



A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR The Writing Workshop



LUCY CALKINS AND COLLEAGUES FROM
THE READING AND WRITING PROJECT



A CURRICULAR PLAN FOR
The Writing Workshop
Grade K

Common Core Reading and Writing Workshop

Lucy Calkins
and Colleagues from
The Reading and Writing Workshop



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Overview of the Year for Kindergarten Writers

SEPTEMBER	UNIT ONE: Launching the Writing Workshop
OCTOBER	UNIT TWO: Approximating Small Moments
NOVEMBER	UNIT THREE: Looking Closely: Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists
DECEMBER	UNIT FOUR: Writing Pattern Books to Read, Write, and Teach
JANUARY	UNIT FIVE: Raising the Quality of Small Moment Writing
FEBRUARY	UNIT SIX: Procedural Writing: How-To Books
MARCH	UNIT SEVEN: Informational Books
APRIL	UNIT EIGHT: Authors as Mentors
MAY	UNIT NINE: Informational Books in Science
JUNE	UNIT TEN: Poetry and Songs

Your kindergartners will come to you this year full of stories and information. Some will come from homes in which parents invite their sons and daughters to add to the shopping list or to write stories for the dolls and teddy bears, and some will come from Pre-K classrooms in which children are invited to write, tell, and act stories. But for most of your children, it will be you who will introduce them to the world of written language. This is an enormously important responsibility because you will be the person who helps each and every child in your classroom know that he or she belongs in the world of written language. You will be the one

to convey that little marks on the page tell stories, carry jokes, give orders, change the world. And, you will be the one to help each child in your care come to believe that those little marks on the page will be a source of joy and laughter, friendship, and power.

The units of study that we sketch out here are based on almost three decades of work, teaching writing to kindergartners and learning from them about ways we can provide powerful help. These units draw on the knowledge not only of TCRWP staff members and researchers, but also of the thousands of teachers with whom we learn everyday. Of course these units have been carefully aligned with the Common Core State Standards. The TCRWP can provide anyone wishing such a document access to a chart that summarizes the links between the curriculum calendars and the Common Core. We hope the curriculum embedded here is useful to you, especially when combined with resources published by Heinemann, including the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* series (Heinemann, 2003) and the DVD, *Big Lessons from Small Writers*, which contains twenty-two videos that illustrate this curriculum (www.unitsofstudy.com). Of course, we expect you to alter these units based on all you know about your children and based on your own interests and passions. We would never imagine that any teacher would use any resource blindly; instead, please add and subtract according to what works for you.

Of course, as you revise these units, you will keep in mind the skills that your children bring with them into kindergarten. The data shows that at least two-thirds of children enter kindergarten already knowing their letters and sounds. Those children are ready to write whole sentences underneath their pictures, starting the first week of kindergarten. Because we would rather err on the side of being too supportive rather than not supportive enough, this curriculum calendar has been written with a more diverse kindergarten in mind. We've planned these units, assuming that many of your students enter kindergarten only knowing some of their letters and sounds. You will also find that you have students who may know several letters and sounds but do not know how to put them together to write words and sentences. If your students are notably more proficient than this, please rely on the first-grade curricular calendar, or on a mix of this one and that one, to provide your youngsters with the levels of challenge they'll need.

Those of you who worked with the TCRWP's curricular calendar from 2010–2011 will notice we have made some important changes while also maintaining a lot of last year's successful curriculum. We continue to recommend two units on personal narrative writing, at the start of the year and a third such unit in January, aimed toward lifting the level of writing. Before the winter holiday, you will find a familiar unit on pattern books. We have added a final part that teaches children to write pattern books that express an opinion. These pattern books provide special support for children's transition into conventional writing and reading. You will note that we continue to support two units that link writing and science. These units are revised—keeping and building on the good parts of last year's work (and there were many good parts to these two popular units).

You will also want to think about assessing your students by using Donald Bear's Developmental Spelling Inventory as well as the Letter and Sound Identification Assessment which is part of the TC Assessments. The TC Assessments can be found on www.readingandwritingproject.com.

In February and March, the units on nonfiction will build off one another. Then in April there is a return to personal narrative with a focus on using authors as mentors, since we wanted children to show their growth in writing personal narratives before they go off for the summer. Poetry and songs bring a new energy at the end of the year and are a wonderful send-off for children for the summer.

Special Words of Advice

There are five ways that we want to especially encourage kindergarten teachers to ratchet up the level of your writing instruction.

First, remember that your children are coming to you able to think of stories to tell and topics to teach. Chances are really great that it is absolutely no problem for them to think about something they have done, put that event onto the page, and tell the story of the event. It's also likely that kindergartners will have no trouble at all thinking about a topic on which they are experts and then teaching others all about that topic. You may find that the prospect of writing a story or an information book makes you break into hives out of nervousness and that you feel mired in writer's block. You are an adult and have the experience to know that everything you put onto the page is not going to captivate every reader. Five-year-olds, however, very rarely experience writer's block. They tend to have no trouble at all thinking up ideas for writing and they can get started at the drop of the hat. So you'll want to teach writing in ways that capitalize on your children's yearning to tell their stories, to teach the topics they know, and you'll want to avoid creating writer's block by suggesting that writers need to use tons of strategies in order to come up with an idea for writing.

Children also come to you with a knowledge of letters and sounds and of genres of writing. You may question whether this is, in fact, true of your students. During 2010, we began the school year by asking hundreds of kindergartners to do a piece of on-demand opinion writing and on-demand information writing, as well as the on-demand narrative writing, and we were flabbergasted by how much children already know, even at the start of kindergarten. The on-demand assessment tasks and continua for assessing student work are available on the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project web site at www.readingandwritingproject.com and we hope you draw upon this resource. You may decide to start the year simply by assessing narrative writing, postponing the other genre until closer to the time when you will teach that genre.

As children write, be scrupulous about not giving any reminders or assistance. Some kids may spend ten minutes, others may spend thirty. In any case, you will want to ask children to tell you their stories so that you can write a dictation on a Post-it to stick to

the back of their work. You'll eventually use these stories to show children and their parents how much children have grown over the course of their time in kindergarten, so propping them up now will defeat that purpose!

Once the writing time is over, collect the pieces, making sure that each piece contains the child's name and the date (as well as, if possible, a transcription if you cannot read the writing). Then you will want to see where your students fall on the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* by placing their on-demand pieces alongside this tool. A Level 3 on our continuum aligns with the Common Core State Standards expected by the end of kindergarten, and so this assessment will help inform the teaching that you will need to do across the year in narrative writing to get your students to this goal.

You needn't match every single trait—just look between the piece that the child has written and the touchstone texts for each level and do the best you can to locate the child's on-demand writing within the scale. Then, look ahead on the continuum to see the work you'll encourage her to do over the next few months and to see specific techniques that you can complement and teach. Look, for example, for evidence that children are writing narratives that have a beginning, middle, and ending. Are children storytelling rather than summarizing and commenting on events? Are they using dialogue? Are there details in their drawings? In terms of conventions, do they record letters and sounds? Can they draw representational pictures? Remember that after a couple of months of work in narrative writing, you'll redo this assessment, saying exactly the same things and providing the same conditions, and then watching to see how much your children have grown in that time. In fact, you will bring the September, October, and early November writing to your parent-teacher conferences and use those pieces to discuss children's growth. You'll then track student progress also in opinion and informational writing.

Secondly, keep in mind that kindergartners are easily able to (and apt to) write at least four or five three-page booklets a week for at least the first few months of kindergarten. As children get older and more proficient, they'll work longer on each page of their writing, writing sentences under their pictures, and they may write more like three booklets a week. But the larger point here is that your minilesson will often teach your students particular things that writers sometimes do. For exams, one lesson might teach writers that it helps to make characters in a story talk, and one way to do this is by adding speech bubbles into a story. That's a terrific minilesson—but if a child spent a full day's writing workshop simply writing speech bubbles on the three pages of his or her story booklet, that would hardly be a day's work! You can only support children working with lots of vigor and productivity if you set children free to start, write, revise, and finish a piece of writing and start another piece in a day, working without you if you do not happen to be at the child's side. A minilesson that helps writers write terrific endings might lead a writer to revise his or her ending on six stories accumulated in another child's writing folder, but even after revising six endings, it is likely that the writer would have more time to carry on as a writer. The focus on a minilesson should in no way be regarded as the work that a child will do in a day. In order to keep children drawing on all they have learned, classroom charts that

contain teaching points from previous minilessons are prominently displayed, and teachers often begin a minilesson by reviewing the strategies on a chart that are especially relevant for writers that day.

Finally, kindergartners are able to bring all that they are learning in reading to their writing. You will want to draw on your repertoire of strategies in reading to use similar strategies in writing. When kindergartners are reading books at levels A and B, we will say to a child, "Look at the picture and expect that the words and pictures will match." We want them to understand that they are creating text in the same way when they write, and their pictures and words need to match as well. When we teach children to point crisply under words as they read their leveled books, we want them to understand that they can also do this when they read their own writing. When they read a book and ask themselves if something makes sense, we want them to bring that same question to their writing. Many teachers find it helpful to have children keep their book baggie nearby when they are writing.



UNIT ONE

Launching the Writing Workshop

SEPTEMBER

The most important thing we can say about September in the kindergarten writing workshop is this: Don't wait! It is tempting to think that children need to know the alphabet before launching a writing workshop—but this simply is not so. Some people go so far as to suggest that youngsters need to be brought into the routines of school before a teacher can launch a writing workshop, again, this is not the case. Writing workshop is an absolutely perfect structure for kindergartners at the very start of the year. Please take the brave step of gathering children on the first day of school and inviting them to live like writers.

You will see that this unit of study relies on *Launching the Writing Workshop* from the series, *Unit of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (Heinemann, 2003), a book that captures the minilessons that Lucy Calkins and Leah Mermelstein gave to classrooms of children during this unit. This book is especially applicable to the start of kindergarten.

This work is also important because the Common Core State Standards call for kindergartners to “use a combination of drawing, dictation, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events.” By the end of the year, the Standards call for the students to not only narrate the events, but to also tell about them in the order in which they occurred, as well as to provide a reaction to what happened. This unit will set them up to work toward these goals by the end of the year. Therefore on the first day of this unit, you will want to see what your kids already know how to do, so that you see where to begin your teaching. Give them blank pieces of paper and ask them to write a story about something they have done. Collect these pieces in order to see what they produce. You will later want to compare this work with what they are able to do at the end of the unit, and throughout the year in narrative writing. It will serve as a nice way to assess their growth as writers, and will also influence your teaching moves across the year.

Writers Write: Invite Children to Write (or Draw, or Pretend to Write) Right from the Start

Gather your little ones around you and lean in close. Point out all the books that surround your meeting area. Tell children that every one of those books has been written by an author—and that they, too, will be authors this year. Tell them, “I’ll show you how to be an author and this very day, every one of you will be an author.” You will want to then demonstrate that authors sometimes write books about things that we have done. To do this, we think of something that we’ve done, take a piece of paper, and put what we remember we did first on the page. A quick sketch of, say, how you went to the counter to buy a shirt. Then, put what happened next. Perhaps a quick sketch on the page of you, at home, putting on the shirt. This writing will probably all be on one page, even though before long your kindergartners will be writing in booklets. Don’t race ahead to the booklet-phase because by doing so, you deny your kids the fun of progressing from single pages of writing to booklets, and that is one of the great highs of the first unit of study.

It is hard to overemphasize the importance of establishing clear structures and routines so children can carry on with independence during writing time. Some teachers of kindergarten struggle with this concept, thinking, “These kids can’t even put on their coats with independence.” But the truth is that young kids can do a lot with independence. When most kids are working with blocks or crayons, they don’t need to stop every three minutes to ask, “Now what?” or “Is this right?” They tend to work with engagement, confidence, and zeal. For now, at the start of the kindergarten writing workshop, the writing workshop should feel like block time, with kids having and pursuing their own wonderful ideas. For this to happen, you need to be ready to accept children’s approximations with pleasure, postponing the nudging you’ll do in time. You need to imagine kids starting, working on, completing their “writing” as best they are able, moving from one “story” to another with verve and confidence, even though none of the work they produce will probably dazzle you with its level of perfection. Chances are good that many children’s “stories” will consist of an underdeveloped scrawl and little more—for now. And, that’s okay—for now. Of course, you should expect that your children will not all be the same at the start of the year, so expect that some will draw representative pictures from the start, and some will write with letters and even words, from the start. But many of them may do little more than make a scribble-like shape on the page. Soon, you’ll intervene in ways that raise the level of that work, but at the start of the year your goal is first to make sure that every child can keep himself, herself, engaged throughout the writing workshop, working hard and in a way that the child, anyhow, believes is productive.

In order for children to carry on with independence, you’ll want to think about the routines that you need to explicitly teach. You may find yourself doing a bit of observing to see whether the kids need instruction in these routines or whether they naturally seem to handle these things. But certainly in many classrooms, teachers find it

helps to teach children to move to and from the meeting area quickly, directly, sitting on their bottoms, hands to themselves, on assigned rug spots. Most teachers teach children what is expected when you say, in the middle of a minilesson, “Turn and talk” and then, a minute or two later, “Eyes back here.” You’ll probably want to appoint some children to distribute the baskets of supplies before the minilesson. You’ll probably also want to teach children to put their names (“That’s the first word we always write on our paper!”) and the date on their writing (date stamps are helpful), to put their writing in their folders (perhaps you’ll use the system suggested in the *Primary Units of Study* series where you store finished pieces on the red dot side of the pocket folder, ongoing pieces on the green dot side), and so forth. But above all, you will teach writers that they can be problem solvers. You can teach minilessons where a writer encounters a problem: She finished one sheet of paper, she broke the tip of her pencil, she forgot what she was trying to say in her writing. “Do you think that when authors run into problems they just sit there and go, ‘Help me, help me, help me’?” (You may want to make your imitation of a needy writer’s voice sound like the little rabbit in the woods’ voice, utterly dependent, squeaky and weak.) After asking whether children think writers act as utterly needy, passive victims, calling “Help me!”, you can shift your tone and stance and voice to show that in fact, writers are just the opposite. You answer your own question by saying, loud and clear, “No way! Writers solve our own problems. Writers think, ‘I can solve this myself.’”

Of course, you’ll support self-reliance not only through the minilesson but throughout the workshop. Every time that children act with self-reliance, celebrate this: “Writers, will you look here for a minute? I want to tell you about the smart work Pedro did. Pedro finished his writing. But do you think he just sat there and said, ‘Oh, no, what will I do now? Oh no, oh no. . .’ No way! Pedro solved his own problem. And you know what he did?”

The reason it is critical for you to support a writing workshop in which kids work with independence is that when children are able to carry on with independence, writing or pretending to write as best they can, you will be able to move among them, teaching into their work. You are only free to teach if kids are not relying on you for every little thing. This means that your first goal—helping writers work with confidence and independence, at whatever level of work they can pull off—actually enables the next goal, which is for you to teach in ways that dramatically lift the level of what kids can do.

In *Launching the Writing Workshop*, one of the minilessons teaches students the saying, “When you’re done, you’ve just begun.” When a writer finishes one piece of writing, instead of waiting for the teacher, the writer starts another piece of writing. At the start of the year, many kindergartners start and complete a piece of writing every ten minutes, and so it will be crucial for them to know how to put the finished writing into a special place in their folder and then to secure a new piece of paper and to start on a new piece of writing.

Kindergarten Writers Use What They Know about Letters and Sounds to Spell Words When They Write

You are probably asking, “How does the child get any actual writing down if he or she can’t yet write?” First, accept the fact that, in part, you are inviting children to role play. Youngsters have no problem pretending to be queens and kings. They have no problem acting as train conductors or mothers and fathers. So at the start of the unit, you should not have any qualms over the fact that your kids don’t actually know how to spell. You are inviting them to write “as best they can,” using really cool paper and fun pens. Some (even many) children will draw and label rather than write sentences. On the other hand, you need to keep in mind that according to recent research, two-thirds of kindergarten children come to school knowing the alphabet, so depending on the context in which you teach, you may well have many children who are already able to spell for others to decipher their meaning.

You’ll probably give students sheets of blank white paper, perhaps with a line for the child’s name. Children then either just draw, or they draw and label, or they just write, or any combination thereof. It does not really matter what kind of paper you use at the start of the unit—the important thing is that you invite everyone to draw stuff that they do, then you circle among kids and get them to point to something in the drawing—perhaps the child himself, herself, in addition to the bike, the sun, the window—and to label those parts of the story. You can invite a writer to say whatever it is slowly—“Say ‘me’ slowly . . . what sound do you hear first? Say it again . . .” and then, when a child has isolated a sound, ideally the first sound, you can say, “Write that! /mmm/ Write that.” Act as if the child can definitely do this—unless you act as if all children can, of course, write, and nudge them to do so, you do not have the chance to see what your kids can do. And, of course, every child CAN write /mmm/. . . even if some write a lollipop or a squiggle. The writing that the child produces in that instance will give you an instant way to assess each child’s letter name and sound identification knowledge. Once you know what each child can do, you will direct different children to different sorts of paper. Children who know a handful of letters and letter names (if not also sounds) can be writing with initial and final consonants, because usually the letter’s name contains the sound the letter makes (as is the case for ‘m’). This means that right away, some of your children will be labeling their pictures. If a child can label using starting and ending sounds, then that child will be very successful writing sentences to accompany his or her drawing, and you will definitely want to give children who can do this paper with lines for those sentences as well as a large space for drawing.

Of course, you will not just assess what kids can do, you will also teach to lift the level of what children do and to show them what proficient writers do that they might try. You’ll want your teaching to be accessible to students because, in part, you will be teaching them the whole enterprise of schooling. You’ll be showing them that at school, a teacher figures out something that the kids can’t quite do, but could learn to do, and the teacher teaches that thing, and then the kids try it and pretty soon—presto!—they can do this new thing. In order to teach in ways that will allow all children to be successful

and that also help engage kids in some of the fundamentals of writing, you may decide to teach youngsters how to make representational pictures that capture the sequence of a story. Imagine a minilesson in which you tell children that when you write, you picture what you did in your mind, and then put that picture onto the page in drawings and in words. You could then show children that you decided to write about (say, for example, your dog). You'd want to show children that when you go to draw your dog, you think about your dog, you see him. In your mind, you picture his head, and so you draw a head on the paper. Then you think, "Does he have more than a head?" and, after checking your mental image, you add a body onto the page. In such a fashion, you continually go between your intended meaning and your physical representation of it, making your representation—the picture—more accurate and more complete. You may wonder why it is important to teach children to draw representationally. One big reason this matters is that the process of doing this is very similar to that which a writer does in order to write. You are engaging kindergartners in the central act of deciding on a meaning, then using all they know in order to capture that meaning onto the page, then revising what is on the page to make it truer, more complete.

Although you will teach children to draw, this does not mean that you will not also teach them to write. Once they have grasped the fact that they can use pictures to tell a story, you might want to say, "Today I want to teach you that writers use both pictures *and* words when we write. Some writers write words and labels beside the picture, and some write sentences at the bottom of the page. But every writer writes with pictures AND words." You won't want to waste any time before you teach children the phonetic principle so that they are able to add these words. That is, you will want to teach each child to say a word slowly, hearing the constituent sounds, and to represent each sound with a mark on the page. Remember that two-thirds of kindergartners come to school knowing their letters, and a third know many of their letter-sound matches.

As you teach children to say a word slowly, and listen to its sounds, keep in mind that your kindergartners should be on track as readers and writers according to the expectations embedded in the Common Core State Standards. It is important that by October, each of your kindergartners will at least grasp the principle that each sound (or phoneme) needs to be represented with at least one letter (or letter-like mark) on the page. This is foundational, and even children who do not yet have a strong knowledge of letter-sound correspondence can learn this principle. You will also see that in short order, with strong instruction, more and more of your children will move from using letter-like marks to using letters. Once you have begun some work with phonics and taught or reminded children of letter names, you will see them using their beginning knowledge of letters and sounds as they write. When a child writes the word *coat*, he might record a *c* or a *k* for the initial sound, and if the child hears an ending sound, he might use either a *t* or a *d* to capture it . . . these sorts of spelling are expected for kindergartners. On the Reading and Writing Project website you'll see samples of work from kindergarten classrooms; these samples will show the expected range of work that you will probably see at the start of the year. The important thing is that you expect children's spelling to change very visibly and quickly and to do so right away.

Certainly you should expect children's drawings to become representational so that by October, a house will have some semblance to a house, and at the same time, children should begin to label half a dozen objects on each page with letter-like shapes (if not letters) that go left to right. Within the first month of school, you will not usually see conventional spelling, but you will see many writers using a bunch of consonant letters to represent first or dominant sounds in words.

To get this happening, you will need to teach like crazy. This is not a *laissez-faire* thing that happens while you monitor kids' behavior. If a child draws himself on a bike, when you pull close to that child, listen to what he wants to write, "I rode my bike" and then point to the part of the drawing that resembles a bike and say, "Let's write 'bike.'" If the child protests that he does not know how to write "bike," then tell him, "I'll show you how. First, say 'bike' slowly. Do that." Let him do it on his own. If you sense he needs support, join him, speaking in a quieter voice than his. Then say, "Let's think about what sounds we hear in b . . . i . . . k . . .," and say it with him again, this time more slowly. "Say it with me," you'll say, so the child joins you in stretching it out. Listen with the child to the sounds as he articulates the word. "What do you hear?" The child might say, "I hear a *b*," but that is unlikely. If he says, "I hear /b/," then tell him, "Write that down" and look intently at the paper, as if you have not a single doubt but that he can supply the letter. It is interesting to see what the child produces.

If the child records *anything*, even if the mark is a wiggle and not a letter, then read it back, /b/, joining the child in reading the /b/, and then making the long /i/ sound. Again, nudge the child to record a mark representing that next sound. If, on the other hand, the child did not isolate and hear a /b/ sound, you'll want to demonstrate how you say the word slowly and listen to a sound, producing your own /b/. You can also tell the child that the letter *b* makes a /b/ sound but the most important lessons for the beginner revolve around phonemic awareness—words can be said slowly, constituent sounds can be isolated and heard and then recorded. At the start of kindergarten, many children will need your help in saying words slowly, isolating the first sound, and making a mark on the page to represent that sound. If the child has not isolated the first sound, you probably won't progress to help the child isolate and make marks representing later sounds. Instead you might move to asking the child to help you label other items—the sun, the child himself, herself. In each instance, help the child say the name of the item slowly, listening for the first sound, and then making a mark to represent that sound. For now, the important concept is that each sound gets represented in a mark on the page. Again, at this early stage, it is not essential that the mark be a letter, let alone that it be the correct letter!

Of course, labeling is only part of writing. Even when children are just making scribbles on one sheet of paper and declaring that a finished story, you can teach revision. Show the writer that he or she can look back and think, "What else can I say?" and then add more onto the page! That's revision. Adding more. Of course, for many children, this will be adding details to the drawing—sea gulls over the beach and shells dotting the shore. For kindergartners, revision first involves adding details into drawings, or drawing a second picture, depicting the next event, and only later involves adding more words.

If your kindergartners do not yet have the skills to sustain work for very long, then for now, stop the workshop after half an hour and use the time you save by having an abbreviated writing workshop to engage your students in ten-minute bursts of interactive writing, doing this work once or twice a day, usually far away from the writing workshop. During interactive writing, the work you do together can mirror the work children are trying to do independently. You could also use interactive writing to demonstrate one part or several parts of what it takes to write a story. For example, if you notice that your writers need work with representational drawings, then together you might share the pen to draw images on the page that do the work of telling, and helping us to remember, our stories.

To support labeling, you might use interactive writing as a way to stretch words together, allowing the children to practice saying words slowly, listening for each sound to then write the words that match the pictures. Interactive writing is a great way to slow down this process so that together you can struggle to do what at the forefront is very challenging work for emergent writers. Once children hear the first sound in a word, they might then need to search for a letter or be taught how to use their alphabet chart to help them find the letter that makes the sound they heard and felt. You might label one page of your writing one day, and then six labels on another page of your story on another day. Even though you will specifically call on certain kids to share the pen, based on their approximations in their independent writing, you will want to make sure that everyone is somehow involved in the stretching and writing, even if the writing for all of the non-pen holders is done mostly in the air. While word writing, and representational drawing might be the main skills you are supporting during interactive writing, don't forget to point out the other writing process work you are doing such as rereading pictures and labels to remember your story, or rereading inside of a word to figure out what is already on the page and to decide what you have to listen for and write next. Interactive writing is also a nice place to tuck in some of the other work that the Common Core State Standards call for around the conventions of Standard English, such as the use of uppercase and lowercase letters, and the ability to "produce and expand complete sentences in shared language activities."

Kindergartners Revise Their Writing, Sometimes Turning a Page into a Whole Book!

For the first two parts in the road of this unit, some children may write two, three, or even four pieces of writing in one day's writing workshop. The children will not yet have the skills, probably, to add details, to elaborate, to think about what readers will want to know and answer their questions by expanding the text (remember, all of that could conceivably be done while children's texts were just drawings). So you should expect that a lot of children will breeze through multiple pieces of writing, and you'll want to teach them where to put finished work, how to choose new paper for themselves, and how to get started on a new piece of "writing."

But then, once children have gotten into the swing of writing pieces of writing, you will absolutely want to teach them that writers revise. There are minilessons in *Launching the Writing Workshop* that can help you do this teaching. The easiest kind of revision revolves around adding on. A writer can revise by adding more details to his or her picture, by filling in parts of the story that were missing from the picture. That will probably be the first kind of revision that your writers do. But soon, you will find yourself asking, “What happened after that?” and the writer’s answer will be perfect content for page two in a booklet. In those instances, you can teach children that if they have more to say, if they want to tell what happened next, they can get another sheet of paper and staple it behind the first—or tape it below the first—in a fashion that allows their writing to literally grow. One of the most exciting turning points in this unit will be the day when you teach children to go from writing a one-page story, to stapling a second page onto the first, so as to make a booklet. The great thing about writing a book is that once a page is done, there is always another page on the horizon!

Don’t short-cut this process by prestapling booklets for children (although you will do that soon). For a time, teach children that after drawing and writing one page about what the child did, the child can “read” the page and think, “What did I do next?” and then add another page or two onto the first to tell the rest of the story. Alternatively, the child can “read” the first page to a friend, then tell the friend more stuff—and then add that stuff on. When a child reads his or her story and then has a lot more to say, you will respond, “You should add that to your writing!” Expect a flurry of stapling. At least for a week or so, let kids staple pages to make their own booklets. “Oh my goodness!” you might say, “I can’t believe you are writing a whole book! I can’t wait to read it.”

You may find that once you move children toward writing in three-page booklets, many of them will need more practice with storytelling. It will be an important step forward to teach writers that they can actually approach a page, already planning to write a whole story. This next step is essentially the starting point of the second unit of study, “Small Moments,” so you may want to postpone it, but then again you may decide that your writers are eager for this and plunge ahead. Specifically, you may want to teach children to take a blank booklet and to narrate the story as they touch one page then another, then another, telling a cohesive, sequential narrative.

You’ll also want to teach kids to read over their writing. This will include storytelling the pictures and then pointing to and reading the labels (or the approximate labels). Tell children that when writers finish one story, after we read what we have written, we then see what else we can add (this will mean not only adding to the pictures but also adding more labels). Of course, when we’re finished, we get new paper and start the next story.

Of course, children will not only need to “read” their writing to themselves but also to others. Although you will likely have kids working in partnerships during the first week of school, you will want to take some time during this part to establish more deliberate writing partners. You will then need to teach your writers how to effectively work in these partnerships in order for them to have an effective routine across the year. You will want to take the time to teach partners to put their pieces between the

two of them and to take turns listening and sharing. This might sound funny, given that some of them won't have many letters on the page, but you can teach them that a writer can take his or her pencil, touch the different things on the page, and say the text or story that accompanies that representation. It is important for young writers to reread their stories so that their writing stays fresh in their minds. This partner work helps to reinforce not only the content of the story, and to infuse a sense of audience, but it helps with early reading behaviors and concepts of print: how to hold a book, turn pages, point to and name things on a page and work with a partner. These are the same kinds of things that students are working on in reading. For example, you might touch the picture of yourself and say, "I blew out my candles (touch the candles). I cut the cake (touch the cake). I took a bite (touch the cake on the fork)." Notice that you have not read your story like this: "candles, cake, eat." You read it like a story.

At the end of the month, you will probably ask children to choose their best piece and to revise it yet again, making it even better in preparation for what will be your children's very first Author Celebration. In this first unit, children may revise by adding more details to their drawings and more labels to their pages, or by thinking about what readers will want to know and adding that information into the story. They will most certainly *not* correct and recopy their publishable work. They are not editing at this point!

