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing*, because expectations for each of these categories are clearly enumerated.

Remind your students that good writing does not happen in isolation. We highly recommend that you and your students call once again on your study of mentor texts. The use of mentor texts will be particularly helpful when your writers are thinking of ways to elaborate each section with a variety of evidence and ways to support each section with text features, such as charts and diagrams. For a list of leveled information books to use as mentor texts, visit our website, tc.readingandwritingproject.com, and click on the "Resources" tab at the top of the page. We also recommend that you use a demonstration text of your own informational writing that you revise in minilessons and use when conferring with your writers. You can also use other students' informational writing as mentor texts. You and your students can study the informational writing included in the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing* as well as the information pieces written by students that are posted on our website.

You might begin your revision work by teaching *elaboration* strategies for informational writing. It can be helpful during this time to angle your teaching and coaching toward teaching students the muscles that information writers need to develop—explanatory writing, descriptive writing, idea-based writing, and anecdote writing. In one session, you might teach your writers to study mentor texts, taking note of the variety of information that information writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Teach your writers to include explanations of important ideas, using an explaining language, and giving examples. Your writers can also include direct quotations from books or from people regarded as experts. You could create a chart with your students, highlighting types of details spotlighted in the Common Core State Standards such as: facts, definitions, concrete details, quotes, or examples related to the topic. In another session, you might teach your writers that information writers think about stories or anecdotes that help to explain or teach about a subtopic. For example, a student with the topic of "Great Artists of the Harlem Renaissance" might decide to include a story about Langston Hughes' childhood as part of a subcategory on the poet. During these sessions, you can focus your conferring on helping writers to synthesize and integrate information from a variety of sources—an easier task if your writers collected adequate information earlier in the unit.

In another session, you could teach your writers to include not only information but some of their thinking about the information. The Common Core State Standards specify that information writers should not only select and organize content but also *analyze* it. Writers can say more about their topic by including their own observations and ideas about what they are teaching. Writers could return to their notebooks to grow ideas, once again drawing on thought prompts, such as "This is important be-

cause . . ." and "This is connected to . . .", and then think about where to add this thinking to their drafts. For example, after writing facts about cheetahs such as, "Cheetahs are endangered for several main reasons: They are losing their food sources, they are being hunted too much, they are losing their habitat, and their babies die easily," the writer could then go on to offer some opinions or commentary about this, such as, "Two of those reasons are caused by humans hunting. People should stop hunting cheetahs and we should be careful to protect their habitats so they can survive."

The Common Core State Standards highlight the importance of using domain-specific language, in other words, vocabulary and terms specific to the topic. Teach writers to be on the lookout for places to use and define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. The Common Core State Standards state that, by grade four and beyond, information writers should use *precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.* There are several different ways that information writers teach vocabulary to their readers. The most supportive way to teach a vocabulary word (and often information writers choose this method for very difficult, technical words) is to write the word in bold and to state its definition outside of the text. Often this is done in the margin of the page on which the word appears. Another way information writers can teach vocabulary is to include the word and its definition as part of the text. For example, a writer might say: "The body of an octopus, called the mantle, helps it to breathe and swim." A less supportive way to teach vocabulary is to include words in the text without definitions, leading readers to use context clues, for example, "The mantle of the octopus is connected to all eight of its legs and helps it to breathe and swim."

Information writers are well-served to keep in mind the old adage, a picture is worth a thousand words. The Common Core State Standards remind us that writers don't just teach information with text, they also teach information through *formatting* (e.g., headings), *illustrations*, and *multimedia.* These tools help readers to understand even more powerfully the information that the writer is teaching. You can support your students in this work by studying mentor texts with them to analyze how text features help us to teach additional information to our audience, such as how we teach important vocabulary through text boxes or glossaries, how we use annotated diagrams to clarify explanations, and how we may think across the headings and subheadings or other text features on our pages to refine the journey we are taking our reader on. You may offer the opportunity for students to include interactive elements, such as "lift the flap" features, foldout maps and diagrams, or exploded details and charts. These often add compelling visual features to informational texts—and our kids need to improve their ability to synthesize and interpret these visual elements. Creating them as writers will only help them as readers.

You can also teach your information writers to revise with the lens of *structure*. In one session, you could teach that information writers make sure that they have grouped information into categories, thinking about whether the information included in each section fits with the subtopic. You might also tuck into this session the reminder that information writers also think about the order of information within

each category, thinking through whether they have organized the information in a way that best teaches the information to the reader. Even though you most likely taught this concept during the drafting stage, you will want to support your writers in the organization of their information within each section during your one-on-one coaching.

As part of this session, you could teach your writers that each section of an information text tends to have an introduction that previews for the reader what they are going to learn about in that section. The Common Core State Standards refer to this work as "orienting the reader." For example, a section titled "The Cheetah's Habitat" might start by saying, "There are many factors that are causing the cheetah's habitat to become smaller." This introduction to the section tells the reader that they will be learning about not just the cheetah's habitat but also ways that it is being destroyed.

The Common Core State Standards lay out the importance of including introductory and concluding sections that are connected to the main topic and that reflect the most important information and ideas from the piece. Teach your writers to revise the introductory sections to their books, asking questions such as, "What do I want to teach readers at the beginning of my book? How can I draw in the reader right from the start? How can I give the reader an overview, an introduction, to my topic? Does my beginning set the reader up to become an expert in this topic?"

Teach your writers strategies for revising their conclusions as well. A conclusion should not only sum up the important information, but it should also leave readers with some big ideas. Your fourth graders will have just finished a unit of study on essay writing in which they used information to persuade. You could teach your students to use those same muscles here to compose a concluding section that is meant to convince the world of something the writer strongly believes about the topic. Teach your writers that a powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples. For example, a student writing about monarch butterflies might write a concluding section with a thesis-like statement such as, "Monarch butterflies are very important to plants." Then, the writer could go on to give examples of different types of plants that monarch butterflies help to pollinate. Another writer, writing about sharks, might begin with a thesis that is a call to action to readers, such as, "Many kinds of sharks are endangered, and we should do our best to protect them."

As you coach your writers, you can draw on published introductions and conclusions, noticing connections between the introduction and conclusion and the main points the author makes in the body of the piece. Study how well-written introductions and conclusions help the reader to know what to *really* pay attention to as they read.

Plan to teach your students craft moves that information writers make. Teach them to use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic. The Common Core State Standards suggest particular transition words at each grade level that will be excellent additions to your transition words strategy charts. Teach students to use transition words such as *another*, *for example*, *also*, *because*; as they become more sophisticated in their writing, teach them to use transitions such as *in contrast*, *especially*, *furthermore*, and *moreover*. Additionally, de-

pending on the skill level of your students, you can teach them some strategies to write with greater description and verve. You can teach them to embed imagery, anecdotes, and/or small scenes to paint a picture in the reader's mind.

You'll want to make sure you have strong writing partnerships going as students draft and revise. In addition to holding each other accountable to the strategies you'll be teaching, partners can support each other by playing the parts of students and teachers, taking turns teaching each other about their topic section by section and asking questions when the information isn't clear or fully developed. Particularly because the topics will be ones of personal expertise, writers may tend to gloss over important background information. Partners can help each other to identify places that need more support and clarification. These places might include discussions of important concepts or places where difficult vocabulary is used. You'll certainly want to create a strategy chart to support this partner work.

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

In teaching editing, tell children that their texts are going to teach important information to their readers and thus need to be clear and accurate. How can the reader learn about the topic if the writer's words are misspelled? In editing nonfiction books, teach children that the resources from which they got their information are great sources for correcting spelling of content-specific vocabulary. Remind them to bring forward all they know about conventions to this genre. In addition, you might also teach children another use of commas that shows up a lot in nonfiction—offsetting definitions of words that are defined in context. The Common Core State Standards for language remind us that as fourth graders' comfort levels with more complex sentence structures increase, so should their capacity to punctuate and capitalize correctly. Fourth graders should be able to use commas in compound sentences and in conjunction with quotation marks, both important grammar rules when writing texts that teach information and sometimes quote sources. Informational writing also provides a perfect opportunity to remind your writers about when and where to use paragraphs.

Then get ready to publish! You and your students should be tremendously proud of the independence and effort they have shown, and of the breadth of their expertise and their prowess as writers. Celebrate these achievements by giving your writers a chance to teach others what they have learned. You might do this in a gradewide celebration or by sharing with another grade or with parents. You might encourage your writers to present their work orally. You might teach them to make presentation boards and captions and to practice presenting their work. Or, you might encourage them to share visually. You could create a gallery of the finished books and to invite others to come for a visit. The Common Core State Standards recommend using technology tools as part of the publishing process. In tech-savvy classrooms, you might suggest that your writers publish electronically, perhaps in the form of a PowerPoint presentation or even as a blog or wiki. Sites such as blogspot.com and pbworks.com are free hosting platforms

that will also serve to teach your students some online formatting skills. You can set your students' permissions on these sites to protect their privacy.

Additional Resources

Teachers, before embarking on this unit and deciding on the trajectory you will follow, you will need to assess your students and to study what it is they need to know. You can use an on-demand writing assessment to better understand your students' level of competency with informational writing. Level 7 of the continuum is aligned to the grade four expectations according to the Common Core State Standards. Of course, your assessment will be ongoing, not just at the start of this unit but at many points along the way, and you will use what you learn through studying your students' work to inform how you progress through the work outlined in the unit. The teaching points offered here are but one suggested way that the unit could go. The ultimate pathway will be based on observations you make of your students and assessments of their work. Here are some further insights about expectations during each part of this unit and how to plan to meet the needs of your individual learners.

In the first part of the unit, the goal is for students to generate a great deal of notebook entries, first trying out topics of individual expertise and then eventually choosing a seed idea and rehearsing for a draft. Study your students' writing for evidence of strategy use and for volume. The goal is that students write productively and move from entry to entry with independence, and that they use a variety of strategies, such as writing possible back-of-the-book blurbs or making lists of possible chapters for their books. You may have some writers who are reluctant to generate more than one or two possible topics. Support these students in reaching further for possible topic choices. If your students are slow to generate ideas, you may want to spend more time teaching strategies for choosing topics of expertise either in small-group or whole-class sessions. If students are not writing with fluency and volume, you may decide to use a timer and to call out voice-overs such as, "By now, your hand should be flying down the page" or "By now you should have written half a page." You may need to gather a small group to shepherd them into writing more quickly and do some diagnostic work to understand what is slowing them down. Then, you will turn your teaching toward helping your writers choose a seed idea for their books. It is important that they have a variety of topics from which to choose. If students struggle to choose a topic, they may need one-on-one coaching during this time.

In the second part of the unit, you will be supporting students as they collect research and information to support their information books. In addition to choosing and possibly further focusing a topic, it is crucial at this point that your students have a strong sense of the subcategories that will fill the pages of their books. Toward the end of this part, your students should have not only a high volume of information but also a variety of information such as quotes, anecdotes, statistics, and the like to support each subcategory. If your students' information seems weak, you may need to

spend more time in this section teaching note-taking and research before moving on to drafting.

In the third part of the unit, your students will be drafting their information books and may need a different level of support than what is outlined in this unit, depending on their competence with expository writing. If your students have more or less an internalized sense of how expository writing "goes," your progression through the unit will likely closely parallel what is outlined in the teaching points that follow. If your students need more support, you may decide to proceed more slowly through this part, drawing perhaps on some of the teaching you did in the personal and the persuasive essay unit.

The way you progress through the fourth part of this unit will very much depend on what you observe in your students' drafts. We recommend that you once again call on the *Continuum for Assessing Informational Writing* as a tool with which to study your students' drafts. Study the work with the lenses of structure, elaboration, and craft, deciding which are the most crucial lessons within each of those categories to teach right away. During all parts of the unit, and particularly this one, you will want to ensure that your teaching supports students' independence. Your teaching will support revision, but your writers may move from drafting sections to revision and back to drafting. Study your students as they work for evidence that they are using a repertoire of strategies and that they are making choices about what to work on next.

As you head into the final part of this unit, take note of how you can support your students in being effective editors for themselves. Your students will likely be using high-level vocabulary and some may need additional spelling support, perhaps in small groups. Notice common punctuation errors and teach into these, possibly through mid-workshop teaching points or minilessons as needed.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit: Information Writers Try on Topics, Then Revise Those Topics with an Eye toward Greater Focus

- "Today I want to teach you that writers of information books study published writing, imagining the books they will create and paying close attention to ways that published authors entice readers to learn about a topic."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers grow potential topic ideas in their notebooks, thinking, 'If I had to teach a course to the other kids in the class, what would I teach?' "
- "Today I want to teach you that some information writers write potential back-of-the-book blurbs, imagining how their books might go and why those books would interest readers."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers try on possible topics, choosing one that they feel they could teach really well."

- "Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for how their books could go. One way we can do this is by creating a table of contents for our work, determining the chapters that could go into our books."

Part Two: Writers Gather a Variety of Information to Support Their Nonfiction Books

- "Today I want to teach you that information writers gather the information that will fill up the pages of their books. Along the way, we make decisions about how much and what kind of research to conduct. We collect these ideas in notebooks, taking care to collect a variety of information and information from more than one source."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers record not just facts but ideas. We can use thought prompts to say more about pieces of information that we collect."

Part Three: Writers Draft the Pages of Books, Starting with Sections They Are Most Eager to Write

- "Today I want to teach you that one way information writers rehearse for drafting is to teach all they know about their topic to a partner. We take note of places where we need to collect more information and make a plan to find out more about that particular subtopic."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers often start by drafting the pages they are most fired-up to write. As we draft, keep in mind that we are setting up our readers to be experts."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers organize the information they have collected within each subsection in a way that best teaches the reader. One way writers do this is by saying big or general ideas that the reader needs to know about the subtopic first, before getting to the smaller details."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers make a plan for the text features that will support each page, such as illustrations, diagrams, charts, and side-bar definitions."

Part Four: Information Writers Study Mentor Authors and Revise in Predictable Ways

- "Information writers study mentor texts, taking note of all of the different kinds of information that writers use to teach readers about subtopics. Information writers often include explanations of important ideas, quotes from experts, facts, definitions, and other examples related to the subtopic."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers include not only information but also some of their own thinking about the information. Information writers might return to their notebooks to grow ideas, drawing on thought

prompts such as 'This is important because . . .' and 'This is connected to . . .' in order to say more."

- "Today I want to teach you that information writers stay on the lookout for places where they might need to define vocabulary words that are connected to the topic that might be hard for readers to understand. Writers keep in mind common ways that information writers teach important words and decide which way will be best for each word."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers don't teach information just with words; they teach information with illustrations, charts, diagrams, and other tools that might help the reader to understand. Writers can study mentor texts to get tips on how to create and revise these text features."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers zoom in to study the structure of each subsection. They make sure that the information is in the right section, that is, that each detail fits with the subtopic. Writers also zoom in on paragraphs within each subsection, thinking about whether the information in each paragraph fits together. Another way that writers study the structure of each subsection is to make sure to start with a sentence or two that tells the reader what he or she will be learning about."
- "Today I want to teach you that writers revise the introduction of their information books, thinking about how they will set up readers to be experts in the topic and how they can draw readers in right from the start."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers revise the concluding section, taking care to sum up the important information and also leave readers with some big ideas. A powerful kind of concluding section in an information book is structured like an essay, with a thesis and some examples."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers use transition words to move from detail to detail and to connect subtopics to the main topic."

Part Five: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

- "Today I want to teach you that information writers edit carefully, taking care to make sure spelling and punctuation are accurate so that readers can best learn the information. Writers might use published resources to make sure vocabulary words are spelled correctly."
- "Today I want to teach you that information writers celebrate all of the hard work they have done by getting ready to share the books they have created with others."

UNIT FIVE

Historical Fiction

Tackling Complex Texts

JANUARY

Your students have now written narrative at several points across their year, including personal narratives to start the year and then realistic fiction. It benefits writers enormously to have an opportunity to return to a genre, working once again in that genre, only this time with greater control, using strategies learned earlier with greater finesse. When writers work more than once in a genre, they can progress from doing as they're told toward using all they know to accomplish their own big goals. It also gives students an additional opportunity to meet the Common Core State Standards' expectations that suggest students need to have increasing control of their own narrative writing while also being more equipped to analyze an author's craft and structure as readers of narratives. The more students return to narrative genres, the more extensive understanding of craft they can control, such as shifting perspective, balancing description, action and dialogue, and the development of deeper meanings inside of stories. Be sure to look at the fiction stories your students wrote during the earlier fiction unit and do an on-demand assessment so that you approach the unit with a clear sense of what your students have mastered and what they need to learn to do. Although your students will be a diverse group, with some having more and some less skill as writers, you'll probably also realize that there are some things that you will have taught that many of them can do, and other things that few have learned—yet. Because students will be willing to work with great zeal on this unit, it represents a terrific opportunity for skill development. Last year teacher after teacher who taught this unit glowed about the high levels of engagement and productivity they saw among their writers. They also saw enormous jumps in their students' craft and independence.

For many teachers, the unit also offers a nice parallel to a reading unit on historical fiction. If your students are reading historical fiction as well as writing it, which we will assume in this write-up, then this unit provides a wonderful opportunity to teach your students that writers read texts that others have written with the lens of being a writer. As writers, students can read with an awareness of the craft moves that an author has made and can even try some of these craft moves in their own writing. It may be, for example, the students note that an author they are reading has inserted historical objects, clothing, and recent inventions into a historical fiction text, and so some students decide to do the same in their writing. Then, too, readers can be taught to notice moments when they have strong emotional responses to their books and to study what the author has done to make those moments matter. During writing, students can try to create their own such moments. Of course this will mean that writers need to read with the eyes of insiders, attending to not only being moved but also the craft choices the writer utilized to affect them.

By partnering this writing unit with the same genre in their reading work, you can provide students with many opportunities to carry strengths from one discipline to another. The fact that students are writing as well as reading historical fiction will make them far more astute readers, and this, in turn, will enrich their book club conversations and help them to look across texts with the lens of *how* writers develop themes, characters, and settings. This, of course, is an important goal in the Common Core State Standards.

Teachers, as you think about what your goals will be for the unit, think also about how you can help your students care about the unit, too. It is always important to launch a unit by rallying students around the big work that they'll be doing. You'll need to decide how to market this unit to your students. In one class, a teacher might say, "You all have done some amazing reading this year and some amazing writing. This time, we're going to put those two kinds of work together. You'll be reading historical fiction, which is a particularly passionate, exciting kind of story, and you'll be writing historical fiction. You'll be able to try out, in your own writing, all the cool things that you see authors doing in the books you are reading." Another teacher may decide to market the unit differently. "Historical fiction lends itself to figuring out the relationship between characters and place. In realistic fiction, the setting might be a school, and the author assumes you know what the school is like, but in historical fiction, the author creates the place, and you need to think hard about the relationship between the place and the characters. This unit will help you write—and read—with a more careful eye to the ways setting is used in stories. You will use all you know about good writing to help readers live in the world of that setting."

It is also worth noting that the unit described in this write-up is intended for a fourth-grade class and/or a class that has less experience with writing fiction—perhaps only a unit or two. If your students are more experienced and sophisticated writers, you might want to refer to the fifth-grade version of this unit.

Before the Unit Begins: Making Decisions about How Students Will Learn about a Time Period

There is one aspect of historical fiction that involves some special attention. It is essential that the writer knows about the historical period in which his or her story will be set. You can decide whether you want your students to prioritize this historical research or just gesture toward doing a bit of it.

If you decide that you want to use the invitation to write historical fiction as a way to lure students into an active, invested study of a particular time and place in history, you will probably structure your social studies curriculum work so that your class studies a historical era and then all of them set their historical fiction stories within that one era. Students will be more engaged and alert learners of history if they know they'll be synthesizing and applying their knowledge of history to their own historical fiction stories, so be sure to tell them at the onset about this project aligning with the Common Core State Standards. Be sure, too, that you allow them to learn about the historical era through film and photographs and stories as well as through expository texts, because it will be important for them to develop images of the time and place that they can draw on as they create stories set in that historical context.

Of course, if students are studying an era in social studies, during the reading workshop they can read historical fiction that may not necessarily be set in that historical context but that supports the writing work simply because the texts that students read are exemplar of the genre they'll write. Of course, it would be amazing if students could be studying one era in social studies and in the reading workshop and could then write a story set within that era, but many teachers do not have multiple copies of enough historical fiction books set in a particular time—say, the Civil War—for the whole class to read only books set in that time period. To keep kids "in books" during the reading workshop, there needs to be enough books for the level M readers to read at least ten books in the month, and the level R/S/T readers to read at least four books within the month. If readers are working in book clubs, the class needs multiple copies of all those books. Most teachers find that during the reading workshop, they do not want to confine all students to reading about just one particular era but want instead to make use of all the multiple copies of wonderful historical fiction novels they have on hand.

It's possible, however, that you don't really have access to a separate social studies time. Another option, then, is to lean on your read-aloud work and minilessons during the reading workshop to provide students with knowledge of a historical era in which to set their stories. This means selecting a time and place in history for all your read-alouds during the unit and asking students to situate their historical fiction stories in that same era. If, for instance, you decide that although during the reading workshop different clubs will be reading multiple copies of the full range of historical fiction books, all your read-alouds could still focus on a topic such as the civil rights movement. Our website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) has lists compiled by teachers throughout the country of much loved genre-specific titles. For example, if you decide to focus on civil rights and ask students to set their historical fiction

stories within this context, you might put together a read-aloud collection of: *Goin' Someplace Special* (McKissack), *The Other Side* (Woodson), *Freedom on the Menu: The Greensboro Sit-Ins* (Weatherford), and *The Bat Boy and His Violin* (Curtis). If you choose this second option, you'll want to not only situate all your read-aloud work within the one selected era but also read aloud some relevant nonfiction material related in content and theme to the time period. Even if your nonfiction materials are slim, some teachers who have tried this option in the past have gathered folders of articles and photos from the time period and have surveyed their nonfiction materials and then created one page "fact sheets" on important people, issues, places, and events during various periods for students to use as supplemental materials.

One way or another, your students will need to do at least some and perhaps a lot of research about the era in which their stories will be set. That research can be transformed because they are researching as writers of historical fiction. Teachers, read ahead to the upcoming description of the first days of the historical fiction writing unit, and think about how the spirit of that work can be brought into whatever research your students do outside of the writing workshop as well. You can vitalize that research by linking it to the job of writing historical fiction.

Rehearsal Involves Collecting, Selecting, and Developing Story Ideas

When the historical fiction unit begins within your writing workshop, you'll want to help students do the work that fiction writers always need to do. Look back on the book, *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*, by Calkins and Cruz, for minilesson ideas, another possible template for how this unit can go, and a reminder of how fiction writers live toward a writing project. The important thing to keep in mind is that fiction writers don't begin this work by beginning their stories. Far from it! They instead begin the work by rehearsing for the stories. Rehearsal involves thinking about lots of possible story ideas, generating possible stories, and then, once one has the gist of an idea, thinking deeply about the setting, the characters, and the various ways the story might spin out. When writing a story that is set in a historical era, the need for rehearsal is amplified. The question that a historical fiction writer needs to ask is not just, "What would make a great story?" but also, "What might have occurred within that time and that place that might make a great story?"

Many teachers find that the best way to start this unit is to teach historical fiction writers to merge the work of dreaming up story ideas with the work of researching the historical era in alignment with the Common Core State Standards. For at least a few days at the start of the unit (if not for longer periods of time prior to the writing unit beginning), students can learn about the historical era from the perspective of being one who wants to create a story set in this time and place. They need to read about the era, thinking, "What possible story ideas are hidden here?" Of course, students will need to learn facts about the time and place and about whatever issue or aspect of life catches their attention especially, but the search for facts will be peripheral. The more important work will be to think deeply about what it was like for people to live

through these events, to live in that time and that place. Writers will read, writer's notebooks in hand, asking, "What was going on during this time period that might be worth writing about?" This means reading responsively, letting even the littlest facts spark empathy and imagination.