In *Launching the Writing Workshop*, you'll see that children are invited to "fix up" and "fancy up" their writing to prepare it for the Author Celebration. If your children are fancying up one of their pieces of writing, this probably means adding fancy borders or stickers around the margins. You might also show your young writers that they can make a cover so their pieces look like real books. For the publishing celebration, you needn't do anything too elaborate in order to please your students. Some teachers suggest kindergartners bring a stuffed animal to school and then "read" the story to the stuffed animal. These creatures can become a listening zoo and work as alternatives to partners on any day. Some teachers suggest children roll their pieces up and slide them into paper-towel rolls that have been decorated into "piece pipes" and then march around the room singing a song—"We are the authors, the authors, the authors, we are the authors that are coming to publish our pieces." The parade can end at the bulletin board and each child can then tack his or her piece into the appropriate square. That is—publishing shouldn't require a huge amount of fuss! Of course, in the best possible world, the way to publish the writing would be to help children see their "writing" doing some real work in the world. In this way, this unit could come full circle.

Additional Resources

As you approach this unit, your plan should be for your kindergartners to all come up with story ideas effortlessly, drawing pictures of things they have done. You will assess those pictures to see if they are representational—did the writer think of something he or she has done, hold it in mind, then work to put it on the page, going back to the

mental picture to recall more and add more? If children instead are drawing what they know how to draw—the row of tulips, the rainbow or hearts—you’ll want to intervene to help them understand the concept that writers have a story to tell, and use drawing and words to capture the meaning that comes first.

Expect children to be able to work with independence, coming up with story ideas, drawing them, adding more, finishing them, turning to a new piece of paper, and repeating that cycle. Independence is a huge goal right now.

Then you will work on the writing part of things. Start by assessing. Ask, “Who is that?” and if the writer says, “Me,” then say, “Oh—you didn’t write that!” and hand over the pen. Watch to see if writers can proceed to listen for initial sounds and record them, correctly or incorrectly. Expect that many kindergartners can actually do this—more than you probably think.

When some kids do not seem to know how to say words slowly, stretching them, listening for the first sound in the word, teach into this vigorously as this is at the heart of phonemic awareness. The actual naming of the letter that fits the sound is less important right now than stretching out words to hear sounds and putting some mark on the page for each sound.

You will be teaching letters and sounds as you work—starting with the easy ones like M and S and T and other letters where the letter name matches the letter sound. Watch to see if kids use what you teach, and if they share it with others, so letters and sounds become the talk of the town.

Your final part will involve choosing pieces that kids love and fixing them up. Every child will be able to do this work.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Writers Write: Invite Children to Write (or Draw, or Pretend to Write) Right from the Start

- “Today I want to teach you that every one of us in this classroom can be an author, and we can write stories like the stories that surround us in our meeting area. In order to write a true story, writers think of something that we do, get a picture in our mind, and we draw the story of what we did on our paper. Then, we write the story! That is—we think, we draw, we write.” (See Session I, “Starting the Writing Workshop,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that writers have a saying, ‘When you’re done, you’ve just begun.’ When we finish one story, we get to work. Sometimes we add to the picture or to the words—and sometimes we get a new piece of paper and start a new story. Our job, as writers, is to keep working on our writing for the whole writing workshop.” (See Session II, “Carrying on Independently as Writers,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)

- “Today I want to teach you that writers, like carpenters and doctors, have special tools and special places to keep our tools. And, we always know where to find our tools. Writers have special places where we keep our tools so that when we get a good idea for a story, we don’t have to waste time looking for a pen or paper or our writing folder—we know right where everything is so that we can grab our paper and start to write.” (See Session III, “Using Supplies Independently,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)

Part Two: Kindergarten Writers Use What They Know about Letters and Sounds to Spell Words When They Write

- “Today I want to teach you that when writers want to put an idea on the paper, we picture something that we did, remembering what happened first and next, and then we draw the story on the paper. Sometimes we add words. After we have put the story of what we did onto the paper, we put our pens under what we have on the page and we tell the story that goes with our paper. As we do that, we often think of more stuff to add.” (See Session IV, “Telling Stories in Illustrations,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
 - ▶ *Tip/Possible Teaching Share:* “As authors we reread our stories. We can point to what we’ve put on the page—our pictures, our words—and tell the story of what is on the page. This will help us to remember all of the work that we did.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when you go to draw something and have an ‘uh-oh’ feeling because you aren’t sure how to draw it, what writers do is we say, ‘I’m going to just draw the best I can!’ And then we close our eyes and think about what the thing we want to draw looks like, and that helps us draw as best we can. We don’t want to just give up! No way! We say, ‘I’m going to just draw the best I can.’” (See Session V, “Drawing Even Hard-to-Make Ideas,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that writers use both pictures *and* words when we write. Some writers write words on labels beside the picture, and some write words in sentences at the bottom of the page. But every writer writes with pictures *and* words.” (See Session VI, “Using Both Pictures and Words, Like Famous Authors,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers want to write a word, we stretch that word out like a rubber band, saying it really slowly. We say it again and again, listening for the first sound. When we hear that sound, we put the letter that makes that sound onto the paper (if we don’t know that letter, we put a little mark on the paper). Then we say the word again and listen for the next sound, and we put another letter on the paper for that sound.” (See Session VII, “Stretching and Writing Words,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)

- “Today I want to teach you that when we are writing we sometimes want to use words that are *really* hard to spell. When we get to those words, we spell the word as best as we can, and then we move on and keep writing. We don’t let one tricky word stop us when we are writing.” (See Session IX, “Spelling the Best We Can . . . and Moving On,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- ▶ *Tip:* “Today I want to teach you that when we don’t know which letter to use for a sound, we say the sound we want to write as we look at the alphabet chart. We look for a picture of something that starts just like the word we want to write. When we find it, we copy that letter onto our paper.” (See Session X, “Using Writing Tools: The Alphabet Chart,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)

Part Three: Kindergartners Revise Their Writing, Sometimes Turning a Page into a Whole Book!

- “Today I want to teach you that writers have systems for storing our work so we can return to our work another day. We don’t just work on a story for one day and then forget it or lose it! No way! We make a plan for where we will store our writing so we can come back to it.” (See Session XI, “Creating a Place for Writing-in-Progress: Long-Term Projects,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- “Today I’m going to teach you that when authors have more to say, we get another sheet of paper and draw and write what happened next. Authors reread and add another sheet so we can tell what we did next.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers don’t only stretch out our words to hear the sounds, we also stretch our stories out, writing across a bunch of pages.” (See Session XII, “Introduction Booklets,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- “Today writers, I want to teach you that we make our stories come to life by adding feelings. We reread our stories, think about how we feel, and how the other people in our stories are feeling, and draw those feelings on all of the faces, and then add words to our pictures or sentences to write about the feelings.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers fix up and fancy up our writing before we publish it. We fix it up by rereading it, and thinking ‘Does this make sense?’ Then we change the confusing parts.” (See Session XV, “Fixing Up Writing,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that writers fix up our writing by making sure other people can read it. To do that, we reread our writing with our finger, and we check to make sure that our words look right.” (See Session XVI, “Editing and Fancying Up Writing” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)

- “Today, I want to teach you that writers celebrate their hard work and writing by sharing with others. One way we can celebrate is by ‘Reading into the Circle.’ We choose a part of our piece and then read that one part to the class. When we’re finished, we turn our head to the next person so she knows it’s her turn until we get all the way around the circle. After we’ve all had a chance to celebrate, we will get into little groups and read our pieces to our group.” (See Session XVII, “Reading into the Circle: An Author’s Celebration,” in *Launching the Writing Workshop*.)



UNIT TWO

Approximating Small Moments

OCTOBER

In the last unit you invited children to write about the things they have done. In this unit you will explicitly teach them to tell organized, structured stories that proceed chronologically through the sequence of a small event.

This unit is based on “Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing” from *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (Heinemann, 2003). In this book, Lucy Calkins and New York City kindergarten teacher Abby Oxenhorn show you how they taught Abby’s kids to write Small Moment stories. The minilessons they taught are here, as are the conferences they gave and the work their students did. You’ll lean on this teaching, or on similar teaching that you and your colleagues have done. All of this work is aligned with the Common Core State Standards which channel kindergartners to produce narrative stories through a combination of drawing and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events. You might also look to the RWP Narrative Continuum (which can be found at www.readingandwritingproject.com), since by the end of kindergarten, in order to meet the standards, we expect kindergartners to be writing at a level 3 or above, so that you are able to set goals for their narrative writing across the year.

Comparing This Unit with a Similar Unit in January, and Establishing Clear Goals

If you glance ahead in this curricular calendar, you will see that we suggest you revisit this unit again in January. We have found that when kindergarten teachers teach youngsters to write Small Moment stories in the fall, children learn to construct well-structured, sequential tales and even begin integrating some literary language such as transitional words such as, *after that*. It is still true, though, that early in the fall, many kindergarten children do not seem ready to write focused, detailed

stories such as those they'll be able to produce in a few months. That is just fine. For now, a child will write, "I rode my bike. I got ice cream. I played." Later, that same child may write about how the ice cream dripped onto her hands. For now, the important thing is for children to become accustomed to thinking of a story, capturing it in drawings and words that span pages in ways that they, and others, can reread and re-create. That's huge! It's amazing for kindergartners to stretch out words, record first and final sounds, reread their own writing, adding more to the page and expanding on their own creations. So, essentially we're suggesting that most of you take the Small Moment unit and teach it twice. This first time, you will care very much that your children will tell and "write" stories that *sound* like stories, and you'll care that each child's spellings go through dramatic transformation toward becoming more filled-out. Of course, if your kindergartners are extra proficient, you may decide to combine January's unit with this one, granting yourself the space for an additional unit of study.

One goal of the unit, then, as in the first unit, is to help children learn to sound out words, stretching them out so they can isolate and hear the sounds at the start of a word, making a mark to represent that sound. You'll teach children that they can listen to the sound, think, "What letter makes that sound?" and try out different letters, relying on what they know about letter names and sounds to make a match. They can then reread what they have written—the initial sound—and try to hear another sound, continuing in that fashion. Your expectation will be that many of the children will write using initial and final consonant sounds, relying on letter names when they do not know the sounds a letter makes.

Another goal in this unit, expanding on the first unit, will be for your youngsters to generate true stories from their lives, record these stories across the pages of little booklets using, at least, vaguely representational drawings, tell a cohesive, sequenced narrative, and label several items on each page.

You'll want children to be able to "reread" the books they write, turning the pages from front to back, "reading" them from left to right, top to bottom. They will continue to work in partnerships, sharing their booklets just as reading workshop partners share their books. You'll want them to "read" in two ways: telling the story using rich, oral storytelling language, and then reading the print, touching the words as they read them. They can sit hip-to-hip, hold the booklet between them, turn pages (ideally from left to right) and tell the story as they study the pictures and "read" the writing. They can begin working on one-to-one matches as they name the things that they see on the page and read the labels under each of those items. By the end of the month, if not before, some of your children will have graduated from writing labels alone to writing a sentence underneath the picture they have drawn on each page. Those sentences will be structured into stories. Unlike the previous unit, children in this unit are all writing one kind of writing—personal narrative writing.

Preparing for the Unit: Storytelling and Story Reading

Some children will come to school with a strong background in storytelling, while others do not have that experience. Literacy scholar Shirley Brice Heath says the most important thing an adult can do to support a child's literacy is to immerse the child in a culture of storytelling. Parents are naturals at scaffolding children to re-create events. For instance, a child and her dad return from the park, and the mother says, "What did you do at the park?" The child says, "I swung," and the mother replies, "Did you?! Did Daddy push you on the swings?" The child nods and says, "Daddy pushed me and I go high. I touched the tree." The mother nods, and retells the story. "Wow. Daddy pushed you on the swing! You went so high that you touched the leaves of the tree." This re-creation of the story is essential to learning how a sentence in standard English should go, and it supports the Common Core Standard where kindergartners are expected to begin using standard English grammar when writing or speaking. This oral storytelling not only pushes kids toward such command of grammar when speaking but it also supports their ability to write stories in a clear and cohesive way.

At the start of the year (and throughout the year, too) you will want to find ways to encourage children to tell each other stories from their lives. As part of this, help children recall events the class has experienced together and to spin those events into stories (not written stories, but oral accounts). Of course, the events can be small ones. During a shared reading, a little inchworm crawled across the page of the book, or there was a fire drill, and the whole class went outside with the rest of the school. After such an event you might say, "I love to think back and remember special moments like that, don't you? Let's all do that together. What happened first? Who can get us started by telling us just the first thing that happened? Then what? Who can tell us what happened next?" You will want to show writers that people take the events of our lives and shape those events into stories. On one day, you might teach students that you can zoom in on the important parts of what happened and tell the story of it. On another day, you might show students that you actually wrote the story you'd told the previous day onto paper, and that now you, like the children, can reread your own story. In this manner, you will create a few stories that the class knows well, and you will refer to those mentor texts often when children write. You might, for example, refer to one such text in order to point out that writers put periods at the end of a sentence, and you might point out that you told what happened first and next, suggesting writers could do likewise. Of course, the important thing is not that *you* are telling and writing stories, but that the children are doing so—and doing so at a great clip.

Another way to practice this rich storytelling work is to have children bring in objects from home that hold meaning and to then tell the stories of those items. You might think of this as show-and-tell, and it is not altogether different—just imagine twenty-five children all showing and telling simultaneously, each to his or her partner! Some teachers have found it helpful and fun to have separate storytelling time. If children storytell at the start of the day or after recess, becoming accustomed to spinning the events of their lives into sequential tales, then during writing workshop it will be especially easy for

children to think of stories they can capture on the page. On some days, you will probably want to encourage children to storytell to a partner at the start of writing time, using this as an early form of rehearsal for narrative writing.

In order for children to write stories, they'll need to hear stories read to them. A deep immersion in the sounds of stories will help children as they now try to write the episodes of their lives as stories, and you'll want to remind them that what they are doing during writing time is they are writing stories, just like those they are reading during reading time, only their stories, for now, are true ones. It will help if you read some stories that resemble the personal narratives your children will be writing. *Shortcuts* by Donald Crews, *A Day with Daddy* by Nikki Grimes, and *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats are all personal narratives that could serve as nice mentor texts, but be sure to use some of your personal favorites as well. Ideally, outside the writing workshop, throughout the school day, you will have found many opportunities to read and reread stories to children. If you are following the TCRWP curricular calendar for reading, for example, your students will be coming to know some stories so well that they can approximate-read those stories, turning the pages of a story like *Caps for Sale* (this story, for example, is considerably too hard for most kindergartners to actually read, but because they know the book well, they'll be able to storytell in ways that are congruent with the pages).

During the reading workshop, we hope children have opportunities to hear you read a small stack of stories repeatedly. We hope that during "independent reading" children have opportunities to touch the pages of those familiar books, saying aloud the words that belong on each page as they re-create a beloved story. If children are doing this during reading, you will definitely want to teach them that after they draw pictures to capture their own narratives, they can then touch each of the pages of their books, saying aloud the words that will eventually go on each page, one after another. In this way, the reading and writing workshops will have wonderful alignment.

Launching the Unit—and the Writing

On the first day of this unit, you can give children booklets and invite them to draw and write the true stories of their lives. Expect that they will be able to draw and write a story a day, approximately.

Those stories should all contain writing on every page—although for many children, the writing will be labels for items in the drawing, and sometimes the child will use letter-like graphics rather than actual letters. This may differ from when your children first wrote stories; you probably gave them single sheets of paper on which to write. Now you'll want to prestaple books (including some with blank pages, some with a line or two on each page), and get these out in trays at a "writing center" (perhaps on a shelf of supplies). After a child collects a blank book from the tray, he or she touches each page, saying aloud the words that will accompany that page. For kindergartners who are just developing letter-sound correspondence, the pages will probably contain a box for a drawing and a line on the top for the author's name. As soon as

some children are labeling with initial and final letters, you'll move those children toward writing their stories in sentences. In order to encourage this, you'll graduate these children to booklets containing pages that each have a line or two under the space for drawing. (By the way, some teachers elect to provide paper containing a line at the bottom of each page from the beginning of the year, letting this paper serve as an invitation for children to approximate writing, recording strings of letters.)

In this month's unit of study, then, a child will take hold of a blank book, and then think about the true story he or she will write, and touch the pages of the blank book, saying aloud what he or she hopes to write on that page. Then the child will either draw or sketch a picture on each page before returning to write something on each page (more on this later). Expect children to work for a day or two on a book, and then finish one book and start another without needing teacher support. By now, you will have taught them to put finished stories into one place, and to keep stories they are still working on in another place (usually each goes into different pockets of a child's writing folder).

You will need to decide whether you want to encourage children to draw in detail or sketch quickly in order to progress toward writing. Most kindergarten teachers feel that at first it is wise to encourage children to work on their drawings and eventually encourage them to focus more on their written stories. That is, in drawings, you may want to teach children to show not only *who* the people are, but also *what* they are doing. This will mean you'll need to coach children to progress from frontal pictures of people floating in the air to profile views of people interacting with objects, their surroundings, and each other. Then, over time, you can teach children to include details into their drawings. If that is your dog, what does *your* dog look like that makes your dog different than any other dog? You say you walked your dog to the park, but what is that particular park like? How did you feel as you walked your dog? Could you somehow make your drawing show not only what you did, but your feelings about what you did? Of course, all of this information will later need to be included in the written text. Children will at first write just the bare-bones of what they did. "I went to grandma's house. I played." Then you will encourage them to add the setting. "I played *in her backyard*." Later, they can include details, "I played ball." They can go on to include their responses to what they did, or their feelings. "It was a great day. I had fun."

Once you've clarified for students whether they are drawing or sketching across the pages of their booklets, you will teach them to generate story ideas by thinking about the things they do everyday, picking one thing and telling just that one story. That is, you'll teach writers to tell the beginning, middle, and end, not of their entire day but of that one thing. It might sound like a student saying, "One thing that I do is play soccer after school. Yesterday, I kicked the ball. I passed the ball to my friends. I scored a goal." Some kids might want to write about their whole day and may story tell like this, "I walked to school, and then I went to my class and we read and played and ate lunch." Or "I woke up, went to school, came home." You will want to help these writers find a smaller focus, like *waking up*, *at recess*, or *playing with my brother*. Depending on the level of focus, you will want to bring them closer to Small Moment writing.

As a way of supporting students in focused Small Moment writing, you might use partnerships to rehearse and storytell and listen to one another before they write. Certainly kids will be doing this on their own as well but at the start this is a good way for partners to work through different parts of the process. You will want to teach your writers to listen closely to one another as they share their stories, so that they are able to notice if a story stays in the same time and place. You can utilize partnerships to give students an audience for the oral rehearsal of a story, to allow your writers to work together to gain a smaller focus in their stories. This partnership work supports the Common Core State Standards for Speaking and Listening that kindergartners will speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly to others.

Writers Work Hard to Tell Stories Using Many Words and Pictures

At the start of this unit, and certainly by mid-October, it will be essential that your kindergartners are labeling lots of things on every page in their stories. At this point in the unit, it will also be essential that they say a word slowly, hear the constituent sounds, and record a mark for each sound. The children may not yet know the correct mark to record for every sound, but you will want to continue to support their learning of the phonetic principle: when a writer hears a sound, we make a mark that represents that sound. In time, writers will learn the correct mark, and by now your children should be in word study time where they will learn letter names and sounds if they do not already have a solid grasp of them, and this will give them terrific boosts as they write.

As children return to writing, day after day, you will want to instruct children in ways that amp up the level of what they can do. A child might, in early October, sound out *somersault* by saying the word, just like that: “somersault.” You may listen to the child do this and think, “She is not ready to write somersault.” You will be right. But the trick is—you need to teach that child how to do this work! So if she is not stretching out the word, hearing the distinct phonemes or sounds in the word and then isolating the initial sound—it is your job to teach her to do this! If another child records a first letter for a word only, then you definitely know that with just a bit of instruction, that child can begin to hear final sounds as well. Your expectation should be that as children spend day after day drawing and writing, you will be directly teaching into what children do. You’ll teach individually through conferring, and you’ll teach in small groups, and you will ask children to work differently after you have taught them. Your teaching will often end with phrases like, “From this day forward, whenever you write, will you remember to . . . ?” As you look across the work that students do at the start of this unit, and in the middle of the unit, you should see dramatic and obvious improvements in their spelling and their control of the conventions of written language. A child who starts the unit writing left to right, bottom to top, will end the unit writing left to right, top to bottom, and adding punctuation to boot! A child who begins with no letter-sound connection can, within a matter of weeks, be using a dozen letters and sounds.

As in all writing units, the growth that individual students make will look different. If you have ELLs in the first two stages of language acquisition, before children produce English, you will want to tell them what you see on their pages as a way of supporting their language development. You might place your finger on a part of their drawing and observe, “Look at your writing! Is this you?” The child can respond with a “yes” or a “no.” Then you can ask, “Are you in the park?” The child may nod his or her head. Continuing your observation and pointing, you can say, “I see a tree. I see the sun. Look at all the flowers!” This way, children can have some meaningful language experience between the teacher, the words, and their own drawings. Additionally, this process can be a kind of scaffold for students who are reluctant to talk about their writing. Keep in mind that the guidance we offer students will in many cases look different as we move from student to student during our one-to-one conferring and small-group instruction.

Writers Ask, “Can I Add More to My Story?”

Once children are progressing with independence, writing and labeling to their hearts’ content, then you can help children add more to their stories. In the last unit, we gave writers choices of what to do next when they thought, “I’m done!” Now, since writers are stronger, we want them to do more. We want them to “revise” as they go. We’ll teach kids that before they throw their writing on the “done” side of their folders, that they need to reread it and ask themselves, “Can I add more into my story?” We’ll teach writers that “adding more” can mean adding to our pictures and/or our words. This would be a great time to revisit, as a way of holding writers accountable, the strategies you’ve taught them to add to their stories. You might remind students that you’ve taught them to add their feelings by adding smiles, frowns, or tears to their pictures. Or maybe you’ve taught writers to add in more about the place where their story happened or even add an additional page to show what happened next. If you don’t already have one, make a chart showing writers all the ways that you’ve shown them to add to their writing.

As a part of this work, you’ll teach kids to reflect on “How do I know that I am done?” They can look at how many words they have on the page, especially if they are labeling. You might teach writers to ask themselves, “Have I labeled enough?” or “Do the most important things have a label?” A great visual way of teaching writers to self-reflect is to show them how to compare their piece with the class exemplar or even your mentor piece. You might show writers, who are ready for this strategy, how to put their piece side-by-side with the class exemplar and ask themselves, “What’s in this piece that I can put in my piece?” You’ll want to make sure that writers don’t copy the content of the exemplar, but use the parts that are noted (pictures, labels, multiple sentences, etc.) in the class exemplar to figure out what they can add. As writers do this kind of comparison work, they might say things like, “Our class piece has two sentences on a page. I think I want to do that too!” Or “In the class story all of the pages have labels. I can do that in my pictures.”

During this part, you'll want to teach children to talk about the stories they have written with their partners to find places that they might add to their writing. You might even make the connection to reading workshop, telling writers that just as they are talking about books during the reading workshop, they can talk about their booklets in writing workshop. For example, if during reading time, you teach kids to look at the cover and think about what the book may be about, they can do the same when they read a partner's booklet during writing time. If during reading children name parts of books they think are important and/or act out what their characters do and say, they can do the same as they read each other's booklets. This will lead them to see how they can add more details into their writing. For example, point out that in the books they are reading, the characters actually talk. The wolf calls out, "Little pig, little pig, let me in!" Maybe there are people in the children's own stories who could talk and the children could include their characters' actual words in the story. Presto: children will need speech bubbles! Similarly, you can encourage children to make some parts of their stories really exciting by telling more details about what happens, or by making those pages more important.

The Common Core State Standards state that kindergarten writers should learn to offer their peers suggestions as a way of strengthening their writing. One way you might teach kids to do this is to ask them to notice what's already on the page and then suggest one thing the writer could add. This might sound like, "Let's look at this page. You have lots of pictures but no words. Maybe you can add labels." Or, "You have a picture but there is lots of empty space around it. Maybe you could add more so we know more about your story?" Or, "Can you show where you are in all of your pages?" When you teach students to ask each other, "What is this?" or "What else can you say here?" you are teaching partners to help each other clarify their writing. Teaching kids to clarify their thoughts and ideas is highlighted throughout the speaking and listening portion of the Common Core State Standards as well—so spending time on this skill will help you to meet several standards. Of course, you won't necessarily expect partnerships to be able to make such suggestions without some concrete tools. Scaffold this talk by displaying partner talk charts and/or small tabletop tools that provide visuals (maybe two faces with speech bubbles) and some key words or symbols making the tool user friendly for kindergartners.

Getting Ready for Publication: Revise, Edit, and Publish

End your unit by having children look back through their collection of stories, choosing one to make even better. Remind your class that writers are always looking for ways to improve their writing before sharing it with others. You will want to remind them of what they did in the first unit and perhaps add on to what they might do as they prepare to publish—this might include rereading a piece to add forgotten details or trying to write more labels next to more items. Once children have spent a day or so fancying up their work with color and a cover, you can choose a way to celebrate their

hard work. Children may have a turn in an “author’s chair,” and you may toast all of their hard work with a cup of juice and a few cookies. Many classes enjoy decorating a new basket to put in the classroom library, perhaps labeled, “The Famous Authors of Room 203,” and ceremoniously placing their published stories in the basket at the end of the celebration.

Additional Resources

This unit is a time to teach kids to write stories across the pages of a booklet. You will want to listen to understand how well your children tell stories—which of them have learned to tell an event sequentially, bit by bit, and which need your help. The goal for the start of the unit is not detailed, perfect stories, but stories that follow a sequential order, telling one thing that happened first, then what happened next.

By now your children should be coming up with ideas for true stories all on their own, easily, and drawing representational pictures that capture those stories, all on their own, easily. They should be able to touch a page of their booklet and say aloud the part of the story that goes with that page. If children are struggling with this, keep in mind that you can support storytelling at many intervals in the day. After recess, children can meet with a partner to tell the story of what they did. After the plant falls off the shelf, children can tell the story of how the whole drama unfolded.

Meanwhile you will want to see that each child has made dramatic progress in his or her ability to actually write letters and words. Those who entered kindergarten able to hear the first sounds in words and to record a letter (right or wrong) for that sound should by now be labeling using initial and final consonants. That is, *bike* should be labeled with at least *bk*. Most of these children can actually use some of the more obvious vowels. Of course, you will have some children who need you to nudge them to hear sounds and record letters. Nudge away! Don’t let a single child write a single page without adding some words to that page. If the child’s spelling, when he or she works alone, comes out in ways that you can’t read, that does not mean the work of hearing sounds and recording them (as best as possible) is not important for that child.

Keep in mind that by December, it is up to you to be sure that all of your kids are writing in ways that allow you to reread their writing. By December, your students should be able to reread their own writing as well. This is not about waiting for that to happen—it requires you to assess and intervene along the way. If some need more phonics work—that is not surprising. If some need more help with word wall words—that, too, should not surprise you.

You should expect that throughout this month, children will write approximately one story a day, three pages a story, going back to add more to those stories without always needing you to be at their elbow. Expect that a portion of the class will still be writing labels—but that the labels will be all over every page—and that more of the class will be graduating to writing a sentence underneath each picture.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit—and the Writing

- “Today I want to teach you that when writers write Small Moment stories, we take one small moment and we stretch it out. We include tiny little details that make the story come to life. We don’t just *tell* the story in a sentence or two, we include the itty bitty details so that our story goes across the pages and we *show* our story with our words.” (See Session I, “Understanding a Small Moment Story” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)
- “Today I want to teach you another way we can plan our stories. Sometimes we can work with a writing partner to plan for future stories we want to write. We can use our writing partner to ‘try on’ the stories we want to tell by sitting, knee-to-knee, and then tell our story using our best storytelling language.” (See Session III, “Establishing Long-Term Partnerships” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers write Small Moment stories, we take one moment and stretch it across the pages of a book just like the authors of some of our favorite books do. One way we can get ready to write the story across pages is to touch each page of our booklet and say aloud the story. This will help us remember what we want to write as well as how our story will go across pages.” (See Session IV, “Stretching One Small Moment” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)
- “Today writers, I want to teach you that when we want to tell stories from our lives, one thing we can do is think about things we do a lot. Then we can think of one time we did that thing, draw what we did, then tell our story. We can touch each page of our booklet and tell the story out loud. Then on each page we draw what we did so we don’t forget our story, then we can go back to write the words.”

“Writers write all the sounds that they hear in words so that other people can read our stories. When we want to hear more sounds and write a word, we say the word slowly, writing all the sounds that we hear.”

 - ▶ *Tip:* “First, we say the word, listen to the sound, and write the letter that makes the sound we hear. Then we reread what we’ve written, say the rest of the word, listen for the next sound, and write the letter that makes that sound. We repeat it several times until we’ve heard and written all the sounds in the word.” (See Session V, “Stretching and Writing Words” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that writers go back and read over our stories when we think we are done. We do this to make sure that it says everything we want it to say and to help us remember what we have written.”

- ▶ *Tip:* “We point to and read the pictures, and we read the words. In this way, we help ourselves remember our stories and are able to check to see if we included all of the important details.”