When Laurie Halse Anderson worked on her historical fiction book. *Fever 1793,* centering around slave ownership in the north during the American Revolution, she stumbled upon the fact that Benjamin Franklin owned slaves. This shocked her and led her down a path of study that ultimately ended up in her book. A pivotal moment for her was seeing a sculpture at the New York Historical Society of a man and woman running for freedom. That image, tied in with all her accumulated facts, led her to hear her main character's voice for the first time.

You may use videos just as you have often used read-aloud books. For example, if you were to show the brief "School House Rock" clip on the American Revolution, you could preface the clip by teaching your students that writers of historical fiction often create time lines of a period so as to try to organize the events and then later look back at those time lines to think, "What were some moments of conflict that might become central in a story?" "What stories might be hidden in this sequence of events?" As you watch the video with the class, you might pause it to ask questions like these. You might say something like, "Hmmm . . . the colonists decided they won't give money to England anymore! Whoa, I bet there is a story there! Who could a character be in this story of them refusing to pay taxes to England? What could be taking place?" Of course, those questions lead a fiction writer to jot story ideas. You might show your class that a fiction writer's notebook includes lots of little story ideas—blurbs about how possible stories could go. The first sessions of *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambition* can provide samples from student notebooks, although these will not be samples of historical fiction story blurbs but of realistic fiction story blurbs. If you do use a video instead of some read-aloud work, be sure that you help your students understand that the work you and they will have done together with a video exactly mirrors just what they may also do as they read nonfiction or historical fiction books.

In follow-up minilessons you might also teach students that writers of historical fiction can try to collect and study information about not just the events of the period but also the details of daily life, personal and social issues, technology, and even important places. Continue to remind them to pause and ask, "What stories do you think are hidden here?" As students study, they jot facts, write longer entries about what they imagine and envision, make sketches, and even paste photographs into their notebooks. Their research will reflect a need to know about a whole range of topics—fashions, modes of transportation, schools, gender roles, and events. A common mantra you may come back to again and again is, "What stories do you think are hidden here?" As students collect story ideas, you might remind them that it sometimes helps to use the template "(Someone) wanted . . . but . . . so . . ." Just a quick word of caution: many students want to create adult characters, such as a general in a war. You will want to carefully, so as not to quash their industrious spirits, move them away from that impulse. Historical fiction offers enough challenges that trying to write as an adult living in the

time period usually proves too much for most students and often distracts from the much more important writing skill work we want the students to develop.

Of course, as students collect story ideas in their writer's notebooks, they'll draw on not only their knowledge of the era but also their knowledge of the genre. They'll draw on the work they will have done in the reading workshop, when they've read historical fiction. All of the reading work that they do will have ramifications for the writing work that you help them to do. For example, Sessions IV and V of *Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction in Book Clubs* (from *Units of Study for Teaching Reading*) highlights the fact that readers of historical fiction need to construct two time lines in their minds as they read. They need to construct a time line of the historical events that are going on that affect the story, and they need to construct a story of the main character's plotline. And here is the important thing that the reading unit of study book spotlights: readers of historical fiction books will notice that the historical time line intersects with a character's time line. Events happen in history, and the protagonist reacts to those events. If you have taught minilessons to your readers in which you channel them to read historical fiction with an eye toward the two intersecting time lines, then you may well suggest that writers of historical fiction can time line the events that are underway in an era and think about the story lines that might intersect with the historical time line.

You can teach your historical fiction writers not only to collect ideas for stories but also to test out those ideas by drawing on all they know about the era and about the genre. To test a story idea against knowledge of the era, a writer might reread his or her entries and ask, "Does this make sense for the time period? Does it ring true? What is a different way it could go?" For example, a student may have jotted in her notebook that she could write a story about a boy in the Civil War who wants to spend time with his older brother, but he is working all the time so they drive together to Florida on vacation. After asking herself if the story makes sense for the period and rings true, the writer could revise the story blurb to say, "I could write a story about a boy in the Civil War who wants to spend time with his older brother, but their family is divided and he is on the Confederate side, so . . ." Help students to think even about little details such as naming the character with a time-appropriate name and thinking about period-based motivations.

Some writers will seem to be more wed to historical facts than to story ideas. You might remind these writers that they are first and foremost story writers. You could say, "Writers, when I collect ideas for historical fiction writing, I want to make sure that I am still writing about people and issues that feel true to me. Remember that when we wrote realistic fiction, we learned that we can take the real struggles of our own lives and give those struggles to a character. You can still do that when writing historical fiction." You could then show your students that for you, one of the biggest challenges to this day is, say, getting along with your older brother. You could teach students that people in history struggled with the same issues, and we can think about how those struggles may have looked if set in another time and place, "Okay, so now let me see . . . I want to set my story in the Revolutionary War . . . and I want to make it a story about a boy who gets into an argument with his brother. Oh, I know,

I learned that young boys weren't supposed to go to war but some lied about their age and got in anyway, so maybe this boy wants to fight, but his older brother knows the one boy is too young. Maybe they have an argument and . . ."

Because your students will have already written a fiction story earlier in the year, you needn't march them all along in sync with each other, but instead you can remind them of the sort of work they need to be doing to rehearse for their stories and give them some space in which to do that work. Be sure the charts from your realistic fiction unit are front and center in this unit. and be sure that you hold students accountable for doing the strategy work that you have taught—in their own way, according to their own time frame. Be ready to teach from whatever the good work is that your students do. For example, get ready to say, "Writers, I want to point out that Keisha isn't postponing revision. She's revising her story blurbs without me even suggesting it, and is doing so to make sure they ring true to the time period. Smart work!"

After a day of collecting story blurbs, writers begin to settle on a story idea (one that imagines a character with some motivations, who gets involved in an action/problem/struggle). It will be important for writers to do the work of making their protagonists become more real. Session III, "Developing Believable Characters" from *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions,* can help you remind writers to develop their characters by thinking about outside traits and also inside traits. As writers do this work, you'll want to also coach them to remember to ask, "Does this ring true for the time period?" To illustrate this, you might take a character from a story idea you are developing and show students that you pause to say, "Let me check my notes, again. What would a girl during this time period be wearing? What is apt to be on her outside? What do I know about this period that could could affect how she feels on the inside about the events in my story idea?"

Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions can also help you to nudge your students to try writing a flash-draft of a single everyday scene that brings their character and their story line to life. The scene might be an everyday scene—the challenge will be for the historical fiction writer to live in the shoes of his or her character while that character is having supper with family or traveling to school in the morning. This work with writing a quick scene can help students comprehend the way in which they'll be writing a story that is like every other fiction story they have ever written, and the way in which this writing puts extra demands on them. Meanwhile, the flash-draft allows you to assess whether your students are remembering the instruction from previous narrative units about writing in a scene—the importance of dialogue and small actions, of writing the external and the internal story, of making movies in one's mind, and of storytelling rather than summarizing. You will probably look across these flash-drafts and make some choices about the whole-class minilessons you need to teach and about the small-group lesson as well.

The flash-drafts are apt to suggest that students need lots of help storytelling and not summarizing. This is the be-all and end-all for writing fiction so the importance can't be emphasized enough. If students need help storytelling, be sure to bring them back to all that they learned during the personal narrative Small Moment work. Help

them realize that the story they write needs to revolve around two or, at most, three small moments.

It will be important for students to settle on a tool that can help them plan out and storytell the progression in their stories. One method for doing this involves using blank story booklets made from folded copy paper or loose-leaf sheets. Writers can be encouraged to sketch a micro-sequence of events that might constitute their story across the four (only!) pages of their booklets, then to touch each page and tell a story of that moment to themselves or to a partner. The power of these booklets is that they are fun to make. Therefore, it is easy for students to make half a dozen story booklets, with each representing yet another possible way that the story could unfold. Model with your own story booklet, showing students that the point is not just to sketch a sequence of events but also to make those events come to life by storytelling each page of the booklet. Tell a detailed and engaging drama on each page of your booklet (contrasting this with telling only a summary of what would be on the page). Show students that you revise your telling—saying the story yet again, only this time better—showing them that you do this to bring out the character's inner thinking more, to make the setting more vivid, to heighten tension. Of course, because your students are concurrently reading historical fiction, as you do this you will want to remind them that they can notice the way authors have made their moments come to life, aligning with the Common Core State Standards. Historical fiction novels have zillions of moments and short-story writers must rely on just two or three, but still, students can learn by studying how their authors brought some especially poignant moments to life. Ask writers to look at places in their book club books where the author has done the sort of thing that they are trying to do.

Many teachers have also found that this part of the writing process is a great time to do a little preemptive work. You will likely want to gather your students' most recent plans for their stories before they begin drafting and review them for any possible pitfalls. You'll want to keep an eye out for stories that contain too many scenes, are not historically accurate, or have structural or other difficulties. You might then meet with students quickly to iron out some of these issues, so that students are moving toward drafting with the strongest possible story ideas.

As students rehearse for the stories they will be drafting soon, the reading-writing connections will be coming at them from all sides, because during reading time as well as during writing time, you'll mention that whatever students notice in the books they are reading should affect their work in the books they are writing. Many of your reading minilessons—minilessons such as those in Session I ("Constructing the Sense of Another Time"), Session VII ("Scrutinizing, Not Skipping, Descriptions"), Session IX ("Making Significance"), and Session XV ("Seeing Power in Its Many Forms") from *Tackling Complex Texts: Historical Fiction in Book Clubs*—will have important implications for writers of historical fiction.

Drafting and Revision: Crafting a Compelling Historical Fiction Story

Once students have experimented with ways their stories could go and set a draft plan, they will begin drafting. Students may plan to write each of the two or three scenes from their booklets on a new sheet or two of loose-leaf paper. As they prepare to draft, teach your students that historical fiction writers set the scene, letting the reader know through the details they include when and where this story takes place. Invite clubs to reread the opening scene from their historical fiction mentor texts, noticing how one author might have both explicitly stated the date while also including period-specific details, like in *The Babe and I*, while another author might bring readers into a scene through a characters actions and then layer in period details, like in *The Bat Boy and His Violin*. Show your students how to use these same strategies in their own writing. One writer might start his story, "It all took place in the summer of 1775, the summer when my father went to war, the summer when Boston was divided among patriots and loyalists, the summer the British redcoats became our enemies."

Above all, remind them of the good narrative writing habits they have been perfecting all year, particularly writing inside of a moment, bit by bit, and not to summarize large and important swaths of text. This is a frequent temptation for young writers who are new to a genre that seems so jam-packed with information the reader should have. Remind them to sprinkle historical details by "showing and not telling" those details.

It is predictable that later your students will need to revise for historical accuracy, so you may write your draft so that it will end up needing this revision, too. You might say, "Oops, in my story Polly wrote a letter that only took two days to arrive! But this book about the colonies said that everything took days and days to travel from state to state, so I'll have to change that detail in my story."

Although historical accuracy will be important in the long run, when your students are starting their stories, by far the most important thing for you to stress will be the importance of storytelling rather than summarizing. Be sure you are ready to pause all your students, ten minutes into their work, and to teach them to ask, "Am I *telling a story* that could have happened during the time period or am I just *reporting about* the time period?" Remind writers that it usually works to start a story by having the character say something and do something, making sure the action is detailed and specific.

If you gather your students' drafts and think about the teaching that their drafts require, you will probably find that many of your young writers have tended toward the melodramatic. Characters will be getting killed in battle, or suffering horrific injuries, or rising up like superheroes to defeat the enemy. You can decide whether to let the melodrama remain or whether to teach them to revise for believability. A good place to practice this revision is in a scene where the main character faces a crisis, choice, or problem. This is where you can teach them to make their character believable, flawed, or complicated, by basing their character on people they know or their own observations and self-reflections. You might model this by saying, "Maybe instead of making my character defeat the British soldiers all by himself, I should think about what could

really happen in real life. Usually when things get better in our school, it is not just one person who changed everything."

Additionally, you'll want to spend some time teaching students about integrating setting into their drafts. Encourage students to think broadly about setting. It's not just where the story takes place but also the time period, the mood, and all the historical details, big and small, that are the markers of a time period. What would a home look like in this time period? Would it be different depending on the character's class or role in the culture? What about the landscape? Roads? Weather? Show kids ways that they could include setting as either chunks of description, or else weave it throughout the narrative, or both.

Through the entire writing process, encourage students to sometimes bring their drafts to book club discussions. Students can trade drafts, and place Post-its on each other's writing with their inferences and interpretations. The club can then discuss these texts as readers (not as a writing response group), giving the writer a window into what readers are truly taking away from their drafts.

Finally, you can teach your students that historical fiction stories can end without having to resolve the historical struggle—true, one character could potentially work to overcome and might even have great influence within a particular struggle, but usually one character, especially a fictitious character, will most likely not defeat the entire British army, give women the right to vote, or solve the stock market crisis.

As students tend to critique how satisfying the ending was at the completion of their book club books, you can teach them to consider if their own story lines were tied up or not and how to leave the ending satisfying while still historically accurate. This is a time, once again, to be wary of the Superman-type endings. We might coach a student who is considering an ending like this, "So maybe in the end Jason can be so worried about his brother that he tells Abraham Lincoln that he needs to free the slaves . . ." We might suggest, just as in your first unit, that he instead consider something the character discovers about himself or about his brother that was hiding there all along. He might try out something like, "Maybe Jason learns that while he cannot change what happens to his brother, he will still always remember his brother as the one who believed in him. Or maybe . . ." Session X ("Writing Powerful Endings") in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions* suggests ways to help your writers write the fiction endings that their stories deserve. Again, you could also revise this lesson to include a reflection on your notes about the time period.

Editing and Publishing: Preparing the Historical Fiction Story for Readers

In the final days of the unit, you will decide what types of editing lessons your students need as both a whole class and in small groups. Historical fiction, and really any sort of narrative writing, is a perfect opportunity to study how the syntax of the narrator can often be different from those of the characters—even each character's syntax might be different. *Catching Up on Conventions* (Francois and Zonana) has a powerful

section about teaching students code-switching—how different contexts require different forms of grammar or punctuation. Or writers could also benefit from the sentence-apprenticeship work from *The Power of Grammar* (Ehrenworth and Vinton) where students lift mentor sentences from a historical fiction book they are reading and try out the syntax and punctuation in their own writing, aligning with the Common Core State Standards.

This is also a time to remind your writers that they already know a great deal about ways to edit their pieces. This might mean revisiting editing checklists or charts you have gathered across the year and teaching your writers that they can read their pieces slowly, look through one lens at a time (more sophisticated writers could probably hold onto several) as they reread, stopping at each sentence to ask themselves, "Did I _____ correctly in this sentence?" For example, historical fiction writers could pay attention to words they chose to use to describe objects, places, or people, and then edit for word choice, researching to see if there are more historically specific ways to name them. Or they might consider how punctuation changes the sound of character's voices—short and choppy, long-winded, excitable. They may look for verb tense, checking that they are maintaining that consistently, either using past tense throughout to indicate the historical nature of the events they are describing, or perhaps using present tense to help readers feel as if they are running right alongside the protagonist.

Students will then publish their stories. Some teachers invite students to pair their narrative with some of the historical artifacts they collected during the first week of the unit, like photographs or illustrations. At the end of the unit you will be amazed how far your students (and you) have come in this study. Historical fiction is not a simple genre. Through your support and guidance your students will not only have learned to read and write this genre but they will also have developed a deeper understanding of narrative craft. You will no doubt wish to celebrate their accomplishments in grand, public ways. One choice might be to have students dress up as a character from their story during your celebration, perhaps even talking and acting like they are in the time period. Another choice could be to have students dramatize brief moments from a few student stories.

Word Study to Support Writing Workshop

In each unit of study, we've added on one or two new pieces of work for children to consider as they edit their work for spelling. Across the year they've learned that giving words their best try and moving on is of utmost importance, as well as using spelling patterns they know from word study and using the word wall to spell and learn commonly misspelled high-frequency words. As the year goes on, you'll probably want to continue to encourage students to use what they learned in previous units throughout the next unit, right from the beginning. As you near the end of this month's unit, you might want to teach children that there are specific strategies they can use as partners to help each other edit their writing for spelling. For example, you might teach kids that instead of spelling the word for your partner, you can say several

things instead, such as "See if you can use one of the spelling patterns from word study to spell that word," or "Do you a know a word that sounds like that word? You can use it to spell this one." Kids can even remind each other to look at the entire word on the word wall, not just one letter at a time. During partner time, you can coach kids to use a chart in the room to remember some of the things they can say to each other instead of spelling the words for each other.

This is also a good time for kids to develop some "expert" vocabulary. Mysteries are full of words words such as *perpetrator*, *investigator*, and *red herring*. Fantasy often has archaic, medieval words such as *saddlebags* and *abode*. Historical fiction will be full of historical terms such as *hearth*, *homestead*, and *pinafore*. Your writers can create individual and shared word banks of the technical words they are collecting as they read, and they can weave these into their writing.

Additional Resources

This unit relies heavily on the template provided in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*. But, of course, you will ultimately need to pick and choose the lessons and progression that make the most sense for you and your students. The path you choose, as well as which of the following teaching points you may lean on for support, will depend greatly on your assessment of what your students are ready for, both in terms of their specific knowledge and experience with historical fiction as a genre and their ability to craft narratives comprised of vivid scenes, well-developed characters, and rich settings.

You will likely find it invaluable to start the unit by either looking over your students' most recent narrative writing pieces or with a quick on-demand writing assessment that will help you make teaching decisions about the unit in general. After the pieces are collected you can use them to help tailor the unit so that you are not reteaching topics students have already mastered and are spending time on topics where more instruction is needed.

If you feel that your students are sophisticated with narrative writing in general or have written historical fiction before, or you feel particularly strongly about your own understanding of the genre, you might opt to refer to the fifth-grade version of this unit, which is more challenging and works toward many layers of text complexity.

In the progression that follows, there are three major parts to the unit. In the first part, students will learn a few different strategies for collecting and developing possible historical fiction ideas. If you feel after just a few sessions that students, either all or some, are ready to move into planning their draft and getting going on it, by all means, move ahead, because it will give more time to the fine-tuning work of revision. If, on the other hand, you are concerned because students' character development still seems thin or their plots are still feeling hazy, this may not be cause to linger more in rehearsal, since it is sometimes the urgency and clarity of planning and drafting that crystallizes young writers' thinking and nudges them into more accountable, coherent story lines.

In the second part of the unit, students will move toward drafting and revising with an eye toward strong narrative craft blended with historical accuracy and detail. If students are struggling with this kind of thinking, you may bring them back to some of the strategies they've practiced in social studies (especially if you've been following the content-area curricular calendar) for analyzing information that they've learned about a historical time period.

In the final part, students will focus on editing and publishing their pieces in a way that will help them practice important conventions. You will want to look at where your students stand with the Common Core State Standards for language as well as where they were on this continuum of conventions at the end of your last writing unit: your teaching will aim to move them up this ladder.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Rehearsal Involves Collecting, Selecting, and Developing Story Ideas

- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers rehearse differently because we aren't just writing stories, we are writing historical fiction. We learn as much as we can about the time period in which our stories will be set, paying attention especially to the people and the issues that matter to them, and to the fabric of daily life—to the transportation, the clothes, the meals, the setting. As we read about the era, we're thinking, 'So how might *my* story go?' and we collect details that could end up as part of our own stories."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Historical fiction writers actively look to be inspired and jot those story ideas down as quickly as possible before moving on to another source of inspiration. We might study photographs or artwork and imagine story lines for the images we are seeing. We might listen to music from the times, touch artifacts, pore over primary documents and think: what stories are hidden here?"
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers can collect possible story ideas by thinking of their own lives and how the desires and problems of their own lives might play out in another time period. We can think about what is at the core of our desires and problems (freedom, fitting in) and then think about what these might look like in the time period we are studying."
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers develop both the internal and external characteristics for characters that live in their chosen story idea. We do this work, remembering to draw on what we know about the time period and make our character true to the times." (Adapted from Session III, "Developing Believable Characters" in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*.)

- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers consider the struggles and motivations of their character, considering both those that are personal and those that come from the historical period. Sometimes these struggles and motivations are more universal in nature and could happen at any time (wanting friendship, needing food). Other times these motivations and struggles are unique to the time period (choosing which government to support, packing a trunk to go to the New World). We can explore both of these possible routes and write long about how our characters can grapple with both. The thinking and writing we do around struggles and motivations will help us ultimately land on a possible story that we want to develop into a published piece." (See Session IV, "Giving Characters Struggles and Motivations" in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*.)
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers plan their pieces thoughtfully, making sure to hold in their minds their characters' motivations, possible obstacles, and the historical time period. Using a combination of quick sketches and a few words in a story booklet can help us keep in mind the action in our stories. Better still, we can make several story booklets quickly so we can try lots of different ways our stories can go so we can make sure our best ideas are the ones that go toward our draft."

Part Two: Drafting and Revision: Crafting a Compelling Historical Fiction Story

- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers don't just draft any old sloppy way. Instead, we keep in mind everything we know about good writing and try to be right inside the time period, experience the events of each scene, and then go to draft while walking in the character's shoes." (See Session XII, "Feeling and Drafting the Heart of Your Story" in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*.)
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers continue researching alongside their writing. They are careful to check historical accuracy. They look at both their entire draft plan and the specific details they have been developing and ask questions like, 'Does this feel true to the time period? Do I know a more specific way to describe this piece of clothing, item in the house, person's name, and so on?' "
- "Today I'm going to teach you that when historical fiction writers are on a roll in their writing and they are writing fast and furiously, they don't want to stop everything and go fact-checking when they find themselves unsure of a little historical fact or detail. Instead, put in a blank space or another word as a placeholder. Then, when we have finished the draft, we can go back and do some quick research to fill in those gaps."
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers look to places in their stories where their readers might be asking, 'Where is this happening?'

and revise those places with more historically accurate descriptions of the setting. We can go back into our notes, return to artifacts and images, and read mentor texts to help us revise to make sure that the settings in our stories are clear and historically accurate." (See Session IX, "Orienting Readers with Setting" in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*.)

- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers are careful to revise our endings, making certain they are the kinds of endings our stories deserve. We know that there are different ways the character's story can end, but that the historical context needs to remain true." (See Session X, "Writing Powerful Endings" in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*.)

Part Three: Editing and Publishing: Preparing the Historical Fiction Story for Readers

- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers carefully reread their writing, looking for the words they chose to use to describe objects, places, or people, and then look back to their research to see if there are more historically specific ways to name them."
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers can read their writing aloud, noting how words, punctuation, and other structures help to set the mood, tone, and content of their pieces." (See Session XIV, "Editing with Various Lenses" in *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*.)
- "Today I'm going to teach you that historical fiction writers publish and celebrate in ways that help readers get lost in the worlds they've created. Sometimes we might include illustrations or photographs within our writing, or we might even act out parts of our stories, trying to speak just as people from that time period would.

UNIT SIX

Poetry

Thematic Anthologies

FEBRUARY/MARCH

A poetry unit is an exciting time in the writing workshop. Perhaps no other genre grants young writers quite the same freedom to experiment with physical space on the page, to savor the sound of the words they are writing and think of them as drumbeats, and, above all, to make universal meaning out of close observations, thoughts, and questions about the world and personal experience. We are suggesting that for fourth graders, this year, your poetry unit could allow for all this but also place an emphasis on collecting poems around a particular theme or topic, as a way to prompt for volume of writing and for depth of thinking, as well as another opportunity for children to experiment with different points of view.

This kind of work is likely to be more complex than writing separate poems that do not connect, according to Webb's "depth of knowledge." In looking closely at mentor anthologies that include poems from different points of view, your students will also be practicing fourth-grade level Common Core reading skills. If your students seem mostly brand-new to poetry (although this is unlikely given that it will have been taught in prior years), or if you'd like to focus more on language development and wordplay, you may wish to turn to the third-grade poetry write-up.