Part Two: Writers Work Hard to Tell Stories Using Many Words and Pictures

- “Today I want to teach you that writers try to remember and write all that happened in their stories. One thing we can do to make sure we include all of the details is to act out each part and then put what we act out onto the paper.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “We put this down in detailed pictures and words to describe these actions.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers write stories, we try to write them in a way that helps our readers feel like they were right there. One way to do this is to think about where we were, who we were with, and what we were doing on each page and then we include those details in our pictures and our words.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “We might picture what is happening in our minds, or act out what is happening, and then draw what our face and body are doing. Then, we can add words to label each action.”
- “Today, I want to show you that when we are trying to stretch out our words and we aren’t sure what letters go with the sounds that we hear, we can use our friends’ names or other words we already know how to spell to help us. We say the word slowly, listen for the first sound we hear, then think, ‘Whose name starts with that sound?’ Then we look at the name chart to figure out what letter makes that sound.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “If you don’t know a name that starts with the sound you hear you might ask, ‘Are there any words that I know that start with that same sound?’ Then you might turn to the word wall or your alphabet chart to find the letter that matches the sound you hear.”
- “Writers, we’ve been learning about how we try to write our stories so that the reader feels like they were right there with us. We know that we do this by including all the important details both in the picture and in the words. Today I’m going to teach you that writers can plan the details that we will include in the story before we write the words on the page. One way to do this is to picture our small moment in our mind and tell the story to our partner before we write anything down, trying to include all the details.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “Our partners can help us plan how the story will go across the pages of our book.” (See Session VII, “Planning Details” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)

- “Sometimes when we are writing we forget to write all the words that we want to say. Today I want to teach you that we can plan our sentences out loud to help us remember. We can then point to where we want each word to go on the page. Finally, we can write the first word and go back and reread it to remember what comes next.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “We keep writing and rereading until we write all of the words in our sentence. This way we will make sure to write all of the words that we want to say in our story.”

Part Three: Writers Ask, “Can I Add More to My Story?”

- “Writers, we’ve been stretching our stories across pages, telling all that happened to us in our small moments. Another way you can stretch your stories out across pages is by not only telling what happened—the outside story—but you can tell your feelings or thoughts about what happened—the inside story.” (See Session XII, “Revealing Internal Stories” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)
- “Today I want to teach you another way that writers make our stories come to life. We often write about what people said in our the stories. This helps our readers to get a really clear picture of all that is happening.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “One thing that might help us to add people talking is to touch each person in the picture and remember what they said and make them ‘talk.’ Then we can add a speech bubble near the heads of the people in our stories so that when we reread our stories we can remember that this person or that person was talking on this page, or in this part of our story. You can actually write the words that the people said right in the speech bubbles.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers think very seriously about whether we are really done with our writing. As a matter of fact, before we put anything on the done side, we reread it, thinking about all the things we know about writing stories.”
 - ▶ *Example:* “We think about if we showed feelings or said lots about the place and what happened, and ask ourselves, ‘Did I try all that here? Can I say more in my pictures? Can I say more in my words?’ Then we take the time to add to our stories, making each page matter.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers are trying to decide if we are done, we can look at the examples of writing around us. In our classroom we can look at the story we wrote together to see what we included, then we can look at our own writing, to ask, ‘Did I do that in my story?’ If the answer is no, then we might decide to go back to our story to say more.”

- *Tip:* “Then we may look at another part of the story we wrote together to ask ourselves again, ‘Did I do that?’ Then ask ‘Is there a place where I might add that to my story?’ We can keep adding to our own stories until our own writing is as filled as the examples in the classroom.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when we meet with partners, we treat our books in writing workshop the same way we treat books in reading workshop, and we can try some of the same things that we do in reading workshop! Just like in reading, we can first look at our partner’s cover and think ‘What will this story be about?’ Then as we read our partner’s book, we can think ‘Do all these pages go together with the title?’ If the cover doesn’t match the story, or some of the pages seem like they don’t belong we can help our partner to make their story better by giving them suggestions to help fix their stories up.”

Part Four: Getting Ready for Publication: Revise, Edit, and Publish

- “Today I want to teach you that once writers choose one story to publish, we go back to revise it adding as much as we can so that others can really understand and enjoy our books. One way to do this is to add lots of labels to the pictures. Specifically, we want to be sure we have labeled all of the people and objects in our stories, so others know who is who and what is what.”
- “When we publish our books we want to be sure that others can read our writing. Today I am going to teach you a way that we can help each other make our writing more readable. We can work with our writing partners, helping each other to edit our work. One partner will act as the editor while the other reads her book. The editor’s job is to go through the piece with his or her partner to help fix it up!”
 - *Tip:* “The editor and the writer will first reread the story really carefully one sentence at a time. Then the writer can ask his or her partner (the editor), ‘Does this make sense? How can we fix it? What can we add?’ Then we fix whatever needs fixing together and switch jobs.” (See Session XIV, “Revising and Editing with Partners” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)
- “Writers, we’ve all learned so much about catching Small Moments from our lives and writing about them, stretching them across pages of a book and writing clearly so that our readers can picture the story in their minds. Today we will celebrate by reading our stories to our reading buddies who will listen and then give us compliments so that we can hear what others like about our books.” (See Session XV, “Reading Aloud for Visitors: An Author’s Celebration” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative*.)



UNIT THREE

Looking Closely

Observing, Labeling, and Listing Like Scientists

NOVEMBER

This popular unit was developed to serve three important purposes. First, it is designed to help children develop the foundational knowledge that will put them in good stead as they move from emergent toward conventional reading and writing. Approximately one month from now, we hope that most of your children are beginning to read leveled books and are writing in such a way that they (and you) can reread their writing. Prior to this unit, children were encouraged to read and write “as best they can,” even if that meant that they drew, told, and improvised exciting stories without really using many letters and sounds. This unit channels them to use letters and sounds to label items and list observations. You might say the unit positions children to slow down their reading and writing, pressing the pause button on their fast-paced plots, to write labels and sentences, not whole stories. Children, then, are able to take the time necessary to stretch out each word, listening not only to the first sound, but to every sound after that. The unit also channels children toward writing list books, pattern books, and books with simple sentences that will likely revolve around high-frequency words.

Then, too, the unit is designed to teach children that writing is not only a tool for storytelling; it is also a tool for learning about science. Writing is a means through which children can study and come to know about (and eventually to teach about) the wonderful world of science. This, of course, is an important part of the Common Core State Standards, which call for kindergarten writers to “use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to compose informative/explanatory texts.” The Standards also state that kindergarten children will be able to “recall information from experiences or various sources in order to answer questions.” This unit allows them to begin to work toward these goals as they notice ways that they can write about the world around them.

It's difficult to overemphasize how important it is for children to understand writing as a tool for learning in the content areas. Many children are enthralled by any chance they get to study bugs, motors, electrical currents, and gravity. It is crucial that schools give children opportunities to learn about the world and to expand their background knowledge. It is equally important that schools let children know that in the real world millions of people use writing as a tool for organizing, holding on to, and using whatever the content is they want to learn.

Of course, a third reason the unit exists is because writing matters, and, because science matters. More specifically, providing children with opportunities to learn about *stuff* matters. Providing opportunities to see that learning about one thing leads to learning about lots of other things. Young children, of course, are dying to know how acorns turn into oak trees, where animals go in the winter, and why leaves fall from trees. It is a very good thing, then, when children are reading not only *words*, but also reading the *world* (Freire).

Before Launching the Unit

In this month, you will invite children to observe, collect, and study bits of their world. You can decide to channel this study toward any topic you like: birds, weather, water, plants, and so on. This write-up, however, is written as if you have invited the children to study plants and trees, especially the effects of autumn on plants and trees. Alter the following plans accordingly if you choose other topics. Whatever the topic, at the start of the unit you may tell your kids that they've been writing great stories, and authors often do write books that brim with stories. Tell the children that there are, however, other ways to write, and that in this unit they will learn to write like *scientists*.

Many classrooms adopt a tree outside the school building at their very own, to observe and study not just for this unit, but across the year, allowing children to see first-hand how trees respond to changes in the seasons. You'll want to nudge children to notice the changing colors of leaves, leaves falling, the difference between leaves and needles. As part of this, you'll probably want to connect some of your read-alouds and discuss how different parts of the tree are structured to allow it to survive the changing of the seasons year after year.

Once you have decided on the kind of writing the children will do, then provide them the materials that match your hopes. If you read ahead in this write-up, you'll see that we suggest you bring a few boxes of large zip-top baggies to school so that children can collect "stuff" on writerly walks to bring to your classroom. We suggest you gather trays or some other container in which to store the items children collect. We suggest you find books children can read or at least reread, after you have read repeatedly, on the topic you are studying. We recommend magnifying glasses. The key point is that you absolutely will *not* want to put all these materials out for the children from the start, because you'll use the materials to excite new work as the unit unfolds.

The materials matter because they help youngsters assume the new roles, the new identities. For this, you'll need special kinds of paper. You may, for example, give them blank researchers' notepads and colored pencils (they're better for capturing subtle details than the markers children may have used until now). Then again, you may give each student a clipboard. You may also decide to send these clipboards home so children continue to live "writerly lives" outside as well as inside the classroom. You'll need to organize the artifacts that students bring in from the world, making them accessible during writing time. You'll probably set up trays or baskets of these artifacts, moving them to the center of tables (or moving kids around trays on the rug) during work time so that children can shift between studying a leaf and writing about it.

Once your research materials have been distributed, you will probably want to inaugurate the unit of study by taking your children on a writerly/scientific walk somewhere, showing them that scientists find interesting things anywhere in the world: a little plant growing in the crack of the sidewalk, the rough feel of the bark on the trees lining the street, little beads of raindrops on the playground swings. Teach children that scientists and writers pay attention and say, "Wow!" They pull in close to really look, to really listen, and then capture whatever they see and hear on the page.

On some of your excursions, encourage children to collect objects to bring back to the classroom. When classes returned from neighborhood walks in years past, the students came in with red cheeks, huge smiles, and gallon-sized zip-top bags overflowing with leaves. They dumped their booty onto their desks and began observing. Some commented on the different sizes of the leaves, others discussed the colors, some counted how many leaves they collected, while others took leaves by the stem and rolled them in their fingers, pretending they were helicopters. They held up the leaves and looked with wide eyes and discussed their observations with all who would listen, growing the vocabulary that they would soon be writing in their books: "Look at this one, it is huge!" "I got a yellow jagged one!" The children were completely engaged and full of excitement and it lasted the entire unit.

As you help your children learn to value paying close attention to the world you'll probably want to read aloud books that celebrate this aspect of the writerly life. Try Byrd Baylor's *I'm in Charge of Celebrations* (1995), or *The Other Way to Listen* (1997). Joanne Ryder's books also illustrate the wide-awakeness you're trying to teach, as do Valerie Worth's poems, especially those in her work *All the Small Poems and Fourteen More* (1996).

Think, also, about the time frame for this month's writing workshop. If your writing workshops have been less than an hour until now, you will want to alter that for this unit. By now, children are able to work on their writing for far longer stretches of time than they could earlier in the year. Because this unit combines writing and science instruction, you'll want to extend the work even beyond an hour if you have time to do so.

Launching the Unit: Living Like Writers, Living Like Scientists

From the start of the unit, you will probably encourage children to write in three- to five-page booklets as they did when approximating *Small Moments*, because booklets have the lovely advantage of always containing another page and therefore providing built-in encouragement to keep going, to do more. The pages in the booklets need to contain plenty of room for nice, big observational drawings with labels. Remember, most kindergartners write with big letters, so they will need lots of space if they are going to write words to accompany their drawings.

By this time in the year, you'll probably want to provide each child with paper that contains at least a few lines at the bottom of each page, signaling that children should by now be writing sentences as well as labels. It's hard to emphasize the extent to which materials themselves convey expectations, and this is especially true if the materials change throughout the year, always marching a few steps ahead of children. The presence of lines at the bottom of each page should convey an important message to your students—but it will be equally important for you to supply students with tons of blank books, conveying the expectation that they will write a whole lot of these. One book a week would be far, far too little writing—they can write even more than one book a day! The more books your children write, the more opportunities they have to write words. Certainly you will want to encourage your kids to start another book as soon as they finish the first. Ask expectation-laden questions: “How many books have you written so far today?” “How many books do you think you’ll write today?” “How many books do you have in your folder so far?” Be sure to celebrate the high volume and stamina that this unit is sure to generate. What could be more engaging for children than working with leaves and twigs, acorns and pine cones in hand?

It is predictable that a few of your children will jump from topic to topic, writing something different on each page of their booklet, or that some of your children will put all of their energy into their pictures, neglecting to attempt writing letters or words. The Common Core State Standards ask that kindergartners not only compose informative texts, but that they do so by naming a topic and by supplying some information about the topic. Therefore, it is important that you teach your writers to stay focused on one particular topic as they write. Use your conferring notes to keep track of the students who are not yet doing this, and meet with them in small groups to coach them into staying longer with one topic and adding labels to everything (spelling as best they can). As you confer with your individual writers, try to figure out a theory for each of your children, “What kind of writer is this? What does he or she tend to do often (not just one time)? Is there a pattern in this child’s behavior as a writer that I could teach into?”

A few of your minilessons will probably teach students that as they study, they’ll find themselves wanting to know more, and that the great thing is that more information is available in lots of places. One of those places is the pages of books. Before long, your children will no doubt convince you to allow them to keep book baggies or book bins, brimming with books on your topic, alongside the materials. Of course, adding books to the mix adds a world of instruction. “If you want to know the

scientific word for the little lines on a leaf—and of course, you’ll always want the scientific word—then the book can tell you!” The words will sometimes be long and hard to read, so you could teach yet more lessons about using academic vocabulary, encouraging children to not just copy the word, blindly, letter by letter, but to try chunking it so they can say the word, and then when they write, chunking it again so they can write it, chunk by chunk.

Of course, one child will help you make the discovery (that you’ll then share with the class) that the books can not only be sources for answers and information, they can also become mentor texts. You might say, “You know those science books at your tables? We can write books just like these about our own topics! About leaves or trees or our walk outside!” In a one-to-one conference, perhaps you and one writer will compare the book he was reading with the one he was writing—maybe even simply counting the number of pages in each. If his own book was shorter than the one the grown-up scientist had written, then your youngster could set that right with just a stapler and some extra pages. This work, of course, can become the centerpiece for a minilesson or a mid-workshop share session as you invite other students to engage in similar work. Before long, students will be pointing out to you that the books written by grown-up scientists all have at least one sentence and often more on a page, and your young scientists will resolve to do likewise. You can help students discover that some of their just-right science books are written in a patterned way and some contain a twist at the end. Naturally, youngsters will want to write in similar ways. You’ll see children writing list books with one phrase or label per page: *The leaf. The stick. The bark.* You should expect other children to be writing simple sentences or patterns like, *This leaf is yellow. This leaf is red. This leaf is green.* Again, the materials you provide will make all the difference.

Praise children’s remarkable ability to see the world. Encourage them to pick up bits and pieces, to put these things on trays, to examine them closely and to draw them with an eye for detail. Stop children as they work, holding up one drawing or another, and talk about the smart ways in which one child used shape and color or another used size to make the item look real. Make photocopies of some of their work in progress and hang it around the room or display it proudly on a shelf or taped to a chart. Congratulate children publicly for spending extended periods of time on one single drawing, adding more and more detail to it, saying “Ooh” and “Ahh” when a child fills an entire page with a drawing of a wee little acorn. That child has made a small item very big, and scientists (and writers) do the same thing.

Whether you have given your students colored pencils or markers, the unit will begin with a renewed commitment to making representational drawings, this time with writers working especially hard to capture details with precision, just as scientists do. In an earlier write-up, we pointed out that teaching children to draw representationally is significant work because this is teaching them to conjure up a mental picture of a topic and then to work to capture that image, that idea, with fidelity onto the page. The effort to put life onto the page, with detail, is fundamental to the writing process. Encourage children who are tracing to try to notice and draw the details on

their own so that their writing is a place to practice close noticing, drawing representationally, with an emphasis on the process of noticing and thinking, taking one's time, rather than a quick fix for a final product.

Of course, as part of teaching children to record what they see with detail, you will want to teach revision. You might, in the context of this unit, revisit the notion that when writers revise, what a writer is doing, literally, is re-vision, or re-seeing. The writer looks again, and this time sees information he or she had neglected to include in a first draft, usually leading the writer to add more into his or her text. A later lesson can involve teaching children that sometimes when the writer re-sees, the writer decides to do a whole new drawing, and perhaps this whole new drawing might be one that zooms in on an object, allowing the writer/scientist and the viewer to notice more. Scientists, of course, sometimes re-see using magnifying lenses. If you have any on hand, they will certainly fire up your children's work, especially if you saved them just for this part of the unit. Even if you don't have magnifying lenses, you can make "zoom lenses" from three-by-five index cards that have a one-inch hole cut out of the center to encourage children to focus on the smaller details of a larger object.

Of course this is writing time, so any drawing that children do will be a prelude to writing—and that writing needs to thread through most of every day's workshop. This means that as the year unfolds you should see children writing for increasing lengths of time, producing more and more text. As always, you'll need to use your understanding of what your children can do in order to guide each child toward the writing that he or she should be achieving.

For some small groups of children, you may teach them to make many labels each day, and as part of this, you will teach them to say words slowly, stretching them out, hearing the first sound, recording the letter that matches that sound, then rereading what they have written, continuing on through the word so the child hears and then records the second phoneme. As you do this, you will be helping those children draw on what they know about letters and sounds. Some children may still rely on letter names for their sense of the sound the letter makes. (This works as a starting strategy because usually the name of a letter contains the sound associated with that letter.) Some children will already be hearing and recording beginning and ending consonant sounds, if not all the phonemes in a word, and you'll want to teach strategy lessons to these groups of children to draw on their growing knowledge of letter-sound correspondence, known words and visual information when they write. This is important work to teach across all units, as the Common Core State Standards expect kindergarten writers to "write a letter or letters for most consonant and short-vowel sounds (phonemes)" by the end of the year.

For groups of children who are hearing and attempting to record most of the consonant sounds in a word (and starting to use and confuse vowels), nudge them to write a sentence under each picture, but be careful not to overstep—this unit is not meant to be a "fill-in-the-blank" unit where the teacher provides all the patterns, and the children supply the missing words. The big idea in this unit is that children will invent their own sentences and patterns, giving them an insider's understanding about language that will support them in reading as well as speaking and listening. If children are stuck,

you could refer them to the growing list of accountable talk prompts you should by now have displayed on a chart in your room. Surely by now your children are familiar with the prompts, “I notice . . .,” “I wonder . . .,” or “I think . . .,” During read-aloud, when you stop to give children opportunities to talk about books, you can coach them to use these prompts in their conversations; then all of these prompts and more can be used to inspire sentences in their science writing.

Throughout the first part in this unit, writing partners can play an important role in keeping your kindergartners engaged and independent. Teach your kids that when they are stuck they should first try their best and move on, but that sometimes we all need a little help. “During independent writing time, when you really aren’t sure what to do or can’t remember what something is called, you can whisper to your writing partner for help, then go right back to your own work.”

Each day you’ll probably want to also have some structured partner time. The excitement of all the science materials lends itself easily to children talking with partners—they go off to their tables and there’s all this exciting material waiting for them. Your children’s reaction should be “Yippee!” Why fight it? Make the most out of their talk by encouraging them to use the actual scientific vocabulary: *veins, stems, leaves, bark*, instead of vague language: *thing, stuff, it*. Some teachers find it helpful to actually have five minutes or so of partner time first before switching to independent writing time. You can direct your partner time by saying, “Take a few minutes to meet with your partner to talk about what you’re going to write today,” allowing children to be excited (and possibly noisy) while they are gathering ideas from what their partner says, before turning their attention to the writing and transitioning into quiet work time.

Writing More! Elaboration, Writing Sentences, Adding Details and Information

If you decide to nudge some groups of children toward list books, it might go like this: “I see the leaf. I see the acorn. I see the pine cone.” You will want to also teach them to elaborate—to think and write more. There are lots of ways to help children elaborate, and the most essential method will be to nudge them to write whatever they notice or think or wonder about an object. Helping children write whatever is on their minds will also entail teaching them to be inventive spellers, tackling words fearlessly. This means that if some children are currently writing with just one or two sounds, you will want to encourage them to slow down and listen for more sounds. If you notice other children starting to represent some vowel sounds, this will inform your word study, where you will want to spend a little time teaching them about short vowels and how to use them to spell. You may convene other groups to work on using known words to spell unknown words. All of this will be possible because children will be using their high-frequency words and patterns to write with greater fluency. Since much of their sentences will flow quickly, writers will have more energy to spell the tricky words with increasingly complex spelling strategies.

Some groups of children might benefit from learning to write different kinds of sentences (complex sentences, with a variety of language structures and punctuation). You might teach your whole class to notice that sometimes the books we read ask questions and suggest that some of them may want to try writing a book of questions. Some children might even try writing a book of questions *and* answers. Either structure will give kids plenty of practice with a new kind of sentence, and more options for kinds of books to write, and a new way to think about the science they are studying—scientists ask questions at least as often as they record facts. You can add both to the list of options they have collected by now (that list now includes all of the structures you’ve taught so far in this unit: label books, list books, books with sentences, now questions, questions and answers).

You can also teach elaboration by emphasizing not only what writers do (revise) but what scientists do. For example, you teach children that scientists usually write what they see first, but then they look again, this time for more details: “I see the leaf. It has little holes in it.” Of course, it is also important to teach children (if they are ready for this) to alternate between recording what they see and recording what they think; for example, “I see the leaf. Why is it red?” Children could also observe and write from photographs some of the time in the same manner.

Remember, as the unit progresses, children will be churning out a lot of little books. They will probably write approximately three a week, each with three to five pages. The lovely thing about this is that when you teach children something new, you can encourage them to revise previously written books, adding whatever you’ve most recently taught to those earlier books. This means that if a child draws and labels for the first week-and-a-half of this study, and then you teach her to write sentences, she might go back and reread her existing collection, this time adding a sentence to every page of her earlier books. If you teach another child that in addition to observing, he could also think, and if you suggest one way to revise is to ask questions, that child could reread all his books, extending them in that way, changing “I see the leaf” to “What do I see? I see the leaf,” or, “I see the leaf. I wonder why it is green.”

By now, you’ve done quite a bit of work to help children learn and use scientific vocabulary of the subject during read-alouds, shared reading, and science time. If your scientists are studying trees, their writing should include terms like *stem*, *veins*, *bark*, and *twigs*. Through read-aloud, shared reading, and during your science instruction, you may want to add scientific words to a science word wall, or chart. Add the words one or two at a time, as they come up in your reading and shared experiences. Write the words large on sentence strips or index cards, like you would for your usual word-wall words. You might include picture clues for these new vocabulary words to help your young readers access the meaning of the words when they glance up at the science word wall to find a word, not just when talking to partners, but also to use in their own writing.

Scientists Think, Make Connections, Predict, Have Ideas, Compare and Contrast—and So Do Writers!

You will also need to keep in mind the big work of the unit to be sure the work progresses. Be ready to show children other options for structuring their science writing (and be ready to invite them to make choices). For example, you might teach children that many scientists are interested in all the parts of an object, and you might invite children to write books about the parts of an object. This could be as simple as a child writing a book entitled, “The Tree.” One page could address one part of the object, saying, “The trunk,” and another page, “The branches,” and so forth. The book might end with a twist: “I want to climb it.”

So far the emphasis in this unit has been on making observations, collecting information and details, and recording those details on the page through drawing and writing labels and sentences—and for many kindergarten classrooms this can and should be the emphasis for the remainder of the unit. You can extend the work that they are already doing by adding new science material for kids to observe and look at; you can encourage them to study their just-right books for new ideas for things to try in their own writing; you can continue to meet with small groups of kids and coach them into labeling with more letter sounds, writing more words and phrases, sentences, and different kinds of sentences.

However, for some classrooms, particularly in classrooms where children are already beginning to write sentences, you may want to take the next step and teach your children new ways to think about the science content they’ve been studying. For example, you might teach your class that, yes, scientists (and writers) do record exactly what we see in front of us, right down to the last detail, but we also can push ourselves to think, “Why?” “Why do leaves change colors?” “Why does . . .” “What is the reason . . .” and then we can stretch our thinking even farther by making a prediction (or hypothesis). *Maybe* or *probably* are good prompts for encouraging children to hypothesize about the science artifacts in front of them, using all that you’ve taught them by now through read-alouds, science instruction, science walks, and so on.

Another option, either for small groups of children or for your whole class, is to arrange the science materials in ways that lend themselves to comparison and contrast. As mentioned before, you might place a basket of different kinds of leaves at each table for the writers to look at. Then teach your children that writers often look closely at objects to notice and write about what is the same and what is different. Together, you might sort a basket of mixed leaves, or pine cones, or twigs, talking about what makes them each the same or different as you go—perhaps even writing as you go. You might create a chart with your kids that lists some language for comparing and contrasting. “I noticed . . . is the same as . . .” “They both . . .” or “I noticed . . . is different from . . .” “One has . . . but the other has . . .”

As children become ready for more challenges, there will be a host of possibilities. You can nudge them toward more precise words, braver choices, or using comparisons to show what they mean: “Some leaves are as colorful as a party dress.” No matter

what structure your children select, you can extend what they do by encouraging them to wonder and to question, perhaps even letting their curiosity lead to small experiments. For instance, the question “I wonder why the leaf is waxy?” will ideally be followed with possible answers, and you will want to teach children helpful phrases such as, “Could it be that (or “because of”) . . . ?” The leaf scientist might conjecture that the wax on leaves lets the water roll right off of them, and that could lead to an experiment. Chances are good that you will not get to this work within your one unit, but it will likely spark continued work around a shared inquiry, preferably one that brings fascinating stuff into your room (and that brings your children out of the room!) long after the writing curriculum has moved on.

By this point in the unit, you have surely read aloud quite a few books about plants, trees, or whatever science topic you have chosen for the unit. Encourage your children to use what they know from the read-alouds as well as the science material in front of them. Teach them that we can also write books about what we know—not just about what’s in front of us. So, even if we have a stack of leaves in front of us, we can write books that are about “different kinds of trees” or “why leaves change color” or “trees in my neighborhood” because all these are things that we’ve studied this month as part of our unit. You might even make copies of the cover of each read-aloud to make an easy-to-see list of all the books you’ve read so far about the topic. You may want to display the read-alouds you’ve done in an easy-to-access part of the room, or even make a chart for each read-aloud (as you are reading it, of course) to remind kids of the key content they’ve learned in each read-aloud so that kids can access that information during writing workshop.

Finishing Up Our Books, Getting Ready to Present Our Work

As the unit nears its end, you may want to ramp up the rereading work that children are doing during writing workshop. Encourage them to use everything they know from reading workshop to read their own writing (to themselves and to partners during partner time each day)—pointing to one word at a time, making sure that the words make sense, rereading to smooth out their voices. You can teach your kindergartners that writers reread their own writing again and again to make sure that it makes sense, sounds good, and looks right. We read with our pencil in hand, ready to make changes as needed.

You’ll also want to make sure that your students have a clear sense of who their audience will be for publishing their work. Near the end of the unit, each of your children can pick one or two of the many books they have written in this unit to return to and publish. Will their published books be on display in the school library? Does your school have a science lab or science bulletin board? Perhaps you’ll invite another class to come and visit so that your children can present one or two of their books to a partner from another classroom. However you decide to publish, you can get the most out of this last part of the unit by reminding children that for the last few days,

they'll be getting their writing ready to share with other people, real live people, who are going to read their books. They can add more labels, more words, more details, maybe even add color, a cover, or an "about the author" page to "fancy it up" and get it ready to share.

Adaptations for Children Who Need Support

As the unit evolves, be sure that more and more children progress from hearing the initial sounds in words to hearing and recording all the phonemes. Identify the children whose spellings do not yet show that they've mastered the idea that each sound needs to lead to at least one mark, one letter, and give those children a great deal of repeated scaffolding. They should practice making labels every day, with you providing the support for stretching words out, hearing more constituent sounds so that those children should be able to graduate soon to writing sentences underneath their pictures. Your goal will be for them to write so that they can reread their writing, using one-to-one matching, and so that you can reread their writing too, or at least long stretches of it. You may want to suggest that when children progress to sentences, they first simply write, "I see the . . ." This may seem like fairly dull writing, but it is not dull to the children. Remember that these children are on the brink of learning to read conventionally, and one of the most important things they can learn is the concept of one-to-one matching. Even if a child writes a text as "boring" as, "I see the green leaf. I see the red leaf," and then the child reads that text back, pointing at each word as she reads it, that child is making gigantic strides.

It will be important for you to encourage children to leave spaces between their words (and through this, to develop more of an understanding of the difference between words and letters). If children squish their letters together without spaces between words, teach them to reread, making slashes where they might want spaces. Another way is to listen to what the child wants to say, and then repeat each word, making one blank on the child's page where each word will go. The writer can then touch each blank, saying aloud what he or she will write, and then record a word in each blank.