A poetry unit of study can usher your children into a new world of meaning-making: a world that fosters deep connections between reading and writing and a commitment to repeated revision. This unit offers a unique opportunity to zoom in on craft—from both the reader's and the writer's perspective. For although poets write to find and communicate meaning, just like any other author, they also regularly "shift attention from the *what* (subject/meaning) to the *how* (language)." Ralph Fletcher recommends this shift in his new book *Pyrotechnics on the Page: Playful Craft That Sparks Writing*, and he's not alone. The Common Core State Standards also expect that our

young readers develop their understanding and appreciation of not just *what* the author of a text is saying but of *how* that text gets that meaning across. As your kids try out multiple poems on a chosen topic or theme, they will have a chance to experience firsthand how differently crafted texts can offer truly different takes on the same subject.

In this unit, you'll invite children to write poems in response to the topics and themes that surround them: poems about finding and losing friends, the power of sports to heal and to devastate. You'll teach children to find the poems that are hiding in the details of their lives. You'll do all this not just because poetry is its own powerful genre but also because the habits they develop as poets—specificity, comparative thinking, understatement, and hyperbole—will serve them well in any genre of writing. It's also true that an understanding of poetry from the inside out will help them build a lasting mental framework for how poetry works and support their ability to read poetry with comprehension and craft appreciation, skills that are expected according to the Common Core State Standards as well as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Watch out for pleasant surprises from your English Language Learners this month. This genre is relatively flexible in terms of grammar, and poems are often shorter in length and volume than prose. This can make poetry feel more accessible to ELL writers, especially if they have an internalized sense of rhythm and meter from being exposed to the richness of a poetic tradition in their *primary* language. Also, this genre borrows from intelligences other than linguistic. Since poetry requires a sense of rhythm and poems can have a lyrical quality, this genre may tap into a writer's *musical* intelligence, too, just as the sense of balance, precision, and symmetry in some poetic forms will alert a writer's *mathematical* sensibility. Expect that your children will bring their own voice and style to the poems that will be created in your room this month—and be ready to celebrate this voice when you see it.

Gathering Resources

To start off the month, you'll want to create an environment where children read, hear, and speak poetry. Perhaps you make baskets of new poems, poetry books, and collections in your classroom library. Or you might recruit the school librarian to add his or her expertise by generating opportunities for students to find, read, and reread poems he or she loves. If you are taking us up on our suggestion of asking children to publish anthologies, you will need to have many examples of different kinds of anthologies on hand. The public library is a great resource for this, because these are books that can stay in your classroom throughout the unit. Try to find anthologies that are focused on a common topic or theme, such as *This Place I Know: Poems of Comfort* edited by Georgia Heard, *Extra Innings: Baseball Poems* by Lee Bennett Hopkins, or *If You're Not Here, Please Raise Your Hand: Poems About School* by Kalli Dakos. If you do not have many of these books, it's easy to create a few folders of loosely connected poems—of course, you could also enlist kids to help you with this. If you are also teaching the text set unit in reading workshop, this should feel like very similar work!

If you teach in a Spanish-English bilingual classroom, or if you have many Spanish-speaking students, you may want to include some Spanish-English anthologies, since there are many lovely examples of this: *Gathering the Sun* by Alma Flor Ada, and *Laughing Tomatoes: And Other Spring Poems/Jitomates Risuenos: Y Otros Poemas de Primavera* by Francisco X. Alarcon. You may want to explore The Poetry Foundation, *www.poetryfoundation.org*, an independent literary organization, whose site contains a children's poetry section, including children's poet laureates. A more extensive list for poetry resources also exists on the TCRWP website.

When designing this unit, *you* might need to call on some inspiration and mentors, too! You can draw on professional books, including *Awakening the Heart: Exploring Poetry in Elementary and Middle School* and *The Revision Toolbox: Teaching Techniques That Work* by Georgia Heard, *A Note Slipped Under the Door: Teaching from Poems We Love* by Nick Flynn and Shirley McPhillip, *Handbook of Poetic Forms* edited by Ron Padgett, *Wham! It's a Poetry Jam: Discovering Performance Poetry* by Sara Holbrook, *A Kick in the Head: An Everyday Guide to Poetic Forms* edited by Paul B. Janeczko, and *Getting the Knack: 20 Poetry Writing Exercises* by Stephen Dunning and William Stafford. Visit our website to find a list of other professional texts you might consider using.

The Plan for the Unit

From the start of this unit, you will want to develop and articulate a clear vision of how your fourth graders will publish: where, for whom, and in what format. How will they celebrate? This will, in part, be based on what you discover after conducting an on-demand assessment; your decision will also be based on what's realistic for the time you have carved out, for the access to materials, and to publishing/performance space. Set a realistic deadline, and expect that, whatever the format of publication, every child will draft, revise, and edit several poems, using mentor texts and your lessons as guides through this process. It's likely that you will think of this as a three-week rather than a four-week unit, giving more time either to genre fiction, which comes before, or to literary essay and test prep, which follow this unit.

Immersion will play a larger role in this unit than in other writing units, from the very start of the unit and all the way through. Because you will want to teach your kids to be able to read poems well and thoughtfully, in addition to teaching them how to use those poems as mentors, you will want to pick some touchstones that serve both purposes well.

As with any writing unit, writing with volume and stamina remains a central goal. This can feel uniquely challenging during a poetry unit of study. One solution is to launch this unit by spending several days creating a class anthology around a common theme and, in this way, demonstrate the many different perspectives poetry can take on, even when working within the same general topic. This exercise will then set the tone for how the students' own work will go: not in a random, poems-coming-out-of-nowhere kind of way, but instead with a mission to explore a topic from a number of points of view through different kinds of poetry.

You will then spend a few more days doing more typical collecting work, but with kids both gathering ideas for anthologies and trying out some poems to go with those topics. A day or two will be needed to then teach them how to select poems for an anthology and how to revise toward the bigger theme, perhaps writing new poems to fill in themes or moods that are not yet there. The continued use of published poems as mentors during five or six days of revision will help maintain a sense of exploration and inspiration as your young poets strive to mimic the work of their poetry heroes.

You will want to spend some days at the end of the unit preparing for publication; whether this may mean creating illustrations to go with the central images of the poems they've written or rehearsing performances to practice how they will deliver their poetry so that the meaning is clear to the audience, this will be a critical time. It's especially important that you teach into this a bit, because these activities can be low-level according to Webb's "depth of knowledge" (if they simply make drawings for the sake of sprucing up an anthology) or high-level (if you teach them to consider how visuals can either support the tone of the poem or offer another lens; how the decision of which poems to place next to each other can change the way the reader will approach each poem).

On-Demand in Poetry

Other units often begin with an on-demand session, which allows students to show what they know about writing in a specific genre. Poetry need not be an exception. From their shared reading of poems and songs to poetry units in writing workshop, your students bring a diverse knowledge of poetry with them into the classroom. As with any on-demand activity, you will want to assess what your kids know so you can tailor the unit and be responsive in your teaching. You might gather your students close and say, "Writers, we are about to make an important shift in our writing lives. We are about to move from being essay writers to being . . . poets! As poets, we are going to see and think and write differently because poets notice what other people miss; poets see the world with wide-awake eyes. So when I walked into our room this morning, I looked with my poet's eyes and I realized that we have an emergency right here, right now in this room. We need poems! And not just any poems—we need the poems that only you can write. So let's take today's writing workshop to fill our room with our poems." You may want to provide paper choice for your writers—long and narrow, short and fat, with lines, without lines. You might also want to provide colored pencils so that after drafting, writers can make their poems beautiful. When studying these on-demand poems you will want to notice, above all else, meaning—what is the message the writer is trying to convey?

Part One: Creating a Class Anthology as a Jump-Start to the Unit

If you are taking on the anthology project, you may begin this unit in a new way: with the invitation to create a quick class anthology around a topic of common interest, all in a few days of quick drafting and revision. You can read aloud *This Is Just to Say: Poems of Apology and Forgiveness* by Joyce Sidman. In this book, Sidman creates a fictitious class of sixth graders who, upon hearing the poem "This Is Just to Say" by William Carlos Williams, write their own poems of apology and forgiveness, creating a class anthology. After reading a few selected poems from the book, you might say, "We could try something just like this!" Again, this work needs to feel fast, furious, and full of purpose. As a class you will quickly collect some possible topics, themes, or ideas for the class anthology, in part because later, when your poets write their own anthologies, you will want the themes of these anthologies to feel deliberate and intentional.

You might show how a topic can have several embedded themes: baseball, for example, might include the themes of "It's hard to let your team down," and "Practice makes perfect," and "Sometimes no matter how hard you try, you still don't win." (This will support and build on the similar work that is happening in reading workshop if you are teaching an interpretive text set unit simultaneously, since you will be coaching your class into coming up with multiple themes inside a single text and finding multiple texts that speak to similar themes.) Then enlist students to write poems that get at these different themes. You'll need to spend a little time coming to consensus around a topic, making sure children all have picked themes or messages that they actually want to try out. It doesn't matter if there is overlap: more than one writer can take up the same theme! The point of this work is to have kids practice using poetry to get across a meaning—they will quickly move to generating poetry, which then will bring them to new meanings to hone through revision.

In demonstration teaching, you will take on one of the themes for the purpose of modeling. Remind kids by tucking in tips that a poem has line breaks, that poems zoom in on small moments and vivid images, and that even in these first tries they may be trying to do these things.

Surround your writers with mentor texts, not just by lining the bookshelves with popular anthologies but by displaying poems around the room—perhaps even having a Poem of the Day display that keeps changing. Mid-workshops would be well spent delving into some of these texts and sharing how two very different poems about the same topic (for example, "Dreams" by Langston Hughes and "Listen to the Mustn'ts" by Shel Silverstein) get at different sides of that topic. (Hughes' poem is dark and suggests that without our imaginations, we are lost; Silverstein is more hopeful, letting the reader know that dreaming is always possible, even when others are naysayers.)

Part Two: Generating Ideas for Anthologies and Collecting Poems through Immersion and Living Like a Poet

Now your students will need support coming up with topics for their anthologies and for generating possible poems to explore different perspectives on those topics. The generating process is as diverse as poetry itself. Poems can grow out of observations or emotions, out of memories and images, or from a clever turn of phrase that is borrowed, overheard, or invented out of the blue. Poems may grow out of, or respond to, other poems. They may grow out of a story or stem from the writer's concern about an issue or the need to make a difference. You'll want to teach writers how to use their notebook as a place to begin collecting ideas for their poems.

Continue to look at poems together and to give your kids time to wander in the poetry books and collections of poems that are in your room. Often, reading poetry in a partnership (where the partners first read the poem aloud, then reread silently, then discuss) can spark conversations that will then lead to fast and furious writing of original poems. You may model how a mentor poem can lead to a poem about the same topic, a poem that follows the same structure, or a poem that talks back to the original poem.

You will want to select a variety of poems to share with the whole class, so that you do not reinforce your kids' ideas that poetry has to look or sound a certain way. If you are teaching toward anthologies, choose a selection of poems from a couple of anthologies that showcase different effects that a group of poems can have. For example, a Jack Prelutsky book may include poems loosely connected by the humor in them, whereas Lee Bennett Hopkins' baseball collection has a more explicit topical connection with diversity of emotion and style. In addition to these touchstones, of course, you will need to be armed with a much broader selection of poetry, in the form of poetry books or folders of poetry, that students have access to for independent reading and apprenticeship.

Combing through *previous* notebook entries might evoke inspiration. "Flipping through the pages of our previous writing might lead us to poems that are hiding in the words . . . waiting to be written . . ." you might say, urging your young poets to pry previous notebook entries apart with a pencil, to circle or copy out a line or a paragraph that they might turn into a poem. You will remind them that writers return to the same themes again and again, and perusing old entries with this lens should allow for some "aha" moments and ideas for new work: "I'm always disappointed in my brother. Maybe I could write an anthology with poems that get at all the ways that I'm feeling about him, to see if I can come up with more than those disappointed feelings."

Looking at images or going on observation walks (nature walks, community walks, building walks) with notebook and pen in hand is another way for children to observe and to imagine what they might write about. Teach them to first write long about what they see, what they notice, and what this makes them think. Above all, you will try to teach—and model—a thoughtfulness and a wakefulness that is essential to getting a poem going. Nothing you say need be very poetic or profound as long as you uninhibitedly model a sense of being alert to the visual details around you.

Just as some poems originate in ideas and images, some begin, quite literally, with words. A catchy phrase or a lyrical line can play in a poet's head and eventually spur a bigger, binding idea. Many teachers have found success in starting a poetry unit by bringing in song lyrics and inviting children to bring in the (appropriate) lyrics to music they are obsessed with. This is a way to both notice how songs actually are poems (including line breaks, repetition, figurative language, and rhyme schemes!) and to use lines in songs to inspire new writing off the same theme or image. You might share a pair of mismatched love songs as a way to show how different songwriters angle their work to give different meanings ("Love Hurts" and "Love Is All You Need").

You will expect your writers, after a day or two of generating or collecting, to end up with lots of small blurbs and/or first tries, all waiting to become more well-crafted poems. Often, these kinds of gathering entries may not start out looking like poems, instead taking the shape of small paragraphs, perhaps like story blurbs from narrative collecting or small patches of thought like during essay writing. This is fine—and to be expected. These entries are initial fodder for powerful poems and they will not arrive in their final and perfected form. It's also fine if your children are using line breaks and creating entries that do look poetic right away. What is important is that children learn to generate ideas that have power and resonance for them.

During the generating stage, you will most likely introduce a few strategies for first-try poetry, then in a mid-workshop or share, quickly show how poets don't wait for revision, that any first try is open for rethinking and reworking. You may then choose to teach a generating lesson that shows how a first try can spawn new thinking that leads to the writing of a whole new poem, not just changing a word here and there—a new poem that offers a slightly different perspective, perhaps on the same topic. In this way you will be continuing to support an important trend in your writing workshop: writing with volume, which in poetry probably means writing lots of poems and lots of versions of poems, rather than writing long poems.

A mid-workshop or a share during these first couple of days could already introduce the idea of on-the-run revision in poetry. Poets don't wait until it's "revision" time to rethink and recraft something they're working on. It's always revision time in poetry. Right away, I can look at the lines I just wrote about a fight I had with my brother:

He was so mad
he threw a shoe
into the basement wall.
I was scared of his anger
as usual.

We can try quickly to add an image from the setting or a detail about an object or piece of clothing that will make this poem more piercing. We can especially look for a surprising detail, or one that adds a new emotion to the poem. You might remind children of how, in personal narrative, in fiction, in informational writing—in every kind of writing—they worked on bringing in important details. Poetry is no different.

So I might close my eyes and picture the hole in the wall in our basement and add some lines:

He was so mad
he threw a shoe
into the basement wall.
The shoe thumped to the ground,
leaving a hole, ragged and dark
between my brother and me.

You might also suggest to them that as the unit progresses, they can still go back and collect more entries, living their lives with the wide-open eyes of poets. They will need to, as their ideas for their anthologies start to shift. If I'm writing about the troubles of having a brother, I might realize I need a poem from his perspective, or maybe from my mom's perspective (or even the wall's perspective!), and I'll have to write those.

Part Three: Poets Get Strong Drafts Going and Revise All Along

Structuring More Purposeful Drafts: Turning Entries into Poems with Line Breaks and Stanzas

Early on, you might also encourage children to talk with a partner and to write reflectively about the entries they have collected in their notebooks. Children may reflect by writing or saying, "I'm writing about this because . . ." or "I want my reader to feel or think . . . One thing that may be missing here is . . ." This work helps children to uncover the deeper meaning in their entries and to begin to plan for a collection of poems that shows different sides of their chosen topic or theme.

Now that students have several short entries, chock-full of meaningful moments, observations, and ideas, you can invite them to draft these more formally and to experiment with the craft of poets. You will probably emphasize free-verse poetry at the beginning. Rhyming well is a precise skill that many adult poets find difficult to master! Teach children to aim first for meaning and for finding a way to describe what matters with words that will make the reader see the world in a brand-new way. You will want to teach students how to draft the bare bones, the preliminary sketch, of a poem out of the ideas they've generated.

Model how this might be done, especially for students who tend to capture or generate ideas in prose, or help students mold poems out of previous notebook entries, which will, of course, be in prose. "Poets know how to turn prose into poetry," you might say, showing them that they can discover rhythm in the sentences they've jotted by breaking them up. For example, you may put one of the blurbs you wrote up on chart paper or a document camera and read it aloud:

I was running in the park with my friends, and we were all running together at first. But because I had allergies, I had trouble keeping up with them. Soon I was all by myself, watching my friends run farther away from me. I felt so weak and alone.

"This is not a poem," you'll tell kids. "But I can find the rhythm in these words and convert it *into* a poem. I can do this by breaking this prose into lines. When I take a sentence and break it into lines, poets call those places 'line breaks.' I can mark the spots with a little slash. I know from the poems I looked at that sometimes lines breaks happen at end punctuation, sometimes they happen at important words, and sometimes they just happen when it would sound good to pause. I'm going to add a few and then ask you and your partner to help me." You might turn back to the chart and begin adding, all the while thinking out loud: "I was running in the park . . . that sounds like a good line. I'll break there."

I was running in the park/ with my friends,/ and we were all running together at first./ But because I had allergies,/ I had trouble keeping up with them.

You could then ask students to help you add other line breaks into your poem. Next, show your class how you can quickly rewrite a draft of your poem, going to a new line at each slash mark:

I was running in the park
with my friends
and we were all running together at first.
But because I had allergies,
I had trouble keeping up with them.

You will decide which kinds of work to demonstrate for your whole class and which make for good small groups or individual conferences. Beginning with more structural changes from their prose pieces to their poems will help students very quickly see their potential as "poets." Experimenting with making lines and stanzas will quickly create the visual look of a poem and what order feels most appropriate. Also ensure the students notice how poets often do not write out full and complete sentences but eliminate extra words and get right to the important stuff.

Instead of: *I was running in the park with my friends.*

Try: *Running in the park*
with friends.

Instead of stressing the technical differences between metaphor and simile, at this point you might teach them how to make meaningful comparisons by placing an ordinary thing up next to something it's never been compared to before: "The grass in the park was soft and green, like my stuffed frog that I slept with when I was a baby." You might tuck in the term *simile* here, noting that you have used a comparison and used the word *like*, but the usefulness of this skill and some ways to practice it well are what you will highlight.

You might also introduce the idea of meter. The CCSS mentions *verse*, *rhythm*, and *meter* as terms that fourth graders should be able to understand and use. While the first two terms are probably already familiar (though you will want to check on this, and with ELLs this will not be the case), *meter* or the number of beats/syllables in a given line, plus the pattern of those syllables, is likely a new or still shaky concept. Again, the point will not be to master meter, but you might teach your kids how considering the syllables in lines gives poets more control over the reader's pacing. In your model poem, you might show how more syllables in a line can give a breathless, fast-paced feeling, so you might choose that for a line that has a lot of action or where there is a rushed feeling:

I was running through the park with all my friends, all of us together, running fast.

But you might add more frequent line breaks and end up with shorter lines with fewer syllables in a part of the poem that is quieter or where you want the reader to go slower:

My breathing got harder and
I started to fall
behind.
Soon I was
alone.

Poets Revise for Meaning and to Create Anthologies with a Range of Perspectives

Once children have a few strong drafts going you'll want to teach them poetic techniques for revision and craft moves to amplify the messages in their poems (and support Common Core requirements for understanding poetic terminology). You will want to maintain a balance between the spirit of playfulness that makes poetry such a winner in the classroom and the intensity of trying to make a piece of writing actually get better, actually become more meaningful through craft. These endeavors are not as contradictory as they seem, and if you put up student work consistently to demonstrate how poems not only change but actually get better through revision, you will get buy-in from your young writers.

Mid-workshops can certainly teach your poets how to take revision across the poems in their anthology. For example, if they are working on tone and word choice, that's work for not just one but all of their poems. And since they are trying to create a range of perspectives and tones for their collections, it will be good work to use the same or similar strategies toward different goals. If in one poem, I'm trying to find as many harsh words as possible to get across how abrasive my brother's anger can be (*he cracked his G. I. Joe against the Jeep*), in a different poem, when I'm remembering him as the little kid I used to protect, I can be searching for soft-sounding words instead (*his hair swirled in ringlets in the playground breeze*).

Remind them of revision strategies they *already know* from their earlier narrative and even essay units. For example, they could try out starting right in the moment, instead of trying to summarize everything about their subject. They could try being more precise about their choice of words. While poetry is yet another form of writing, it is still *writing*, and your year is built on spiraling skills to help students become more independent with the choices they make as writers, to tap the potential of poetry to deepen the work they have been developing all year.

The revision strategies you might teach your young poets are limitless. These "revisions" will often be specific craft moves such as whittling away excess words, being deliberate about tone and mood, inserting figurative language . . . the list is long, and you will choose what you might fit comfortably into your instruction in this month. You will want to draft a poem or two of your very own in front of the class and use these as the models on which to demonstrate each revision strategy. In each case, aim so that children see clearly what you did, how they might do the same, and also that this move made the poem visibly better.

For example, some of your revision lessons could consider multiple titles, how they can often enhance the meaning of a poem by either adding more to the ideas, being more literal than the rest of the poem, or even setting up readers to expect one thing and then become surprised when the poem itself goes in a totally new direction.

As readers of poems, your students also no doubt already learned how endings play a huge role in the poem's meaning—they can now put equally as much care into the construction of their own. They may reread their poem and decide on either a fitting last line or a last line that turns the tables on the rest of the poem. After the poem about the fight with a brother, I could end with a line that goes with the rest of the poem:

He was so mad
he threw a shoe
into the basement wall.
The shoe thumped to the ground,
leaving a hole, ragged and dark
between my brother and me.
That hole is always there now, between us.

Or I could think: what's a surprising idea about my brother and his anger? Maybe an idea that's more risky, that I don't like to admit? And then I could instead end with:

I'm so glad he threw that shoe
so I didn't have to.

Partner work will be important to keep up the energy during revision, because you can have partners helping each other by giving feedback and even recommending next steps. A poet who has written about the loss of her dog in a story poem, for example, might read to a partner and the partner might say, "Is there an image of your dog that comes back to you over and over? You could try finding that image and repeating it." Partners can also notice where there may be holes in a poet's plan for an

anthology. In an anthology about school, a partner might note that all the poems seem to be from girls' perspectives—couldn't the poet try a poem in the voice of a boy? In other words, partners can coach each other to try out the teaching you've already done.

As students meet with their partners to read and revise their collection of poetry, you will want to urge them to play with punctuation. They might refer to inquiry charts on punctuation. You will want students to challenge one another on the true meaning of their poems. If they want the mood of the poem to be sad, they might decide that it is best to have fewer exclamation points (saying, for example: "Exclamation points make everything sound upbeat and exciting . . . they won't fit here") and more periods and perhaps a dash to show long pauses. Students might plan to use commas to break apart a list of things or to add more detail-supplying words to their lines: *The bright, yellow leaf died as it drifted, softly, quietly to the ground.*

Teach your students that poets convey messages through sounds and through imagery. Teachers in previous years have sometimes categorized their revision strategies in these ways, both in their instruction and on charts posted in the room. Children can try to create *sounds* in their poem to further express their thoughts and feelings, how their lines could have rhymes between them or even within them. You might show them published poets who are really skilled at rhyming, like Jack Prelutsky, and teach your students that to rhyme is a choice, not a requirement, of poetry. And more important, which words to rhyme are an important decision.

Other sounds are important, too. You might go back to one of your own mentor texts that you read aloud and look again with your class at how long vowel sounds can have a very different effect than short, choppy, hard consonant sounds. They might also revise for the sounds of their poems by looking again at the choices they are making with repetition. Your young poets will hardly be able to contain the urge to read their poems aloud, and partners can help a great deal in this—either listening or, better yet, reading the poem back to the poet to see if the words they wrote sound the way the poet hoped for.