Additional Resources

This month, you are really providing yourself with a different path toward the same goals that were outlined in October. The unit provides your students with lots of support writing sentences. You should be able to read their writing, and they should be able to read it as well, using one-to-one matching.

If you have some students who do not know five to ten high-frequency words or who do not (at the very least) use beginning and ending consonants roughly correctly, you will want to really ramp up your instruction this month to ensure that this unit

provides those children with time to catch up. For these writers, the work on varied sentences and elaboration will be somewhat beside the point. The real goal for them will be to write so that people can read their writing.

On the other hand, for your more proficient writers, you can surely teach them to spread their wings during this unit.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit: Living Like Writers, Living Like Scientists

- “Today I want to teach you that writers are like scientists; we both live wide-awake lives, looking closely at the world around us to learn new things and to share what we learn with others. Like scientists, writers look at things differently—we notice things that most ordinary people just walk right past. Instead of walking past the everyday things, writers stop to jot down our thoughts and observations, using words and pictures to capture every detail. As scientists, we have already been jotting down a lot of things we are noticing about the trees and leaves around us, and today I want to teach you that writers can write down our observations in booklets, so that we can share what we learn about the world around us with others.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “Scientists don’t only draw careful observations of what we see, scientists also add labels beside our drawings so others know what things are. So, as we record what we see, we will want to be sure to do this too.”

- “Today I want to teach you that when we are writing like scientists, we need to try to capture what we see, exactly the way we find it. So if there is a hole in the leaf we are writing about, we don’t just make a dot, we draw a hole. We need to look closely as we draw and write about the things we see, including exact details as we see them.”

- “If we want others to read about our scientific findings, we need to help them to do this! In order for others to read our writing, we need to spell words the best we can. Today, I am going to teach you that one way you can be sure to get down as many sounds as you can is by stretching out your words slowly, writing down all of the sounds that you hear. You can say the word you want to write, listening to the first sound you hear to get the first letter down. Then, say the word again, listening for the next sound in the word; put down the letter that makes that sound. Keep doing this until you have as many sounds down as you hear! Remember to just do the best you can!”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “You may have to say the word five times, but the more sounds you get down, the easier it will be for someone to read.”

- ▶ *Tip:* “As you write, you might stop to reread what you have recorded. You could put your finger under what you have written, as you read the word. Sometimes as you reread a word, you realize, ‘Oops. I forgot to put one of the sounds onto the paper,’ and then you can add more letters.”
- “Today I want to teach you that before we start writing, we plan what we will teach others, but we also plan for other things! We plan how we want our book to go and what it might sound like: Will it be a book that teaches what things are? Or what they do? Or do we want to ask our reader questions? We might even try a few ways our book could sound before we choose the one that best fits our plan.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers make plans to teach lots and lots! Before you start writing, you might look at your just-right books to see how long those books are, then you might say: I know lots of facts to make my book just as long! One way to do this is to say all of the stuff you want to teach across your fingers and then grab a booklet to write down all of the stuff you want to include so that you make books just like the ones you are reading!”
- “Writers often talk to others about what we are planning to write, before we even get our pencils ready. Today I want to teach you that sometimes it might help to work with a partner first, before we start to write a new book. We can ask our partner, ‘What are you going to write today?’ and listen carefully to all that our partner says. We might even get more ideas for what to teach just from listening to what our partner plans to do!”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “When writers are stuck, first we try our best and move on, but sometimes we all need a little help. During independent writing time, when we really aren’t sure what to do, or can’t remember what something is called, we can whisper to our writing partner for help, then go right back to our own work.”

Part Two: Writing More! Elaboration, Writing Sentences, Adding Details and Information

- “As writers and scientists, we need to look again and again, adding to our pictures and our words. After we draw and write about a leaf, we look again at the leaf, really closely, maybe with a magnifying glass. We try to find any details we may have missed. Today I want to show you that as writers we can always add more details to our pictures and to our words.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “You may even decide to start a new page, zooming in on the details!”

- “Today I want to teach you that writers use drawings and labels to remind us of what we want to say, and then we can go back to add more, adding our ideas about the stuff we’ve put onto the page. Sometimes what we write on one page gets us started, and we end up writing in a pattern, saying similar things on every page.”
- “Scientists use lots of fancy words to talk to one another. For example scientists who look closely at birds call themselves ornithologists, and those who look closely at stars are said to study astronomy. Today, I want to teach you that when we are writing like scientists we will want to be more scientific and exact, using the same kinds of words that other scientists do. We can use the charts, books, and other words that we see around the room to make our words more precise and exact. As we write, we might stop to think, ‘Wait, do I know another word to describe this?’ or ‘Is there a word in the room that can help describe or name what it is that I am talking about?’ Then we can find those words and add them to our books.”
- “Today I want to teach you that as writers we often see what other authors have done in their books to get ideas for what we might do in our own. Writers look over a book and think, ‘How does this whole book go?’ and then think, ‘How do I want my book to go?’ For example you might read a book about leaves and ask ‘How did this writer sort the leaves?’ Then you might think about how you could sort your information in a similar way.”

Part Three: Scientists Think, Make Connections, Predict, Have Ideas, Compare and Contrast—And So Do Writers!

- “Writers, I am so impressed with how you have gotten the hang of looking closely at the things around you, making observations to then write about in your books the way scientists do. Today I want to teach you that scientists not only record what we see, but we also add information based on what we already know. We can write about all of the parts of an object, like a tree or a flower, even if the parts aren’t right there in front of us.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “Even if we just have a stack of leaves right in front of us, we can write books about ‘Different kinds of trees,’ or ‘Why leaves change color,’ or ‘Trees in our neighborhood.’ We have learned all about trees and leaves and can say so much more than just listing the details that we see in front of us.”
- “Are you ready for a whole new kind of work? If you are, then today I want to teach you that scientists don’t just collect tons and tons of stuff, writing it all down in any old way. Instead scientists also try to figure out how to sort things into ‘piles that go together.’ Then scientists draw and write to teach people about why these ‘piles go together.’”

Part Four: Finishing Up Our Books, Getting Ready to Present Our Work

- “Writers, we are in the home stretch of our unit. Do you know what a home stretch is? In a horse race, the home stretch is that final part in the track, when the finish line is right ahead, and the crowd starts cheering like crazy because pretty soon the whole terrific race will be over. Well, we are entering the final stretch of our unit. So our work will change, as it always does for writers when we are in the home stretch. You ready? Today I want to teach you that whether a writer is a scientist-writer, a story writer, a fairy tale writer, or a newspaper writer, writers always take the last few days to look back over all we have written to decide ‘What’s good here that is worth revising and sharing with the world?’ We put all our good stuff in a revision folder, and then we start revising it. And to ‘revise’ means to ‘re-see,’ to look again at what we have done and to ask, ‘How can I make this good work into terrific work?’ Writers reread our writing and put Post-its on all the parts where we think we can make our work even better—then we get going!”

- “Today I want to teach you that as writers we don’t just automatically put our books away on the ‘finished’ side of our folders when we think we are done. Instead we reread our books a couple of times and think to ourselves, ‘Do I have more to add to my labels? To my pictures? To my sentences? Do I have more to say about what I see . . . where I see it . . . and why it looks or feels this way?’ Writers often say more and think, ‘Wait, I want to tell more information, to be more specific.’ We don’t just say, ‘I see a hole in the leaf.’ We say, ‘I see a hole in a leaf, and maybe a caterpillar made the hole.’ Or, ‘This leaf has spikes. The spikes are on the top.’ We can add more into our pattern books when we think we have more to add.”
 - ▶ *Tip/Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “I saw some of you adding tons more labels—like you were labeling not just *leaf* but also *stem*, *edge*, *bug bite*, and things like that. And some of you were adding lots of words to your labels, like ‘skinny long stem.’ Some of you had written one sentence at the bottom of each page, like, ‘I see the leaf.’ And you thought, ‘I can add so much more!’ So you added more. I thought maybe I’d teach all of you to do what some of you were already doing, okay? So today I want to teach you that as writers we reread our books and we ask ourselves, ‘What do I think about this?’ and we add what we think to the page.”

 - ▶ *Tip:* “Writers sometimes reread our writing and find ourselves wondering and having questions about things. So, we add questions to get the reader wondering, too. For example, Jessica reread her book, ‘I see a hole.’ She added, ‘How did the hole get there? I wonder if a ladybug ate it.’”

- “Today I want to teach you that neither writers nor scientists wait for teachers to tell them how to revise our writing. No way! Writers don’t come up to teachers and say, ‘Please, Miss, how do I make my writing better?’ and then just do what the teacher says. No way. As writers we are the boss of our own writing. We reread our books and think, ‘What else can I add?’ And then we look to charts, books, or other kid writers to get tons and tons of cool ideas.”
- “Today I want to remind you of something you already know. We have already been fixing up our writing. Writers not only fix up our writing, we also fancy up our writing so that it is ready to be published.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “I’ve brought the list out from the last unit of ways to fix and fancy up our writing. Of course you know that we can look back on old charts to get ideas for what we can do, but we can also add to those old charts. I’m wondering if there are other ideas you have for how we could fix and fancy up our writing?”



UNIT FOUR

Writing Pattern Books to Read, Write, and Teach

DECEMBER

We know that reading and writing go hand in hand, and now is the time to make this connection really visible for your students. In November, your kindergartners wrote like scientists. They observed experiments closely and then used labels and lists (and sometimes sentences) to write what they saw. This month, your writers will build on what they have already learned and again use labels, lists, and sentences to make pattern books like the ones they read in the leveled baskets in your library. One way you might rally kids around this writing is to give them a purpose to write the kinds of books they like to read, which is in alignment with the Common Core State Standards. You might decide to actually type up the pattern books your children will make and add them to the classroom library. It is important to remember that if you do this, you will want the typed copies that will go in their baggies to have conventional spelling, since the kids will be rereading them many times. This will reinforce and expand their sight-word knowledge, in addition to supporting other conventional spelling. You could keep the pictures in the typed version the same by making a copy of the child's written book and then adding the typed text.

You will be inviting your children to independently author pattern books like the ones you worked on in reading last month and will continue to read this month. To begin this unit, you might say something like, "Writers, I looked around our classroom the other day during reading workshop, and I saw all of you reading, and I realized that you are reading so many books now that we may need *more* books in our library. I mean, your baggies are bursting with books, but you readers are gobbling them up so fast! We need to get more of these books. So, I thought maybe you would be willing to *make* more books for our library. I thought that this month we could be writers of the kinds of books we have been reading. Now that we are all drawing pictures and writing words, I think we are ready to fill these baskets (point to your leveled baskets) with

our books. We can really make the library our own. We can fill our library with books about our favorite things, about our families, and about our friends. We can use what we know about each other to make just the right books. The readers in this class will have no trouble finding books they are interested in reading, because we will be in charge of making the books we want to read!”

While the opening to this unit emphasizes making books and creating a more personalized library, this unit is also about using patterns to help children write. We want to make sure, however, that this unit is not taught in a heavily prompted way. For instance, you will *not* want to point out a pattern in a book and say, “Everyone could use that exact pattern to help them write their book.” While we believe that the concept of pattern books can be very supportive to beginning writers, we don’t want this unit to have a “story starter kit” feel. There are several ways to avoid this “pattern of the day.” One way is to lean heavily on your read-aloud and shared reading times. You are probably already reading level A–D books in shared reading to teach beginning reading skills. To support this unit, you might also read aloud some of those books. When reading aloud, practice savoring the words: slow down your reading of the few words on each page, think carefully about the rhythm of the pattern, and the stress you might put on each word. This reading tip holds true for reading your kindergartners’ writing as well. You will want to model the savoring of their writing, helping all the children—and the teacher—see the big beauty in these little books. To help your writers write with patterns, you will also want to make sure that in reading these pattern books, you are asking children to pay attention to how these kinds of books, levels A–D, talk. They talk with repetition.

In both shared reading and read-aloud of leveled books, you will want to point out the characteristics of a pattern book. Think aloud and show, or invite your kindergartners to notice, things like sight words, repeating sentence structure, and the ways pattern books communicate meaning. You can talk about how the title holds all of the pages together and how it also might be repeated on the last page. You might show your students how pattern books often have a twist on the last page. This twist or “surprise ending” involves a change in the pattern and a slight change in the book’s message. You will also want to highlight how the pictures in a pattern book don’t just help support the words but add meaning to the new words on each page.

We imagine that your children may be using the same kinds of writing paper they were using in the November unit. They could use full-page booklets or you could try to make the books look more like the level A/B/C books in your library. You could use half-sheets of paper to make your booklets. You will want the paper to have a picture space and a line or two (or three) underneath for writing. The paper choices should match the writing that your writers have done leading up to this unit. If they are filling the lines, give them more lines! Some of your writers will still be writing with labels, but in this unit you will want to show them how the label can go under the picture on the writing line. They would then be making level A books. These label-making kids could be taught to do two-word labels on the writing line to help build their word-writing muscles. For example, if a child’s book is entitled, “My Toys,” and his or her

labels go like this: “Balls, Animals, Cars, Games, People,” you could teach them to add a word to help their reader know a little more about the thing on each page. The book might then go, “*Bouncy Balls, Stuffed Animals, Little Cars, Board Games, Plastic People.*” Children who read texts that are at levels A, B, and C and who are working on one-to-one matching in reading are prompted to put spaces between their words, to reread their own writing pointing under the words, to notice when they have left out a word and to add that to their writing, and to write using first and last letters. These children will label four to six items on each page of their writing and will also write a sentence or two underneath their picture.

Whether your children are writing list or label books, you will want to make sure that they are writing a lot of them—at least one per day. At this point in the year, you will want to consider the volume of writing that your writers are producing, and you will continue to build on that volume. They should be writing more than they were at the beginning of November, so keep this in mind as you look across the number of booklets they are producing. You might do this by creating a little celebration ritual at the end of each week. Perhaps you conclude each week of the unit with partner time, and reading partners read to each other books they created during writing workshop. Maybe the celebration involves reading and then placing the books they created in a basket that looks like the baskets in the leveled library. Maybe each partnership gets a basket to share. When it comes to volume, you could also use your shares and your mid-workshop teaching points to have kids reflect and celebrate the number of books they are adding to your leveled library.

Writing Our Pattern Books

This first part is all about creating energy for the unit. Your first minilesson might sound something like the quote from the second paragraph above. You will be trying to show your writers how their reading of pattern books can help them make pattern books of their own. Remember that pattern books are not just books with repeating words. Pattern books are books that use repeating words to communicate meaning. You will want to be sure your message is that when writers create pattern books, they first think about how all the pages go together to communicate meaning to the reader. Then those writers use patterned language to communicate their meaning. The energy in this week should come from two places: first, your writers should have a lot of motivation to create a more personalized library; second, they already know how pattern books work, so they can start making them right away. Your goal will be to have most children finish a pattern book on the very first day of the unit. A book per day is how the pace of the unit should feel.

When it comes to pointing out how a pattern book works, you want to make sure that your writers not only notice the word pattern that carries meaning across the pages. You should also point out how the picture on the page helps the reader understand the one or two new words on each page, as the Common Core State Standards

demand. The pattern in a book involves all three cuing systems: meaning, structural, and visual. It is set up to help the reader make sense of the book (meaning), to talk to the reader in a certain way (structural), and to use illustrations (visual). You are not necessarily teaching the three cuing systems explicitly during this writing unit, but you want to make sure that your explanation of pattern books is balanced by these three sources of information. To help your children understand how to make a pattern book, you might make a chart that says something like, “Pattern books have: a topic, four to six ideas about a topic, words that talk about the topic and are the same on every page, and representational or meaningful drawings that help your reader read your book.”

In this first week, as in every unit, you will need to remind your children how to find topics or ideas for the pattern books that they know a lot about and matter to them. One way to do this might be to remind kids of the books that they wrote in the last unit, thinking about how they might have used patterns to write information about a particular topic. You might also remind them that they can write books about themselves. Your students might also find ideas from each other. They could, for instance, interview their reading partners and ask them what kinds of books they like to read. A third way to come up with topics could be by looking through the level A–D book baskets. You might teach your students how to look at the books in the baskets, thinking about how they might make their own version of the same thing. For instance, a child finds a level B book about bugs, which says, “Bugs are big, bugs are small, bugs have spots, bugs have stripes.” That child could think about how there are a lot of bugs in the park and then he or she might write a “Bugs in the Park” book. It might sound something like, “Worms on the ground, ladybugs on the slide, flies on my head.” You would then be teaching your writers that even the very lowest-level books are still mentor books. In this particular case, mentoring is about how to get a fruitful writing topic. You’ll want your writers to think about the different topics or ideas that they might find in pattern books, so that they begin to realize what they might write about.

This unit will of course involve drawing pictures to plan how the books will go. You will also want to do some teaching about how the pictures on each page need to do two very important things. Every page needs to have a picture that the reader can search to find the meaning of the book, and which also helps with the tricky word on that page. When students are drawing pictures, you will show them how writers ask themselves, “What needs to be in the picture for my readers to understand tricky words?” You could tell them that the writer is planting a clue in the picture to support their reader. You will probably also be teaching that pictures in their books should go with the other pages. Second, you might want to teach how every picture needs to say as much as, or even more than, the words say. This supports making more thoughtful, deeper inferences. You might teach your writers to make sure that there is something, at least one thing, in every picture that teaches or shows one more sentence’s worth of thinking—even though that sentence won’t be written. In these early leveled books, pictures do all the work of encouraging early reading between the lines, or inferring. You want your list-book writers to trust and help their readers to do this kind of work in their pattern books as well.

Their pattern books will be somewhere between six to eight pages long, about the length of a typical early level book that they would read in your library. In this first week, you are looking for your writers to write fast and furiously. Your hope is that they have about five little pattern books done by the end of this first week of teaching. Just as it was in the November writing unit, volume needs to be a major focus. You want to make sure that your children are increasing their output of writing during each unit and across the year. If you think about it, these books are perfect for “fast and furious” writing because they are short and simple. You will want to make sure to tell your writers how many books you expect, and you will want to make sure that you model making that many too. Always remind them to use pictures to plan. Another thing to ask themselves when planning is, “What are the big things I want to say in this book?”

You will also want to angle your teaching to the “word side” of writing. Once your writers have ideas and patterns for their list books, they will need to do some pretty important things with the words in those books. In this month’s reading unit, you will be getting kids to pay close attention to the patterns in their books, and the sight words that pop up from one page to the next. You might teach your kindergartners to use words from the word wall and other words they know to create their patterns, helping them to write in ways that are easier to read and which follow the Common Core State Standards for Language. You could then make sure that each of your students has a way to know which sight words are their own. Using the November word reading assessment, for instance, each child would have a collection of words that they could think about using in their books. You would want children to know that these words give them writing power because if they just know them, they can write them with very little time or effort. All their effort should be put into the one or two words per page that step outside of the pattern.

However, just because sight-word writing and reading can play an important role in this unit, you don’t want your kindergarten writers to write books as if they were fill-in-the-blank workbook pages. What you don’t want them thinking is, “I am writing about space and I have to use these words on this list . . . so what do I say?” Instead, you want to show your writers how their own language, expressing their own ideas, can be made more patterned. Remember that many of them were elaborating in their list books in the last unit, so now you want to allow them to use what they already know while incorporating a pattern. You will want to be sure to teach children how to use patterns to express themselves. They can do this by taking the first thing they have to say about a topic, and then thinking about if there is part of that first sentence that might be used on the rest of the pages. If a child says about a picture in her book, “This is a picture of a planet,” then you want to ask something like, “What do you want to say about your picture?” They might say something like, “Space has planets in it.” Then, the child could be shown how the rest of her book can go just like that first page. She would then draw a second page and talk out the words for that page using the pattern already established on the first page. Page two could have rocks drawn in space. The child could then write, “Space has rocks in it.” Once your kids understand the patterns found in the books they read, you can teach them to change the pattern on the last

page, as is common in level C and D books. To change the ending, you might show your writers to reverse the pattern. For example, if they are talking about all the things space has, you might teach them to say what is *not* found in space. They might then write something like, “Space doesn’t have *me!*”

Maybe the last day of this first week has a mini-celebration. Your writers take a leveled basket and then put their list books from the week in them. Reading partners could then read through the new “leveled” library books. What great reading work, and what great motivation to make more! You might say something like, “We have work to do. A whole class of readers is waiting for the book of their dreams! We have a library to fill!”

Writing Fancier Pattern Books

This part will also involve teaching children to pay attention to how their pattern books work. Whenever you are teaching kids about the different ways that books work, you will want to be sure that you talk about why an author chooses a particular structure. Different structures are always chosen because they are the most effective way to communicate meaning in a book. During shared reading of lower-level big books, you want to point out how some books have a seesaw pattern. One page goes one way and the next page goes another. “I like ice cream. My mom does too. I like pizza. My dad does too.” Their book might go like that too. You might want your writers to notice how some books ask a question and then spend pages answering that question. Or, you could again point out that other Level A–D books go one way for the whole book and then have some sort of tricky switch at the end. So a book about school might go, “We like to go to art, we like to go to music, we like to read and write, we like to do math, we like to go to gym, (and for the twist) we don’t like to go home.” In reading, the children will learn to notice the different patterns that help them read across books. In writing workshop, you will want the children to approach pattern books as writers, so that they are able to notice the moves the writer makes in order to make sense of the topic or story she is writing about.

As we talked about in the first part of this unit, pattern books are often written in a way to convey meaning. Therefore, this last part of the unit is about writing books that mean something. When the children are reading level A/B/C books, we don’t want them to think that all they are doing is practicing reading words so that they can get past these early level books and move on to the real books. They need to figure out what the books are *about*. The same goes for writing. We don’t want our writers to write pattern books just to use words they know, we want them to be able to convey information, an idea, or a story in an effective way. In order to teach this last part well, you will have to believe that even the smallest books can hold big meaning. You want to make sure that the kids are reading, and during read-aloud time you are reading little leveled books too. You want to teach your readers, for instance, how the title often holds all of the pages together in the books. So as writers, they learn to give their books a title that will help their readers get the big important stuff too. The message of this week is that writers work to communicate their meaning. The title is one way to communicate clearly. The

ending is another way to convey meaning. It could say the opposite of the rest of the book, and be surprising. There could be a big change or a new feeling on that last page of the list book. It could be all about an individual and then shift to someone else in the end, or it could be all about the rest of the world and then come back to an individual on the last page. You can teach your writers that using your ending to help a reader understand what you are really trying to say is what writers do in all kinds of writing. The Brand New Readers by Candlewick Press do this kind of writing work well. For instance, in *Worm Is Hot*, the title does the work of saying one of the big ideas of the book. This book also has a surprising change at the end. You will probably need to collect and read aloud several of your own examples of books with patterns that do some fancier meaning work.

Again, you will want to make sure that your writers are producing about one list book a day. Continue to support them in using several strategies to find ideas and inspiration for their books. As they are working on writing the words of these books, writing the tricky word will inevitably slow them down. This is true in reading too. You will want to make sure that your writers are calling on all they know about how words work to help them write the one or two tricky words per page. At this point, you'll want to remind them to put down a letter for every sound they can hear when they stretch out a word. They could use their reading partner during writing to help them make their list books more readable. Talk to your writers about how they are writing *for* readers. You might want to use some of the lessons from the *Writing for Readers* unit of study book during this week. What a partner can do to help with readability is to try to read a pattern book, and then the writer of the list book can pay attention to the words that are hard for the partner to read. The writer could then use those hard-to-read spots to help stretch and write words a little more conventionally. You will want to use your assessment of each writer's word knowledge—like our spelling assessment—to help you teach the writing of words. Each child should be using what he or she knows (and what *you* know he or she knows), about words to help write the text of the books.

This part could end with another celebration of filling your library bins with students' writing, as you did during the first portion of the unit. You might have your writers work with their partners to transfer what they learned in this part to their books from the first week too. This is really important revision work. Because your kindergarten children have been writing label books or list books for almost two whole units now, what they learned in both units should be reflected in all of their books. You could use your charts from both units to help children improve all of the books they made in both units.

Pattern Books with an Opinion

In this last part of the unit, you are going to teach your pattern book writers to write pattern books with an opinion. According to the Common Core State Standards, kindergarten students should be able to use a combination of drawing, dictating, and

writing to compose opinion pieces in which they tell a reader the topic they are writing about and state an opinion or preference about the topic. So, since you have already taught your students that pattern books start with a topic, you can now show them how people often have opinions about a topic. You will need to teach your writers strategies for finding their opinion topics. Maybe you teach them that thinking about times when you *should* do something is a way to discover topics about which you might have an opinion. For instance, if you have to go to bed at 8:30, or if you should do something else in addition to playing computer games, then those might be topics about which you feel strongly and have opinions. Show your writers how you might state your opinion by saying, “I don’t like to go to bed early, or I don’t like anything except my games.” You could also teach to the other side of opinion. You could demonstrate how thinking about what you *want* to have or do can help you discover topics about which you have strong feelings. For instance, kids could think, “I want to go to the Brooklyn Children’s Museum,” or, “I want ice cream for dinner.” Your writers could also learn to write opinion books talking about things that they like or dislike. For instance, a book in this genre might start with the idea: I don’t like to do laundry. So a book like this might go, “Doing the laundry is hard, it takes a long time, it is hot near the machines and it is hard to fold clothes well.”

To make sure that children are learning to state an opinion clearly, you might teach them to say what they think or how they feel in one of three ways—in the title, as a beginning, or as an ending. You might also teach children how to use a circular structure to begin and end their book with a clearly stated idea or opinion. No matter which structure you emphasize, you will want to be sure to teach your writers that these structures are chosen because they can help a writer state their intended meaning most clearly. Make sure that you are teaching your writers to use the drawing process to help them say more about their ideas. For instance, if a child’s book begins with, “It is good to be nice to people,” then they might draw a picture with one person being nice to someone who is hurt or someone else who is lonely. You could demonstrate how during your drawing you realized that you could use your picture to say more. You could then make a page that says, “Be nice to people when they hurt their knee,” and another page that says, “Be nice to people who don’t have friends too.” Your writers could also use pictures to add more to their words. They might do this by focusing on the part of the drawing that goes with the words and drawing it in an up-close kind of way. For instance, if they say, “Broccoli is disgusting,” then they might pull in close to someone eating broccoli, and draw their face with a scrunched-up nose and eyes.

To help your children write a little more in their opinion pattern books, you might teach your kindergarten students to help other people understand how they feel or what they think by giving an example. For instance, if a child’s opinion is, “Mario is fun,” you might ask him to give you another sentence that goes with that one. You might say, “Ohhh, Mario is fun. Can you say another thing that goes with Mario is fun?” I am hoping the child will say something like, “Yoshi is fun,” or “the castles are fun,” or “the music is fun.” You might stay away from asking for reasons why Mario is fun because examples can do the same work as reasons. Once children are giving

examples, you want to get them to show, not tell, the examples they are giving. For any one of the examples, they might just do some more explaining about that thing so that the reader understands more. You might say, “So, the music is fun. Can you say another sentence that goes with the fun music?” Then you can hope they say something like, “It gets fast when Mario is running and spooky when he is in the dark castle.”

You might also teach kids how to use dialogue to capture the opinion voice. Teaching your writers how to ask other people how they feel or what they think about their topic is one way to get the opinion voice into their books. You could then show your children how you write down what other people say in dialogue bubbles and in the text too. Children could also be taught how to talk directly to the reader to get the reader to understand their opinion. They might be taught how to say things like, “What you really need to know . . .” or “You are probably thinking . . .” to help them get their writing to sound more opinionated.

As you finish this last part of the unit, you will want to have a culminating celebration of the writing that your kindergartners have done across the unit. You might decide to allow students to share brief reviews of their books, so that others may select the newly published books to add to their book baggies. This would be a great opportunity to not only empower your writers by acknowledging a true purpose for their books but also help you expand your own classroom libraries, giving kids more books to choose from for their independent reading time.



UNIT FIVE

Raising the Quality of Small Moment Writing

JANUARY

Now is the time for the long-promised Small Moment unit of study. With the emphasis placed on narrative writing in the Common Core State Standards, this is an important unit aimed at getting kids to narrate a single event in their writing, not only noting what happened in sequential order but also providing some sort of reaction. Earlier, you taught children to see their own lives as full of stories and to capture those stories across the pages of booklets. Now you return to that theme, knowing that your children are ready to take your invitation and run with it, able to write sentences under their pictures, able to zoom in on tiny moments and bring those moments to life. You'll teach the youngsters that instead of writing the whole story of the day they moved from their old home to their new one, they can write about a particular moment that mattered most—about saying good-bye to Annie, or about when they watched their mom wipe away tears (thinking no one was looking). You'll also work closely with students as they recall and record their reactions to the small moments in their lives—delving into and naming their feelings about, say, scoring a goal in a soccer game, losing a tooth, or a friend moving away. As students write their stories, bit by bit, including lots of interesting details, you'll teach them to revise through rereading what they have written and adding things they may have forgotten to say, answering the questions readers would be most likely to ask.