Poets also convey their ideas visually, and children can revise to decide how long or short their lines are on the page, if there are stanzas or not and how many, which words are capitalized, and what kinds of punctuation to use. They will learn how poets use the "white space" around the words to pause, take a breath, and make something stand out from all the other words.

Revision is a perfect time, if you choose, to look at a few standard forms of poetry. It is probably not necessary (nor wise) to attempt to teach every form, nor is it even necessary to teach any unless you feel that both you and your students will benefit and be interested. Once students have lived with their entries for quite some time and have worked on many different permutations of them, have mined them for meaning, inviting them to experiment with how, say, a haiku or pantoum might enhance what they are trying to say can feel really powerful and now purposeful. Choosing to work on form near the end of the unit, not the beginning, means that students are making *choices* about how and when to use them versus simply filling in blanks just to get the right number of syllables. For instance, the entry about the hole in the wall might

work as a haiku, with the last line delivering a change-up, now that you understand what you are really trying to say:

His anger still shrieks:
"I threw the shoe at the wall,
but it's all your fault."

You might also return to the concept of meter here, or at least to the related concept of syllabification, and invite students to make up their own forms by controlling their line breaks based on a syllable count they invent. Instead of a 5/7/5 haiku form, they could experiment with a 7/9/9/7 form, or any combination they want to try, figuring out what pacing feels natural to speech and what feels forced or awkward.

Part Four: Editing Poems and Assembling Anthologies for Publication

Editing poetry, at first, can feel a little like an oxymoron. How do you teach students to look for rules of standard English when poetry often breaks so many rules? While, true, poetry *can* break rules, no one poem breaks all—otherwise readers could make no sense of them at all. So, you may introduce to your writers that poets edit with their reader in mind. They make purposeful choices about what kinds of grammar, spelling, and punctuation rules they are going to follow, and if they do not follow some, what alternate rules they will follow. For instance, a young poet might decide that at the end of every idea he will not use a period but instead go to a new line. When he edits, he will check that he always does. Another writer might choose to capitalize following standard rules, and she will check for this. In other words, you'll teach children to edit their poems for consistency in the grammar rules that they've chosen to observe.

As poets assemble their anthologies, they might also decide to include the mentor poems they used or other published poems that fit within the same theme. This might also be a good opportunity to invite students to carry some of their biggest discoveries about themselves as writers into different genres. A writer might go back to an entry from, say, September or October that fits within their same theme and revise considering not only the meaning but also the sound of their sentences. An excerpt of this could find its way into their anthology.

You will want to support your writers in deciding on an order for the poems in their anthologies. You might return to mentor anthologies at this point, taking a close look at how poems are organized and pausing to consider, "What if this poem was in a different place? What would the effect be of reading it earlier or later than the surrounding poems?" Then your kids can work in partnerships to have similar conversations about their own work, coming to final decisions about placement only after having reflected and reconsidered.

Editing in poetry is also about sound. Children will probably read their poems aloud several times, checking each time if they included all the marks, lines breaks, and kinds of words that make their poem read just as they want it to sound.

In addition to students publishing anthologies, you may want to consider incorporating a performance aspect to your celebration, where students pick a poem they have written and/or a favorite mentor poem to memorize and perform during the celebration. Poetry is multisensory: create a celebration that reflects the many dimensions of poetry.

UNIT SEVEN

Literary Essay and Test Preparation in Writing

MARCH/APRIL

The unit of study, as described here, combines an abbreviated unit on literary essays and a two- to three-week unit of test prep in writing, designed with New York State's ELA in mind, but also directly supporting other similar assessments, such as the NAEP Assessment and state tests in Connecticut, Tennessee, and Florida, among others—assessments that ask students to respond in writing to a passage or passages they've read. Obviously, teachers from other states will need to investigate whether your high-stakes tests require similar work from students, and you'll want to place this unit prior to the date when your students are assessed. We encourage you to look over the entire unit and make some decisions about it. If you teach very proficient writers, you might decide to progress more quickly through the journey of this unit, or to bypass some portions of it, because the plans have been written with a special eye on the need to scaffold strugglers so they can do competent work on the essays that are required on high-stakes tests. It is only the last part of this unit that is officially test-prep, but the entire unit helps students write structured essays about texts.

Literary essay practice opens the door to many crucial pathways for our students. It offers a bridge between reading and writing. It helps students learn that writing can be a way to not only hold on to one's thinking about a particular subject or, more specifically, about a text but also to clarify and elaborate on that thinking. This unit will help students become more skilled in what the Common Core State Standards refer to as "opinion writing"—that is, the logical, thesis-driven writing that was introduced through the personal and persuasive essay unit earlier in the year. The unit does this while also moving students along in their journey toward the text-based, analytic work that is foundational in high school and college classrooms. In fact, the skill

of responding to a text with a reasoned, well-crafted piece of writing is emphasized across several of the CCSS. It is touched on not only in the standards for opinion writing but also in the standards for speaking and listening, in the research standards, and even, to some extent, in the informational writing standards. In short, this task, writing about reading, could be seen as the gold standard of the CCSS.

Our latest thinking about this unit has been influenced by the fact that in New York State, standardized tests require students to be ready to write essays at the drop of the hat. Most writers in our schools can whip out a personal narrative easily in a period—we need those same writers to write literary essays with equal ease. For teachers whose students struggle under this sort of pressure, we are now recommending that you teach literary essays in a way that helps students grasp, right from the start, what a well-structured, somewhat complete essay would look and sound like.

In the past, we've recommended helping students first develop ideas that are worthy of an essay, and then we've suggested that you can help them develop the muscles to write each part of an essay well, finally teaching students to put already-revised parts of an essay together into a draft of an essay. In contrast, in this unit plan, we're suggesting that right from Day One, your students draft whole literary essays, and that over time, you help them work to improve various parts of those literary essays and do so by revising this or that part of all the essays the students will have written up to that point.

Across the unit, we expect that students' flash-essays go from being very rudimentary (because students' abilities are not yet well developed) toward being more developed (although still flash-essays). That is, we're suggesting you give students repeated practice writing flash-essays so they internalize the form and voice of the literary essay. This move is defensible especially because students will have already worked in a slower, more bit-by-bit fashion to develop the particular muscles they need for essay writing by doing some of that work during the earlier essay unit.

We have placed this writing unit of study in such a way that we hope you are teaching it at the tail end of or directly following the interpretation text sets unit in the reading workshop. This is important because in this unit, students devote themselves to the work of developing accountable theories about texts. In the reading workshop, then, students will have already read passages from their book club books exceedingly closely, observing the details of those passages and using that close reading as a way to generate ideas. They will have grown provocative ideas and practiced the habit of developing and supporting those ideas.

To support your students in this, we hope that during their reading club work, you nudge them to listen to each others' ideas and to notice when a club member says a claim about a book that could become a thesis—a "box." Help the club to talk about that idea at some length, "speaking in essays." Club members can each open his or her copy of the book and look for text evidence to support the idea that is on the table. In this way, readers will become more proficient at work that is central to the literary essayist, including the work of finding and elaborating on evidence and of retelling a part of the story in a way that is angled to show how this part of the story substantiates a claim. This work of analysis and reflection will be crucial both in preparing your

students to be able to do this in writing and in bolstering their speaking and listening skills, aligning with expectations from the CCSS in these areas. See the interpretation unit for more on this.

Teachers, do not expect students to produce flawless drafts of essays. Expect quick essays. Expect students to keep writing or revising another essay every day, so that they become accustomed to writing fluently and with increasing structure, coherency, and precision. As students move through this unit, the quick drafts of essays that they produce will be stored in folders, and students will revise all of these essays, repeatedly, as they learn to incorporate new and more advanced moves into their texts. That is, after teaching students to cite the text, they may return to half a dozen essays, adding citations. After teaching them alternate ways to conclude an essay, they will reexamine their conclusions on a whole stack of essays, rewriting those that call for new conclusions. The goal of this work is to help students master the essay form with the same ease with which they have mastered personal narrative.

In the final part of this unit, you will move to more overt test preparation, when you will introduce your students to the kinds of writing tasks they will likely face on the New York State ELA examination and teach them the frameworks that will support their successful responses to those tasks. You probably want to save a few weeks at the end of this unit to be able to walk students through the different scenarios and give them practice with all possibilities. If the majority of your students did well on the writing task of the test last year (make sure you look at the old tests well before you begin this unit), ensure that you get to the more in-depth work of crafting evidence well, since this will challenge those writers to important new work. You may do this during either part of the unit, but their investment in it may be higher when they're writing about their own reading.

Preparing for the Unit: Charts and Texts

As you prepare for the unit, it will be important to move charts from the earlier essay unit front and center in your meeting area. If you have a chart that helps students know the academic language of essay writing, move it to a prominent spot—and if you do not have such a chart, you may want to make it (usually charts are the result of a series of minilessons, but this one needn't be). Such a chart might feature an essay, with different parts of it labeled: thesis statement, introduction, conclusion, topic sentence, support/evidence, quotation, paraphrase, unpacking, transition. You'll also want to move your chart containing what some teachers refer to as "conversational prompts" front and center in your classroom. This chart will probably list phrases such as *in addition*, *also*, *an example of that is . . .* , *another example of that is* . . . Many teachers will have used a chart such as this to help students elaborate during the earlier essay unit, and they will have kept such a chart alive by referencing it often during whole conversations off the read-aloud, when they worked to help students "talk long" about an idea rather than jumping from one underdeveloped idea to another. Later in the unit, this chart could even be made into smaller table tents or notebook tape-ins.

For children to write about reading, they'll need to have some texts to write about. For the first part of this unit, if your students are reading novels and talking in book clubs about the deeper meanings they find in those books, you will probably channel them to write their literary essays about those novels so they use this written form to harvest their interpretations of those books. This decision will support cross-pollination between reading and the writing workshops and will give the first part of this unit extra power, depth, and authenticity. The conversations students have with others about books during reading will allow them to form, revise, and expand their ideas before selecting ones to further develop through writing.

You'll also want them to write some essays about shorter texts, so you'll want to be sure your students have access to some rich, provocative short texts as well as to novels. One of the advantages to working in a short text is that the process of finding evidence doesn't take long when one needs only skim a page or two of writing. Then, too, when kids write about a short text, it is easier for them to know that text really well, rereading it several times and mining it in conversations with others. On the other hand, any theory a child might espouse will probably have thinner substantiating support when the text on hand is a short one. If you are looking for short texts, Cynthia Rylant's book, *Every Living Thing*, has some wonderful short stories. Eve Bunting's picture books are also very meaty ones. Of course, the possibilities are endless.

You may channel all the members of a book club to write about the same texts in the Literary Essay unit, because that way, the social dynamics of the group will support individuals' work. However, you will probably also want to give students some individual choices, because this will escalate their investment in the work. However, you may want to influence the choices of your strugglers so that they are in texts that they can read and that those texts will also allow for the interpretive work.

Assess Using On-Demand Writing

As with most writing units, you will want to begin this work on literary essay by finding out what students can do when working within this genre. To do this, you will probably give an on-demand essay prompt that asks them to take fifty minutes to write a quick literary essay about a familiar read-aloud text. You might say something like, "We've read and talked about *Freedom Summer* a lot. Right now, write a literary essay in which you tell readers an idea that you have about *Freedom Summer*, and then show evidence that supports the idea, drawing on details from the text." Be sure you have multiple copies of the text you ask students to write about so that they can hold copies in their hands and illustrate their capacity and tendency to cite specific evidence. When you look at your students' essays, the *Opinion Writing Continuum*, developed by TCRWP, will help you understand your students' levels of proficiency and the pathway they can travel to progress toward increasing levels of proficiency. This continuum is aligned to the Common Core State Standards in Opinion Writing, so it can help you chart your students' progress toward those standards.

If you find that the majority of your students' essays show a clear structure and contain a thesis statement, topic sentences, and transitions, you may decide to jump ahead to Part Two of this unit. Part One is meant to develop this sensibility in students whose writing about reading is not yet clearly organized; Part Two builds on that work by teaching writers how to use evidence more effectively and how to elaborate within an already-established structure.

Part One: Interactive Writing: A Quick, "In-the-Air" Class Essay to Launch the Unit

We recommend that you start this unit in an unusual fashion. Instead of teaching a minilesson to launch the unit, we have found it is helpful to lead students in an interactive writing activity in which you and the class co-create a quick literary essay, with each student (or each partnership) writing a version of the literary essay that the class is working on, doing this work "in the air" first, and only later on the page. After saying aloud to each other the exact words that they might put onto the page, receiving coaching in each paragraph of that literary essay, students disperse to put that in-the-air text onto the page and to complete it.

Because this day sets up all the work you will want to do for the rest of this unit, we have described it in much more detail than we have the days that follow. We want you to be able to imagine not just the big arc of this day but the fast-paced feel to it, and to also let you in on all you'll be assessing for and coaching into, all of which will then set you up to continue to support your kids in these same ways in the weeks ahead. Please read this not as a script but as one way this could go, complete with all the thinking that will help you decide how to proceed with your particular class.

To do this work, you'll want to select a fiction text that the class knows well. Many teachers have used a picture book such as *The Other Side* by Jacqueline Woodson or *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts as the grounds for this essay.

You may want to begin with just a bit of preliminary assessment work. One way to do this is to say to the class, "Students, we're going to be learning today that any kind of writing can be *said* as well as written. Listen to me *say* a kind of writing, and see if you can determine what kind of writing this is."

> I used to love snow, but lately, I haven't liked snow at all. I haven't liked snow because it is hard on my schedule, my finances, and my health.
>
> One reason that I no longer like snow is that it has made it very hard for me to stay on schedule. In the mornings, I leave with just enough time to get to work, but then when I get to my car, I find it is buried in snow. I have to spend ten minutes brushing the snow off, and then if I try to drive quickly to make up for lost time, I find myself careening around corners, almost landing in snow banks. So snow is bad for my schedule because it makes me get a late start to my day.
>
> Another reason that I no longer like snow is that it is hard on my finances. The other day, I had to spend . . .

By this time, some students should have their hands in the air and be ready to call out, "That's an essay." You need not continue the essay—the point will be made. "You are right. And just *said* an essay. Starting today, you'll all be saying essays a lot."

Teachers, tell students that this first day of the writing unit will not follow a usual format. You'll be doing a shared writing activity for twenty-five minutes on the rug and then sending students to write for fifteen minutes. You might set it up like this: "Specifically, today, instead of a usual minilesson, let's work together on the rug to say an essay about . . . (and you pick the text). To write an essay about a text, you first need to look back over the text, so let's do that now. As we look back over the book, will you think, as you would whenever you are going to write an essay about a text, 'What idea do I have about this book that I could write about in an essay?' " Then teachers, you'd want to skim through the book ever so quickly, and afterward you'd ask students to then take a minute to jot ideas they have about the book in their notebooks. Don't help them at this point—let this be something of an assessment. You will be looking for them to bring all of the idea work that they have been doing in reading workshop into writing. Are they growing ideas about characters? About the book's theme? Are they just stating facts or questions, not ideas? Teachers, if your students haven't yet had much practice interpreting, they'll probably generate ideas about character traits. This seems to be the work that readers find most accessible. If most of your students' ideas are character-based ideas, you will want to eventually work on supporting their interpretations, but meanwhile, you will probably decide to launch this unit by showing readers how to write a literary essay that revolves around a writer's claim about the protagonist ("So and so is a good friend"; "So and so is determined . . .").

If many of your students simply retell instead of jotting ideas, do a voice-over to the whole class, reminding students of sources for ideas—drawing on whatever you have taught in earlier units. "Remember, readers can get ideas by thinking about the kind of person that the main character is. We can get ideas by thinking about the ways the character changes, or by thinking about what the main character learns. How does the main character change? What does the main character learn in this story?" Give them a minute for writing the ideas—not ten minutes—expecting a few sentences or two. After giving the students a minute to jot, harvest some of their ideas, scrawling a few ideas that students volunteer on chart paper. For now, don't fix them; just jot them. As you do this, notice the level of ideas that students have generated. If the ideas are mostly character traits, you know you have some work to do through the reading unit to help them develop more sophisticated interpretations. But especially for now, at the start of this unit, you are trying to help kids learn essay structure more than you are trying to help them develop high-level interpretations of the texts. As you jot a bunch of ideas onto chart paper, you'll want to think about choosing one for the essay that the group will write, aiming to settle on an idea that feels within reach for most of the students.

Teachers, something to note: In this work, you will be helping students write essays in which they provide evidence from the text to support their claim, their idea. Sometimes when readers generate ideas that are about the theme of a very short text, those ideas may surface only at the very end of the story. You are helping students write es-

says in which they provide multiple instances of text evidence, but when they go to provide evidence from the text, there may not be a lot to draw on. For example, a student writing a literary essay about *Those Shoes* might want to write, "In this book, Jeremy learns that friends are more important than the 'right' clothes." This claim reflects a strong understanding of the book's lesson, but the evidence supporting the claim is mostly concentrated at the very end of the book, because it is only in the final scene of the book that Jeremy learns this lesson. Teachers, if your students generate ideas about the texts for which it will be challenging to provide evidence, for now, you might quietly steer the class toward ideas that do have evidence throughout the story.

If the story is *The Other Side*, one of the ideas will probably be something to the effect of "The children find ways to connect with each other even though the adults try to keep them apart." You could select this idea from the list on the chart paper, and say to the class, "Let's work together to *say* the start of an essay about this idea. Turn and say the start of such an essay to your partner."

Teachers, plan on writing (actually on *saying*) an essay that is low-level and straightforward enough that it is accessible to almost everyone in the class. You'll be coaching the class to state the claim, then finding places in the text to support the claim, and "writing" a paragraph about each bit of evidence.

You may need to be more clear with kids about what you mean by suggesting they say the start of the essay to each other. "You can't just start the essay by saying 'The children find ways to connect . . .' You probably need to pretty it up, with the title of the book and all? So say the start of our essay to your partner." Soon the class will have produced the start to the essay. You might say a version aloud: "Jacqueline Woodson's picture book, *The Other Side*, teaches readers that children find ways to connect even when grown-ups are trying to keep them apart."

"Okay, writers, once we have written the start to the essay and made our claim, we need to think of *reasons* or *examples*, right? So right now, reread your copy of the story with your partner, and find and mark parts of the text that show that children connect even when grown-ups try to keep them apart." As children talk, you might do a voice-over to remind students to draw from all parts of the story, including something that occurs early and something that occurs late in the story. Two minutes later, ask one student to point out a part of the text that everyone can use as an example, and coach kids to write the first body paragraph in the air to each other, starting with the transitional phrase, "*Early in the story*, (the children find ways to connect with each other). *One example is the time when . . .*" Soon one writer will say a draft of the essay, starting at the very beginning:

> Jacqueline Woodson's picture book, *The Other Side*, teaches readers that children find ways to connect even when grown-ups are trying to keep them apart.
>
> Early in the story, the children connect with each other. For example, when the girls are on different sides of the fence and playing alone, one of the girls, Annie, asks Sandra and Clover if she can play with them.

Teachers, obviously there is more that a writer could do at this point (more on this later), but your goal is not to help students write perfect essays. It is, instead, to be sure they all grasp the essentials of a competent essay. So you will need to decide whether this is challenging enough work for your class, for now, in which case you could simply proceed to coach them to look for another example. You might do this by saying something like, "So now it is time for a second reason, a second body paragraph. Remember you need to go back to the claim and restate it, adding your next reason, your next example." Help students preface the next paragraph with a transition, one that will work in many literary essays. "*Later in the story, there are more example*s (of the girls trying to connect with each other). *For example . . .*" Again you will want all students to do the work, putting their finger on the part of the story they reference as evidence and saying the start of their second body paragraph aloud in the air to each other. Then you'll call on one child to share his or her second body paragraph with the class. If the child you call on to start this work selects a portion of the story that is only tangentially related to the main claim, you might coach by saying, "Does this *hit you over the head* as an example of the children connecting with each other, or is it sort of loosely connected to that idea? If it is not an obvious connection, if it doesn't hit you over the head, look for a part of the story that obviously supports your idea."

Structured this way, this is high-level work according to Webb's "depth of knowledge" criteria, even though you are scaffolding it. The key will be to coach the students into reaching for the more appropriate evidence without giving it to them, if you can help it. It is the sorting of evidence that makes this a more complex task than merely retelling, so if you let kids give any old example as evidence, you are not highlighting the work that is both rewarding and cognitively demanding.

Of course, in this fashion students will be writing (saying, actually) very sparse paragraphs, and you may look ahead in this write-up to see ways to extend this work and use those ways right now. Remember, however, that the goal for today is to bring all your students into writing a whole essay, even if it is a very rudimentary one. Still, it is likely that your students will be able to do a bit more. The next obvious step is to teach them that after citing an example from the text, it is helpful to "unpack" the example by writing, "This shows that . . ." For example, students might say, "This shows that even though Annie lives on the other side of the fence, she still tries to connect with the girls." Later we will help you extend this effort to elaborate on cited evidence.

Chances are that by now, it will feel as if your students have spent enough time working together on the carpet, and so you will want to send them all off to their desks to write an essay. You can let students know that they have options. They could write the essay the class has been working on together, or they could take another idea about the text and follow the same template, writing a similarly structured essay about a different idea. This, of course, allows for your more proficient writers to spread their wings just a bit.

You may wonder whether the essay that you and the class worked on together is a complete one, because it will presumably end abruptly. You are right to wonder, and some students—many, we've seen, actually—may add a concluding paragraph when they write their own essay. Others will not. Another day, you will want to show the

class that it is great to end an essay with a final paragraph that pulls the distinct examples together and advances the claim. If you wanted to do this instruction now, you could help them start the final section by saying, "Now, as I think about my idea that 'children try to connect even when grown-ups are keeping them apart,' I realize that . . .' " and channel them to come to some new idea that stands on the shoulders of the first one. This is important work, whether you teach it now or later, because it sets students up to realize that essays can lead us toward new thoughts . . . and, in book club conversations, toward new spoken essays!

When you send kids off to write whole essays themselves, in the fifteen to twenty minutes remaining in the workshop, you'll need to coach kids to write, write, write, fast and furious. You may show them prompts for the essay such as these:

- State the claim like it is the start of an essay.
- Rehearse for the essay, locating places in the text that support the claim (box-and-bullets).
- Take the first part of the text. Say, in a new paragraph, "Early in the text, there are examples of (and repeat your claim). One example is the time when . . ."
- Cite detailed actions and words.
- Unpack this example by writing, "This shows . . ." and refer back to the claim.
- Then cite a second example, again using the transitional phrases as in the first paragraph, and again unpack this.

As children write, you can do some fast prompts. If one is retelling the text, say, "Don't retell the whole story. What particular part illustrates your idea? Go to just that part." If someone is writing without any elaboration, say, "Don't just mention that a part supports your idea. Show how it supports your idea by citing little detailed actions or words, and then telling the reader how those actions or words make your point."

Part Two: Interactive Essays across the Day, across the Week

Of course, once your students have written these little essays, you'll study their work to understand the instruction you need to provide to take them to the next step. You may decide to do this same work across the curriculum as well as during writing. Our content-area curricular calendar has specific recommendations for how to follow up this work in other disciplines.

Quick Revisions of First Drafts

Save the essays that students write—perhaps each writer has a folder full of these—because soon you will teach them certain things that essayists do, and you'll want them to go back and revise each of their essays to meet these new criteria. For example, on the second day of this workshop, if students did not include the transitional words that you prompted them to use at the start of their body paragraphs and did

not indent those paragraphs, then you'll probably teach a minilesson about the importance of revision. You'll probably also tell writers that the first thing essayists check on is the structure of their essay, suggesting they check that they've used transitional words and restated their claim at the start of each of their body paragraphs.