By this time of year, most kindergartners will have no trouble generating ideas for writing. They can begin writing each day simply by rereading the piece they were working on the preceding day, and then starting in on today's picture and words. Although this unit begins with an emphasis on oral storytelling and rehearsal, remember to stress that rehearsal will be a quick process of touching and telling a story across pages. This type of rehearsal certainly does *not* require the use of graphic organizers or ditto sheets

to help them prepare for writing. In contrast to October's unit, the lion's share of their time in the Small Moment writing workshop will be spent actually writing their stories, not planning for them.

Before you launch children in writing Small Moment stories, you'll want to prepare for your instruction by asking your kids to participate in a performance assessment using the prompt, "Think of a true story from your own life, and write about it using everything that you know a writer." You will then want to place these on demand pieces alongside the *RWP Narrative Writing Continuum* (www.readingandwritingproject.com) to see where your kids' writing falls and what you need to teach in order to aim for level 3 pieces by the end of kindergarten. Level 3 on our continuum is aligned to the kindergarten expectations stated in the Common Core State Standards.

Not only will you want to look to what your students are already able to do in their narrative writing but you will also want to round up a few texts that can illustrate the sort of writing you hope your students do. It's important that you immerse your children in great exemplar literature. You may want to read aloud *Katie Loves the Kittens* by John Himmelman or *The Rain Stomper* by Addie Boswell. You may revisit books that you read in October, such as *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats. In addition to reading picture books that resemble Small Moment narratives, you will want to tell and retell several Small Moment stories with your children and perhaps write one of these during interactive or shared writing. Be sure the stories you tell (and write) are focused on one small moment. Instead of telling the story of an entire reading workshop, you could storytell the time when Kiana was reading a book and got to a funny part, and he couldn't stop giggling so he had to find a special place to sit. Kiana finally calmed down enough to read the rest of the book. Your demonstration will help children learn to focus on a particular incident and then to tell the story sequentially, starting with what happened first.

You may find some stolen moments during the day when you can give children chances to storytell little vignettes from their lives. Think of these storytelling opportunities as a takeoff on show-and-tell time—perhaps at the start of a day, during a morning meeting. Children's stories about what they did on a Saturday will tend to go on and on, so you can prompt storytellers to think of their whole story, and then choose one part that mattered—that made them really mad, or really excited, or really scared. Help them tell the story of that one part in a way that gives listeners goosebumps. Encourage them to build up the details, to add to the good parts. As children become accustomed to storytelling the small moments of their lives in ways that affect listeners, you may also want to tuck in reminders for them to use "time" words to show listeners the passage of time, prompting them with phrases such as *and then* or *after that*, or *a little later*. Once a child has told and retold a story several times, that child can "revise" by telling more about the setting ("One beautiful sunny day. . .") or by adding exact dialogue ("'Shhh!' said Mrs. Jones"). This oral storytelling time will be invaluable to your young writers' language development.

We recommend you rely on *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing* (Heinemann, 2003) by Lucy Calkins and Abby Oxenhorn as a resource to help you with your mini-lessons. In the book, this unit begins with the teacher reading a snippet of a narrative

to students, asking them to listen to the small moments embedded within the text. The teacher in the published minilesson reads a passage from *A Chair for My Mother* by Vera Williams, but you could select another text if you prefer. Whatever text you select, you will want to use it to explicitly teach your students that authors of Small Moment stories use specific details and small actions to capture the beginning, middle, and end of a little moment of time—fifteen to twenty minutes or so. This one minilesson alone has been sufficient to position thousands of kindergartners so they can leave the minilessons ready to write their own Small Moment stories. Look, too, to the ideas shared in each session titled *If Children Need More Time*, as these pages offer additional methods, activities, and strategies to clarify and extend your teaching to support your writers. You may, for example, decide to teach the same minilesson from Session II but use a different vignette from your life so that students see and hear how you are generating these ideas.

Launch Young Writers in Rehearsing and Drafting Focused Small Moment Stories

On the first day of this unit, children will write a Small Moment story—the whole thing—in a booklet. Some booklets will contain space enough for the child to write a line or two underneath the picture, others will have more lines for longer writing. Either way, children will benefit from having several pages of paper stapled together into a booklet. You will probably want to teach your students to touch each page and say the exact words that they will write on that page (see Session IV) and then, of course, once a child takes a few minutes to say his or her story aloud, the child will begin sketching and writing that story (although it will change many times in the course of writing, as it should).

Following the Common Core State Standards for the command of conventions appropriate for kindergarten writers, you will want to nudge your students toward writing a letter or letters for most consonant and short-vowel sounds in each word. You will also want to show children how to put a space about the size of a finger between one word and the next, ensuring that they notice where one word stops and one begins. In your conferences, you'll celebrate each small step along the way—a child who notices that she needs spaces between words, another who notices letters that are scrunched up, or one who tries to add more sounds and letters to his writing.

You will want to remind students about the importance of partnerships and how writing partners rely on each other not only to read and share past work but also to think about and plan for the work they might do next. Session III in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing* suggests that you take time during your minilesson to share with your writers the importance and longevity of partnerships. Session IV recommends that you show writers how the work of touching each page and saying what they plan to write can also be done with their partners. They will learn that writers can tell their story again and again to one another, each time putting in more dialogue, actions, or thinking to make their piece sound more like a story and less like a summary.

Writers Get Ready and Practice Writing More on the Page

During the first part of the unit, your writers will have created at least three or four Small Moment booklets with plans for writing even more. You'll now teach strategies to lift the level of their Small Moment narratives. You will guide writers toward the hard but rewarding work of writing more—more focus, more elaboration, more letters, as writers stretch words, and more words on each page—we mean more as in, "I'll take a Small Moment narrative with the works!" This is no small feat.

If you have a few children whose "sentences" seem to be random strings of letters, it is crucial that you have those children label lots of items in each drawing, hearing and recording all the phonemes in a word. Coach them to label each object in their pictures by saying *one* word and listening for the sounds they hear. Support them as they label at least five things in each picture, and guide them beyond labeling objects to labeling actions and feelings. When children struggle to write sentences, help them to repeat the sentence they want to write and then say the first word, hear the first sound in that word, and record it. Then teach them to reread and say the rest of the word, recording the remaining sounds they hear and then rereading what they wrote to recall what they wanted to say, to remember the next word, and so on.

Also, you may decide now is the time to reteach students to sketch across the pages of their booklets as they touch and say what will go on each page. This time around you might want to emphasize the importance of a *sketch* rather than a drawing (in which case, see Session VI). You will model for them how to sketch quickly the important parts of the story and then move to the next page and sketch quickly again, again and again across the pages. Once they have sketched their stories across the pages, they can go back and fill in the pages of their books with writing. Remember that children need to be writing multiple stories with ease, so you don't want them to spend too much time rehearsing each story. Quick sketches help to keep the emphasis less on the pictures and more on the words.

Session VII in *Small Moments* shows a teacher narrating a shared class experience, full of rich detail when she tells it aloud, but lacking when she goes to write it on the blank pages of her booklet. You might decide, like the teacher in the book, to tell a fire drill story aloud, full of action and suspense, but as you touch the first blank page of your book to go into lackluster summary, saying "We heard the fire drill," then turning the page and saying, "We went outside," and then turning the page again and saying, "We came in." At this point you can stop, pause dramatically—and model for the children how to mull over the details of the story, asking yourself whether you really captured the excitement and the details of your story on the pages. Then the class can work together to add that rich detail into your written account of the fire drill.

You want your writers to compile a healthy stack of pieces so that as you teach your children strategies to elaborate, they will be able to revise again and again, both on created pieces and, as always in kindergarten, "in-the-air" revisions they are doing on the work of the moment.

Crafting Small Moments with Importance, Detail, and Purpose

Your writers will have many Small Moment narratives sketched and written by now. It isn't uncommon for a kindergarten writer to have as many as ten pieces in her writing folder. Use the *RWP Narrative Continuum* to establish what writers are gesturing toward under the magnifying lens of elaboration. Do your writers include dialogue and small actions in their pieces? Do they focus their pieces as true Small Moment narratives, that is, are they an episode, not an entire day's or trip's worth of events? Once you've established exactly what elaboration work your writers are already doing, you can think about where next to take their writing. The *RWP Narrative Continuum* offers suggestions for next steps to lift the level of your writers' elaboration. Remember that by the end of kindergarten, in order to align with the Common Core State Standards, you will want your students to be writing at least level 3 narratives on the Continuum.

You might draw on Session XI in the *Small Moments* book, which teaches students how to focus on the most important parts of their stories. You'll demonstrate for your writers how, as you reread one of your pieces, you make plans to make it stronger—how you reread and ask yourself, "What's the most important part of my story?" Then you'll show your writers how you go back to that part and add details to make it longer and slow it down. You may also show your writers how when you find that "most important part" you sometimes realize that you have to cut away the other parts to focus on a Small Moment story that really shows your feelings and thinking around that most important part.

Additionally, drawing on Session XII in *Small Moments*, you might teach writers how to unfold the pleats of their stories and how to reveal the internal story inside their pieces—reactions, thoughts, observations, and feelings. Dig through your writers' folders and find a piece to use as an exemplar model (or borrow one from your teaching colleague down the hall) that shows how the writer wrote not only what happened, but also her reaction to what happened. Alternately, you can model using a piece like "The Hug and Kiss" by Tatyana (*Small Moments*, Figure XII-1).

Bringing Small Moments to Life: Fine-tuning, Publishing, and Sharing Our Best Small Moment Stories

When getting ready for celebrating, the children will each choose one piece to revise, edit, and make beautiful. Show your writers how you go through your folder, reread each piece you've created, and ask yourself important questions before choosing. You may ask, "Does this piece share a big feeling?" "Is this the piece I put my whole heart into to make especially like me?" "Do I think there is more work I can do on this piece to make it even more spectacular?" These questions are big, and show children the importance of careful rereading and questioning (both of which are Common Core State Standards work!). Once children have made their selection, they will revise not only by adding letters to words they can't read, not only by inserting words they deleted,

but also by using revision strips and flaps to add missing information, to elaborate on ideas, and to make big changes.

One revision technique you may want to demonstrate is writing new endings that stay closer to the heart of the story. Children can end with feelings or with what someone said, or add words to say exactly what happened at the end of the moment. For example, instead of a child writing, “Mom put a Band-Aid on my knee, and then we went home,” she can think about the end of that small moment and write: “Mom put a Band-Aid on my knee. She gave me a kiss, and I felt much better.”

You can demonstrate that writers reread their writing to revise and check, above all, that it makes sense. You might have children repeat the mantra, “Say it, write it, read it!” to keep them going. Children can revise by adding details to their stories and writing more about the important parts. They can critically read each page and be sure that each one has at least five labels and one sentence.

Not only do you want to encourage children to reread their writing in order to revise but you also want them to stop often and think to themselves, “How can I make this easier for others to read?” Teach children to edit by looking specifically at their handwriting, spaces between words, punctuation and spelling. It works to use the mid-workshop teaching point as a time for children to stop and reread their writing, adding to their drafts to make the texts easier to read. This important habit will help children with their reading skills and will help them add more to their writing.

You may decide to have children do this work in the teaching share as well. You could create a class chart entitled, “Ways to make our writing easy to read” and then add to it throughout the unit. Specifically, you could teach the children how to use the resources in your classroom to build a repertoire for spelling tricky words. Your writers may already know that they can say a word slowly and write what they hear. You may also use some of the following prompts in conferences or small-group strategy lessons:

- “Say the word. Listen to what you hear at the beginning/end. Do you know another word that has that same sound at the beginning/end?”
- “Say the word. Do you know another word that sounds like that word? Use that word to write the new word.”
- “Say the word. You know how to spell that—it is on our word wall! Write it quickly.”

Remember, too, that partnerships can support each other in the formal editing of a piece. For this work, we suggest you turn to the *Units of Study* book *Writing for Readers: Skills and Strategies*. Sessions X–XIV offer strategies for teaching partners to support each other with adding sounds, spelling, and punctuation. Writers can sit side by side, touching each word together, and when something is unreadable or needs a bit of help, they can offer each other friendly suggestions.

Once children have revised and done some beginning editing work, they will be ready to fancy-up their booklets, and then to share them with an audience.

Additional Resources

This unit is a time to lift the level of your students' narrative writing. You will take a day to do an on-demand assessment of what your writers do as Small Moment writers, then use the *RWP Narrative Continuum* to understand how well your children write stories—which of them have learned to write an event sequentially, bit by bit, and which need your help; which are focused on a sliver of time (about twenty minutes) and which continue to write list-like events. After you've assessed their on-demands, think to where your teaching for this unit will begin.

Expect that your children will, by now, be able to write several Small Moment stories from the start of the unit. If you find some children struggling to come up with topics, remember that this is a return to narrative writing after two months of expository, so your children may need a reminder that Small Moment narratives are true stories that are all their own, and that they are to capture such stories across the pages of booklets. Find and use the chart you created during the Approximating Small Moments unit earlier in the year that holds a few strategies for generating ideas, and remind your children that these are the “go to” strategies for generating ideas. This way you will be able to get the unit up and off to a quick start. Most of your children will write sentences on all the pages of their booklets. If some children are still working to stretch and hear dominant sounds inside words, of course, tailor your teaching to meet them there, helping them to hear and record sounds to make their words more readable.

You should expect that throughout this month, children will write approximately a story or two every day, at least five pages, as well as revising with ease by adding strips and flaps and pages to tell more. By the end of this unit, your kindergartners will be able to reread all of their pieces and when it is time to choose one to publish, their choice will be connected to who they are writing for and the purpose of their piece.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launch Young Writers in Rehearsing and Drafting Focused Small Moment Stories

- “Today I am going to teach you that writers catch small moments from our lives and stretch those moments out across a few pages. First, we think about something that we have done, then we draw and write the first part using itsy-bitsy details, then we turn the page, draw and write the next part using itsy-bitsy details, and then we turn the page one more time and draw and write the last part using lots of itsy-bitsy details.” (See Session I, “Understanding a Small Moment Story” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)
- ▶ *Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “Remember writers, we reread our writing to make sure it makes sense: Say it! Write it! Reread it!”

- “Today I am going to teach you that writers don’t always write about everything that we do, instead we often pick one small part of a story to zoom in on. After we think of one small part of a story to zoom in on, we can picture the moment in our heads, kind of like we are watching a movie, then we draw and write what we see in our head on the paper. We might look back before we go to the next page to make sure we wrote down everything that happened in that moment we chose to write about.” (See Session II, “Discovering One Small Moment” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)
 - *Tip:* “Remember our song that helps us remember what to do when we start a new booklet? ‘Think, think, think, touch and tell, sketch and write, then revise.’”

- “Today, I am going to teach you that we reread our books as we write them to make sure we have zoomed in on one small moment. We look at each of our pictures and reread our words to make sure that the whole book is a ‘one time, one place’ story. As we turn each page we might think, ‘Is this in the same place? Is this at the same time?’”
 - *Suggestion to the teacher:* You will want to have your eyes on student work with a few lenses: productivity, sequential narratives, and readability. (See pages 18–20 in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing* for more information on each of those lenses.)

- “Writers don’t tell the whole story on the first page, we stretch it out across as many pages as we need. Today I want to teach you one way we can plan our stories to help stretch them out across pages. We can first tell our stories across our fingers, then we can touch each page to see what part will go where.”
 - *Tip:* “We think of a small story from our life and we tell just a little bit as we hold our first finger. Then we put up our second finger and tell just a little bit more, trying to keep our story in the same place, and we keep going until we told all of the small moment story from our life. Then we look at our fingers to see how many pages we will need in our book.” (See Session IV, “Stretching One Small Moment” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)

- “Today I want to remind you that writers are always working hard to make their story readable. One way we do this is to spell the words the best we can by stretching them out. We can do this by first saying the word slowly to ourselves, making sure we can hear all of the sounds. Then we write the letter that makes the first sound we hear. After that we can say the word again, listening closely for the next sound, writing the letter that matches that sound. We keep going until we have written a letter for every sound we hear in the word, and then we reread what we wrote to check that the letters match the sounds.” (See Session V, “Stretching and Writing Words” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)

- Tip:* “Remember that there are many ways to help you figure out how to make your writing more readable! We have tons of resources here to help like the name chart, alphabet/ blend charts, word wall and all the charts and books in our room!”
- Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers sometimes plan a sentence before we write. You might say your sentence out loud and then point with your pencil to where each word will go (with a big hop between words), then write a word (recording all the sounds you hear), reread, write the next word and reread, until you get the whole sentence down!”

Part Two: Writers Get Ready and Practice Writing More on the Page

- “Today I want to teach you that writers write to make our reader feel like they are in our story. One way that we can do this is to go back to the moment and write it down bit by bit, naming what happened first, and then what happened right after that, and right after that.”
- “Today I am going to teach you another way to get your words down on the page quickly and easily. Writers don’t need to stretch out every single word. Some words we know in a snap! When we go to write a word, we think: ‘Is this a word I know in a snap?’ If it is we write it fast, checking with the word wall if we need the help.” (See Session X, “Writing Some Words in a Snap” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)
- “Writers work with partners to help them revise. One way we can do this is to reread our Small Moments with a partner and find a favorite or most important page so that we can add more. We act out the important part—with action, feeling and talking—and go back and put those tiny details into our picture and words.”
 - Tip:* “We can use special tools like a flap or Post-it to add on more words. Sometimes we will have to add a whole new page when we have a lot more to write!”
- “When we write with tons of details, we will need to spell new words. We use strategies we know—stretching out the word and using resources around our room. But we can do more! We can spell by thinking about a word that sounds like the word we are trying to write. We ask, ‘Do I know a word that sounds like _____?’ Then we use what we know to spell the new word. (Example: Do I know a word that sounds like *stay*? Yes! *Day* can help me spell *stay*.”)
 - Tip:* “We say the word and think, ‘Do I know a word that sounds like _____ at the beginning? At the end?’”

Part Three: Crafting Small Moments with Importance, Detail, and Purpose

- “Writers, we’ve been stretching our stories across pages, telling all that happened to us in our small moments. Another way you can stretch your stories out across pages is by not only telling what happened, the outside story, *but* you can tell your feelings or thoughts about what happened, the inside story.” (See Session XII, “Revealing Internal Stories” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)
- “Today I want to teach you another tip to help you add details to your stories. Writers add feelings to our stories so the reader can learn more about us. We reread each page and think, ‘How did I feel at this part of the story?’ We write on each page with tons of detail to show how we felt. We write the words that tell and show exactly how we felt. (Example: I jumped up in the air when I scored the goal. I felt proud.)”
- “Today I want to teach you that when writers are trying to decide if we are done, we can look at the examples of writing around us. In our classroom we can look at the story we wrote together to see what we included, then we can look at our own writing, to ask, ‘Did I do that in my story?’ If the answer is no, then we might decide to go back to our story to say more.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “Then we may look at another part of the story we wrote together to ask ourselves again, ‘Did I do that?’ Then ask, ‘Is there a place where I might add that to my story?’ We can keep adding to our own stories until our own writing is as filled as the examples in the classroom.”
- “Today I want to teach you that when we meet with partners, we treat our books in writing workshop the same way we treat books in reading workshop, and we can try some of the same things that we do in reading workshop. Just like in reading, we can first look at our partner’s cover and think, ‘What will this story be about?’ Then as we read our partner’s book, we can think, ‘Do all these pages go together with the title?’ If the cover doesn’t match the story, or some of the pages seem like they don’t belong we can help our partner make their story better by giving them suggestions to help fix their stories up.”

Part Four: Bringing Small Moments to Life: Fine-tuning, Publishing, and Sharing Our Best Small Moment Stories

- “Today I am going to teach you how writers think about the whole story—thinking of ways to end our stories in strong ways. Writers like to make ‘close-in to the moment’ endings. One way to do this is to keep the last page in the same place

as the page before it and think about how you felt or what you thought in that moment and end with that.” (See Session XIII, “Writing Close-In Story Endings” in *Small Moments: Personal Narrative Writing*.)

- “Today, I want to teach you how to get your writing ready for other people to read. Remember that writers ask themselves, ‘How can I make this easier for others to read?’”
 - *Tip:* “We reread all of our writing, pictures, labels, and sentences. We think about what we need to ‘fix up’ like our handwriting, spaces between words, or uppercase and lowercase letters so that our writing looks like a book in the library.”
 - *Tip:* “You can always look up at our chart, ‘Ways to make our writing easy to read.’ to help you think about what else you do to make your writing easier for others to read.”
 - *Tip:* “We can also use our partners to help us edit our work.”

- “Today, I am going to teach you how writers check and fix up words so that it is easier for other people to read. One thing that writers do is reread their writing like detectives to check that snap words are spelled correctly.”
 - *Tip:* “To do this, you might read and touch each and every word, asking, ‘Is this a word wall word?’ When you come to one that doesn’t look right, circle it. Then, after you check each word, go back and fix the ones with circles, using the word wall to help.” (See Session XIII, “Peer-Editing: Spelling” in *Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies*.)
 - *Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “Sometimes when you reread your story you may realize that you forgot to use punctuation to help your reader. So, when that happens, read the part how you want it to go and put punctuation in where you need it.” (See Session XIV, “Peer-Editing: Punctuation” in *Writing for Readers: Teaching Skills and Strategies*.)



UNIT SIX

Procedural Writing

How-To Books

FEBRUARY

To begin a unit on How-To books, tell children that writers not only use their writing to tell the rich stories of their lives or to label their environment or to celebrate others but also to teach. Writers can teach “all about” a topic, in which case the writing is informational, or they can teach people how to do something, in which case the writing is procedural. This unit focuses on the latter. Procedural writing requires explicitness, clarity, sequence, and an anticipation of what readers will need to know.

Procedural writing is important for lots of reasons. First, most informational texts contain chapters, sections, or text boxes that are procedural. That is, a book on sheep will contain a page titled, “How to Shear a Sheep” and another titled, “From Sheep to Sweater” that is apt to be a procedural text. So this unit supports children with the challenge of reading and writing those portions of informational texts. Then too, procedural writing is critically important in content area literacy. Science texts are filled with instructions for experiments and with reports on investigations. In order to read these texts or to write lab reports, children rely on knowledge of procedural writing. The Common Core State Standards also place an emphasis on writing narrative, informational, and opinion pieces across the year. This particular unit focuses kindergarten writers to work toward the standards noted for informational writing in particular.

The unit described here leans heavily on a portion of the book *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports in Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (Heinemann, 2003). If you want more step-by-step support for your teaching than this write-up provides, that book will help you. The book supports all-about writing as well as how-to, so plan to find the portion of it that is procedural and to expand those eight sessions into a full unit.

Before the Unit Begins

You'll want to plan for this unit by gathering materials, engaging students in some preliminary work, imagining the work you hope students will produce, thinking of the various parts of the unit, and rethinking your schedule so that you are sure you are devoting enough time to the writing workshop.

The world is filled with “procedural” writing—cookbooks, instructions for new toys and games, craft projects to make, and so on. You'll want to gather examples of how-to writing so that even before the unit begins, you can start immersing children in the sounds of these texts. Choose a few to read aloud and to study, examining how writers use their words and pictures to teach readers. There are lots of great procedural books—if you want a few to look at for starts, you could look at the page “How to Carve a Pumpkin” in *The Pumpkin Book* by Gail Gibbons, or at the book, *How to Make a Bird Feeder* by Liyala Tuckfield (Rigby Literacy), or *How to Make Salsa* by Jamie Lucero, *Make a Valentine* by Dale Gordon, or *How to Make a Hot Dog* by Joy Cowley. *Walk On!* by Marla Frazee is a more sophisticated mentor text for children who are writing several how-to's with ease and want to take their writing up a notch. Although you will gather many of these texts, you'll also be looking for one or two that can function as mentor texts for the unit. You'll return to those one or two texts often throughout the unit.

To help children grasp what it means to write a how-to text, you might create an opportunity outside the writing workshop to immerse children in this genre by building, cooking, or otherwise making something with your children so that you can, as you proceed to do that thing together, jointly construct a shared/interactive how-to text, capturing the steps of that process. If your school has had a fire drill, you might want to create a how-to chart listing the steps that are involved in that fire drill.

Before you invite kids to write how-to texts, you will want to prepare paper that can scaffold their writing so that it follows the conventions of this genre. That is, you will want to give children paper that looks like the paper used in the “How to Carve a Pumpkin” page of Gibbons' *The Pumpkin Book*. This paper will probably have a sequence of small boxes, each numbered, in which the writer will draw what is entailed in a step of the procedure, with space for written text beside each box. Be sure the paper you use provides enough room for students to instruct. Specifically, if the paper that you put out has four boxes on a single page, make sure there are six or seven lines beside each box and that most of the children who select this paper are encouraged to use two sheets of it to capture the steps in a procedure. Then, too, you can also give children room to grow by encouraging them to go from writing one how-to text to writing another. Become accustomed to asking questions such as “So is this your first book for today's writing workshop or your second?” and, “How many how-to books have you written today?” What you will not want to see is a child who thinks that recording a quick, underdeveloped four-step how-to text constitutes the child's full work for a day!

Of course, for some children, the best way to support rigor will be for them to write more than one how-to text in a day, but for others, the best way to support rigor will be to channel them toward writing more elaborate texts. It will be important for you to

talk up the paper choice of longer booklets containing five to six pages, with more single pages available to encourage writers to add yet more pages if needed. In instances when procedural texts span many pages, usually each page represents a single step explained in further detail.

As you anticipate the writing that your students will probably do during this unit, rely somewhat on your knowledge of your students as readers. You will want to expect that children who can read books that are at levels C to E will go far beyond labeling their pictures when writing a how-to text. These youngsters can be expected to write sentences alongside each step in each of their procedural books, with the higher-level readers adding little bits of advice and tips to each step in the procedure. You'll also want to make sure that these writers don't spend most of their time drawing, because they're ready to write with volume and fluency. These writers should be encouraged to revise, adding words, sentences, strips, pages to their how-to's. And these revisions shouldn't consist of a mere word or a mere sentence strip—these writers will add whole pages to their drafts.

Of course, you may also have some kindergartners who are at the very early stages of reading, working with level A/B books. It will be critically important for you to approach this unit intent on supporting these kids in doing the reading work they need to do. These children need to label their drawings and diagrams, using beginning, middle, and ending sounds in each label and rereading those labels. You may want to help these youngsters use articles in their labels such as *the* pot, *the* stove, *my* cookies. They should also be nudged to write sentences, but you will want to help them leave spaces between words when they do this and you will want to help them reread what they write, exaggerating the one-to-one match. For these writers, it is important for them to know that a finger is a tool during writing time, just as it is during reading time. A finger can be used when a writer moves from writing one word to writing another (the writer leaves a finger of white space between words), and the finger can be used as writers plan what they will write and later reread what they have written. Whether the writer is planning or rewriting, the writer moves left to right across the page. To "reread," the writer touches and says what he or she has written so far and continues to say and touch what still needs to be said and written.

When children who are level A/B readers write sentences, you may want to point out to them that their books can be pattern books—after all, the books these children are reading will be highly patterned. One child's book about making cookies might go like this: "Put the butter in the bowl. Put the eggs in the bowl. Put the flour in the bowl. Stir, stir, stir. Put the nuts in the bowl. Put the chocolate chips in the bowl. Stir, stir, stir." You will be offering your A/B readers some powerful opportunities to see, say, find, and read the high-frequency words that constitute such a large percentage of the texts they are reading.

Finally, you will want to plan the general progression of the unit. We've written this write-up with the idea that the unit will fall into four main parts. First, you'll launch kids into this new kind of writing and set them up to write with great energy, producing lots of little procedural texts. Not surprisingly, you'll then teach in ways that aim to lift the

level of student work. This write-up suggests that second part of the unit emphasizes the importance of writing in such a way that readers can read the writing—which means leaving spaces between words, recording many sounds for a word, relying on sight words when possible, and so forth. The write-up then turns to lifting the level of students’ writing, and of course this includes work on revision, as well as work designed to help writers create more elaborate and clear texts from the start. This third part could, of course, be flip-flopped with the second. Finally, we suggest you help writers select one or two of their books to revise more extensively, this time with more reading–writing connections and a deeper use of mentor texts. This deeply revised work is what is published at the culmination of the unit.

Getting Started: Thinking of Topics, Rehearsing, and Writing Tons of Books

At the start of the unit, you’ll want to tell children that during *this* unit, they’ll be teachers, using writing to teach others. And part of this will be teaching others how to do things that writers know how to do. Of course, right away you will want to help children think of things they might teach others. In the first session on how-to writing in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports* (Heinemann, 2003), Calkins opens this unit by saying to writers, “Today is an important day. We start a new unit of study. I believe you are ready to graduate to a whole new level. Congratulations, you are ready to move on to the next level. It will be hard work, but it is important work. Starting today, you will be not just writers—you will also be teachers.” It is easy to help children generate ideas for how-to books they can write. Their everyday lives are full of things that children know how to do and could teach others. Kids will come up with simple topics like, “How to Get Ready for School” or “How to Jump Rope” or “How to Make a Good Pancake.” Some children might come up with topics where the steps involved in doing something aren’t already established and clear—for example, a topic such as “How to Make a Best Friend” is a topic many of us, as adults, wonder about! If you have the chance, you might steer your more novice writers away from the more abstract topics and from topics for which they don’t have a lot of experience. In order to help children mine lots of aspects of their lives for potential ideas, it helps if you draw your topics from a variety of sources. Instead of suggesting that you might write, “How to Make a Cake” and “How to Cook an Omelette,” you might shift from a cooking topic to a pet-related one (“How to Give Your Dog a Bath”) and then to a school-related topic (“How to Choose a Good Book”).