Writers will probably have used transitional words and restated their claim at the start of the first body paragraph, especially because they received so much support for doing this, but many of them will have just flowed from one paragraph to the next without a new transition, and especially without restating the claim, referencing the opening paragraph of the essay. This directly relates to CCSS, which require students to use clear paragraphs and to link ideas within and across categories of information using words, phrases, and clauses (for example, *in contrast*, *especially*). You can support the revisions they need to do by distributing scissors and tape, although you will also have some very fluent writers who created a torrent of unstructured text and need to revise from the start, this time constraining the text into paragraphs.

Your teaching might sound like this "Writers, many of you wrote a ton yesterday, and that is great. But here's the thing. Many of you wrote like Bob did—do you see how his writing goes all the way down the page, without any breaks? Today I want to teach you that there is a saying, 'First things first.' And when writing an essay, the first thing is structure, organization. The simplest, clearest way to organize an essay is to divide your essay into paragraphs and to use transitions and to indent at the start of each paragraph." In the teaching part of such a minilesson, you could recruit the class to join you (and watch you) as you help one student—say, Bob—reread and rethink his essay, deciding whether he can scissor it into paragraphs or whether he needs to write it over again, this time dividing it into paragraphs. "So let's see if we can help Bob find his first example and then cut his essay up so that this first example is in a separate paragraph." (Drawing a box around each paragraph is another option.) If you show the writers how to help Bob with this first paragraph, kids can work with partners to figure out what Bob could have done with his second paragraph, or they could use the active involvement portion of the minilesson to look over their own writing, noting their structure.

If Day Two of the unit channels students to rewrite their first essay, working on structure, Day Three, could give students a chance to write another essay, this time with much less support. Your teaching point on this day would probably emphasize that we, as writers, take a moment to think over the writing that we're going to be doing, and when we do that thinking, we often remind ourselves of how this kind of writing goes. That teaching point would allow you to review all that you scaffolded on Day One, referencing the list of things that you hope writers have internalized, so that this time you do not need to walk kids step-by-step through the process of writing a simple literary essay as you did on the preceding day. However, you won't leave students entirely on their own. Teachers, if you grasp the principle of withdrawing scaffolds as soon as you can, then you'll gauge the amount of support your students need and provide it accordingly. Perhaps this second essay will be written about a book that readers have been talking about during the reading workshop, with partners (who will

need to belong to the same reading club) writing at least the start of one shared essay "in the air" before separating to each put their own version of that essay on the page.

Writing More Flash-Draft Essays, and Revising New Essays and Ones Written Earlier as Well

We are imagining that the overall plan for the unit is such that your students will continue to write quick essays every other day, revising all their essays on the days between. After children write their second essay with much less scaffolded support from you, you'll study those essays and think about what the next big step is that you could teach, again reaching for something that feels accessible. If their essays are still not structured and still need major help with transitions and paragraphs, you may need, on Day Four, to reteach the minilesson you taught on Day Two. "Writers, remember that after writing an essay, we shift from being writers to being readers. We read over our draft of an essay, remembering to check 'First things first.' This means we check for structure and revise our essay if it is not well structured."

It is likely, however, that only a small group will need that support and that most of your students will be ready for you to lift the bar, teaching them another goal that writers set for themselves. There is, of course, no set sequence for what aspects of essay writing should be taught first, then next, and next, but if you have taught writers to make a claim and to structure the essay, it is logical that your next instruction might focus on helping them bring evidence from the text into their body paragraphs. It is likely that many of your writers will not have been very specific or detailed when referencing the text, and you'll want to teach them to unpack and elaborate cited examples. You might also tuck in reminders about using the correct conventions when referring to titles of novels or stories (underlining for novels, quotation marks for stories), as required by the language standards of the CCSS.

In writing about *Because of Winn-Dixie*, for example, a writer may have written, "Winn-Dixie helps Opal make friends with people in the town. Early in the book, for example, Winn-Dixie helps her make friends with the librarian." You can teach writers that specifics matter: proper names, exact quotes, precise actions. To teach this, you will want to channel students to actually underline key words and phrases from the text, bringing those into their literary essays. Remember that when writers revise to make sure their references to the text are specific, that they can revise not just the essay they just wrote (on the novel) but also the two other essays they will have written across the course of this unit.

As writers continue alternating between drafting flash-draft essays and revising them, you will continue to assess their writing and decide on whatever the new things are that you want to teach them. You'll generally teach new muscles on the revision days, expecting students to revise all their essays to incorporate the use of those new muscles, and then on the days when students write flash-drafts, you'll remind them of the growing number of things that they have now learned. That is, whatever the students learn to do first as a form of revision will eventually become

part of their first-draft writing. You'll expect that their third or fourth essay will be written with paragraphs, transitions, specific references to the text, and so forth.

Before long, you'll want to teach students to write introductory paragraphs. There are various ways to write introductions. Sometimes, it helps to approach a literary essay by writing about literature in general, saying broad Hallmark-moment statements such as, "People can learn life-lessons not only from school but also from books" or "I used to read books for the plot, but more and more I read books also for the life-lessons." When helping students to write these introductory paragraphs, you can teach them a few templates that often work: "I used to think . . . but now I believe . . ." "Some people think . . . but I believe . . ." "When I first read . . . I thought . . . but now as I reread it, I realize . . ." It sometimes helps to include a tiny summary of the text within the opening paragraph, and you could teach writers that the template "(Somebody) wants . . . and so . . . but . . . in the end . . ." can help them write those summaries.

In the same minilesson or a different one, you could also teach writers to revise their essays by writing closings. You might teach writers that closing paragraphs will probably be a place to link the story's message to the writer's own life—the ending is a good place for a Hallmark moment! "This story teaches me that I, too . . ." An alternative is to link this story to another story, or even to a social issue in the world.

As you continue to alternate between students writing flash-drafts in which they draw on their ever-growing repertoire of skills and students learning yet more things that literary essayists do and revising their essays to include all they learn, there are a few predictable lessons you will probably need to teach. The session, "Packaging and Polishing Literary Essays" from *Literary Essays*, can help you teach students to read their drafts carefully—most likely with a writing partner—looking for places where there are gaps (in thinking or transitions) and fill in those gaps as they revise. You will probably also need to teach students how to cite more than one bit of the text by using transitional phrases within a paragraph as well as between them. After citing one example, a writer might write, "Also . . ." or "In addition . . ." and then include a second example.

You will certainly need to help students elaborate on whatever they have cited. If you channel them to quote or paraphrase the text and then discuss how the referenced passage makes their point, you'll find that students are often at a loss for words. If a student has claimed that Paul Revere was brave and then developed this by citing a passage in the text that discusses him riding at breakneck speed in the middle of the night, you'll want that student to be able to write, "This shows that Paul Revere was brave because he didn't . . ." To help students do this elaborating, you'll want to explain that what they do on the paper is essentially have a little book talk right there on the page, talking over what the referenced passage does show. You can coach some students who struggle to make a little word bank that reiterates their claim, copying many words exactly from the text. Revere was a "bold, fearless, eager patriot," for example. If a child had those words on his or her page and wanted to show how a detail illustrated Revere's qualities, he could do so more easily. "The way that Revere rode through the night, from one town to another, shows that he was a fearless patriot." The use of a synonym list helps a child to inch from repeating toward paraphrasing.

Our aim has been, above all, to help students become at home with the structure and conventions of this genre. A folder full of five or six quick essays that have been constructed and then revised means writers have now had considerable practice putting together and developing a basic idea-based (box-and-bullets) essay. One route that the unit could take from here is to teach children to slow down and write a more sophisticated and developed literary essay. This would mean working for a week to write one literary essay, and then working approximately as long revising that essay. If you decided to teach students to write more ambitious essays, the essays included in the book, *Literary Essays*, can serve as mentor texts for you, and that book can help you with this instruction. You could also draw from the following list of minilesson ideas, teaching this content in whatever sequence makes sense to you. Ideally, you are still encouraging students to be able to do this work in a relatively short time frame so that, given a little time to make some changes, they will have some strategies they can turn to that take only five or ten minutes to accomplish, rather than work that stretches over days.

- Deciding when to paraphrase and when to cite directly.
- Making more sophisticated transitions.
- Writing one-sentence retellings of texts to include in the introduction.
- Including the title of any texts and name(s) of the author(s) in the introduction.
- Building out conclusions that illustrate the significance of the thesis statement and/or relate to real life.
- Elaborating on evidence by staying focused on the part of the story that best supports an idea, citing specific details (rather than retelling the whole story).
- Revising to include forecasting sentences at important points, especially at the beginning of paragraphs. These sentences let the reader know what the next part will mostly be about.

Part Three: Writing for the New York State ELA (or Other Similar Standardized Tests Which Require Writing about Reading)

One thing that state tests across the nation have taught us is that the tests demand writers who are flexible and resilient, who compose swiftly and with fluency. These young writers need to be able to write on demand about subjects with which they may not be familiar. They need to be able to do this using text support from texts that may be inaccessible, and to support an idea constructed in response to a prompt. They need to write with clear structure, with some sense of voice and style, and they need to use helpful and visible transitions in their writing. Finally, their vocabulary needs to be sophisticated and literary. That is what is on the rubric for New York State, and probably it's on the rubric in other states as well. To prepare students to write for the state test, we need to prepare them to write for specific tasks, knowing what is on the rubric.

The New York State ELA (NYS ELA) rubric emphasizes four elements: structure, which is most clearly shown by the use of a thesis, supporting evidence in clearly indented paragraphs, and a conclusion that states what has been argued and perhaps offers an additional insight; text support, which is clearly evidenced by quoting or paraphrasing or referencing the text or texts that are given; craft, which is clearly shown by the use of detail, transitions, long and short sentence structure, control of conventions, and literary vocabulary; and insight, which is demonstrated most easily by ideas about the text and by making connections outside of or beyond the text, but that are clearly related to the text. Almost all state tests measure student writing by these qualities; they simply name them with different terms on their rubrics. The NYS ELA values these qualities.

This unit takes a turn toward test-prep with the NYS ELA in mind. For students to do well on the essays embedded in that test, they appear to need to be able to write a boxes-and-bullets essay like the one you have taught already, only the chances are good such an essay would draw on two rather than one text. In addition, students need to be able to write argument essays, again drawing on two texts, and to write compare-and-contrast essays. If your upcoming work in the unit is focused primarily on test-preparation work, you'll probably want to channel students to write about short texts rather than books from here on in. If you do this, we recommend you select two pairs of texts that your students can read, perhaps drawing on passages used in previous tests.

Until now students have been writing off ideas picked out of a single literary whole novel that they probably read at length during Reading Workshop time. The texts provided in the tests, however, will be two short passages, perhaps one literary and one informational (we cannot know for sure about the genres until we are closer to the time of the test). The upside is that the test prompts themselves often provide the idea, claim, or thesis that writers must defend, so this seven- to ten-minute reading can afford to be quick, literal, and extractive. That is, unlike the deep-rereading work that kids may have needed to do to develop deeper interpretations from whole novels, they can shortcut to a more bare-bones reading, one that sets them up to write off a predeveloped claim. This relieves some of the burden, but remember, writers will need to rely on all that they've learned about structure, gluing paragraphs together logically with transitions, citing from the text, unpacking cited examples, and concluding to do this work well. And, of course, they need to do it all with speed.

To start this work, you might want a pair of passages from one test to be stretched across many cycles of work, with different writing prompts. This will save you time as well as make children familiar with different kinds of prompts. For example, you might start by using the same two passages to teach students how they can write a boxes-and-bullet, claim-and-support essay drawing on the two related texts, how they can write an argument (drawing on the two related texts), and how they can write a compare-and-contrast essay (drawing on those same two texts). This would mean that during the writing workshop, students need not do a lot of writing. They'll instead mine the same passages repeatedly. For example, we recently used a passage about a guide dog and one about a guide pony. In teaching students to write a boxes-

and-bullet, claim-and-support essay drawing on both these texts, we gave students a prompt such as, "Write about the ways that animals can support people with disabilities." When teaching students to write an argument, drawing on two texts, we gave them the question, "If you were blind and had to choose between a guide dog and a guide pony, which would you choose? Draw on details from the two texts to support your answer." To teach students to compare and contrast, we channeled them toward comparing the relative merits of guide dogs versus guide ponies. Because this portion of the unit again imagines students writing multiple flash-essays in each form, you will probably want to make at least two sets of paired passages, with questions that channel them toward these three different kinds of essays.

It is important, while selecting these new replacement passages, to pick ones that will be easy for most of your students to read. If, for example, you have a whole class of fourth-grade strugglers, we recommend doing a few cycles of work using texts from the third-grade ELA. Of course, another option is to decide that not all kids need to practice on the same texts. After the first day of the week, which is a shared experience on familiar texts, you could have groups work on different texts with prompts that are similar but different, because they are linked to easier and harder passages. Or you might simplify some of your texts, so you have more than one version in the room. You will need to find texts to use—you can gather the samples from Book 3 of the grades 4, 6, and 8 tests from years past, as well as the samples from last year's Book 3 in all grades, if and when it is released. If your school purchased test-prep books, you can harvest texts from those books as well. In addition, the texts on the NYC social studies website are helpful informational texts, as are the short texts in Stephanie Harvey's *Comprehension Toolkit*. Keep in mind that we expect the texts this year, as they were in spring of 2011, to be closer to two pages in length, rather than three-quarters to one page.

We have found that the essay prompts for Book 3 of the NYS ELA have tended to lend themselves to a few different essay structures. While we cannot with certainty predict which of these will provide the best response to any particular grade's task this year, we do know that it will help students to be familiar with a menu of possible structures, some of which should be:

1. Boxes-and-bullets essays
2. Argument essays
3. Compare-and-contrast essays
4. Simply answering the questions or responding to the parts of the prompt, in the order in which the questions are asked or the prompts are given.

The first of these structures is a simple idea-based essay, much like the ones children have been writing so far. To start, you might share a few test prompts with children that set them up to write a simple idea-based boxes-and-bullets essay. For example: "Write about the challenges of being a gold rusher . . . drawing on two texts that show this" or "Write about how people who are different can still be friends . . . drawing on two texts that both teach this." Together, the class might work on reading an essay prompt, re-

viewing two familiar texts with that prompt in mind, then writing-in-the-air the first two paragraphs of that essay. As this happens, you might record a few key sentences of the whole-class version on chart paper.

After fifteen to twenty minutes of a shared writing-in-the-air experience, you'll send students off from the meeting area to write the entire essay, fast and furious, from beginning to end. Most children will probably be able to complete the entire essay. The next day, you might ask children to look over these essays and make quick revisions, using all they know about paragraphing, transitions, and citing from the text. Remember that on actual timed tests, children do not have the luxury of returning to revise an undeveloped draft—they have time to produce one draft alone, so their "revisions" need to be as inbuilt and spontaneous in this initial draft as possible. Teach children that their next first draft now needs to be written in paragraphs, to include transitions and to cite from the text—that they need not wait until the *end* of a drafting cycle to make these additional changes. With this requirement in mind, give them a new prompt (using the same two texts) from which to write a boxes-and-bullets essay.

Since writers are now drawing from two texts instead of one, you will want to teach children to quickly read both texts within seven to ten minutes and to refer to *both* for citations and evidence. You might teach them to underline evidence when they read each text, reminding them to balance their references to both the passages. Often, one of these texts is informational and this may clash with the fact that so far, children had been writing off their fiction novels. You'll want to unearth charts from the nonfiction unit and revisit strategies for finding main ideas and for mining paragraphs for topic sentences so that children navigate these texts quickly and efficiently. You'll probably then choose a different pair of texts for them to write an essay from, reminding them to read these for the main ideas within and to underline citable evidence from both before they write their next quick essay.

Writers must also be aware that pace and expectations change during test-prep work. Emphasize that they must begin with a mental outline (boxes-and-bullets) for how their essay will be structured, that they must aim to finish within the set time by making it a habit to glance at the clock, that they must write legibly and pay attention to conventions—explain that these things add up when tests are graded. "Real writers often need to train themselves to work to deadlines. They often need to have a finished piece of writing by a certain time," you'll teach. You'll probably then provide another claims-and-evidence prompt off the second pair of texts, this time asking children to pace themselves to finish essays within the allotted time.

Channel them to self-monitor for time and pacing while writing. For example, when the first ten minutes are up, children ought to be done with introducing a claim; at the end of twenty minutes, they ought to have provided two or three cited reasons; and by the end of twenty-five minutes, they need to be wrapping up their conclusions. You might require that children strap their wristwatches on or set children to pair-monitor each other's time and pace. When they're done, partners might evaluate each other's work against a checklist of strategies and conventions (paragraphing, use of transitions, and so on) to note whether these have been included.

The second essay structure you'll want to teach children is the compare-and-contrast essay. To start this work, you might pick two categories from children's everyday lives and prompt them to compare and contrast these: taking the bus versus riding the subway, being the oldest versus being the youngest of siblings, the class's pet frog versus their pet ducklings, the Nintendo DS versus the PSP. The two categories must be close to your children's lives, ones in which you know they're experts. Ask them to suggest ways in which the two categories are similar (both the bus and the subway have the same fare, both cover roughly the same routes, both are run by the same agency) and ways in which they are different (that the bus allows one to see the environment while the subway goes through underground tunnels, that a bus takes far longer than the subway). You might stand and take notes on an overhead board as they generate these lists verbally—some teachers find it helpful to do this work on a T-chart. As they do this, you'll note that this is not new work, that children are quite adept at comparing and contrasting in their daily lives. What will be new, however, is taking this familiar compare-and-contrast schema and fitting it into an organized essay structure.

You'll therefore want to model how to use their lists of similarities and differences to create a compare-and-contrast essay. Start such an essay off before them: introduce a thesis statement ("Buses and subway trains are somewhat the same and somewhat different."), elaborate their similarities in the next paragraph and their differences in the third paragraph. Then, prompt children to do the same work in partnerships. Suggest another pair of categories from children's everyday lives and ask them to create a combined T-chart or similarities and differences. Then, prompt one partner to "say" a thesis statement using the template *X and Y are somewhat the same and somewhat different*. Or *X and Y have many similarities and differences.* Or *X and Y are partly the same and partly different*. Then, have partners state and elaborate the similarities, counting these off on their fingers, before stating and elaborating differences.

As soon as possible, move children to doing similar compare-and-contrast work off the two passages you selected earlier. Prompt them to compare two categories from within these texts (for example, "X and Y were both _____ who faced many challenges. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast the challenges they each faced.") by making a T-chart, reminding them that they'll need to consult both texts to develop this chart. You may want to teach kids to sort the items on their chart, from most significant to least, or most clearly the same to less clearly the same. Then you'll show kids how to circle the items on the chart that are the same for X and Y—they'll describe those in their first body paragraph, which will describe similarities. The rest they'll list in their next body paragraph, which will describe differences. This kind of organization is only one way to structure an essay, of course, but it is an easy way to get most of your kids into this structure.

As before, once writers get going with a few flash-drafts, you'll want to teach strategies to refine compare-contrast essays. For instance, you might teach children that when citing evidence from texts in a compare-contrast essay, they will want to be specific and they might paraphrase instead of quoting extensively while doing so. You may prompt them with the specific words with which to begin paragraphs: "Examples

of how X and Y are similar include . . ." Or, "Examples of how X and Y are different include, . . . This shows how X and Y are different." You will want to provide children with the language of comparing (*both*, *alike*, *similarly*, *in the same way*, *correspondingly*, *this is just like . . .*, *this reminds us of . . .*) as well as the language of contrasting (*on the other hand*, *however*, *contrary to this . . .*, *instead of . . .*, *in contrast . . .*, *opposite to this . . .*, *at variance with . . .*). Once children have written their first two quick essays, you'll want to show them how to craft an effective conclusion, one that restates the thesis, perhaps by adding whether the similarities outweigh the differences or vice versa. For instance, "Even though X and Y have a few things in common, they are largely different," or "X and Y are very much alike, except for a few small differences."

Once children have a few compare-contrast essays in their folders, you might move them along to a third essay structure: the argument essay. You should know in advance that you will be teaching your children to forward and defend a claim, to consider and refute counterclaim(s), then to reinforce (and, to an extent, reinvent) the original claim as part of a conclusion. When teaching this structure, the good news is that children are natural arguers. Rather than starting right away by showing how to argue in ways that draw on texts, you might start by helping them do a bit of in-the-air writing in which they argue about something closer to home. You might show them how you could argue in a very simple essay format, including in your argument the elements of the essay (such as the claim, the supporting evidence, and the conclusion) as well as the new element that you'll be introducing: refuting a counterclaim.

You might tell them: "Students, today we're going to begin a new kind of essay—the argument essay. You're all great at arguing—I should know: I keep hearing you. Before we get deep into this work, I want to teach you that an argument can be *said* like an essay. Listen to me *say* an argument essay. You'll be able to pick out the claim and the evidence, but more important, listen to see if you can pick out the one move that makes an argument essay different from the other idea-based essays you've been writing till now. I'll give you a hint: it's called 'shooting down the counterargument.' It's where I will consider an opposite argument and poke holes in it, showing why it isn't a strong one. See if you can pick out the point when I do this."

> I want to argue that kids should have more time at recess.
>
> Kids should have more time at recess because they are getting overweight, and recess gives kids good exercise so they don't get fat and have heart attacks. Also, kids should have more time at recess because fresh air is good for kids and helps them concentrate when they come back into school. If you just sit in a chair all day, you practically fall asleep.
>
> You might argue that recess is a waste of learning time. You might say that school is for education, not for fun. I disagree because I think a little bit of recess makes the learning time much more powerful. Otherwise, if there is no recess, half the class ends up falling asleep and some kids become bad and make it so no one can learn.

"See what I did? I considered what someone arguing against me would say—that recess is a waste of learning time. I considered an opposite argument and tried to squish it with logic."

You might set children up to "say" an argument essay to partners. Provide a prompt such as "Which is better—vanilla or chocolate ice cream?" or "Which is the better team, the Red Sox or the Patriots?" and ask Partner A to choose a side as Partner B listens. Provide stepwise directions for how this argument essay might go. At the start say to them, "Tell your partner which side you have chosen to say your essay in favor of," and provide thirty seconds for kids to do this. Then say, "Once you've chosen a side, tell your partner why you think this side is better. Give one or two reasons." Again, pause to let children do this before proceeding with the third step. "Now, consider what someone arguing against your flavor/team might say. Consider a weakness that they might point out in your topic. Then, tell your partner why they're wrong—shoot down their argument with a reason."

After children have had a go at these three steps with such assisted practice, call their attention to what they just did. "Writers, you did three things just now. First, you chose a side to argue for. Second, you came up with reasons to support your side. And third, you considered the opposite side's argument and explained why it wasn't as good." As you count these three steps out you might also put them up on a chart so that children can visualize the argument essay as being distinct from the claim-and-supports essay or the compare-and-contrast essay. Now, you might provide a second prompt ("Which is better—wearing uniforms or choosing what to wear to school everyday?" or "Which is more fun—Art or Math?") and this time, ask Partner B to "say" the essay out loud to Partner A, asking partnerships to refer to the chart to check off each of the three steps. Once children have said their argument essays out loud, you'll want to bring back the two pairs of passages they wrote their claim-and-supports (boxes-and-bullets) essays from earlier, this time using different prompts, ones that ask them to choose one or the other side of an argument. For instance, previous test prompts have followed formats such as "The authors of 'Passage X' and 'Passage Y' both live unusual lives. Write an essay in which you explain which lifestyle you would prefer and why," or "The main characters in 'Text 1' and 'Text 2' helped other people in different ways. Would you prefer to help the way X does or the way Y does?"