In order to build the drumroll of excitement for this unit, you might want to help students understand that this kind of writing relates to all they do across the day. You might invite children to join you in a tour of the classroom, with each student carrying a small basket (like an Easter Basket!). Students can be invited to fill their baskets with a few objects they like to work with. They’ll collect blocks, interlocking cubes, counting bears, and scissors. After the walk (which would take just a few minutes), writers

might sit at their writing places and do something with what they have collected. Then you might ask them to freeze, and to think, “What did I do first?” That’s the first portion of their how-to book. Then writers can think, “What did I do next?” and record that step as well. Before long, writers will be shifting from doing something to recording what they do.

Of course, there are lots of ways to build off this. For homework, you might ask children to follow the same steps at home and then either bring their objects to school and write about how to use them, or you can as writers write about your objects at home. Home will be a place that brims with real-world things that children can do, and you could ask children to take a tour of their homes, recording on their Tiny Topics notepads all the things they know how to do in each room. In the kitchen, a child might record that she knows how to wash the dishes, how to feed the cat, and how to take out the trash. Of course, there will be lots of giggling about what children know how to do in the bathroom! An alternative might be for you to suggest that children bring in photographs that show them doing all sorts of wonderful things. Those pictures could serve as basis for how-to titles.

Children will have absolutely no problem generating lots of ideas for how-to books, and this is important because you’ll definitely want your students to be able to shift between writing one book and starting another book without you needing to be part of this process. So it can help if writers have a list of how-to topics, or a pile of covers they’ve made for the ten how-to books they are dying to write soon.

Although we’ve described the work of generating ideas for how-to writing using lots of examples, don’t let this make you think that children devote a whole sequence of days to choosing a topic for a how-to text. Instead, think of this process of choosing a topic as something that lasts for just a portion of one day’s workshop but that resurfaces periodically throughout the unit. So for a portion of the first day of your writing workshop you’ll help kids generate ideas for the how-to books they might write. But within ten or fifteen minutes, your children will all have topics in mind and can begin rehearsing for the writing they’ll do in this unit.

Just as your children storytold their texts before writing them during the narrative units of study, so, too, you will probably want to give your children opportunities to act out procedures, chronicling the steps they are taking in ways that help them take on the structure and language of procedural texts. For example, in Session II of the book *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*, Calkins says to children, “The best way to check whether your directions work is to read them to a partner who will try to do the thing you are teaching (for real or pretend) and if the directions don’t *quite* work, you can revise them!” After this minilesson, children can sit in your meeting area and pretend to go through the steps they plan to teach readers. One child, for example, might pantomime the process of brushing her teeth, naming the steps that she takes. Over time, you can coach writers to be more specific even when they talk about their procedures, so that instead of saying, “Put toothpaste on your toothbrush,” they might say, “Squirt a line of toothpaste onto the toothbrush.” In this way, you can help children make their oral procedural texts more carefully sequenced and explicit, which will mean

of course, that their written procedural texts will be sequenced and explicit as well. You can coach into their oral procedural texts, encouraging them to use words like *first*, *then*, *next*, *afterward*, *before*, *finally*, *last*, as a way to convey timing and order. You will also want children to think about the precise words they use to convey actions. If a child writes, “Then you put the chocolate in the milk,” you might suggest that the child actually demonstrate the action, trying to come up with more exact words for each action. Chances are that the word *pour* will come to mind.

Write So That Readers Can Read the Text and Follow the Directions

Teachers, you will notice that this year’s kindergarten curricular calendar doesn’t contain the very important *Writing for Readers* unit—a unit that encourages writers to make sure they are writing so that readers can actually read their writing. In fact, the one time when the work of that unit—writing readable texts—is most critical is right at this juncture of kindergarten, for now is the time when all your kindergarten children should be reading conventionally, moving from level A/B to C and D books, and children are ready to make that move as readers when and if they write so that they and others can read their writing, pointing under the words, with one-to-one matching.

You could, of course, insert the *Writing for Readers* unit into your curriculum right at this point in the year, drawing on the book by that title from the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* series. But you have another option, and that option is to skim that book, taking some of the minilessons from it and adapting them so they fit into this part of your how-to unit. *Writing for Readers* was written to follow *Small Moments*, on the assumption that children were continuing to write narratives, so you will need to adapt the minilessons somewhat to align them with the fact that children are writing procedural texts. But the main emphasis in that unit, and that book, is on telling writers that they need to write in such a way that their book can be passed into the hands of someone who will read it and they need to make sure they write in such a way that others *can* read it. This means leaving spaces between words, hearing all the sounds in a word, drawing on the sight words that the writer knows or almost knows in a jiffy, and using the words and chunks of words that one knows in order to write words one doesn’t know. At this time of the year, most of your children will have control of more than approximately twenty to thirty sight words and you can encourage them to use these words (and the word wall, on which many of them will be recorded as a resource).

Children should be motivated to take on this big work as long as you create lots of opportunities for them to put their writing into the hands of another child and to watch while that child tries to read their writing—and to follow their directions. This latter challenge—writing so that readers can actually use procedural texts to learn to do things—raises the issue of helping students lift the quality of their writing. This can lead you and your class into the third part of this unit, which will focus on lifting the level of procedural writing.

With Feedback, Writers Can Revise Their How-To Texts, and Make New Texts Worlds Better

If you take a child's directions in hand and read them aloud while the class watches, trying to follow exactly what the writer has said, you are almost sure to meet with confusion. In *Nonfiction Writing*, the teacher reads a child's directions for doing a somersault. Sitting on the chair at the front of the meeting area, the teacher reads, "Put your head down," and tucks her chin down, as she sits primly on the chair. Then she reads, "Now turn over." *Huh?* Turn over?! The children will break into peals of laughter at such a predicament, of course, and you will have made your point. It is nowhere near as easy to give directions as one might think. Time and again, the directions assume the reader knows things the reader doesn't know, the directions bypass crucial steps, or the directions neglect to mention crucial tips and bits of information.

By dramatizing how hard it is to actually follow the directions children have written, you can invite kids to step up to the challenges of this genre. You'll probably want every writer in the room to be able to read his or her text aloud to a listener who does (or pantomimes doing) as told, in order to discover the missing steps of details. For example, a child who is pantomiming making cookies and reads, "Put the cookies into the oven," might pause and ask herself, "How? How should I put the cookies in the oven?" Not only will this work help your writers to improve their books but it also gets at the Common Core State Standard around speaking and listening that calls for kindergartners to "ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood."

As procedural texts are shared, read, and enacted—they will also need to be revised. Model for them how as they act out each of their partner's steps, if they can't do the next thing because of information to *freeze* and say, "Wait! How can I do that?" Then writers can listen and revise their steps to fill in the missing parts. The writer who has described making cookies by saying, "Make the dough into cookies. Put them into the oven" will need to rewrite those pages of her book so that she explains how to shape the little balls of dough—half the size of a golf ball, and how to space them on a cookie sheet, and how to slide that cookie sheet, once full, into the already warm oven. In such a manner, you will teach writers to critically reread each of their steps and ask themselves, "Do I have a step missing?" Then you'll teach them to go back and add steps using strips, Post-its, or extra pages. After children reread and revise their directions once, adding a whole lot more information, they can scrutinize what they have written to be sure as many words as possible are specific. Instead of *putting* the cookie plate into the oven, the writer now writes that she *slides* it.

You may decide to teach some of your writers the elaboration strategy of adding speech bubbles to include directions for how, where, and why to do the steps they are doing. It may be that a few readers go back and reread their writing to add speech bubbles, as one writer did who reread "How to Make Cereal," and into each step, added speech bubbles in which the narrator tells the "maker" of the cereal what he is doing, and why he is doing it. A piece that originally read, "First, get a bowl. Next open the cereal box.

Then pour the cereal into the bowl. Last add milk,” may now read, “First get a bowl,” and the speech bubble from the picture may include, “I’ll ask Mom to reach a bowl for me . . . Next, open the cereal box,” with a speech bubble that says, “I’ll make sure to roll the baggie back down so it stays fresh,” and so on across pages. This strategy engages students in elaborating to include additional directions and clarify steps, and it can be used to teach kids to elaborate using tips, warnings, and additional information.

Writers who have a difficult time naming precise words may need more practice in small groups to develop their oral language. Doing small-group language rehearsal and practicing using the ordinal words will support them. Give children specific words to use and have them act out different how-to instructions. Suggest words to describe actions of the children. Partners then could practice naming the actions as well. You might say, “Let’s act out together. Do it again. Hmmm . . . How could we say that?” Partners can turn and talk, practicing naming the actions as the teacher makes additional language suggestions. You could also grow a chart of words children are learning with pictures or photographs to support them, for example, a picture of a child pouring water paired with the word *pour*.

In addition to examining their work for clarity, young writers can begin incorporating even more features of the how-to genre. You might teach your writers how to eliminate extraneous details in their pictures, zooming in close on the part of the picture that teaches and using labels and arrows in their pictures. You might also teach children to put on a “teaching voice” and give a direction: “First, you open the jar, then you put a spoon in it, then you scoop up some peanut butter.” One challenge young children sometimes encounter is writing with voice and not writing from the first person. You can tell children that when they write how-to books, they have to be “bossy.” You might say, “Writers, I know that your mom and dad tell you not to be bossy, and in school we talk about not being bossy with other children on the playground, but when you write your how-to books, you have to be bossy.” You want to use your bossy voice and tell the reader of your how-to book, “*You* have to do this, or *you* have to do that.” You want to remind your writers that the world is filled with a huge variety of how-to texts and that they can learn how to revise their own books by studying others.

Publishing at the End of the Unit

You can celebrate children’s hard work by creating centers where children can teach a small group of people how to perform their task, visit younger children and become their “Teacher for a Day,” or hang their how-to books in the hallway with a stapled example of actual materials used or a finished product beside it.

Additional Resources

As you launch this unit, expect your writers to generate many how-to topics, and to plan and write several how-to pieces each day. The goal during the first part of the unit is for your children to generate and write procedural texts with ease and for them to

write with a teaching voice. As your children get an idea and begin to write, you will want them to do so with a sense of order and sequence. If children struggle to know how to break down a how-to topic into smaller, attainable, and writable steps, prepare to step in and show them how to say each step, act out each step, then write the step.

Look to the readability of children's how-to pieces. If you have students who are scrunching letters and words too closely together, teach the importance of spacing between words using a finger as a spacer, with an emphasis on helping writers notice and write with space between words. Consider the work you will do to expand your writers' knowledge and usage of high frequency words. By now, expect your writers to have a clutch of fifteen or more high-frequency words and encourage them to use those words as they construct their how-to pieces.

Then you will work on teaching students to lift the level of their how-to books to teach in clearer, more specific ways. Expect writers to reread often and add steps that clarify and elaborate their procedural writing. Think about offering children tools to do this work—Post-its, flaps, and extra step boxes in the writing center so that children do this work with purpose and independence.

The third part suggests teaching into volume and revision, emphasizing that when your children start a new book, they put in (from the start) all they've learned about how-to writing. Look at your student work and decide what kinds of strategies your students need. Many students will need you to teach them how to choose words carefully that tell not only *how* to do something, but also tuck in tips, offer suggestions, give warnings, and use particular language that teach explicitly. If you find students returning to one sentence per step, teach them to add sentences that help to clarify how to do whatever it is that they are trying to teach.

Your final move into editing work should be focused on making the writing readable. Emphasize clear end punctuation so that your children's writing is clear and sequenced. As children choose one of their many how-to pieces to publish, guide them to think about who they are writing for and to include all of the smart how-to strategies they've learned throughout the unit.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Getting Started

- “Today I want to teach you that as we get started writing our how-to books, we think about things that we know how to do so that we can teach others. We can think about the things that we do every day at home, at school, or even outside and then we'll want to get started writing our how-to's right away. As we think of our topics, rather than just making a list of ideas, we can write our how-to titles on the covers of different booklets so that we have several books ready to go!”
- *Tip:* If you find some writers struggling to generate ideas, you might remind them of the ways they know how to get ideas from narrative units, saying: “Remember that when you get stuck thinking of an idea for a how-to book, you can use the

classroom chart to help you come up with an idea. You can think of things you know how to do, think of people in your life who you can teach and what they need to learn, look around the classroom, or scan the chart of topic ideas.” (See Session I, “Introducing How-To Books” in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)

- ▶ *Tip:* You will want writers to get started on the work of writing a how-to on this first day, so you might stop them after ten or fifteen minutes to encourage students who haven’t started their first book yet to do so.

- “Today I want to teach you that writers can reenact or rehearse our how-to’s to help us remember each step or detail. We can gather the materials, or even pretend to have all them in front of us. Then, we can move through the process paying attention to each step and telling it across our fingers as we go. We then retell the steps again and grab the number of pages we need to make our books.” (See Session II, “Checking for Clarity” in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
 - ▶ *Tip:* Another way you might teach this as partnership work is for you to say something like, “Today I want to teach you that writers can rehearse our how-to’s with a partner. As we get ready to write another book, we can look back in our folders for another cover. Then we can practice teaching our how-to to our partner making sure that the steps go in order and it is clear for the reader to follow. We can use step numbers or sequencing words like *first, next, then, after that, last, or finally.*”
 - ▶ *Tip:* You might also teach them to act out their steps with their writing partners by saying, “When we meet with our partners today, we can read our how-to books to our partners and they can act it out. We can watch our partner to see if our teaching made sense, and if we need to, we can add steps in or take parts out to make it clearer.”

- “Writers of how-to’s use a special kind of voice in their writing. They use a telling voice that teaches their readers what to do. When we write our own how-to books, our voices can sometimes even sound a little bossy. Our writing often sounds like, ‘First, you need to . . .’ ‘Next, stir the bowl quickly.’ Today I want to teach you that our writing makes more sense to our readers when we use precise words. One way we can do this is to think about the action in our steps as we act each step out, asking ourselves, ‘What is the word that describes what I am doing exactly?’ (For example, Do I put the milk in? Or do I pour the milk in?)”
 - ▶ *Tip:* Some students may need some work around vocabulary to name what the action is precisely. You could have a chart with pictures and action words describing them (for example: a ball with an arrow up and down with the word *bounce* next to it) that children can reference as they write.

- “Today I want to teach you that as we write our how-to books, we can help our readers to understand our steps by adding to our pictures. There are so many things we might do! We might zoom in on the important parts of our pictures, so that the reader has a close view of what we are talking about, we might also use a picture inside a picture to show special parts up close. We can also add labels, diagrams, action lines, and arrows to give readers a more precise view of what we are saying with our words.”
- *Tip:* You might turn to *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports* to teach how one might add features to their how-to: “Today I want to teach you that writers of how-to’s include specific features in their books. We do this to make sure that our how-to’s are clear and easy to follow. We can include: an informative title, a list of things we’ll need, pictures that teach us what to do, and numbers for each step.” (See Session III, “Revising Words and Pictures” in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)

Part Two: Writing So That Readers Can Read Our Writing

- “We want others to be able to read the directions we write in our how-to books, so it is important to spell words the best we can. Today I want to teach you that you can use tools around the classroom to help you spell words that you are unsure of, and to make your writing easier to understand. You can look at the word wall to spell sight words, and our charts for words that we use when giving directions, and even the books in our room can be helpful tools too.”
- *Tip:* “If you don’t see a word around the classroom, don’t give up when you come to a word that is tricky to spell. Just do your best to record all of the sounds you hear, saying the word slowly stretching each sound. We do our best to record as many sounds as we hear.”
- “Since we are writing to teach others what to do, we want to make our writing really easy to read. Not only do we need to spell the best we can but we also want to be sure that our readers can tell where one word ends and another begins. Today I want to teach you that one thing you can do to make sure your words are clear and easy to read is to put finger spaces between each word.”
- *Tip:* You might find that your writers are not rereading what they have written after it goes down on paper, you might stop them mid-workshop, or as a share to say, “Writers, can I stop you for a second? I know we have been working hard making our writing easy to read by putting spaces between words. Just like you use your finger to tap under words in your just-right books, you can do the same thing when reading your own writing. See if you notice where one word ends and another begins.”

Part Three: Writers Can Revise Their How-To's and Make New Ones Even Better

- “Today I want to teach you that when you think you are finished with a how-to book, you can check the how-to charts in the classroom to make sure that you have tried out *lots* of the strategies that you have learned. You want to teach as much as you can on every page of your book. You might decide to go back to a book you thought was done, reread it page by page to see if you might add something to teach your reader even more.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* You will want to have paper strips and tape so that your students can add lines to their writing as they revise.
- “Today I want to teach you that writers study mentor texts to get ideas about ways to make our writing even better. As we are studying mentor texts, we can ask ourselves, ‘What is this writer doing that I could do to?’ Then, we can reread and revise our how-to’s.” (See Session V, “Revising: Learning from a Variety of How-To Writing” in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
- “Today I want to teach you that in our how-to books, we can use cautions, tips, and warnings to help the reader be safe and successful. When we reread the steps in our books, we can stop to think, ‘Does the reader need to be careful or do they need a helpful hint?’ and then we can add that information to the page. We can add it to the bottom of the page or in a ‘call-out box.’ We can use all caps, bold letters, or exclamation points to stress important things.”

Part Four: Preparing for Publication

- “Today, I want to teach you that when writers are getting ready to celebrate our how-to books, we choose our best writing and work to make it stronger so that we can share it with others. We reread our pieces to our partners, asking if we are missing a part, and we add it in. If we have a step we don’t need, we take it out.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “When writers revise our steps by adding and taking away pages, we change our step numbers to make sure that the numbers are in order. Cross out the number that’s wrong and write the correct number.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that when writers are getting ready to celebrate our how-to books, we fix up our words and sentences to make our pieces smooth. We point and reread word-by-word, and we might add missing words with a carat or cross out words that don’t belong.”

- ▶ *Tip:* You will want to remind your writers of all of the things they already know about editing, for example, you might say: “Writers, as we fix up our pieces, we can also point under each word and ask, ‘Is that a word wall word?’ and check the word wall to see if it’s spelled correctly. Point, ask, and check!”
- ▶ *Tip:* “Writers, as we fix up our pieces, we check for punctuation. We reread and check for periods and exclamation points.”
- “Today, I want to teach you that when writers are ready to celebrate, we fancy up our work. We might do this by adding color to our pictures or creating a book cover that matches the information inside. We can even add an ‘About the Expert’ page, so that readers can learn more about us!”



UNIT SEVEN

Informational Books

MARCH

Your children enter kindergarten brimming with passions and areas of expertise. There's the child who knows everything about sharks, the child who can tell you twelve million facts about princesses, the earthworm enthusiast, and the list goes on. One of the wonderful things about working with kindergartners is the delight they take in their own knowledge. This unit channels that energy into writing. Kindergartners will love being asked to teach you what they know, and then to teach everyone else, and the world. This means, of course, that we need to let children in on the fact that their beloved bicycle, their action figure collection, and their favorite topics—horses, dinosaurs—are book-worthy! During this unit of study, each child will write lots of informational books about lots of different topics. As they do this, your children will be getting off to a good start in school because the work they'll be doing aligns with the Common Core State Standards for kindergarten, which call for students to compose "informative/explanatory texts in which they name what they are writing about and supply some information about the topic."

Planning for the Unit

To understand what your children can do as informational writers, you will want to take a day, right at the start of this unit (if not earlier in the year) to engage your children in a performance assessment (available at www.readingandwritingproject.com). Say to writers, "What do you know a lot about? You can make a book that teaches others a lot about that." Your kindergartners will then have fifty minutes to do their best informational writing. You may roll your eyes at the suggestion that you would test your kids on writing that you haven't yet taught for even a moment, but please trust that when we ask kindergartners to do informational writing—which they have actually been doing since the start of kindergarten—the work they produce floors us. Some children, of course, have

little concept of the genre, but others seem ready for third grade! In any case, the real point is that if you do this work at the start of your unit, then you can adjust your teaching plans accordingly, and you also have a baseline against which to compare the work students are able to do in a few short weeks, at the conclusion of the unit.

Expect that your children will learn informational writing in leaps and bounds. The Common Core State Standards suggest that by the end of kindergarten, your children should be doing the work that is represented by Level 3 on the *RWP Informational Writing Continuum*. We have found this goal to be well within kindergartners' grasp. Before long, your students will know that when writing a book on a topic such as, say, kittens, a writer should expect to divide the book into some sort of categories, with each section of the book containing information that pertains to a different aspect of kittens. The topics and subtopics that children address will tend to be those they know about from personal experience, but of course they'll also write some about topics they study in school and by poring over books. The texts that children produce, at least by the end of kindergarten, if not by the end of this unit, should, according to the Common Core State Standards, be readable by others. This means they will be characterized by directionality, a sense of word, a command of high-frequency words, and the use of onsets and rimes. By the end of the year, your young writers will generally write a few sentences on each page. But, of course, the end of the year is still far away, especially in kindergarten-time, where a few months is a fifteenth, not a thousandth, of a life time.

You will also want to prepare for the unit by looking over, *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports in Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (Heinemann, 2003), which contains minilessons you might consider using during this unit. Read this write-up, too, and notice some of the important ways it departs from the book. In a nutshell, the kindergarten curricular calendar for 2011–2012 suggests that instead of combining how-to and all-about writing into a single unit, you can teach each of these units as self-standing ones. This write-up further suggests that instead of walking students through the process of writing one fairly elaborate how-to book, you launch students into a process of writing lots and lots of these books on lots of topics. Your teaching in this unit will lead students to make a small folder full of all-about books, returning to revise these as they learn new strategies. The books written toward the end of the month should, from the start, include things that are revisions to other, earlier books. That is, the books at the start of the unit might contain a hodgepodge of facts, in no particular order, and might therefore be scissored apart into categories. The books written later in the unit will probably have a table of contents, with different pages allocated for different subtopics. You might, of course, decide against this plan and instead follow more closely the plan that is laid out in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*. These are decisions you'll need to make—obviously there is no right answer, although for now, we are casting our vote toward encouraging children to create lots and lots of all-about books.

Then you will want to prepare for the unit by acquiring (or making) paper that can support your students' writing during the unit. Analyzing your students' on-demand assessments can help you make decisions about the kind of work you can expect your

children to do in the unit, and those decisions will have implications related to paper choice. Again, you'll need to decide whether you want to follow the plan laid out in *Nonfiction Writing* or depart a bit from it. In that book, you will see that as Laurie Pessah and I walk students through a sequence of work that leads them to each write a single all-about book, we channel them to make sure that one page is for a how-to section, one page is for a "The Kinds of . . ." section, one page is for a Small Moment story related to the topic, and so on. In that book, we help the whole class understand that whether an individual is writing about soccer or about computers or about dogs, that person can write a how-to page related to the topic. Whether the person is writing about soccer or computers, the writer can also write about the different *kinds* of a thing, related to the topic, and different *parts* of a thing, chapter, and so forth. We've tended to think that such a system aims for goals that are a bit high for many kindergartners and may end up needing to micromanage what kids do so that the goal is within their reach. We'd rather encourage kindergarten writers to do the work they want and, in a sense, need to do. For kindergartners, then, we're suggesting that once a child has selected a topic, you let the child go to it, writing an informational book. After a few days within the study, you can teach children that actually, it helps to sort out information by subcategory, and so you can help children approach their next books by first writing a table of contents in which they make plans to divide content so the appropriate information goes onto each page of the book. If the child is writing about soccer, chapter one might address the players on a team, and chapter two might address how one makes a goal and chapter three might tell a story about one time when the writer played soccer. For now, although these distinct chapters each suggest a different kind of writing, we think it is enough for the child to categorize his or her information so the content about one subtopic goes on one page, and the content for another subtopic goes on another page. Of course, subdivisions like this won't exist on any books children have already written, but they can easily cut those books apart and sort the information, creating chapters after the fact.

Later, when writers are in first and second grade, teachers will help children recognize that some of their chapters are really how-to chapters, needing paper formatted like a how-to book, and other chapters are Small Moment story chapters, needing paper formatted to support narrative writing. And you may, in fact, confer with or lead small groups to show children that they can add a how-to page to their books, which otherwise will tend to not include any procedural texts. But our sense is that if you were to become invested in kindergartners matching their paper choice with the genre of each chapter of their all-about writing, this one decision would end up meaning that the entire class of writers moved in unison from writing a how-to page of an all-about book to writing a Small Moment page of that same all-about book, and so on. There are lots of downsides to trying to yoke the whole class together, and the most important might be a lack of productivity. Many children can write lots of pages of their all-about book in a day's writing workshop, but if every child must write an all-about page on Monday, beginning and finishing that page that day while others wait patiently, this is bound to slow half the class down.

Finally, you will want to select mentor texts for this unit. Choose texts that represent complex grade-level texts, as well as mentors that are just a notch up from those that you expect your children will write. Read this write-up and make sure that the mentor texts you select will provide you with examples that you will need to teach the content of this unit. For example, you will want mentor texts with tables of contents, chapter titles, and diagrams. Some questions to consider when picking a text are: Will this text support the volume of writing that I expect my children to produce? Will this text use elaboration strategies that I want my children to strive for? Will the text structure teach my children about ways to organize their writing? Some children may benefit from a list-like structure (similar to the books they are reading), while other children would benefit from mentors with sophisticated text structures and elaboration strategies. People have had great success with *Cats* or *Hamsters* from the Capstone Press's All About Pets series, or *Grasshopper* from the series All About Insects. These series are chock-full of both content and structure that is appropriate for kindergarten readers and writers. You'll find yourself constantly returning to this series as you show your students how to add tables of contents, pictures or photos that teach, and words-to-know (glossary) pages. You may also want to use books in the Gail Gibbons' series, such as *All About Baseball* or *All About Soccer*.

Launching the Unit

Don Graves, one of the leaders in the field of children's writing, once asked a group of teachers to list their children's names. Then he asked the teachers to list, beside each name, four or five things on which that child is an expert. His point was that none of us can teach writing unless we recognize that each child in our class is an expert on many things. A child may know all about a specific church, about a game, about a tradition, about a sport, about a television show, about a kind of weather, about a place, about a job, about an animal, about a language. These topics and a trillion others all merit attention; the important thing is that you find these areas of expertise, and respect them. In classrooms where informational writing will flourish, one will hear the teacher saying to one child, then another, "You know so much about . . . I'd love to learn all about it from you. You've got to teach me . . ." In these classrooms, children will push back their shoulders and stand tall, proud to be recognized as the class expert on one subject or another.

It will not be hard, then, for children to choose topics on which to write all-about books. There will be instances when a child is unsure, however, and needing help. When you have the opportunity to steer a child toward a topic, we recommend that at least at the start of the unit, you channel children toward topics of personal expertise—and ideally, topics that will give the writer power as well. A book on Gym Class may not give the young writer any social cache, but a book on Magic Tricks or Slugs or on Skateboard Wheelies might—which will tend to make the young writer all the more willing to invest in writing in the future.

To help children choose topics that they will be able to write about with breadth and depth, you might have them brainstorm places, people, things, and topics that they know well and could teach others about (dance class, the barber shop, the Yankees, a sticker collection, *Sesame Street*, submarines). You could devote a portion of the first day to group discussions and partner work that aims to stir up topic ideas, and later, you might start the school day by asking children to suggest topic ideas to each other. As children wait in line, they could work with a friend to list five possible all-about ideas. As part of this, children will begin to recognize individual expertise. “Tonia should write about Polly Pockets. She has so many,” one child might say. You may find that your students will begin working on books like “All-About Star Wars,” “All-About Chuck-E-Cheese,” and “All-About Brothers.” Don’t project onto children the writer’s block that you, as an adult, would experience if nudged to write an informational book. Six-year-olds believe they are experts on a world of topics, and they expect that of course, people will want to learn about those topics. Within the first day of this unit, your children can all start writing all-about books.