Test prompts do not overtly state whether students are required to write an essay that is idea-based, argument-based, or one requiring comparing and contrasting. Therefore, students will need your help in learning how to read the prompt and decide upon the appropriate essay structure. Teach them to pay attention to the clues within the prompt. For example, a question that begins with "Which . . ." is likely asking them to pick one side of an argument. Remind them that when the prompt asks them to pick one of two provided alternatives (X versus Y), they are probably being asked to construct an argument essay. Tell them they'll know when the prompt asks them to write a compare-contrast essay because it will use the words *similar* and *different*, *similarities and differences*, *the same and different*, or *What's in common* and *What's different*? For instance, if the prompt asks students to explain how puppies and kittens are similar and different, then they know they are being asked to write a compare-

contrast essay, but if the prompt asks *which* of these two they'd choose for a pet, they need to be aware that they're being asked to construct an argument.

Of course the test may throw a curveball at kids on occasion, asking them to argue a side, and then compare and contrast as part of that argument. You can decide if you simply want to tell the kids this, or practice, perhaps even with the kids rewriting some of the prompts so that writers are asked to write with more than one structure. For instance:

> Write an essay in which you discuss how children can raise butterflies and tadpoles. What's different about these two?

There's no way to predict exactly what the test prompts might be. We want our kids, therefore, to be resilient writers, who realize they have many writing muscles and are ready to argue a side, compare and contrast, and teach information—all using evidence from texts they read.

The fourth and final essay writing structure you'll want to teach students this month is specific to tests and not one that they will work on in real life. For this reason alone, it requires explicit instruction. You'll show students how sometimes we can't always predict exactly how the test writers will write the questions or prompts, which means that we're not sure how to structure our response. When this happens, a really good safety net, a kind of fallback, is to simply take each question that is asked (or each part of the prompt) and write one paragraph that directly and fully answers that part or question. We may be able to add in an introduction or conclusion—but we may simply go in parts, answering each part as we go, and that will be sufficient.

For instance, let's consider the fourth-grade prompt from 2010:

> Imagine if the girl in *Butterfly House* had found a tadpole instead of a butterfly. What would the girl have done to take care of the tadpole? Do you think it's more interesting to take care of a butterfly or a tadpole?

One way you can show your writers to do this work is to simply do everything the test writers say. Ask children to read the test prompt and identify the number of questions that have been asked. In this prompt they've asked two specific questions—tell children that they will want to devote a paragraph each to answering these. Teach children that they can't ignore any question in the prompt but must answer them all, *in the order in which they've been asked.* Once writers have the two paragraphs down, they might think of a very brief introduction—but this is not crucial. Instead, it is more pressing that you teach children to be attentive to leaving no part of the prompt unattended or unanswered. Provide children practice with a variety of prompts, for example:

> Imagine that you have gone to look for gold during the Gold Rush. What hardships might you face? What good things might come from your search? Do you think it was worth it to search for gold during the Gold Rush?

Your students must be able to point out that three specific questions have been asked and that their corresponding essays must have at least three paragraphs, one per question. One possible danger of telling kids to just answer the question is that they might not include any evidence from one of the texts because the specific parts of the prompt won't lead them to this crucial work. Your teaching point might be: "Writers, as we look at the questions we'll be answering, we can go back to the texts and put a star in the margin or underline or circle the parts of the texts we're going to use as evidence for each question. Here's a trick! We have to use some evidence from both texts. So we need to try to make sure we've starred something in each text."

You will want to actively demonstrate how you do this and set children up to do this work in partnerships, either as a shared writing experience or by letting partners rehearse by starring or underlining their evidence and sharing how they'll get to evidence from both texts. You'll want to teach children that even though they're simply answering the questions or parts of the prompt, that they can still add a conclusion to their essays, either by providing a one-line insight gleaned from answering the prompt questions ("It seems like tadpoles would be a lot harder to care for than butterflies") and perhaps, by adding in a personal response ("But either would be fun! *Butterfly House* and 'From Tadpole to Frog' make me want to raise a pet. I'd love to have a pet and I would take good care of it like this girl does. Maybe I could even ask my grandfather to help me.") If you teach children the latter, teach them also to keep such a response brief—the last thing you want is for the angle of the essay to shift into a personal one.

Celebrating Progress at the End of a Month of Essays

By the end of the month, your young essayists will be able to think and write according to a variety of essay structures. One way to celebrate all the work that they've done this month is for children to publish their folders full of essay drafts. These folders, by now, will have become more than receptacles. Their contents—probably a dozen flash-drafts of various types of essays—are likely to represent an arc of development, like mini growth-portfolios. Many teachers have found it exceptionally powerful to have students review their own progress across a month. If you choose to send children along a reflective journey, looking at the various essays they've written this month, you might ask them to begin by organizing the essays in their folders. You might distribute a few separator sheets, asking them to separate the four kinds of essays they've worked on in this month, in chronological order, adding dates and perhaps a table of contents.

There are various ways of looking at these portfolios. For instance, "How easily can you identify the type of essay you've written just by glancing at the format and use of transitions?" Or "Look at your first few drafts," you might say, "and compare them with the essays you wrote toward the end of the month. What new things are you doing toward the end that you weren't doing at the start?" Partners might study each other's portfolios and write little notes of appreciation for specific things they see in

each other's work. If you want to mine the portfolios for even more teaching potential, you might involve the whole class in developing a simple rubric through which they self-assess the essay(s) that they feel to be their best work. Alternately, students may prepare a small presentation of their portfolios for a partner, a small group of peers, or to a wider audience, presenting the various formats and revisions strategies that this month of learning has encompassed.

UNIT EIGHT

Informational Writing

Reading, Research, and Writing in the Content Areas

MAY

This unit is a culmination of all the informational writing students have been working on throughout the year, from the informational book unit to the writing included in the content-area curriculum calendar. Students have been busy this year learning how to construct and write engaging informational books. Students have gone on a journey in the content areas, learning how to use writing to explore, learn, and make meaning with new content. Students have a foundation in using sketching as a tool for thinking about new content and using time lines to organize information. Writers have learned different ways to write about information, from summarizing, comparing and contrasting, to ranking and prioritizing information. This unit is an important opportunity for repeated practice of these writing moves with the intent to move students toward proficiency. However, this unit is also a time to put all of this year's work together. It is designed to give students the space to put all these writing moves together to create one large product. This month, students will use writing workshop to write and produce research reports, expressing their understanding of the new content they are learning during reading workshop.

During reading workshop this month, your children will read widely about a content-area topic. For instance, if you are teaching fourth grade in New York, this means that you are probably studying the American Revolution, immigration, and government systems in social studies. But whether you are teaching fourth or fifth grade, and whatever content you will be in at this time, this write-up will help you develop a rich cross-disciplinary unit. It will give you and your students time (that precious commodity!) to delve deeply into content, read across many texts that address your topics, and write about it with engagement, purpose, and more sophistication than earlier in the year.

You will have gathered all sorts of nonfiction materials—expository nonfiction, narrative nonfiction, maps, primary documents, digital texts, and even images. Your students will be engaged in partnerships or clubs reading about this content. They'll have time to talk to one another to deepen their understanding and grow ideas. They'll mark interesting parts of the book with thoughts and reactions, ready to share with friends. As readers, they are also able to read and understand a wider array of nonfiction books: narrative nonfiction that takes the reader through a time line of historical events, expository nonfiction (informational and all-about) that teaches all about a topic, and question-and-answer books that invite the reader to wonder alongside the author. The writing inside these books and texts will serve as writing mentors, providing writers with a wealth of mentoring opportunities around authorial choices, craft moves, and publishing possibilities.

In addition to reading these texts to learn content, students will read as researchers, specifically with the intent to gather important information and parlay it into their own research reports. These reports are similar to informational books in that they present information about a topic of expertise. They are different, though, because research reports present information in a format that is more reminiscent of an essay structure, rather than a book format. Research reports contain information separated into sections, potentially with headings, and have diagrams or text boxes containing supplemental information. Some of you may envision your students using publishing software, such as Microsoft Publisher, to create visually compelling reports. Others might envision a research project where students echo more of the work being done in the content-area reading unit. It might also be the case that some of you may feel students need another round of informational book writing and might choose to design this unit around another exposure to that form of publication.

This is an informational or expository writing unit. In whichever form children choose to publish their findings, this unit is first and foremost about students using writing to teach others about what they learn in the content area. It would be easy for this unit to take the form of a research report or project. That is to say, the actual writing work of the unit could potentially be secondary to the physical report or project. You'll want to keep in mind, therefore, that this research report helps meet all the writing demands for the CCSS's informational standards. These writing standards require students to construct informative or explanatory texts that examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly. Specifically, it's important for students to introduce a topic clearly and group related information into paragraphs and sections. This includes formatting, such as headings or illustrations. When writing these texts, students are expected to develop the topic with facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or examples. Students can link ideas within categories of information using words and phrases, such as *another*, *for example*, or *because.* The use of precise language or content-specific vocabulary is required, as well as providing a concluding statement or section. This reminder helps ground this unit in writing work essential to creating sophisticated and grade-level research reports.

In the first part, children will be studying a whole-class topic during reading workshop and will be reading a lot of texts across the whole-class topic like the Civil War or

the American Revolution. Students will place a concentrated effort on gathering information and laying a firm foundation for understanding the new content. In the second part, while they are reading to learn about more specific parts of their topic, they will be using writing to expand their content-area knowledge. They'll write longer about initial notes and observations they made, question new knowledge they've learned, or generate new ideas. The third part will be the most intensive writing portion of the unit, as students pore over the notes they've taken and figure out ways to piece together different aspects of their reports. You'll want to support children as they look closely at mentor texts, write, and rewrite different portions of their reports. For instance, as the class is functioning as a research community on, say, the Civil War, students will branch off and construct more specific reports on the trials and tribulations of the Underground Railroad. In the final part, students will revise and publish their reports. The unit will culminate with an opportunity for children to share their research and celebrate their writing.

Preparing for This Unit

In preparation for this unit, remember the informational book writing students have done earlier in the year. Students wrote from an area of expertise, with little to no research. Students presented information in categories and subcategories, incorporating text features for a variety of purposes. Many of you had an instructional focus on writing craft, elaboration, and revision. Some of you chose to provide opportunities for children to embed narratives within the expository structure. When preparing for this unit, you'll make important decisions about how children's writing work from past units will inform and elevate the work of this unit.

The goal of this unit is to write informative or explanatory texts, where writers compose a piece of writing that explains and presents information and ideas in a manner that demonstrates an understanding of the topic. Not only is this type of writing detailed in the Common Core State Standards, it is also highlighted by NAEP, the National Assessment of Educational Progress. NAEP is the largest nationally representative continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. NAEP brings awareness to the fact that throughout the K–12 curriculum, writing to explain is the most commonly assigned communicative purpose. Students write summaries, research reports, and other kinds of explanatory tasks in all of their school subjects. This awareness furthers the rationale to end the year strongly by teaching this important type of writing. Students will be expected to write in this way many times throughout their academic lives. This unit provides the opportunity to learn this type of writing and learn it well.

For those of you using the Content Area curriculum calendar, your children have probably learned content in a variety of ways during social studies workshop all year. They've likely engaged in long conversations off of fascinating picture books, like the story of Molly Bannaky. They've talked about what it must have been like to live during that time and their reactions to what was fair and unfair. They've watched video

clips, guided by you, in which they stopped to turn and talk, role-play, or watch you think aloud. They've pored over countless primary sources—photographs, woodblock prints, maps, and time lines—and used these to grow ideas and talk to their partners. They've listened to mini-lectures you've given where you clearly taught big ideas and the facts that support those ideas.

The social studies content you choose for this month should be a highly engaging one. You'll likely align this unit to your district's Scope and Sequence. You'll want to choose a topic for which you have many resources: books, videos, primary documents. You'll want to be sure that your whole class can study many subtopics within the main topic, so you'll want to ask yourself, "Does this topic have *breadth?*" Instead of doing a monthlong study of just the battles of the American Revolution, for example, you'll likely want to broaden the topic. This way, children could also study the dress of the time period and what life was like for those who were not fighting. They could compare different kinds of colonies, events leading up to the Revolutionary War, leadership during the time, and so on.

This month, it's essential that you continue to keep up a strong reading and content-area workshop, because children can write about new learning only if they've truly learned something new. Flood your children with images, facts, and stories about the time period of study. Even better, begin the work of the content-area reading unit a week or two *before* launching this writing unit so they'll begin on Day One with lots and lots to say. As your researchers become knowledgeable, they'll be eager to share what they've learned and the ideas they have about all the new information they know. Students will, then, begin to turn their research into a writing project, or you can imagine small-group or class-wide projects. Again, it would be helpful to reference our companion content-area reading unit for May when planning this unit to seize opportunities for overlap. That is to say, these units are symbiotic and designed to overlap.

You will want to consider the following questions:

- What's the topic of study? What will my whole class be learning about? What are the choices for students within that larger topic?
- What materials do I have and need to serve as writing mentors, and what do I have to teach the content?
- When will I begin this unit to ensure that children know enough about the content before they write about it?
- Will my students be working in partners, small groups, or independently to create their final piece?

Part One: Writing to Develop Expertise and Grow Ideas in Reading or Content-Area Workshop

Your job in the weeks leading up to the launch of this writing unit, and in the first week or two of the unit, will be to teach your children a lot about the topic of study. You might want to set up a special place for this collection of information, sketching, and writing to be housed. Perhaps it's a social studies folder that they decorate with a picture of themselves as a historian or person of the time period on the cover. Perhaps it's just a tabbed section in their already-established social studies notebook or writer's notebook.

Decide if you want children forming groups around one topic of inquiry, or whether you want children to each survey the whole topic, gaining broad knowledge, before zeroing in on one to study with more depth. For example, if you are choosing to study the colonial and Revolutionary period as a whole-class topic, you might steer the class into groups that study subtopics. You could offer ideas for subtopics that are guided by your content standards—such as, life in the colonies; comparing New England, Middle, and Southern Colonies and Europe. You could also think about the social studies thematic strands and have children choose one of those: culture; time, continuity, and change; people, places, and environments; individual development and identity; individuals, groups, and institutions; power, authority, and governance; production, distribution, and consumption; science, technology, and society; global connections; civic ideas and responsibility. It could also be that children individually choose their own subtopic that they derive from reading and thinking broadly during writing workshop. Whichever way you choose, this compartmentalization of topics and subtopics helps students see the relationship between two or more ideas or concepts in a historical context (which the Common Core State Standards refer to in the *key ideas and details* standard). This overall setup and organization are echoed in the companion Content Area reading unit.

In Writing Workshop

As the unit begins, you will immerse your children in all the different ways that they can write about what they are learning in the reading or content-area workshop. You will want to teach them that social scientists write in many ways for many purposes. During this first week of the unit, their purpose for writing will be to capture what they are learning, thinking, and writing to grow their ideas. Therefore, you will probably teach them that their notebooks are collections of many kinds of writing.

One kind of writing is observational writing—they will record in extreme detail all that they observed while studying a primary document or drawing from the time period. During social studies workshop, they may have observed and sketched. During writing workshop, you teach how they can go back to those sketches and observations and write in words, phrases, sentences, and even paragraphs about what they have seen and sketched. Teach them that they can use prompts like, "I notice . . ."

"I see . . ." "This reminds me of . . ." One way to ensure your children are doing this writing in as much detail as possible is to teach them to remember the thinking skills of a social scientist: considering cause and effect, comparing and contrasting, evaluating, drawing inferences. When social scientists write observations they want their reader to be able to picture what they are writing about, so they try to write about every little tiny thing they see, using the most precise words they possibly can. They also add what it feels like, right down to the smallest detail.

Another kind of writing is sketching with labels and captions. During social studies workshop, they may have drawn a striking image from one of their books and then labeled it using precise vocabulary. In writing workshop, they could add captions that explain the image in greater detail. It is conceivable that some students feeling full of the energy and enthusiasm of discovery will add a few words to one sketch then move on to another and another. Therefore, it is important to teach them that historians (and writers!) linger. This means teaching them to add all that they can add to their sketches, in both words and images.

You may also want to teach children some discrete strategies for note-taking. They may learn to take notes as boxes-and-bullets, recording a main idea and supporting facts. You may teach them to read a chunk of text and think, "What is the most important part of this? What facts support that important part?" You may teach them to keep their topic of inquiry in mind, if they have decided on one at this point, and return to their book for notes. That is, they'll be using tables of contents and indices to find sections in a text to reread and take notes on what they're rereading. All the while, they'll take notes on cards, Post-its, or small pieces of paper that can later be sorted and organized. The size of the piece of paper or card will help to ensure that they aren't recopying sections from the book but instead jotting quick notes about what they've learned.

If social scientists simply put their diagrams and observations into the book without any other writing, the people reading the books would probably be left wondering, "What does this mean? What does the writer think about all this stuff?" Teach students to help their future readers by writing their ideas that accompany the research they've begun to collect in their notebooks. Teach students to develop their ideas by asking themselves, "What do I think about this?" or "What is important about this?" and then write it down. That way, when someone reads their writing they won't be left wondering, "What does this mean?"

Social scientists may write an annotated time line. They take notes about events that happened in sequence. On the top of the time line, they might record facts about what happened and the date it happened. Below, they might annotate this time line with their own thoughts or ideas. You can imagine the student making a map of Harriet Tubman's journeys in her notebook, or a map of the main paths of the Underground Railroad and Harriet's stops on it. Or a time line of her escapes, or even a quick sketch of the plantation she escaped from. The main point of this kind of writing is that it is quick and its purpose is to synthesize information and ideas as you read to get ready to write.

Part Two: Writing to Develop a Research Base of Knowledge and Deepening Our Expertise in a Topic in Reading or Content-Area Workshop

It is important that you continue a strong reading and/or content-area workshop because the work during that time is the fuel for what children write in writing workshop. At this point in the unit, students will most likely be breaking up into different categories or subtopics, taking on a specific angle to your whole-class study. The experience of the whole-class research community in the previous part will support students' independence in smaller research groups. These smaller research groups help meet the demands of the Common Core State Standards' speaking and listening standards, which ask students to engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly. During these conversations, students will come to discussions prepared, having read materials they can explicitly draw on as they explore ideas under discussion. It will be helpful for students to write in their special notebooks or folders, collecting their thoughts, questions, and ideas to bring to their group. Harvey Daniels describes some of this in *Subjects Matter*, which may be a helpful resource for you. He encourages students to trade notebooks once a week and write to each other in their notebooks, responding to each others' research, reflections, and ideas. As a whole class across these next weeks, your children will continue to listen to read-alouds, watch videos, even take field trips.

In Writing Workshop

In this second part, while students are reading to learn about more specific parts of their topic, they will be using writing to expand their content-area knowledge. They'll write longer about initial notes and observations they made, question new knowledge they've learned, or generate new ideas. Students will need to begin to fuel their own research. One way to do this is to generate questions and pursue a line of thinking. Questions that begin with "What" or "When" lead researchers to quick answers that clarify information. Questions that begin with "Why" or "How" lead researchers on a longer pursuit to answer the question. For instance, initially students might ask, "When did the Underground Railroad begin?" and move on to question, "How did slaves learn the safe codes to use while traveling toward freedom?"

Additionally, historians often use their notebooks to question and wonder. Because it is important that children continue to write with volume and stamina, you will also want to teach them to try to hypothesize answers to these musings. You could imagine kids saying things like, "I wonder why . . ." Or "How come . . ." Teach kids to catch these thoughts by quickly jotting them in their notebooks. Then, teach them to think through possible answers by using prompts such as, "Maybe . . ." "Could it be . . ." "But what about . . ." and, "The best explanation is . . ." For example, a child might look at a picture in one of her books about Colonial America. The picture shows a

woman raking or hoeing in the field. Three other females—other adults and a child—are in the background on their knees, also tending to crops. The caption reads, "Everyone in the family pitched in to help with the chores." The child might write in her notebook:

> *I notice in the picture that there are four women working in the field. It looks like the field is right next to their house. It makes me think this is their own private garden. It's not very big; it might be that the food that they grow there is just for them and their family. The caption says that the whole family pitches in to help with the chores. But I only see girls and women in the picture. It could be that the women and girls had different chores than the men had. I'm surprised that a woman's chore would be tending to the garden, though. From what I already knew, I think of their chores as being things like sewing and cooking. I'll be interested to learn more about that.*

As the unit progresses, you will notice that your students are beginning to have more developed thoughts, ideas, and opinions about the class study. Congratulate your students on figuring out the value of writing to think about their topic. Here you might want to teach kids that historians not only write about what they observed or noticed, they also write about what they think about these observations and noticings. Therefore, you might teach kids to look back over the writing they've collected in their notebooks and to write long about what they are thinking or realizing. These entries might begin with "I know some things about . . ." and continue with examples, "One thing I know . . ." "Another thing I know . . ." This could then lead into some writing to think, "This makes me realize . . ." "This helps me understand . . ." or "I used to think . . . but now I know . . ." "My thinking changed because . . ."

This is a good time to either remind or teach students to make their own graphic organizers and develop their own systems for jotting as they read. They'll probably begin by putting Post-its on the texts they are reading. Then they can turn to their notebooks. This is a good time to review the boxes-and-bullets structure of:

Idea

- Example
- Example
- Example

Some of the students' books will naturally be organized like this as ideas and examples, and they can use the headings and subheadings to guide their note-taking. Often, however, they'll need to read over the text, think about the idea they have about this section, and then organize their notes with their original ideas and examples they carefully selected from the text. Later these will make good ordinate and subordinate sections for their research report. You may also teach your students to write full sentences and paragraphs in their notebooks, structured along the same lines as the boxes-and-bullets—almost like mini-essays, with an idea and evidence

and perhaps some reflection. For instance, you can model writing a notebook entry that sounds like:

> *I think Harriet Tubman is amazing because she was so brave. For instance, they tracked her with dogs and teams of men who wanted to capture her. They would track her for miles and miles and she had to walk in streams, and run at night. She was also brave because they did capture her, and she always escaped again. I can hardly imagine being caught, and then waiting for the moment to sneak out again.*

Teach your students to write reflections, where they look over their notes and write entries describing their new understandings and their emotions about what they learn, what they find upsetting, what they admire, and so on. This is where they will be developing their own ideas about what they read and putting those ideas into lots of words. Teach them to use the sentence starters you used for essays earlier in the year, such as, "Some people think . . . but I think . . ." "In other words . . ." and "Another way to say this is . . ."

You may see some of your students struggling to use accurate research practices to cite and reference in their writing. Some students struggle to determine which information is important to note and write down for later use. Teach students the strategy of looking across their notes and listing, for example, the three most important parts about what they are studying. For instance, if students have been reading about the Underground Railroad, they might say that Harriet Tubman, the struggles the slaves faced, and the new opportunities awaiting them were three important parts. Then, teach students to use these categories as filters, using them as guides for gathering important research. Some teachers find it helpful to put these three or more categories on index cards so that children can reread texts or their notes using the index card like a bookmark, stopping to copy important information on the cards.

You'll also want to teach students to prioritize the research they gather, determining which research is most important to include. You might take this opportunity to remind students of the ranking strategy work they learned earlier in the year. Remind them that using "-er" words (*bigger*, *lesser*, *greater*, *smaller*) is a helpful way to determine importance and prioritize information. Imagine students working with their research clubs, holding lists of facts and examples, asking each other, "Which had the *larger* effect?" "What had the *lesser* impact on . . . ?" "Who had the *greater* influence on . . . ?" Other key words, like *most* or *least*, are helpful to incorporate into conversation or writing when prioritizing information. Students can use phrases like *most* influential or *least* effective to sift through research and make decisions on which points to refer to in their later writing.