Teach Students to Revise Books in Their Folders, and to Make Their New Books Be Even More Ambitious: Revising and Writing to Support Categorization

One of the most exciting and important lessons that you can teach your youngsters will be the lesson that informational writers sort stuff into categories so their readers can learn more easily. Because this is especially foundational, you will probably want to make the lesson very concrete. You might say to kids, “I want to teach you about my dog.” Then you could begin to go through a jumble of items, each of which sparks you to say a different fact (making sure that items 1, 3, and 6 relate to your dog’s food, and items 2 and 5 relate to another subtopic—grooming your dog—and yet other items relate to a third topic). This needs to be extremely brief so just give one fact for each item. Picking up a biscuit, you can say, “My dog eats four treats a day.” Then picking up a comb, say, “My dog often has burrs near her paws that need to be combed.” Returning to a food item, or an empty measuring cup, say, “I feed my dog a cup of dry food every morning and night.” Returning to grooming, you say “My dog’s tail often gets burrs that need to be combed.” You could then point out that it might be hard for kids to remember things they are learning when everything is all snarled up together, and show them that people who are writing teaching books often sort things out and talk about things that go together, all at one time. You could then make three piles, and say, “I’m going to teach you about feeding my dog, grooming my dog and about . . .” Then proceed through one category. You won’t need to go through all your items and categories to have made your point, but you will want to show children how this translates into a table of contents.

Children won’t have a pile of things in front of them to sort, but they can take a new topic and think about what their chapters might be. You could even channel them all to

write on a kind of animal, just for starts, as you could give them a chance to think about the categories, listing them across their fingers, and then you could help by suggesting some (and you can cite categories that pertain to all animals).

The simplest version of this is for children to say what they know, what they would write, for each finger, essentially writing one sentence about each finger-topic. This might sound something like, “One thing that I know about parties is that people have fun at them. Another thing that I know is that a lot of people play games like pin the tail on the donkey at birthday parties,” and so forth. The children will be tapping their fingers as they ramble off information about their topics. Again, this rehearsal won’t take more than a few minutes, so children don’t need to wait to get started on writing chapter-books. They can pick the topic they know the most about and start their books the same day! For this work, you can supply premade booklets with a table of contents page and a line on which the child will write the chapter title at the top of each page (for now, assume one-page chapters). Chapters may be titled, for example, “How to Take Care of a Cat,” or “Parts of a Cat,” or “Things Cats Like to Do.” For each chapter, children will write what they know about that category.

Of course, as you teach children to plan all-about books that contain subheadings and to use tables of contents and subheads to help them sort information into categories, you will definitely want to make reading–writing connections, pointing out that the authors of published books do this as well. You can invite children to study *how* authors do this, gleaning more tips by looking closely. Some astute writers will notice that some books have a hierarchy of headings (writers refer to these as A-heads, B-heads, and C-heads but don’t tell this to your six-year-olds!). Others may notice that some writers also have little boxes on their pages where they put information that doesn’t go in any of the chapters. Of course, there is a lot you can prompt writers to notice—including the fact that writers tend to write more than one sentence in a chapter (but more on that later).

After you teach writers to plan their chapters, sorting information into subheads, you might suggest they go back and revise the book or two they wrote prior to receiving this instruction, sorting things out by scissoring the sentences apart and taping them into the appropriate chapter pages. The goal would not be to make those first books perfect so much as to give kids another manipulative way to experience the concept of categorization. As children do this work, they will of course mess up—don’t worry about this. The goal is not perfection, it is for children to begin to grasp an important concept.

Eventually, you may want to let children construct their own booklets, and to at least expose them to paper written in different formats (diagram paper would be a good choice for a chapter on “Parts of a Cat” and how-to paper might be a good choice for “How to Get a Cat”). But of course, both of those topics could also be written on any sort of lined paper, and most children will be more intent on plunging forward, writing a lot, than on thinking how a chapter will go and choosing paper to match.

Teach Students to Revise by Elaborating—and Then to Begin Writing Longer Books, Right from the Start

Every genre of writing has predictable challenges and when writing informational books, one of the most important challenges is to include information! This means that you will need to help young writers elaborate, or say more. There are lots of ways to teach students to say more. You might start by pointing out that now that your youngsters are writing books like real authors, they'll want to study what real writers do and think about doing likewise. One thing writers do, of course, is write a lot more than a sentence on a page. That is, they "say more." That alone is great advice for your children. Part of this means that you need to be sure your expectations are properly high. If a child can write one sentence on a page, that same child can write three sentences. And frankly, a child can write three sentences on a page and four or five pages, and do that in a day. Try challenging your kids. "Can I give you a challenge?" you can say to three kids. "I read that kids your age can actually write a whole book—like five or six pages long—in *one day*. And this person said those books can have a bunch of lines on each page. I think that's too hard for six-year-olds. I read that and thought, 'Really?' But then I got this thought that maybe, just maybe, you actually *could* write a six-page book, with a bunch of lines on each page, in a day. Would you be willing to try . . . just to see?" The kids will be bursting with excitement to show you, and will rise to the occasion. And from that point on, your expectations for the whole class can leap ahead.

Of course, you can also lure kids to write more by teaching them that writers reread a page and think, "Can I add an example?" and then we get a giant colorful Post-it, and add that Post-it to the page, holding an example. Of course, there was no need for the Post-it. The example could almost certainly fit beneath the text just fine. But the Post-it will make the process of adding more feel like carpentry. Flaps off the sides work equally well. A writer who wrote, "Zebras are at the zoo," may return to that page, reread, then ask herself, "What more can I teach about this part?" Then add on, "Zebras live in the safari part. They stand together and walk together." Keep your expectations high as you teach your writers to say and write more and use tools to nudge your writers to reread and add on, as long as you also teach them that actually, in the end, writers write longer chapters right from the start. In the end, if a child has written a chapter titled "The Parts of a Car," and written only, "Cars have four wheels," before he goes on to the next chapter "Cars can move fast," the child will likely be able to say, "Oops! How can I say more about the parts of the car? Well, sometimes they have four wheels and they go flat."

Another important way for writers to elaborate is for them to consider readers' questions. By this time, your students will probably each have a folder full of five or six all-about books. Teach children that they can read these to a partner, hear questions that the partner has, and try to write in ways that answer those questions. That is, if a child has said, "There are a lot of bad guys in Star Wars," then another child might reread this and ask, "What are their names? Who are the bad guys?" The author, then, can insert this information. You may need to teach children that they can use carets (not carrots!)

and arrows to insert information into the right spot in a text. Of course, the bigger lesson is that writers reread, asking ourselves the questions that we anticipate readers will want to ask. We become our own partners.

Teach Students to Elaborate by Revising to Add Text Features— Then Writing More Developed Books That Incorporate Text Features from the Start

As children continue to write multiple all-about books, you will certainly want to teach them that they can include text features in their writing. Again, you can use published all-about books as the source of inspiration, and encourage students to revise the books they have already made and to make new books that include text features from the start. Children can add diagrams, charts, glossaries, and pictures with labels and captions to their own books. They could even add a Fun Facts or Question: Answer page. You may revisit some of your favorite mentor texts to allow your writers to read with a writer's eye, noticing the features that the authors use to convey information. You will want to teach your writers to not only recognize what different features they might include in their books but also why they might choose a particular feature to include as they write. Therefore, if you teach a minilesson on how to say more by adding a diagram, you will want to be sure to model how you decide where a diagram might help you to say more. You would not want to demonstrate that every all-about book has a diagram page, making students think that it is okay to just add a diagram to any book in any old place. Instead you would want to teach your students several features they might add and how to go about deciding where to add what. Think about a child who is writing an all-about book on soccer, for example: if her first chapter is about practice, a diagram might not be the most useful feature to add. You want your young writers to begin to realize the types of decisions they need to make when they revise.

You also might teach your writers to not only add text features but also to say more by adding their own voice to their all-about books. Again, thinking about the child who is writing all-about cars, you might teach writers like him to state a fact and to state a reaction as well: "Keep air in your tires. If a tire goes flat, call for help. Don't worry. One time I got a flat tire and the police came. I was scared but he was nice." You might work in small groups with especially proficient writers to help them know that when adding their thoughts about a subject, it can help to make comparisons. "Dinosaurs are as big as a house." "Sometimes cars are really long, like a hot dog. Those cars are called limousines." You may also consider reminding students of strategies they learned to use last month. Children can add warnings and suggestions in their all-about books just like they did in their how-to books: "Watch the signs on the road!" or "Be careful as you drive!" Again, it's important to model and practice these strategies with writers through shared writing of whole-class books. You may decide to teach your writers how to use features of nonfiction to teach more. You can teach them how a caption, that writing under our picture, gives "ohh and ahh!" information for our readers to learn

even more. Or you may teach how a label and arrow doesn't just name the part, but more often, it points to and gives a quick definition or example of what it has labeled. If I label my diagram of a baby bottle, I don't simply write, "ring" but I draw an arrow and write a label to teach, something like, "the plastic ring holds the bottle nipple in place." Other features you may teach writers to use to elaborate and teach more are the features of zoomed in pictures and close-up details to both sketch and write. You can teach your writers how to add an introduction to their informational book as well as a conclusion. You can show your writers how an informational writer introduces her book to you by asking a question and promising to answer that question as you read her book. You can also teach how at the end of informational books, writers often write a big feeling or thinking to leave their readers with so they will remember all they learned when they read her book.

One Final Grand Revision Process as Part of the Work of Preparing to Publish

As they reread to themselves and/or partners, children may need to go back to clarify and to add something to the book they are working on. In the Common Core State Standards for Speaking and Listening, kindergartners are expected to ask and answer questions to seek help, get information, or to clarify something not understood. Therefore, the act of reading to a partner to prepare for publication gives students a great opportunity to do this work. When they've changed one piece based on this feedback, they can simply go back to their folders, take out one of the other topic idea pages they created earlier, see if they can say five things they know about the next topic of their choice, and begin writing another all-about book. When children have collected many little books, they are ready to choose their favorite to further revise. We are responsible for building excitement about revision in our classrooms. If we are excited to revise, our students will be too! We want to remind them about all the wonderful revision work that they did in the previous units and build on what was previously taught. We may want to revisit a chart on elaboration strategies in nonfiction writing that we created earlier in this unit and use it to revise their books. As children are rereading their all-about books, they could use the repertoire chart to suggest strategies for adding more chapters and more into each chapter. Children can also revise by thinking about what their audience would want to know more about or what their readers might be confused about, or by responding to questions from a partner. They can also check each *chapter* (or page) for clarity by rereading their pages, stopping after each sentence to think, "Does this go with this chapter?" and if it does not, taking it out. Children can revise their pictures to teach their readers more by "zooming in" on specific details or adding labels. Children can also study nonfiction texts and find new ways to revise their pieces based on what "real authors" have done, such as adding "teaching words" like *also*, *one way*, and *another*.

As your class gets ready to publish, keep in mind that children will be making decisions about how their all-about books go together. As this is a teaching genre, it's best if your celebration can match this purpose. This is a great opportunity to turn your classroom into an expert share fair, since these books were written with the express purpose of sharing knowledge! Children will be so proud of the books they authored. Kindergarten writers might meet with the Pre-K children to teach them something new, or they might invite another class or adults to tour the classroom while the children stay at "posts" around the room, ready to teach visitors about their topic.

Additional Resources

This month, you are teaching your writers to write about areas of expertise to create informational books. Start with an on-demand to see what your children are already able to do in writing informational books. This will help you to determine what route to take when planning your teaching across the unit. If some of your writers still need help focusing on one topic across pages, then you may want to revisit the initial strategies you taught in this genre from Unit Three to do some small-group work. No matter where your kids fall on the *RWP Informational Writing Continuum*, you will want to get your children writing all-about books from Day One, finding ways to teach them toward the Level 3 pieces that align with the kindergarten expectations within the Common Core State Standards.

Expect by the end of the first part of this unit that most of your children will have three or four informational books inside their folders. You will then use these books to assess your writers as you go, leaning on the teaching points that follow that make sense for the majority of your kids. You will likely find that some of your writers are writing well above what the kindergarten expectations demand, and so you will want to push these writers using the strategies and skills named in the *Continuum* for Level 4 or 5 writers.

Once children have several information books in the works, expect your teaching to support writers with organizing and categorizing information into chunks or chapters. Prepare to teach writers how to do this quickly, as they go. Also be sure that your writers see this revision work as ongoing so that it helps them as they begin each new informational book, making their booklets more sophisticated from the start. If children have a page about the swings at the park, then a page about the slide at the park, then a page about using your legs to pump and swing high, then you'll want to teach them to reread and think about which chunks of writing go together. If instead they have written one page about the park, another page about baking a cake and a third about riding the train, you may need to teach them simply to focus on one topic, rather than forging ahead to teach them how to group information within a greater topic. Either way, this work will involve scissoring and taping as your writers rearrange and revise their books page after page and booklet after booklet.

By the third part, this unit aims to teach your kids further revision to support the usage of text features that lift the level of your writers' information books. Kindergartners will take what they've learned and practiced as readers of nonfiction and revise their own pieces to include captions, detailed pictures with labels that teach, clear explanations, and even tucked-in examples and instances from their own personal experiences that tie in with the topic that they are writing about. For the children who have already filled up all of the lines on their pages, you will show them how to add strips and flaps to the bottom of each page as well as ways to elaborate with arrows and labels to add more to their pictures. However, for the children who write one or two sentences per page, you might teach them to reread, asking "What *more* can I say about this part," to show them how they can fill the lines on their page with words. You should remember that you can learn what you need to teach just by looking at the booklets that your students are producing.

As you move into the final part, you'll look to the pieces your children have written and think about the important editing and readying for publication work you will teach your writers. Expect to show many of your students how end punctuation can be changed to show questions, excitement, and telling sentences. Also, teach into the careful rereading and sometimes rewriting of parts that were too squished together. Show how a quick revision strip can work wonders to make a part or page more readable and crystal clear for the reader.

One Possible Sequence of Teaching Points

Part One: Launching the Unit

- "Today I want to teach you that when informational book writers get started, we think about topics in which we are experts, things we know all about, so that we can teach others. We think about people we know all about (people in our lives and famous people), places we go (to eat, to play, to shop), things that we do (at home, at school and outdoors). We choose a topic, say everything we know across our fingers, grab a booklet and write, write, write."
- ▶ *Tip:* Sometimes our writers choose topics outside their realm of expertise. When that happens, you might pull a small group to teach that "When you plan out possible books, if you find you can't say more than five facts, then you know the topic is a no-go. We put that idea back and try on another. Once we have a plan, we grab a booklet with the number of pages that matches the number of facts we said across our fingers and get started in our writing."
- "Writers, you already know that when you finish writing one book, you start another. Today I want to teach you that as we write informational books, we need to take a bit of time to choose our paper carefully so we have space to say all we want to say. Our charts can help us make wise choices as we do this."

- “Today I want to remind you that writers sometimes decide to go back to revise *all* of their books, rather than starting a brand-new one on a new topic. And one way we might revise our books is to think of ways that we can add to our pictures to teach more about our topics. Teaching pictures have labels and other stuff in them to help readers learn not just from the words of the book but also from the picture.”
- ▶ *Tip:* “You can also zoom in on the important parts of your pictures so that the reader has a close view of what you are talking about. Or you might decide to use a picture inside a picture to show special parts up close. You might also add action lines and arrows to show the reader direction and captions to explain your pictures.”

Part Two: Teach Students to Revise Books in Their Folders and to Make Their New Books Be Even More Ambitious: Revising and Writing to Support Categorization

- “Today I want to teach you that writers of information books study how all-about books work and how they are organized. When we study how the books work, we can plan how we want our books to go.” (See Session VII, “Introducing All-About Books” in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
- ▶ *Tip:* “Some things that we may notice are: a big all-about title, a how-to page, chapters, headings and/or a table of contents.”
- “Today I want to give you a big tip. When we want to teach people about something and we have a huge armload of junk to teach, we don’t just throw it all down on the table in front of the reader like this (blech!). Instead, we first sort it into piles or bins of stuff—and we say to the reader, I want to teach you about basketball. Here’s the stuff I know about basketball rules (then we tell that stuff). Here is stuff I know about basketball teams (and we tell that stuff). So, to get ready to teach others (that is, to teach readers) it helps to sort our information into piles of stuff that go together.”
- ▶ *Tip:* “That’s what a table of contents does. A table of contents can help us to tell the reader how our information is organized.”
- “Today I want to teach you that we can go back to all-about books that we made early in the unit and revise them to make sure that all of the information is grouped together in an organized way. As we are rereading to revise our writing, we can ask ourselves, ‘Which information goes together? Could I open up the booklet and switch the order of pages? Could I create a table of contents?’”

- “Today, I want to teach you writers to try on topics like we try on clothes. First we think of a few possible topics. Then, we try them on by naming what information we could include in our table of contents. If we have enough facts to list four or five parts in the table of contents, then we know that our topic is a good fit.” (See Session VII, “Structuring All-About Books: The Table of Contents” in *Nonfiction Writing: Procedures and Reports*.)
- ▶ *Tip:* One way to help writers develop categories for their writing, besides thinking of what is the same, is to ask them to think about: parts of the topic, kinds of the topic, times with the topic, and places that have to do with the topic.

Part Three: Teach Students to Revise by Elaborating—and Then to Begin Writing Longer Books, Right from the Start

- “Today, I want to teach you that one way we can revise our information books is to add stuff to them. We can reread our writing and ask ourselves, ‘What else can I say here?’ Then, we add more to *each* page.”
- “Today, I want to teach you another way to revise our books. We can think about what questions readers will ask us and then answer those questions. One way to figure out the questions readers might have is to share our books with our writing partners to see if they have any questions about parts of our books that might be confusing. Then we can go back to fix up those parts answering their questions.”
- “As we look to write and revise our informational books, we can look to other informational books for ideas and help to see what kinds of things we might add to our pages. We can try to use the same kinds of sentences that other writers use about their topics when we are writing about our own. Today I want to teach you that as you reread your book you might read each page and say, ‘What more can I say about that?’ If you aren’t sure, you can think of the words that other writers use in their books and then see if you can start another sentence with *All, Most, Some, Many, or Few* to help add more details to your page.”
- ▶ *Tip:* If a child is writing a book on birthday parties, he may have a page that simply states “Birthday parties have cake.” We want to teach him how to elaborate, thinking what else can he say about the cake so that he may add a line that says “You sing Happy Birthday before you blow out the candles.” Using the aforementioned words, he could, for example, say more such as “All birthday cakes have candles.” “Most birthday cakes are round or rectangles.” “Some birthday cakes are SpongeBob cakes.”

- ▶ *Possible mid-workshop teaching point:* “Writers, I have noticed that so many of you are writing as if your hand is on fire and you have so many more words than lines on a page. Don’t forget to use the flaps and strips in our writing center to help you add more space for writing. Don’t stop just because you’ve run out of lines on your page!”

Part Four: Teach Students to Elaborate by Revising to Add Text Features—Then Writing More Developed Books That Incorporate Text Features from the Start

- “Today I want to teach you that writers can study mentor texts to get ideas about which text features to include in our informational books. As we are studying mentor texts, we can ask ourselves, ‘What features is this writer using that I might use?’ Then, we can reread and revise our books. We can add diagrams, charts, glossaries, and pictures with labels and captions just like the authors of the books we are reading.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers carefully choose the text features we want to include in our informational books when we are writing new books and revising older ones. We don’t want to include a feature just because we can. We think about which features would help us to teach more about our topics. What would make sense to add? For example, we may include a caption to a picture that we need to explain or we may include a diagram to explain the parts of something.”
- “Today I want to teach you that writers can revise our informational books by thinking about reactions and thoughts we have about our topics. As we reread our writing, we can think, ‘What are some important tips or comments I should include for my reader?’ Then we can add that important information.”
- “Today I want to teach you another way writers add detail to their informational books. Sometimes they use comparisons to talk about how something is the same or different from something else. As we are writing and revising our books, we can include comparisons, just as we did when we were writing like scientists. We can compare what we are writing about to something that others might already know and be familiar with.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* “You might say, ‘A referee wears a shirt that is striped like a zebra.’ If you think that most of your readers will know about zebras and how they look, then this comparison will help them to learn what a referee looks like. Comparing the things you are teaching about with things that your reader might already know, can help people to really picture what it is you are trying to say.”

Part Five: One Final Grand Revision Process as Part of the Work of Preparing to Publish

- “Writers, today is an exciting day because we are choosing a piece to publish. We have been writing and revising all-about books all month and now we are getting ready for our celebration. Before we celebrate, we need to choose our best piece of writing and revise it a bit more. Today I want to teach you that writers can reread the pieces we want to publish, revisit the strategies that we were introduced to, and find places in our writing that we could add to. We can ask ourselves, ‘What other parts can I push myself to add?’”

- “Today I want to teach you that you can reread your writing with your partner to revise and make sure what you wrote makes sense. You can point under each word as you read asking, ‘Does it make sense and sound right?’ If not, you might add words with a caret, cross out words that don’t belong, or use a revision strip to rewrite the sentence.”

- “Today I want to teach you that it is important to not only reread our writing but also to look at our writing in different ways. One way we can reread our writing is to see if our book is easy to read. We can ask ourselves, ‘Are all of my word wall words spelled correctly? Did I put finger spaces between words? Did I try to use periods at the end of sentences?’ Then, we go back and make any changes that we need to make it easier to read.”
 - ▶ *Tip:* You might show your writers how they can edit with partners going on a word wall word hunt, a lowercase letter hunt, a punctuation hunt, or a sound hunt so that our writing is easy to read.

- “Today I want to teach you how we might fancy up our writing as we get ready to publish. We want our books to look the best they can before we put them out into the world. As we get ready for our writing celebration, we can reread our books one more time, and then we might add color to our pages or page numbers to our books to make them look more like the informational books in our classroom library.”



UNIT EIGHT

Authors as Mentors

APRIL

As the spring sets in, kindergarten classrooms are abuzz with the newly “grown-up” work that they’re doing as almost-first-graders. Their growth is evident in lots of ways. Children who were once shy about making friends now easily start games and invite others to join in. Children who were once reluctant to read now confidently announce, “I can read all the books in that bin!” So, too, children’s growth in writing should be evident.

Teachers, if you have been teaching writing every day and have been using this curricular calendar, you’ll no doubt be able to stand back while your children are writing, scan the room, and breathe a proud sigh. Your children will almost certainly have surpassed all expectations. They’ll be doing work that people once thought of as first-grade work. So yes, teachers, you could easily coast from here on and still know that you taught writing well. But there is another way to go, and we want to challenge you to try this other way. Here is the thing: Your writers are right now poised to soar as writers. As you well know, momentum from good work builds on itself. At this intersection of your year, if you resolve to “go for it,” then you will see that your kids’ progress as writers literally begins to take off exponentially. Before your eyes, kids will go from writing a few sentences a page to writing paragraphs. They’ll go from writing in a sort of running-off-the-mouth, first-thought-that-occurs-to-them sort of way toward actually trying to write really well, with beautiful language and sound effects and details and complex sentence structure.

Teachers of kindergarten writers have a choice. You can teach your kids to do better than anyone expects a five- or six-year-old to do—or you can teach your kids to reach for their full potential as writers. And that potential is something to behold. We’ve written this unit to make sure that it taps into kids’ energy and -ambition and resolve—and we hope it taps into yours as well. This will be a unit in which you say to your children, “Did you see what Rosemary Wells did?” Then you will add, “You can do that too!” You will show your students they can study an author or a book to learn “cool things” that they can do in their own writing.

Ostensibly, then, the unit is about making reading and writing connections and about helping students learn the author’s craft, and we’ll consider what this means in a minute. But first, it is important to say that the unit uses reading–writing connections and author study to lift expectations for all aspects of students’ work. So before the unit begins, run your eyes over students’ products and watch students as they work, and think, “What’s the next huge, important, challenging but reachable step for these students?” Research on achievement has shown that students learn in leaps and bounds if we give them feedback that instructs—that points out specifically what they are already doing that is new and important—and if we give the crystal-clear challenges that are ambitious yet within reach. So think about your students’ revisions, for example. How many of them shift between writing and rereading their writing to assess it without you nudging them to do so? How many of them reread their writing and think, “Oh, my goodness. I could make this *so* much better!” Of course, laying a piece of writing beside published work that resembles whatever the writer had tried to do is one way to show kids a horizon that they can reach for, but your conferences and mid-workshop teaching points and small-group work can also show kids the next steps.

Of course, you can do similar work with any aspect of your writing workshop. Think, for example, about your children’s partnership work. You know from your own teaching experience how wonderful it can be to have a colleague with whom you can plan your work, mull over your work, and imagine new possibilities. Are your kindergartners using partners in true and authentic ways? Are kids really taking seriously the role of being someone’s writing friend and writing coach? How could you help kids reinvest in this social structure that has such potential?

The Important Decisions You Need to Make before the Start of the Unit: What Sort of Work Will Students Do? What Author Will They Study?

Authors as Mentors, from the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing* series, underlies this unit and builds on the assumption that students are writing Small Moment stories. Because narrative writing is fundamental to children’s success as readers and to their abilities to write in many genres, a great many teachers use this unit as a time to bring children back into another unit on narrative writing. They know that by this time in the year, children are ready to work not just on telling what they did in an event, but on writing the story in a vivid and compelling way, and teachers use reading–writing connections to lift the level of students’ work. On the other hand, other teachers decide to use this unit on *Authors as Mentors* to support a unit that invites writers to work with independence, exploring genres that young people notice in the world of books and saying, “I want to try writing like that!”

These are both reasonable ways to proceed, and we encourage the kindergarten teachers across your school to work together to make a shared decision, so that whichever pathway you pursue, you are not teaching alone. If you elect to make this a multigenre unit, with children looking through the world to find books they love and

then trying their hands as writing like those books, you will probably turn to Katie Wood Ray's publications as a source for guidance. We welcome that choice and are convinced it has advantages—and none greater than in the area of motivation. On the other hand, an enormous body of research exists that suggests the factors that make for achievement, not just in writing but in all areas. That research has shown that learners prosper when they have a crystal-clear goal toward which they are working and are given very clear feedback about what they have done so far that takes them toward that goal and what they need to work on next. If you elect to make this into a “Choose Your Own Mentor, Choose Your Own Pathway” unit, it will be important for you to still teach toward very clear goals, giving youngsters very clear feedback that supports their progress toward those goals. That is, this option is a good one as long as your writing workshop doesn't become a sort of freewriting workshop.

We have decided to angle this write-up as if you have decided to support author studies within a unit on focused personal narrative writing. We expect, however, that many of the suggestions embedded in this write-up could be transferred to an Author as Mentors unit that instead invites young people to work on a whole array of genres. The way we've planned the unit, however, assumes that you start by recalling the work that children did when writing Small Moment stories, encouraging them to show how, now that they are older, they can go back to the idea of writing Small Moment stories, only this time, write them as if they are practically first graders. You might even show your kindergarten children the work that a class of first graders had done, and say, “Do you think you can make your stories more like this?” You could, of course, issue the invitation to resume writing Small Moment stories differently—the important thing is to get kids going, writing on their own topics before you show them the work that published authors have done, so that you avoid the all too common situation where kids look at a story an author has written and write just an adaptation of that story. For instance, after reading Rylant's *When I Was Young in the Mountains*, a child writes, *When I Was Young in Brooklyn*. Writing adaptations like these wouldn't be the worst thing in the world, but ideally, when you help children make reading–writing connections you help them notice how an author wrote, not the topic the author addressed, so that writing “like the author” means writing well, rather than writing about the topic the author addressed.

Before you can plan this unit, you will want to look at your students' narratives. Perhaps you'll do another on-demand assessment, or you'll just look at what they write on the first day of the unit. Either way, you'll want to see where, on the narrative continuum, their current work falls and to look at the work a level beyond where they are so that you know what the next steps for your writers are, and so that you harness the work of the author to teach toward those next steps (as well as perhaps toward other next steps). That is, if your children are writing stories in which they tell a sequence of events they experienced but they rarely show how they responded to those events, their feelings or thoughts, then you will want to explicitly teach them how to do this, using the author's work to make the point. This teaching will be aligned with the Common Core State Standards in important ways. The Standards claim that whether

children write about one single microevent or link together a few microevents, they should be able to not only write about the events in sequential order, telling not only what the main character, the writer, did and said but also telling what the main character (the writer) felt and thought in response to what he or she did. More than this, the work in the Appendix of the Common Core State Standards suggests that standards for narrative writing are especially high.

When deciding on the whole-class mentor author, you will want to select an author who writes at least two or three texts that are rather like the Small Moment stories the children have been writing. Be careful to talk to your colleagues in first and second grade to be sure that children will not be studying the same author year after year. We want to expand our students' repertoire of literature and to help them learn from lots of different authors and pieces of writing. You will also want to consider the amount of writing your students are now producing. You will certainly want to choose authors who are writing about as much if not a little more than what your students can produce at this point in the year. We strongly recommend that you consider the books by Angela Johnson (starting with *Joshua's Night Whispers*) featured in *Small Moments* and *Authors and Mentors* (these titles are available through Booksource if you don't already have them). There are two other collections of books that have become kindergarten favorites. You may want to use Kevin Henkes' *Box of Treats*, which includes such titles as *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick*, *Wemberly's Ice Cream Star*, and *Lily's Chocolate Heart*. Each of these books are focused and compelling stories of children and the treats they love. Another well-loved set of books for this unit is Rosemary Wells' collection of board books about Max and Ruby: *Max's Breakfast*, *Max's Bedtime*, *Max's Birthday* and *Max's First Words*. These are fiction stories, not personal narratives, but they are strong examples of narrative craft, and studying them pays off.