You'll want to seize this opportunity to teach children to cite research correctly, showing them how to incorporate research and put it in their own words. When practicing paraphrasing, you might find it helpful for students to write the research fact on one side of an index card and then rewrite it on the other side of the card from memory. Or perhaps you use the structure of the research club and have students play a form of written "Telephone." One student might write a research example they want

to paraphrase at the top of their notebook and pass it around to other members of the club, where each student reworks the example by replacing verbs, adding descriptive words or phrases or reworking the sentence. Of course, you'll teach into preserving the accuracy of the information. For instance, you might model reworking the research example:

> *Harriet Tubman is perhaps the most well-known of all the Underground Railroad's "conductors." During a ten-year span she made nineteen trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom.*

into

> *Harriet Tubman is maybe the most famous of all the Underground Railroad's guides. Over ten years, Tubman traveled nineteen times into the South to accompany more than 300 slaves to freedom.*

Part Three: Studying Mentor Texts and Writing Drafts of Research Reports in Writing Workshop

This third part is the intensive writing portion of the unit, where students pore over the notes they've taken and figure out ways to piece together different aspects of their reports. Students will be looking closely at mentors and writing many potential parts of their reports on an aspect of the whole-class study.

Students will need mentor texts as they are drafting their research reports. At first, it might feel as though you have little to no samples available for your students, because you probably don't have a bin in your library labeled "Research Reports"! First, you'll have your own demonstration writing. Second, the TCRWP reading series has many sample nonfiction articles on the accompanying CD-ROM to utilize as mentor texts. Third, access sites like Time for Kids for sample articles or reports. Last, the nonfiction and content-area books that line the shelves of your libraries include incredibly rich and valuable samples of writing that students can use as mentors. Just think of the pages that include lots of information categorized with headings, tables, or text boxes. Your goal is to collect many texts that can serve as models for what your children will make, not to collect all books about the topic of study. You might even give writing mentor texts about topics that are very different from what your children will write about so that they cannot copy the content but instead are inspired by the layout, structure, and craft of the books.

Remind your students of their learning from the year: often expository nonfiction is divided up into chapters, each with its own subtopic. To make a research report like this, the writer probably learned a lot about the topic, collecting facts and ideas, and then organized those ideas into categories. Or instead, the writer might have learned a lot about the topic, thought of categories, and then searched for specific facts to fit into those categories. You might also draw from some work they've done writing about

nonfiction, showing them how some sections take on a compare-contrast format, others a cause-effect format. You'll help your children see that nonfiction is detailed with specific words about the topic and partner sentences that explain, define, and teach the reader.

It will be very important to be reading aloud, doing shared reading, and shared writing of nonfiction. Reading like a writer and writing as a whole class will serve as students' immersion of what they'll write and will serve as a reminder of how to use mentors. For example, you could make an overhead of two sections from a nonfiction text or place them on your SMART Board and have the whole class read the pages together. You could ask your students questions leading them to notice aspects of how the parts are structured and about the kinds of information they find. You could ask them to talk about how they think a writer might have made this particular page, with this particular kind of writing. All the while, you can be making charts that serve as "directions" for how to make the different sections that will form their research reports. A chart could have a photocopy of a page with arrows labeling the different parts or sections. Then, during shared writing you may show your children how to use the resources—mentor texts, charts—to make that kind of writing.

All the while you'll also remind students that their notebooks are valuable resources filled with their thoughts, wonderings, observations, and conclusions. They could look back at what they've already written and use it not only as inspiration but also for elaboration. Or, they could take detailed drawings or diagrams that they created in their notebooks and cut them out and tape them to new pages, adding lines of text on the bottom of the page. You might teach children to look back to their detailed drawings to write more on the page. Or, teach them to go back to a sentence where they wrote a vocabulary word that might be new for their readers and try to write another sentence to support it, defining what it means. Other children would benefit from thinking about how to elaborate on other parts of pages, like the captions or labels. To decide what to teach in these few days, it would be helpful to look at your children's writing to see what they are already doing and teach them some new ways to elaborate.

Writing partners will help students move toward more independence and away from depending on you for content and writing feedback. You might teach a lesson about how to utilize a writing partner to give ideas for what information would be helpful to include. You can teach your children how to use their partners as sounding boards, asking them, "Did that make sense?" or "Do you feel like there is anything missing?" or "What questions do you still have about my topic after you read that page?" Later, you might ask children to read each other's work, making sure what they've written makes sense.

If you find that some of your children are including more information on each section than what fits their topics, you might teach children to read back over what they have, making sure to stay focused on what the sections are about.

Part Four: Revising, Editing, and Publishing to Get Ready to Teach Others in Writing Workshop

At this point in the unit, many of your children have drafted numerous sections in a variety of structures. In this final week, you will want to rally their passion and purpose in studying history toward sharing what they have learned with others. First, you will teach them to lay out all the writing they have done and choose the best parts to turn into a research report. They'll take those pieces and will revise, edit, and publish to share at the celebration. You might teach them to choose by thinking about their audience and asking, "Would others be interested in reading about . . . ?" Then, you will teach them to return to their mentors, reading closely to notice the details and subtlety within a given structure.You will definitely want to help kids notice and then try revision techniques again—things like partner sentences (if you can write one sentence about something, you can write two or more), sequencing (going from main idea to supporting details), vocabulary (using the specific words that match the class study), and adding extra sections of charts (diagrams, time lines, captions, front covers, back covers, and blurbs). It's okay, and probable, that you will be reteaching some of the same lessons you taught earlier.

Since these are informational texts that children have authored this month, you might remind them to check that their paragraphs each have a clear topic sentence, and that the boxes-and-bullets structure is clear to the reader. Model how you might split one paragraph into two smaller paragraphs to make each present a distinct idea. Ask writers to revise their heading and subheadings. Urge them to ponder, "Would a new subheading help the reader understand this part of the text more fully? Would a table of contents benefit the reader?" You'll also want to alert writers to the diagrams they might have included in the text. Ask them to revise these diagrams, looking over carefully to ensure there are adequate captions and labels that explain each diagram clearly to the reader. "Does the diagram explain or connect to the text on that page?" children might ask themselves. "Would this diagram work better for another portion of the text? Should I shift it there?"

Part of the revision process might include inserting new text features to give more clarity to the writing. Suggest that writers insert a text box or two if their readers might benefit from knowing an extra fact. Demonstrate how one might choose a title and a cover illustration for one's research report. Before they begin their final edit for spellings and punctuation, ask writers to consider, "Is this report teaching the reader about my topic in a clear way? What can I do to make my teaching even clearer?" Guide students to revise for focus or cohesion. All the parts of the report should not feel disjointed; instead they blend together or build on each other.

Writers might consider if they want their piece to have a slant or angle, or if they might include their own or others' perspectives on just one part, like the introduction. Using what they know about analytical writing from previous units, they might return to some of the informational writing and elaborate by providing perspective.

As the unit draws to a close, it will be important to remind your young historians that they've already learned so much about how to fix up their writing for publica-

tion—capitalization, beginning and ending punctuation, and limiting the number of *and*s in any given sentence. You can teach kids to edit their work by rereading it to make sure it all makes sense, crossing out and adding parts as necessary. Kids can check their writing for frequently misspelled words and spelling patterns they have been working on, all by themselves.

Finally, to fancy up the pieces for publishing, kids might use real photographs, just like many informational texts. They might also add more details to their pictures and diagrams, as well as color. Kids might also make important vocabulary bold or underlined.

Some classrooms may prefer, especially if this teaching is contained within your social studies block, for students to share their new understandings in projects. This can include acting out important scenes (narrating why this moment is important in American history); having a symposium on the issues of the Revolution and formation of government that still affect us today; using film, picture books, and articles to compare the American Revolution to others that have happened around the world; and so on.

UNIT NINE

Memoir

JUNE

Anyone who has ever kept a journal or a writer's notebook knows that writing is a powerful tool for thinking. When we write we can take passing and impalpable images, insights and memories, and pin them to the page. Our thoughts stay with us, fodder for more thinking, for better ideas. In the process we learn to write not only to capture but to *understand*. In memoir, we seize the opportunity the written word affords us. We take the opportunity to reread, to rethink, and to re-imagine the very selves we've come to know. That is to say, this is a heady, advanced, significant unit of study—although, it is also a unit that can be done by some students in a much less-advanced way and still work for them. The unit was designed as the crown jewel and the culmination in the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*, and you'll want to lean on *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well* as you teach it. In electing to end the year with this unit, you are sending a message to your students. The message is: "I'll be expecting you to rise to new heights this month, to reach for horizons that are far more ambitious than any you have ever known before. This month will be for work that is more grown-up, more important, than anything you've done before." That is, ending the year with memoir means ending the year with ambition and rigor, urging students to draw on all they know about narrative writing, interpretation, and meaning making. It is important to note that on Webb's hierarchy of intellectual thought, memoir writing qualifies as belonging to the highest category, because this unit requires reflection, synthesis, and critical thinking. The unit also represents an important touchstone in any Common Core State Standards–aligned curriculum, since those standards require that 35% of students' writing be narrative. The Common Core State Standards include, in their appendix of benchmark texts, narra-

tive exemplars that represent work that is far more sophisticated than the benchmark texts illustrated for opinion and information writing.

Teachers, before embarking on the details of the unit, it is important to clarify the term *memoir* and to consider possible goals for the unit. You may be unclear about the differences among personal narrative writing, autobiographic writing, and memoir. The truth is that in the world, different people use the terms differently, and sometimes interchangeably. The teachers connected with the RWP have settled on our own shared definitions for the terms—definitions that are widely accepted—and we have found it helpful to do so. We think of personal narratives as true stories—they tend to capture a vignette or a small moment in a writer's life. A personal narrative does not attempt to tell a writer's entire life story, as one would expect to find in an autobiography, but instead zooms in on an important moment or event. The writer of a personal narrative *does*, however, try to bring the elements of story to his or her true story, and this writer also asks, "What is this story really about?" bringing that idea forward just as a fiction writer shapes his or her story so as to advance a meaning or a theme. Memoir, too, often contains stories. These stories are usually told in a retrospective fashion. (In a memoir, there is almost always a *now* and a *then*. There is a sense that the text is being written by someone older and wiser, who is now looking back to make sense of prior experience.) But in memoir, the message is especially primary. Memoir is the writer's effort to say something big and important about himself or herself. Stories are there, then, in the service of the larger message. That larger message is an interpretation. Students think of interpretation as the work they do when reading a novel. But, one can also read or reflect on the stories of one's own life and develop interpretations, or life-lessons, about one's own life. The writer rereads or reflects on the story of his or her life and asks, "What are the life-lessons I have learned?" "What themes or issues surface in my writing again and again?" These might range from "I'm the kind of person who says what I think, even if this gets me in trouble," to "My father's illness has forced me to be strong," to "The times in life that you most wish you could skip are often the times that change you the most." In this way, reflection leads to an idea, and then writers collect vignettes *around* the idea. Writers of memoir may still construct tight, detailed narratives—a memoirist might write about a day at the zoo with her dad—but the purpose of the story is to use this day, this episode, to reveal something enduring about the writer. Learning to write in this way is an important part of the Common Core State Standards, which requires that students learn to use writing as a way to convey reflection.

When ending the year with a unit on memoir, then, you will want to explain to students that the writer who has, since September, collected stories about his Little League baseball games will now have the opportunity to lay out these stories and reflect on their meaning, perhaps eventually learning that what ties these moments together is the sense of belonging that comes from being part of a team, or the feeling of pride that comes from watching his father's smile from the stands. These discoveries, this process of reflection, are the essence of memoir.

Materials for the Unit

Before beginning memoir, you and your colleagues will want to study student work to imagine the various shapes your children's writing might take. You'll find examples of student work in *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well,* on the *Resources for Teaching Writing* CD-ROM. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project website also has a collection of student writing from this unit (www.readingandwritingproject.com). If you can do so, you'll benefit from reading Katherine Bomer's book, *Writing a Life*, and Bill Zinsser's, *Inventing the Truth,* an anthology of articles on memoir that includes chapters by Toni Morrison, Annie Dillard, and Russell Baker. It will help enormously if you also read some published memoir. We especially suggest the anthology, *When I Was Your Age: Original Stories About Growing Up*, edited by Amy Ehrlich. You might consider starting a mentor text basket in your classroom where these texts are displayed. You may want to include stories from *When I Was Your Age* or passages from *Knots on My Yo-Yo String,* by Jerry Spinelli. Lee Bennett Hopkins's *Been to Yesterdays: Poems of a Life* is an anthology of poems, as is Cynthia Rylant's *Waiting to Waltz*; and both are memoir. Picture books such as *We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past* by Jacqueline Woodson, *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco, or Cynthia Rylant's *When I Was Young in the Mountains* also make for powerful mentor texts. Encourage students to add to this basket as they find other sample memoirs in their independent reading. Encourage them to take time from writing to immerse themselves in reading the sort of text they hope to write and to rely on these texts as they draft and revise their own. Keep in mind that familiar texts make for the strongest mentors, so you'll want to make a point of exposing children to these texts through your read-aloud at the start of the year.

As you read over student samples of memoir and published memoir, you will want to continue thinking about what it is that you imagine your students writing. Because students will have grown up working within units of study that channel them into one structure or another—that is, into narrative writing or essay writing or how-to writing—one of the important challenges for students in this unit is asking them to construct their own shape for their writing. The texts that they produce will not all be the same. They'll need to think, "What do I want to say?" and "How can I best structure a piece—organize a text—to say what I want?" Your review of published memoir will show you that there are countless ways that a writer can structure a memoir. The unit will present youngsters with options, which we think is an important message. These are end-of-the-year fourth graders, and they should be able to make informed choices and work with increasing independence. This is not to say that your students won't need guidance, some more than others, and so it will be especially important that you have several optional templates in mind for how youngsters' memoirs might be structured. You can teach them these optional structures and allow them to choose between them—or to combine several structures into their own hybrid. One added benefit of this instruction is that by encouraging students to choose a structure that best supports their message, the unit helps students think analytically about structures in texts, become aware that authors choose structures just as they choose words and details, and know that this choice needs to match the author's message.

A Few Memoir Structures

Big Idea Writing, Followed by a Focused Narrative, Angled to Illustrate That Big Idea

In this structure, the writer begins with a few reflective lines or a reflective paragraph furthering a realization the writer has come to about life. The writer might begin with words like, "All my life . . ." or "I've come to realize . . ." and then progress to set up and unpack one of life's truths. Typically, this idea is then illustrated with a small moment. "Eleven" by Sandra Cisneros is an example of this, as is Emily's memoir about her older sister from the *Units of Study Resources.* The writer sets up the big idea and elaborates on it a bit ("Before my sister went to middle school, when the shine in her eyes was still there, matching her bright smile, she used to play with me. We used to play merry-go-round-chair on my mom's spinning chair, but all that changed when she went to middle school."), and then Emily follows this up with a small moment that illustrates her insight.

Essay Structure

Some writers choose to structure their memoirs like a personal essay: stating an idea, reasons, or ways that that reason is true, and then supporting these reasons with multiple small moments. For example, a writer might realize that in notebook entry after notebook entry, he writes about the times when he hoped his father would come to a school or family event, and at the last minute, his father was too busy. This youngster might decide to write a memoir about his longing for more time with his dad, and to structure it as an essay in which each of his support paragraphs tells about one way in which he has missed his dad. If you choose to showcase this structure you might consider pulling samples from your past personal essay units or from the personal essay samples on the *Resources for Teaching Writing* CD-ROM.

The List

You will find that some memoirs are structured as lists, much like "pearls on a string." The string represents the common theme and the pearls may be snapshots or small anecdotes. Paul Auster's *Invention of Solitude* has an excerpt that fits this structure (see Session VI from *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well),* in which he strings together a list of memories with the refrain, "He remembers . . ." Cynthia Rylant's *When I Was Young in the Mountains*, structured as a series of snapshots, is also a strong mentor text for this structure. A child writing in this way might choose to string together a list of memories about *first times* or *last times* or a favorite uncle, with a refrain like "He always . . ." or "I remember the first time . . ." to usher in each small anecdote about that topic, elaborating on each story, and then returning to the familiar refrain to introduce a new anecdote.

The Plan for the Unit

By this time in the year, most of your children will be well into their second writer's notebook, giving them plenty to draw on as they begin their memoir. Children will begin this unit by learning to reread and reflect on past entries, trying, as they do, to grow big ideas, which they will then collect around. This progression of work doesn't exactly follow the pattern of most writing units: with writers collecting focused entries for a few days, then choosing a focused seed idea, then rehearsing and drafting. That previous progression kept writers working with focused texts. This unit opens the Pandora's box of writing about big ideas, allowing for more messiness, more of a mix of big ideas and small stories, and leaving writers with more work to do to create well-structured pieces out of rich chaos. Writers in this unit do not focus right away on a seed idea but instead choose a "blob idea" (also known as a writing territory) and collect entries around that territory. The process of developing big ideas starts early in the unit.

To help writers get in touch with the really big territories and issues of their lives, you may want to read a few especially provocative excerpts from published memoirs to them, knowing that writing can serve, as Kafka writes, as "an ice-axe to break the frozen sea within us." The memoirs that you read to them will inspire your young writers to be brave enough to tackle important topics and to be honest. Literature calls us from our hiding places, helping us bring ourselves to the page. The importance of this can't be overemphasized. Of any quality of good writing, the one that matters the most may be that elusive quality writers refer to as *voice*. A person writes with voice when that person allows the imprint of his or her personality to come through in his or her writing. For examples of student writing that you might share with your writers, refer to Session I from the CD-ROM.

Once writers have a sense of their "blob idea," you can channel them to collect both Small Moment entries and reflections that relate to that idea. You'll teach writers to do this writing in ways that help them think more about their emerging insight. One way to do this is to teach writers to ask questions that uncover the mysteries that lie at the heart of these ideas.

Of course, as young people collect entries that relate to their "blob idea," they (and you) will be thinking, "How might I somehow pull this together to create a unified piece of writing?" To help your students think about this, you will want to invite them to study mentor texts to note various common structures (such as those described earlier). Youngsters can look at published text, asking, "What component sections does this contain?" and "Why might the author have structured the text in this manner?" and "What can I learn about structuring my memoir from studying how other authors have structured theirs?"

After collecting entries, studying student sample and mentor texts, and choosing a structure within which to write, students will be ready to draft. As always, drafting works best if it is fast and furious. The fact that a draft is written quickly generally positions students to willingly engage in some serious revision.

But let's revisit this progression, looking with more detail at the specific lessons you might teach and the work your students might do.

Developing and Collecting: Writing to Discover Our Thinking, and Writing with Depth

As mentioned previously, you'll begin the unit by telling writers that they'll be writing memoir. Their goal will be to put themselves onto the page. They will probably still write about small moments, but these will be small moments that show who the writer is as a person—small moments that capture the tensions in the writer's life, that show turning points and life themes. You can tell youngsters that you'll help them make memoir from the small moments of their lives, and that the very first thing for them to do is to collect small moments that are not, in fact, small at all. You can remind students of all the strategies they already know for generating Small Moment stories. They can think of a person, a place, a thing, or, perhaps most of all, an issue that matters in their life and then list small moments connected to that person, place, thing, or issue. Perhaps a youngster experiences peer pressure and jots small moments when he or she has struggled with peer pressure. Encourage your writers to collect snippets of as many memories as they can squeeze out. You might even take students on a "memory walk" around the school, stopping to reminisce about places where memories live and ask, "What does this place mean to me?" Even as they are collecting, students can begin to reflect by stopping at significant entries and asking, "What does this make me think or realize about myself?" and "How does this change who I am?" You'll use your own writing to encourage students to put moments that bristle with meaning onto the page. Encourage students to take just a few minutes to jot possible Small Moment stories into lists, and then channel them to write, fast and furious, long and strong. By the end of fourth grade, your students should know that you expect them to produce a page-and-a-half or two-page entry in a day's writing workshop, and similar amounts of writing at home, and you expect their rehearsal for writing to take minutes, not days. As your students collect these entries, you'll look at them and gauge how much reteaching you need to do. Are they starting with action, dialogue, and storytelling rather than summarizing? Do they seem to be working to not only tell what happened but to also write this as a compelling story? You may want to bring out charts from narrative work done earlier in the year to remind writers of all they know. Be ready to say to them, "Guys, you aren't doing anything close to the work I know you can do. Draw a line under what you have written so far. Let's remember what you know, and then start again, this time writing in ways that show all you know."

Teach your students that, as Katherine Bomer elaborates in *Writing a Life*, "The resulting lists, dialogues, descriptions, and small narrative moments will constitute the junkyard, treasure chest, photo album, or whatever metaphor you use to describe a collection of thought entries from which students will choose ideas to develop in their memoir draft." After your students have collected Small Moment stories for a few days and reminded themselves how to write those stories, you may teach them that they can annotate these, writing in the margins about the big issues and ideas that hide in the details of those stories. A story about an incident in the school cafeteria may really be a story about fitting in, feeling judged, and wanting to be popular. The

writer can jot those topics in the margins of the entry. Children will learn to ask, "What meaning does this pattern have? How do these events, memories, and feelings fit with my idea of who I am?" and "Is there a metaphor, symbol, or image I could use to represent what I'm trying to say about myself and my life?" This, then, will help you transition to the point where you can tell your students that because they are in a unit of study on memoir, they will be writing about the biggest topics of their lives—the really big themes that they find themselves coming back to over and over. Don Murray once said that most people, as writers, have just two or three topics that they write about again and again. What are those topics for your students? Maybe, for one of them, it's the relationship with a sibling, for another it's peer pressure, for a third it's summer camp.

One of the important things to help writers realize is that through the process of collecting and writing around a seed idea—or, as previously mentioned, a "blob idea"—writers' sense of what it is they want to say and show will change. Instead, writers write toward an emerging sense of what it is they mean to say. We may start by saying why we are writing about something. We may have a general intent, saying something like, "I'm going to write a memoir that explores my homesickness for the old house, maybe for the old tree or the tree fort, or for both." Then, as we work, we zoom in with increasing decisiveness. Usually ideas about any one topic are complicated, so once a writer has written about one set of ideas on a topic, the writer can come back and revisit the topic, writing an entry that begins, "On the other hand . . ." In the end, some of the best writing will result from efforts to get our mental and emotional arms around the full breadth of a topic. Then, too, we teach children the wisdom of Eudora Welty's advice, "Write what you *don't know* about what you know." Where are the mysteries, the questions, the feelings of angst for you in this beloved, close-to-home topic? As part of this work, you'll help writers realize that their ideas about a topic are complicated and that thinking deeply and precisely is important. You can teach writers to choose and develop, reselect and redevelop a seed idea. You will help your students postpone closure, letting their emerging sense of directions and their image of what it is they will write grow within them.

Revising from the Start: Generating Thoughtful Writing

As writers collect around their big, important blob idea—putting small moments, turning points, and images into their notebooks, you'll want to refer to Session II, *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well,* to help them rewrite from the start. They'll need to be reminded even when writing about big ideas that they still must write with focus and detail. As writer Richard Price one said, "The bigger the topic, the smaller we write." You'll want to spend a bit of time helping students remember the strategies they already know for writing compelling narratives, such as, writers zoom in on a tiny bit of time, dream the dream of that episode, almost enacting it as they write, and writers aim to capture the drama of the moment in such a way that a reader can feel as if he or she is experiencing the moment for the first time. If this is a moment about saying

goodbye to a big brother before he goes off to college, and the writer wants to show that it's hard to talk about things like missing a sibling, then perhaps the author would begin the story by having himself rehearsing in his mind the conversation he wanted to have with his big brother. Then, approaching the room where his brother was, the writer could reenact the inner monologue of trying to get up the courage to tackle this subject, and so on.

You might also show children that the same story can be told in a several ways so as to convey a variety of meanings. You may want to tell about a person you know who often retells stories. And, each time this person shapes his or her story, it is to make a different point. In the minilesson, you could show how the person in your life retells a single story differently, based on the point that he or she wants to make.

As students gather Small Moment stories to capture and illustrate their big ideas, they can also revise the stories to make them more effective—which will mean steering clear of summary and going toward storytelling or revealing the internal story. You can help writers draw on all they know about stories—how can the setting of a story, for example, help further what the writer wants to say.

Then, too, the writer will also need to write reflection entries. Think about the beginning of "Eleven," for example. Often when students write ideas, they resort to clichés, in which case you'll want to teach them the saying, "The words that came first were anyone's words—I had to make them my own." Help writers capture their own specific truth. The conference at the start of *Seeing Possibilities*, a DVD full of video snippets, will help you—and your children—imagine the sort of work writers will be doing.

Expect that children will be concerned about the line between truth and fiction. Frank McCourt, whose memoir *Angela's Ashes*, was published in the United States as nonfiction and in Europe as fiction, often spoke about how what was important was that the writer told about true feelings and that it felt true on the page. Writers inevitably won't remember, exactly, every line of dialogue. Let your kids know that they may have felt that the day was dark and stormy because their emotions were dark and stormy. What's important is that your writers feel as if the stories they want to tell matter, and that they try to write them in such a way that they'll matter to the reader. They will actually learn to blend the art of fiction writing and personal narrative into just the art of narrative.

All of this will sound like very challenging work—and it is. This does not mean, however, that you should allow your students to eke out tiny entries at a snail's pace. Instead, expect each writer to write something like two pages a day, and an equal amount every evening, (ten pages in school a week, double that in all). It is critical that you help writers understand they can grab a pen and write fast, filling a page in ten minutes and moving on to the next. If you question whether this is a realistic expectation for your young writers, ask children to remain in the meeting area after the minilesson and to write alongside each other for a bit. Don't tell them that your goal will be to notice the length of writing they produce in ten minutes of writing time, but *do* rally them to work productively alongside each other. "Let's not waste a second," you can say. "Let's really get a lot of writing done." After ten minutes of straight writing, ask children to mark where they both began and stopped their writing and to count

the number of lines they produced, then triple that number. This new number can give you a rough index for the amount of text that child can do in one day's writing workshop and again, in one evening's writing time. That is, if the writer produced a particular amount in ten minutes, certainly the child should be able to produce *three times* that amount of writing each day and again, each evening. This will help you see that most children in your class can be held to standards for production that are considerably higher than those to which you have become accustomed, aligning with the Common Core State Standards. It can also help you see that some children need small-group instruction and lots of praise (a star for half a page, encouragement to keep going, prompts to keep the hand moving, and so forth) geared toward helping them write more quickly.

You'll double the amount of writing your students do by using evenings as well as school time for gathering entries. Note that the homework assignments you give to your children do matter. If you invest in homework, then your children will as well. For support in creating homework assignments, we recommend looking at *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. There are numerous carefully designed homework assignments aligned to this curricular calendar on that CD-ROM—ready for you to tailor to your kids and to print out and send home with children. Children who spend even just twenty minutes a night writing will have many pages of writing in their notebook each month—and there is no reason not to ask for such a tiny bit of time!

Providing Effective Feedback That Will Support Writing Growth

When you are conferring during the collecting and developing phase of this unit, remember that you need to make sure that you invite each and every individual to invest in writing, and in the class. In *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well,* teachers are reminded that, "There are only a few times in the lives of each of us when we feel truly heard. It can be an extraordinarily powerful thing to have someone listen and say, 'What you're onto is really huge.' When someone listens like that, really taking in the significance of what we only gesture toward, suddenly our eyes well with tears, and we find ourselves saying more than we knew we had to say." This unit will work if it invites every writer to write with honesty, intensity, and energy; it is, therefore, important that we, as teachers, begin the unit with an enormous spirit of receptivity and empathy.

Especially now, at the start of the year and at the start of memoir work, it is critically important that we, as teachers, be people who gasp and wince and weep and cheer in response to the heartbreak and the happiness that students bring into the writing workshop. Ultimately, a youngster will be able to write well about his or her own life only if that writer can reexperience it. We need to listen deeply and to be profoundly moved by our students' life themes so that they can be moved by them as well.

If your first job in this unit is to reestablish the kind of writing workshop where children peek out from their hiding places and take risks with a pencil in hand, then your second will be to assess what that writer produces and ask, "What does this writer most need from me, as a teacher of writing?" John Hattie, Professor of Educa-

tion at the University of Auckland in New Zealand and researcher of international renown, has analyzed studies involving tens of millions of students in an attempt to quantify what makes for effective instruction and learning. His research lays out three principles that, in over 300,000 studies, have been shown to have the greatest affect on student learning. These three principles state that teachers must set challenging but accessible goals for students, students need to be crystal clear about what these goals are so they can work toward them actively, and students must receive concrete, instructional feedback on the extent to which they are approaching these goals and on what they can do next to progress.

Keep these three principles in mind when conferring or teaching in small groups. You'll want to make sure that students are actively working toward goals they care about. You might consider helping each student to start a goal sheet, where they record progress. For instance, for students who need to work on stamina and fluency, you might set a goal—writing a page and a half each day in the writing workshop—and then you might devise a system so those writers push their own stamina and record the results. In conferences, you and the writers who are working on stamina and fluency can talk about strategies that are working, and those that aren't, and can gauge progress.

Drafting and Structuring Go Hand in Hand

By the end of the second week in the unit, you will probably want your minilessons to help writers think about alternate ways to structure their memoir. As they move to drafting, writers need to ask, "Will the piece contain one focused narrative? Two stories held together by reflection? Will there be a clearly stated idea, or will the story suggest a theme?" You will use student work and published texts to show students some of the most common structures and help them to spend some time charting possible shapes for the writing that they'll do. As students consider one way to structure their writing, it will be important for them to examine published work to notice the particulars of what writers have done. The book, *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well* will be a great help to you at this point. "Eleven," by Sandra Cisneros from *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* could be in that folder—and don't worry if children have studied it before. We also recommend "Not Enough Emilys" from *Hey World, Here I Am!* by Jean Little and "My Grandmother's Hair" by Cynthia Rylant from the anthology, *Home*.

Draw on samples of student writing from the Reading and Writing Project website and from the CD-ROM that accompanies *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*, as an added source of support as students explore alternate structures. You may want to invite children to examine their own entries for structure, boxing out sections that resemble the narratives they will have written all year and sections that resemble essays, all the while searching for the structure that will best frame the big meaning they hope to express.

When reading a text, looking at its structure, you can teach students to look for component parts. Paragraphs can help them do this. Some kinds of words also signal the microstructures in a text. Some signal words suggest the text is organized chronologically (*next*, *for instance*) and some suggest the text is organized to highlight contrasting information (words like *yet*). Still other signal words suggest the text reveals a cause-and-effect relationship (*therefore*). You want to teach students to read the whole excerpt to notice when the author has shifted from writing in one microstructure into writing in a second microstructure. Is the text composed of a list of items? Does the text contain one small story after another? Is it a single, extended narrative? Is it made up of questions and then answers? Is it a claim followed by one reason after another?

Although writers can make calculated decisions to organize a text in one way or another, the actual process of writing is more passion-hot than critic-cold. Milton Meltzer has said, "In the writer who cares, there is a pressure of feelings, which emerges in the rhythm of sentences, in the choice of details, in the color of the language." Sometimes the writer inserts reflection at the very beginning (who can ever forget "Eleven," and that image of an onion?). Sometimes the writer inserts it at the end (think of Jerry Spinelli's *Knots in My Yo-Yo String*, and how he comments on his own story at the end, telling the reader what it makes him think and feel). This will be new work for your students, to actively plan for how their story will lead the reader toward and around ideas and how they'll state those ideas. They don't have to know all this at the beginning though—you'll get them started writing a few small moments in their notebooks, then they'll reflect on some of the ideas in those moments, and on the issues, themes, and ideas that often interest them as writers, and they'll focus on stories that show those ideas. Then you're off!

Sometimes young (and adult) writers find it helpful to take a few minutes to make a storyboard before starting to draft the memoir—showing in each box what anecdote they'll tell, and where the bits of reflective writing will be. Others like a flowchart. And often, it's in the drafting that writers realize they need to pause and think about their structure. Sometimes, as writers write their memoir, they begin to clarify in their mind why an anecdote is so important and what idea it is really showing. Then they can go back and insert reflection at the beginning of the piece. Or they can try waiting until the end and putting reflection there. Have some familiar memoirs that you have marked up to show where the writer is telling a story and where the writer is developing an idea or reflection. It's also helpful for your writers to talk to a partner, explaining what they want to do in their draft—how they want to develop their memoir, what structure and craft they'll use.

Revise to Bring Out Meaning and Balance the Internal and External Stories

Students will have revised their entries throughout this unit, and now they will revise their draft. You may want to refer to Session IX through Session XIII in *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well* to guide your instruction, while also relying on what you notice

when studying your children's writing. One of the first things you'll probably want to teach children is how to revisit the most significant parts of their draft to elaborate on those parts. You might teach children how including telling details can help convey their thoughts. You'll certainly want to show how you emphasize the parts of the story that illuminate the central idea or theme. One significant craft move, which writers use to illuminate such themes, is the use of refrains. You can teach your children to reread their writing for powerful lines that are worth highlighting and to figure out where and how that line could be repeated again in the piece to make the most essential ideas stand out. As children write to reveal the central theme of their piece, you'll also want to teach them to revise by telling the truth. Return children to the idea of memoir as a place to which we bring our heartbreak and happiness and teach them to bring out the emotional truth of a moment by revealing what they were feeling at the time, or the truth about how they feel now as they look back on a moment. Then, too, you will want to teach children that they might revise by leaving things out. Annie Dillard says the true work of memoir writing is learning how to "fashion a text," knowing "what to put in and what to leave out." We all know the child who writes without leaving a single detail to the imagination, beginning with blueberry pancakes at breakfast and ending with the chicken and mashed potato dinner he enjoyed in the evening. For this child, and for many children really, it can be difficult to know which details to include and which to leave out, which details further the overall theme of the story and which are merely inconsequential distractions. Memoir offers you an opportunity to teach this learned art, showing young writers how to ask, "What is it I'm really trying to say here?" and then "Which details help to show that?"

Using a metaphor or comparison also adds beauty and craft to memoirs and can provide a means to capturing an idea or feeling that is too big or complicated for words. Your job will be to teach the children that writing with metaphor is not about tacking on a comparison but rather about allowing a strong metaphorical image to emerge from the writing that already exists. Another way to revise and elaborate is to incorporate more than one small moment, or to try the same small moment, this time angling it to show more than one idea. Sometimes you can show writers how to develop more than one emotion or feeling—many good stories center on moments of complicated emotions.

You can also teach your writers how to experiment with different craft to illuminate the underlying theme, as the Common Core State Standards suggest. If my theme is the trouble I have explaining myself to my mother, for instance, I could show this through dialogue. But I could also try it again, this time contrasting what happens in the dialogue with inner thinking. You may teach your students to consider if a different small moment could illustrate this theme. They could go back to the notebook to try it out, or draft a new part and see how it fits with their overall draft.

You might also want to touch upon strategies for endings by studying mentor texts, noticing how writers reflect on their experiences and provide closure. Writers can try several endings. Some of Jerry Spinelli's memoirs in *Knots in My Yo-Yo String,* for instance, end with reflection from a current perspective. Others hint at what happens

next for the character—what story will be next. Others end with a sort of cliff hanger, leaving it unclear whether the writer had learned his lesson or if it will be repeated.

Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

Katherine Bomer has been calling for more emphasis on celebration as a significant part of the writing process. She offers up the idea of children writing their memoirs in large print, so they can wallpaper corridors and ceilings as installation pieces. You may want to invite students to rehearse reading their pieces out loud, then tape them for a kind of *This American Life* podcast. They could sort them by theme and publish them in a few anthologies. They could sort them by topic, and publish them in different places in the school, so there are writing boards for pieces about families, and others for memoirs that include pets and animals, and others about our bodies, and so forth. Invite your students into the celebration decisions, and you may particularly encourage them to sort stories by theme—if your students know ahead of time that their stories are sorted this way, it often helps them to develop that theme!

Additional Resources

As mentioned in the write-up, the memoir unit of study is an ambitious one for your students. The good news, however, is that you can teach a memoir unit in differentiated ways, knowing that some of your students will essentially produce personal narrative writing while others will grasp the full breadth of reflective writing. Either way the work will be good for them. You will want to look at the student work on the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5* CD-ROM and on the Reading and Writing Project website (www.readingandwritingproject.com) for examples of student memoir. If some of your students struggle and end up writing pieces that feel closer to personal narratives than memoir, lean on the fourth-grade personal narrative write-up to help them with this work. You'll want to pull out charts from your previous narrative units and make sure that children carry all they've learned, all year, into this new form of writing.

In any case, expect your students to begin the unit writing focused, detailed, chronologically ordered, personal narrative small moments. They should have no trouble generating topics, though if a few do struggle with this we recommend you convene a small group and support them in this venture, making sure to teach transferable strategies, assess understanding, and then expect independence quickly. Now, at the end of fourth grade, it is reasonable to expect children to write a page and a half in one day's writing workshop. They should all write with end punctuation and paragraphs, and with a variety of sentence structures. For those that don't, you'll want to continue the teaching you've surely been doing all year in this area. Look at students' on-demand writing and assess what they can produce in a sitting. You'll use this as a baseline, and plan instruction that will help their writing progress steadily from there.

The following resource, which offers one possible path for instruction, is based on the book *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well*, from the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5*. Specific references are made to the fifteen sessions in this book, as well as suggestions for additional teaching points you might incorporate. As with all our units, we encourage you to build on and adapt this work to meet the specific needs of your children.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Developing and Collecting: Writing to Discover Our Thinking, and Writing with Depth

- "Today, I'm going to teach you that memoirists look for Life Topics by rereading their writer's notebooks or recent entries, looking for subjects that thread their way through much of what they have written." (See Session I, "Uncovering Life Topics" in *Memoir: The Art of Writing Well.*)
  - *Tip:* "Writers reread old entries, asking themselves 'What is it I'm seeing again and again in my writing?' They're on the lookout for people, places, emotions, or objects that repeat themselves."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Sometimes Life Topics are hidden and writers need to dig deeper to discover them. As writers, we can look at seemingly unconnected entries and ask, 'How might these connect with each other?' Oftentimes, there are underlying issues or truths beneath the seemingly separate bits."
  - *Tip:* "Sometimes a writer finds he or she has one or two great images, within which the writer's heart opens. We search for those images."
  - *Teaching share:* "Writers take charge of their own writing lives by creating self-assignments."
- "Today I want to teach you that writers remember the wise words of poet Richard Price, 'The bigger the meaning, the smaller you write.' They take the big meanings they uncover and imagine the ways they might write small about them, often by collecting Small Moment stories that go with a Life Topic, attempting to bring out the deeper meaning as they write the story. As they do this, they rely on everything they know about generating Small Moment ideas. They might think of first times, last times, turning points, or moments when we learned something, but this time using those strategies to generate ideas that relate to a Life Topic."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers use what they know, the strategies they have in their back pocket, to generate and write small moments. They do the same when writing about big meanings. Yesterday you learned to reread your entries looking for hidden themes that underlie several stories. Another way to write about big ideas is by taking that idea and writing,

'The thought I have about this is . . .' and then writing long to uncover new thoughts."

- "Writers don't just write to come up with new story ideas, they write to find depth in the ideas they've already uncovered. One way to do this is by writing, as a famous memoirist once said, 'What you *don't know* about what you *know*.' To do this, writers take a topic they know well and ask, 'What *don't* I know about what I know?' and 'Where's the mystery in this topic?' and then write to explore those questions."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers write to explore new ideas and do so by asking and entertaining hard questions and by visiting a subject, repeatedly, from different perspectives. After a writer has written about a subject by advancing one idea or claim on that subject, the writer may deliberately try to write about the same subject, advancing the exactly opposite idea."
  - *Teaching share:* "Sometimes a writer thinks about a topic or a question by linking that one starting subject to one thing, and another, and another (to a quote, a statistic, a memory, a classmate's idea)."
- "Today I want to teach you that, when a writer wants to take a deep dive in his or her writing, one strategy that he or she uses is to read (or listen) to literature and then write. We let the story wash over us, and then in the silence afterward, we write what we need to write. We don't write about the text; we write in the direction the text has pushed us."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers make use of multiple strategies as they write, combining and layering what they've learned. Even as they free-write off a piece of literature, a writer might choose to then take that writing and ask, 'What's the mystery here?' or decide to write small about a time in their life when this big idea was especially true. All of this is just to say that writers make use of *everything* they know, employing strategies on more than one day and for more than one purpose."
  - *Teaching share:* "Writers can rely on partners to help them make plans for future work."
- "Today I'm going to teach you that writers need lots of ways to accomplish almost any job. Writers have lots of strategies for choosing a seed idea, and we know that sometimes the process of focusing our writing, choosing a seed idea, happens over the course of many days. Strategies for choosing a seed idea include: rereading entries with intention and value, marking small parts of writing that stand out, looking for connections and patterns, categorizing our most powerful writing into several possible Life Topics, choosing one Life Topic, and writing an entry that combines various images and ideas related to your topic."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "After choosing a blob idea, writers take time to capture this idea in a paragraph or two."

- *Teaching share:* "Writers know that probing questions help writing to evolve more quickly. They take a reflective stance on their own ideas by asking questions like, 'What are the reasons I keep writing about this?' 'I've written what's obvious about this, what else can I write?' 'What do I want to show about myself?' and 'What does this say about me?' "

Part Two: Drafting and Structuring Go Hand in Hand

- "Writers structure our texts in lots of different ways, and today I'm going to teach you a strategy for doing this. One way we learn to structure our texts is by reading texts other authors have written and by studying the structures they have used or made. We can then decide which structure feels best suited to our topic and make a writing plan for ourselves."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers often need to make decisions as they study mentor texts, deciding whether they are memoirs or personal narratives, and then making a decision about what structure the text seems to follow."
  - *Teaching share:* "Writers take time to reread their own writing from an aerial view, noticing how they've structured their entries."
- "Today I going to teach you how to be your own teacher! When a writer can't go to a writing teacher, we can become our own. But before we can suggest next steps for ourselves, we need to spend time listening. A good writing teacher looks backward in order to look forward. He or she might ask questions about previous work and how it turned out, why a writer is trying certain things, what else the writer plans to try, and what plans the writer has for what to do next."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "As writers elaborate on their seed idea and collect small moments to go along with it, they often find they want to revise what they are saying. Rewriting and revising a seed idea, imagining new possibilities, is an important part of the writing process."
  - *Teaching share:* "Writers share among themselves and help each other to care about their blob ideas by discussing the ways they're finding to invest themselves in their topic."
- "Today I want to teach you that, before writers begin their first drafts outside of their notebook, they think hard about how they can inspire themselves to do their best work. Writing well requires talent and knowledge and skill, yes . . . but also magic. One way to find our own inspiration is by learning from another author about what *they* do, and then making our own plan from what we learned."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers find the courage to write about the real topics that are on their minds. When we find ourselves writing entries where everything is perfect we can ask, 'Where's the struggle in this subject?' and 'Is this the truth of what has been on my mind lately?' "

- *Teaching share:* "When writers find they have an excess of entries they pause to ask, 'What do I really want to say?' and then use that question to narrow their writing and find a new focus."

- "Writers, today I want to let you in on a secret that memoirists know: that both the external events *and* the internal feelings of a story need to evolve across a time line, a story mountain. When writers write a story they know there will be a sequence of actions—that one thing will happen, then another thing will happen, and another. Not only this, but there also needs to be parallel sequences of *reactions*, of feelings and thoughts and dreams and fears that the main character (in memoir, that will be you) experiences. With each external event, the narrator or the main character sees and thinks and feels a bit differently on the inside. Something happens and we realize something we hadn't realized before. Something else happens, and we feel something we hadn't felt before."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "When writers tell the internal part of their story, they find that one way to do this is by adding internal thinking. But this isn't the only way! We can also reveal the internal story with specific actions that *show* how a character is feeling."
  - *Teaching share:* "When trying to put feelings on a page, novice writers will often try to find one perfect word to describe the emotion. What more experienced writers know is that usually when we want to reveal a feeling we need to do so by writing sentences or even paragraphs that capture the emotion. We can do this by helping people know the specific way the writer experienced that emotion."
- "Writers know that details in a memoir can say something about the kind of person we are, the kind of life we lead. Today I'm going to teach you how writers, as they work to reveal themselves through memoir, remember they can show themselves not only by bringing out their internal thoughts but also by spotlighting details that reveal whatever it is they want to say about themselves."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers sometimes need to invent details, making sure they are ones that reveal the truth of their lives."
  - *Teaching share:* "Writers know that tiny moments, even something as small as a hug, can be stretched into a sequence of external events and a journey of changing feelings."
- "Today I want to teach you that, just like whole pieces of writing often have a structure—with narrative writing often organized chronologically by time, and essay writing often organized into big ideas, then supportive details—so, too, a single paragraph or a single chunk of a text often will also have a structure. After writers generate what amounts to a pile of ideas, the writer rereads all of these and figures out how she or he will structure the chunk of text, relying on what she or he learned from studying mentor texts to help make this decision."

- *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "When writers are looking to lift the level of their own writing, they study what other writers have done. They think, 'What do I like that this writer has done?' and 'How could I use a similar technique in my writing?' "
- *Teaching share:* "Writers often alternate between narrative and reflective writing when working on a piece. They write a bit of their narrative, then stop to write reflectively about it, exploring new ideas and finding big meanings they've yet to bring forth in their narrative. Writers then return to their narrative to revise and rework it, bringing out what they discovered while reflecting."

Part Three: Revise to Bring Out Meaning and to Balance the Internal and External Story

- "Writers know that the hard work they do changes as they work through the writing process. Today I want to teach you about a special sort of reading writers do when they read their own writing. They do not skim over it as if they've seen the draft a hundred times. Instead, they examine the draft in all its particulars, allowing the page to teach them how to write."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writing well takes attentiveness, and this is something writers know well. It takes getting to hard parts and pushing past them, instead of using the hard parts as an invitation to wander around hoping someone is going to deliver a magic solution."
  - *Teaching share:* "Writers read their own drafts noting the component sections, asking, 'How is this draft almost-but-not-quite structured?' Then they make revisions to bring forth and complete the structures."
- "Today I want to teach you how writers often take tiny details from their lives—often something that could be very ordinary—and we let that one detail represent the whole big message of our story or our memoir."
  - *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "As writers, you've focused intently on crafting powerful lines as you write—lines that hold meaning that is enormous to your writing. Writers often search their writing for lines such as these, looking for ways to highlight them, because highlighting a particularly strong line can also highlight a particularly strong idea. One way to make a powerful line stand out is by repeating it here and there across a piece of writing."
  - *Teaching share:* "When writers use a metaphor at the end of their piece, they first ask, 'What message do I want to convey as this story ends?' and then use the metaphor to bring forth that meaning."

Part Four: Editing, Publishing, and Celebrating

- "Today I want to teach you that when writers edit our writing, we read it out loud to hear the sound of each word, to hear the rhythm of our sentences. Truman Capote wrote, 'To me, the greatest pleasure of writing is the inner music

the words make.' The sound of our words is powerful. Writers communicate with readers by choosing words that convey not only the content but also the mood, the tone, and the feelings that they want to convey."

- *Mid-workshop teaching point:* "Writers can play with punctuation as they write to bring out the tone in their writing, making their writing sound as they intended it to."
- *Teaching share:* "Writers rely on partners to help them edit, putting one piece between the two of them and reading it, inch by inch, asking whether each sentence creates a clear image and moves the idea along."

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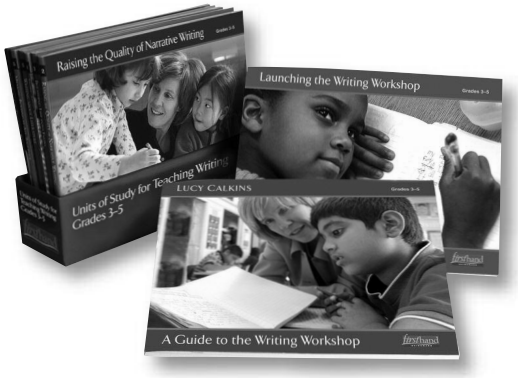

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