Starting the Unit: Learning to Live Like an Author

Once a mentor author has been selected and children have fastened their eyes on a mentor text, you'll need to do a bit of fancy footwork because their instincts will most likely be to learn from a mentor author by writing *about the same content* rather than by borrowing craft moves. You do not want a study of Kevin Henkes' *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick* to lead to a whole raft of "my sister wouldn't share her candy with me" stories. To make it less likely that children look at a published text and then produce one matching the content, we suggest that you start the author study by talking up the idea that when we learn from a writer, we start by thinking, "How did this writer probably get the idea to write this story?" This can lead to some work encouraging writers to live writerly lives and it can allow writers to produce a draft of a story (or two) that you can then help them to revise, borrowing craft moves from the mentor author. Then, too, you could talk to children about the fact that this time when they are writing Small Moment stories, they are a *ton* older than they were long, long ago in January when they wrote these stories. You might take your children into first-grade classrooms in

your school to watch how those first graders write up a storm and to see that they revise all on their own, using flaps to add parts that were missing and to try a new start to a story and to expand the exciting parts of a story. Then you can turn to your kindergartners and say, “Is there any chance you guys would be brave enough and powerful enough to try writing like *first graders*?” However you launch the unit, don’t let the fact that the children will be studying an author lead you to imagine that this unit is all about writing perfect books—slowly, across many days. It is crucial for young children to be given opportunities for repeated practice at any skill you want them to develop. So this month, imagine they’ll be generating three to five stories a week, each three to five pages and each containing the number of lines that is just beyond the amount of writing your children produce without nudging. Chances are good that most of your children will be writing on paper with four lines. Your children should have no problem generating ideas for writing, and writing focused, chronological narratives with details. They’ll sketch instead of draw and most of the time in a writing workshop will be spent writing, rereading, and revising.

If you use the message, “We’re going to try to write just like real, published authors” to support children’s participation in the writing process, you will then find yourself encouraging them to walk through life a bit differently, aware of the rich moments that happen each day that could be “seeds” for writing. As you read and reread your mentor author’s books with students, you will muse about (and in many cases, invent) ways your mentor author may have gotten the idea for the text. Exclaim, “Kevin Henkes must have gotten this great idea for his story, *Wemberly’s Ice Cream Star*, from one hot day when he ate ice cream and it began to melt. He must have thought to himself, ‘I need to remember this moment,’ and then wrote it down.” You want your students to see that their own lives are full of these small moments.

You will also use your mentor author to help teach children to focus their writing. If the mentor author is Kevin Henkes, you may say, “Do you see how in *Sheila Rae’s Peppermint Stick*, Kevin Henkes doesn’t tell you all about Sheila Rae and Louise’s day? He doesn’t tell you all about the games they played, or the meals they ate, or what they did at school. He just focuses on that tiny moment when Louise asked for some of Sheila Rae’s peppermint stick, doesn’t he?” When using finished writing to teach, the problem is that you do not have the author’s process to draw upon, so you may find yourself telling stories about how the author *probably* went about writing the story. For example, you could highlight Henkes’ focus by saying, “You know what? I bet when Kevin Henkes might have first written his story it went on and on and on and on—and then he probably reread it and said to himself, ‘*What??* This story doesn’t have any details. I go so fast through things that no one can picture it!’ And then I bet he wrote it again, trying to zoom in on a smaller moment so he could add in the true details. Maybe one of his drafts went like this: ‘Sheila Rae and Louise played checkers and then they played trucks. They played with dolls and they also jumped rope. Sheila Rae would not share her peppermint stick with Louise.’” Then you could tell the class, “You know what he did? I bet he reread the draft that went on and on and on and then said to himself, ‘Of all the moments I could tell, which moment is the moment that other

people just have got to hear?" That's a question writers ask a lot." Don't persevere too long over the job of planning a perfect story because, as in any unit of study, you want writers cycling through the process at a good clip, writing as best they can, and if your youngsters really have not yet grasped what it means to zoom in on a small moment to write with enough detail that readers can experience the story as they read it, you are more apt to help them do this during revision than during planning.

Within about four days of starting the unit, your children will have lived like authors, and they will have written at least two or three stories. Now your unit begins in earnest. Until children have drafts of a story (or two or three), it is hard to teach them how to study an author's craftsmanship and to try to emulate that craftsmanship.

Teaching Children to Notice and Emulate Craft Moves

Now you can invite children to look at a text and think, "I bet I could do something like that in my story!" and then you'll invite them to go at it. Of course, children can often emulate strategies and craft moves that will not necessarily improve the quality of their writing. We have all had the experience of watching kindergartners add tons of sound words to their stories, and although the writers may be emulating what an author has done, all those sound effects do not necessarily improve the quality of their stories. You'll decide whether to push for additions that actually enhance the quality of the writing or whether you'll celebrate the process of looking at an author's piece, noticing what the author has done, and trying to do likewise, whether or not the results are all that compelling. You'll probably be most apt to steer children toward reading-writing connections that make a big difference in the quality of a piece if you aim toward big goals. So adding dialogue, for example, can make a piece better or worse, but bringing characters to life is bound to make a piece better. Putting sounds into a piece is not apt to help the writing very much, but trying to create the world in which the story is set on the page will make a big difference. In this next part of the unit you may shift your focus to encouraging students to look back and add more. Teach children how to reread their pieces, thinking about which part is the most important. Often, this part will be the very thing that made them want to tell their story in the first place. If children are having a hard time figuring out the most important part of a story, you can teach them to ask themselves, "Where in my story do I have the biggest feelings?" This is the part that you'll probably help children stretch out with details that spotlight what makes this moment so essential. For example, a child rereading a story he wrote about swinging on the monkey bars might highlight that the most important part was when he slipped and fell. This, then, is the part of the story he will want to further develop, adding in dialogue and small actions that show his feelings. You might want to refer to Sessions III-VII from *Authors as Mentors* (Heinemann, 2003) to see how to negotiate what craft moves you might pull into your lessons.

Children may notice that their mentor author has written well about the actions that a character does. You can teach them that writers were only able to do this because they imagined exactly what the characters' bodies were doing and what the things

around them were doing, too. For example, in *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick* by Kevin Henkes, Sheila Rae stumbled, the books fell, the stool tipped and the peppermint stick broke. Readers can picture what is happening in that passage because Kevin Henkes first pictured this and wrote in a way that lets everyone else picture it, too.

Children are apt to admire the endings and beginnings used by the mentor author. You will again want to try to supply the process behind those great endings and beginnings, suggesting that the mentor author only was able to produce these because that author wrote a whole sequence of drafts, choosing the one that worked the best. Youngsters can talk about the different possible ways to end a story, noticing what the mentor author did to end his stories. For example, children might reread the ending of *Lily's Chocolate Heart* and recognize that Henkes ends the piece with talking. They could then try this in their own piece. They might notice that Henkes begins *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick* with a description and then try that same technique to start their stories.

Partners can meet and show each other parts they revised. They can help each other plan possible additional revision strategies and read and reread their stories together thinking more deeply about them. Children can talk to each other about what real-world author they are trying to write in the style of, and why. Children can get ideas for revising their pieces, by asking each other, "Did you say everything about the most important part?" or "What did you do like Rosemary Wells/Kevin Henkes to make your writing better?" Partners will be delighted to be asked to act out stories together to find places to add more actions or dialogue or feeling or thinking. They can reread their stories and use a revision checklist the class has created to name what revision strategy they might try today. Partners can also read their stories and try to picture what is happening—if they can't picture it, writers can add details.

As always, when getting ready to celebrate, the children will each choose one booklet to revise, edit, and make beautiful. You can remind children to go back and reread their pictures, labels, and words to make sure their writing makes sense. They can revise their stories by adding details to the pictures, which they can incorporate into labels or words, depending on what they are ready for. They can look at their pictures to add feelings to the faces in their pictures and then add those to their writing. You may encourage them to try writing speech bubbles if they are ready for that work. According to the Common Core State Standards, kindergartners are expected to capitalize the pronoun *I*, write letters for most consonant and short vowel sounds, and spell simple words phonetically. As kids do some beginning editing work, you will want to be sure they are more than meeting these standards, which shouldn't be a problem for most of your class. Children may also look back at their mentor authors for illustration inspiration. As they study the illustrations, they may pay attention to the author's color choice and particular style. They may spend a day adding color or adding detail to their pictures to get their books ready for celebrating. You may also ask them to add a cover and a title. Partners will be an important part of this revision work. Children can help each other find places where they can add more to their pictures, labels, or words. Children can also use the word wall to make sure they spelled those words correctly.

Once children revise and do some beginning editing, they will be ready to fancy up their pieces and share their writing with an audience. You may choose to celebrate by having children sit around and read the one line that they feel is most like the author they've emulated. Or, perhaps, you'll decide to pull out all the stops for this unit's celebration. Maybe you'll celebrate by having your class do a book reading (and of course book signing) in your school library. Have your writers set up a table with little copies of their books (these could be made or they could be copied from the school copier—not hundreds, just a few for each writer) and invite other classrooms and grade levels (older kids love to do this!) to the celebration. Let your authors first read their piece (of course, using her best read-aloud voice and acting) and then, let her sign and hand out a few copies of her book to her readers (just like they do at Barnes and Noble when Mo Willems releases his latest page-turner). This celebration could be as little or as enormous as you'd like, so long as you remember, above all else, that we are celebrating the process and the creator of these pieces, not necessarily the piece itself.



UNIT NINE

Informational Books in Science

MAY

We have several goals for the upcoming unit of study in writing workshop. First, we want children to use writing to explore an aspect of science that is essential. Last year, we wrote this unit as if children were studying plants and trees or animals, this year we are writing it as if they are studying Exploring Properties—properties of objects such as wood, paper, and fabric. The reason we’re channeling you toward Exploring Properties, rather than plants and trees or animals, is that we also hope this unit provides children with opportunities to use writing to engage in the work that scientists do—developing and testing hypotheses, gathering data, and studying information for patterns. Plants and trees grow slowly over time, whereas we can observe changes in wood, paper, and fabric in a matter of minutes, so the topic of Exploring Properties seemed more conducive to fruitful, expeditious experimentation. Of course the topic that you and your children study together is your choice, and you can easily use the basic outline of this unit to support studies of any topic that you believe will be engaging for your kids and will bring them toward an understanding of one of the concepts that is essential to science. This unit also allows for kindergartners to be engaged in shared research as they write, an expectation as stated in the Common Core State Standards. The unit gives kindergartners the opportunity to read and write, not only to further their reading and writing skills but also to further their knowledge across the curriculum.

This unit builds on the energy and enthusiasm children carry about the world around them. You have probably noticed that the children in your classroom are eager to learn about their world. They gather leaves as they change colors from summer to fall, collect rocks and sea shells, and come to school excited to talk, draw, and write about the things that surround them. Before now, your kindergartners will presumably have been engaged in some science study and workshops, and they will probably have learned to observe closely, to ask big questions, and to follow procedures in order to

pursue those questions. Now you will channel their burgeoning interest in science into the writing workshop, showing learners that writing need not be an end in itself, but that it can also be a tool for learning.

You will want to approach this unit with a grand plan for the overall design of it. As in many other K–2 units, children will cycle through repeated tries at doing the work of the unit, but this time the work is not rehearsing, drafting, revising, and editing writing so much as it is writing to record, to question, to hypothesize and observe, and finally, writing to teach others. As children engage in this work over and over, you'll teach in ways that lift the level of what they are doing, so that over time they will use more sophisticated moves as they record, question, experiment, and teach.

Obviously, the unit breaks with tradition in that it is hybrid—that is, it is science and writing rolled into one. Usually, your writing workshops will have lasted one period (forty-five to fifty minutes) and will have begun with a minilesson and then a big chunk of time for kids to write, and ended with time for children to share their writing with partners. But in this hybrid science writing workshop, we hope that at least twice a week you'll be able to extend the writing workshop so that it is ninety minutes for science and writing. You will most likely want to break this science writing workshop into two parts. You might start with the science portion of the workshop, with children conducting their experiments. When children go off to their work spots and get started working, they might well be testing wood to find out how many paper clips it takes to sink it, dropping water on the wood samples to compare absorption or exploring a variety of techniques for making things from paper and wood. The FOSS Wood and Paper Kit and Fabric Kit can be resources for activities, experiments, and materials to support this unit. Depending on the experiment, you may want to give children clipboards and paper to record their observations and wonderings. You may need to be explicit with your children. You may need to give them clear directions: "Now that you have tried your experiment a couple of times, take out your writing." Of course, this is still a writing workshop as well as a science workshop. Imagine the hybrid format by thinking that on the one hand, kids will at some points be engaged in scientific processes of hypothesizing, and on the other hand, will be engaged in writing processes of recording observations and drawing conclusions. Imagine your two hands, folded together, with fingers interlocked. In just that way, your youngsters will shift from doing the work of being a scientist to doing the work of being a writer. In the first part of the unit, children will study a whole-class topic during a daily science writing workshop, and will write, sketch, and jot down questions to record and expand their thinking. They'll conduct experiments, first as a class and then on their own, and learn to write their own experiments. They might write observations, musings, and their own predictions about what might happen and why it might be happening. They also could write how-to texts detailing the experiments that they've done as a class and on their own. Perhaps they'll even invent future experiments. This unit, then, provides children with a clear purpose for writing for an audience so that others can follow their experiment. Children will draw on much of what they know about different kinds of (and purposes for) writing in this unit, using aspects of what they have learned from

writing how-to texts and nonfiction books. Don't be too concerned if your children's initial writing feels sparse. Like you, they will need a bit of time to find their footing in this hybrid unit and learn to balance scientific inquiry with the writing process.

In the second part of the unit, children will launch into their own experiments, trying them out and writing them up. You'll build on what children learned to do in Part One, teaching them new ways to record information, to write more detailed how-to texts, and to explore questions in writing.

In the third and final part, children will compile all the information they learned about their topics and make informational books that teach others how to conduct similar experiments that give information about the topic, describe the procedure that talks about their daily journey, and discuss their observations.

Preparing for the Unit

The very first preparation you will probably want to do for this unit is to decide on a whole-class topic, preferably one that is aligned with your science standards. This is a crucial choice. Remember that your whole class will be living like scientists around and inside this topic for the whole month. We're suggesting Exploring Properties because it aligns with kindergarten science standards and offers many component parts for students to study. You will, of course, want to consult your library when making a topic choice, since you'll need nonfiction books on the topic to serve as writing mentors and sources of information. You'll also want to consider choosing a topic about which your children have some prior knowledge, or which they can study simultaneously in science workshop. When choosing, you'll want to ask yourself, "Does this topic have *breadth*?" In other words, will you be able to divide the topic into plenty of component parts for children to study in greater detail over the course of the month? Can this topic accommodate a multitude of in-class experiments? A topic like "The Life Cycle of a Butterfly," for example, might be too narrow for a whole-class inquiry, because it is hard to imagine a whole class writing about nothing but this for the length of an entire month and even more difficult to imagine the kinds of experiments they'd create to explore their burgeoning questions and hypotheses.

A second thing to keep your eye on while choosing a whole-class topic is whether it is localized to students' real environments, or accessible to bring into the classroom. Keep in mind that you want children living the real life of scientists this month and so the topic ought to provide actual chances for them to make observations, conduct experiments, note and describe findings. Much as you would like for kids to read up on their topics, in this month you're aiming for kids to *live out* the scientific method and not just summarize what they find already written in reference books. In the end, you want your scientists to climb inside their topic and live with it, channeling their natural sense of play into the act of being a scientist.

You'll want to plan to teach science in your own classroom or collaborate with the science teacher and draft several possible inquiries and experiments that children might

pursue this month on the chosen topic. You'll also need books: ones that can serve as reference and mentor texts for the kind of writing you hope children will produce, books with diagrams and illustrations for children to pore over and study. You'll line these books up around the children's work area, read aloud excerpts from these, and reference them as touchstones during conferring and during the demonstration portion of your mini-lessons. You won't want to underestimate the power read-aloud will have in propelling this unit forward, exposing your young scientists to a wide variety of nonfiction texts on Exploring Properties, such as wood, paper, and fabric: narrative nonfiction that takes readers through the process of how wood is made into paper or cotton is made into fabric; expository nonfiction that teaches all about types of wood and paper; nonfiction procedural texts that teach how to accomplish a scientific experiment; and question and answer books that invite the reader to wonder along with the author and answer questions. The work done in read-aloud will not only support a growing content knowledge but also the skills of scientific writing. The Common Core State Standards in reading invite children to synthesize information by connecting pieces of information in a given text; this unit allows for your students to work not only on building their skills as writers of information but also as readers of informational texts. You'll help children do this through read-aloud, pointing out big ideas and then showing them how these big ideas can serve to propel their experiments. For instance, after reading *Paper* by Alexandra Fix, you might model some big ideas, like "Paper is important and it is used for lots of things. If paper is made from trees, we must use a lot of trees to make paper. It is important not to waste paper." After growing some big ideas about paper as a class in read-aloud, children might then plan for what experiments these ideas lead them to want to conduct. You'll hear children say things like: "I wonder if we put out a recycling bin in our classroom, how much paper would we save from being thrown out?" Or, "How can we take paper that's been used and use it for other things?" Then too, as they develop conclusions from their own experiments, children can use what they've learned from reading about paper to add evidence to bolster their own ideas, like "You don't always have to use new paper and cut down trees. It takes a long time for trees to grow."

Lastly, you'll want to decide *where* your students will do all this writing. You may decide to have students keep booklets where they can record their observations, sketches, questions, and thoughts. These booklets are a place to write with volume and stamina as children study the world around them. You may also want to introduce varied paper choices, such as paper for Venn diagrams, "before and after" diagrams, how-to, and so on.

Scientists Write to Learn about the World around Them, Experiment to Answer Lingering Questions, and Use What They Know about Nonfiction Writing to Teach Others What They Have Learned

As the unit begins, you'll want to immerse your children in a topic for scientific study. We're recommending that you expose them to one area of Exploring Properties in the first part, narrowing their study to only wood, for instance. You'll expose them to far

more in Part Two—once they’ve learned to observe, research, and write like scientists. So, on Day One, you’ll want to spread materials around the room relating to wood (or whatever topic you’ve chosen) and invite kids to hunt for matching samples, drop water on the samples, and float them in basins. Give your children this first day to immerse themselves in the study of these objects, to play, experiment, and play some more. You’ll equip them with booklets and other scientific tools, such as magnifying glasses, and show them how to record observations and questions about the objects they’re studying, knowing that throughout the unit you’ll probably want to teach children more and more ways scientists use their booklets.

One form of writing you might teach first is sketching with labels and captions, where scientists draw the setup from an experiment and then label it using precise vocabulary and adding in captions that explain the process in greater detail. You might want to set up a vocabulary wall where you can add new vocabulary words (with pictures). 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 scientists (and writers) linger. This means teaching them to add all that they can add to their sketches, in both words and images. For example, if a child has drawn a simple sketch of a sink and float experiment, then you will teach him to not just draw the bucket and the wood, but to draw the amount of water in the bucket, the size, shape and color of the wood, and the number of paper clips they used to try to sink the wood. You will teach this child to label all the parts using the language scientists use (referencing books and read-aloud texts for this information when necessary) and then to elaborate on those labels by writing captions to accompany them.

As early as Day Two of this unit, you’ll be ready to channel all your scientists toward one teacher-led experiment. You’ll remind students of all they’ve learned about the scientific process. You might say, “Remember how in science you learned to ask questions, come up with a hypothesis, make observations, and then make a conclusion at the end? Well, today we’re going to do an experiment using different types of wood and water and use everything we know about the scientific process together.” You’ll want to give students the essential question that drives the experiment on this day, rallying them toward a common inquiry as the Common Core suggests: “Scientists, today we’re going to do an experiment where we investigate to see if all wood floats. Let’s all be thinking about the question, ‘Are some woods easier to sink than others?’ as we do the experiment.” Students will jot down lingering questions, discuss their hypotheses, try out the experiment you’ve created for them, and then jot a bit about their big ideas or conclusions. You might even teach children that even after drawing conclusions we can be led to new questions. For instance, if my conclusion is that “All wood floats. But some wood is easier to sink,” we can also wonder, “What else can I do to make wood sink?” You might also consider giving your students special paper, or a template for creating their own paper, on which to record the various stages of the scientific process: questions, hypothesis, observations, and conclusion.

After students have conducted this experiment they will be ready, on the following day, to teach others how to do the same by writing a how-to text. You'll want to have the experiment materials around, since many students will need to reenact the steps of the experiment, remembering each step, before writing their how-to text. "Wouldn't it be fun to teach the first graders how to do this experiment?" you might begin. "Let's use everything we know about nonfiction writing and how-to texts to write up this experiment." Finally, in the next days, you'll teach children to design their own experiments from their unanswered and lingering questions. For instance, if you have a group of students who wonder what else would make wood sink, you might design an experiment together as a class to test this question. Then some children might try out this experiment, record their observations and then write procedural how-to texts to teach others how to conduct the same experiment.

Collaborating with Partners and Recording Our Experiments, While Raising the Level of Our Non-Narrative Writing

You'll begin this part by setting up tables, much like you did at the beginning of Part One, but this time with a far greater quantity of materials. In the first part you focused your children on one area of Exploring Properties, such as wood, paper, fabric, plastic, and so on, but will now give them free reign to explore the many areas of this field. You'll want to pull out all that you have related to this area and borrow from your science teacher and science kits, as well. Different types of wood, wood with and without holes, sandpaper, wood shavings, different types of paper, water in buckets and droppers, different kinds of plastic like plastic wrap and water bottles—chances are, once it's all out, children will find more uses for much of this than we ever imagined!

Children enter this week with new questions and ideas to test out and explore. As they move from teacher-initiated experiments to child-initiated experiments, you might consider allowing children to collaborate with partners or science clubs to discuss which experiments would be best to administer in the classroom, pitching their hypotheses and working together in choosing a project to pursue. Since children are deciding which experiments to pursue, you'll want to help them consider some of the following questions: "Do we have all of the materials that we need?" "How long will this experiment take?" "Do we have enough time?" "Which experiment will we want to start with?" Toward the end of this part, you might consider inviting children to design their own experiments, either alone or with a partner. You'll teach children to think about what materials they might need, what steps they would take, and what they think will happen—their hypothesis. Then they'll sketch a plan of what they will do to carry out the experiment. Once children try it out, they'll write a how-to describing step by step what they did, and the outcome—their findings. For example, if as a class you did an experiment on how water interacts with different kinds of paper, how it is absorbed into some types of paper, like construction paper, or how it is repelled, as with wax paper. Some children might wonder if the same thing happens with

different kinds of fabric, so they might design an experiment in which they test the results of putting droplets of water on different kinds of fabric, such as linen, felt, canvas, or any other fabric you can find in the classroom.

Their booklets are beginning to fill with the fruits of their scientific labor, and you will want to take this opportunity to help students fine-tune and build on what they're already doing. In this part, one of your roles will likely be to help children understand that writing plays a vital role in science, helping us to question, analyze, record, and teach others as suggested in the Common Core State Standards. In Part One, you taught students to sketch and label, and you will probably want to begin by teaching them yet another form of observational writing. You'll want to show them how scientists record, in as much detail as possible, all that they observe while exploring properties of materials such as wood, paper, plastic, fabric, and other materials. They then return to their sketches and this time write in words, phrases, and sentences what they have seen and sketched. Teach them to use prompts like, *I notice . . . I see . . .* and *This reminds me of . . .* to elaborate on their observations. One way to ensure that your children are doing this writing in as much detail as possible is to teach them to observe with categories like color, texture, shape, and size in mind. A word of caution: Some children may write assumptions rather than observations. That is, upon noticing that gluing two sheets of wood together produces stronger wood, a student might write "Wood glued together is stronger." You will want to teach students to write the observation, "The wood we made from many pieces of wood glued together was stronger than just one piece of wood." Teaching this reinforces that scientists observe without inferring.

Another way that scientists use their booklets is to keep track of data. So, you might teach kids to measure and record their findings, or to sort, classify, and record that data. This writing might take the form of a T-chart, picture diagrams with close-ups, or before-and-after diagrams. Children might create a T-chart to compare different kinds of paper. You will want to teach children that when recording data, being exact matters. Teach them to transfer what they are learning in science to the writing workshop, specifically, things like attaching units of measurement to numbers. Then, too, you'll want to teach them more ways to expand the information they observe and to formulate possible theories or hypotheses. You'll find it helpful to chart several prompts and teach children to use them to develop and elaborate on their ideas. Among others, you'll certainly want to teach prompts like "I noticed . . ." "I think . . ." "I used to think . . . But now I know . . ." "I wonder . . ."

It will be important to help children negotiate time spent "experimenting" and time spent writing. You'll want to remind students that writing is a powerful tool for thinking and teach them new ways to record, analyze, and write about information. Draw attention to child-created record systems and encourage your young scientists to draw on all they know as they branch into this work. You might find yourself saying, "Scientists, writers, I want to show you all what Maya created. She made a chart with a place to draw and measure how the wood looked before she sanded it, and how the wood looked after she sanded it. It's really helping her organize this data. Maya has agreed to let us make some copies of her chart and add it to our writing center so we

all can use it to record our data.” Or, “Can I stop you all? Sam just came up with a great idea. He realized that the prompts we use to have ideas about our books, ‘I noticed . . . This makes me think . . .’ ‘I wonder . . .’ ‘The idea I’m having about this is . . .’ can also help us to have ideas about what we’re seeing in our experiments!”

Then too, you’ll want to teach children to question and wonder about the materials they are exploring with pencil in hand. Because it is important that children continue to write with volume and stamina, you will want to teach them to try to hypothesize answers to their musings. You could imagine kids saying things like, “I wonder why . . . ?” or “How come . . . ?” Teach children to catch these thoughts by quickly jotting them in their booklets. Then, teach them to think through possible answers (hypotheses) by using prompts such as, *Maybe, Could it be, But what about*. For example, assuming that your topic this month is Exploring Properties, you might show children a few “observations” you’ve made when outside of school. “I was at the hardware store this weekend and I noticed that there were all these different types of wood. I was wondering, why are there all these different types? I wonder why people use one type of wood instead of another?” At this point, you might lean in and share with the children how this led you to develop a hypothesis. “Writers, I’ve been thinking about this and I came up with a few explanations for why this happens, a few *hypotheses*.” You might then begin writing these out on a chart or whiteboard. “My first hypothesis is that it depends on what the wood is going to be used for and how strong it needs to be. If it’s for building a picnic table you need strong wood that okay to get wet, but if it’s for a train set, you’d want wood that’s easy to shape into the train cars.” Continue on, developing a second conceivable explanation. “My second hypothesis is that if people are going to see the wood, like on a train set, you’d want it to be nice and smooth, but if it’s just going to get covered up like when you build a house, it doesn’t really matter what it looks like as long as it’s strong.”

Children will learn to write and draw in these various ways throughout the unit, sometimes through minilessons, other times through teaching shares, mid-workshop teaching points, or while stopping and sketching during read-alouds. As we mentioned earlier, you’ll want to see this unit as cyclical. That is, you’ll encourage children to move through the scientific process again and again across this month, each time teaching them new ways to write, record, and finesse.

Throughout this part of the unit, children will develop questions and then harness those musings into plans for their own experiments. Children will write about any of the things they noticed during the experiment, the steps of how to conduct the experiment, their findings, or design new experiments. All of this will later (in the next part of the unit) become part of a final published product. As students move through this process, you’ll want to remind them that science is about experimentation and that, just like writers, scientists often go back to revise and try again. Encourage partnerships to raise questions, conduct an experiment, note what worked and what didn’t, and then design another new experiment. Once they have discovered a powerful experiment, they’ll move to documenting it in a how-to text so others can replicate it.

Just as you used storytelling to help writers develop language that more closely matches the language of good storytellers, you'll want to coach students to tell and retell class activities in ways that teach others, thus honing their ability to document experiments with accuracy and detail. For example, they might teach each other how to go across the monkey bars without falling, or how to make flowers out of tissue paper. As students practice retelling class activities, you can teach them how to use sequence words (e.g., *first, then, next, finally*) to organize their thinking and convey timing. You will also want to teach them how to use very specific language to clarify their thinking and instructions. If a student explains or writes, "Put water on the fabric," encourage her to verbalize how to put water on the fabric. If you help her to think about how she does it and actually demonstrate the action, she may decide on, "Get the dropper. Hold it over the middle of the fabric. Squeeze the top of it to get the water out," instead.

It can be helpful for students to act out their experiments with partners as a way to uncover precise actions and language needed for readers to effectively complete a task. You will want to teach children that in order to write procedural texts, they need to envision the steps they go through when they perform a given task. They should see it "like a movie in their minds," and then write each step they see in their "movie." Often, children will leave out big steps or assume their readers know more than they do. This is a great way to use writing partners. One partner can read her writing aloud, while the other partner acts it out. Perhaps you decide to start the writing portion of your workshop each day with partner time. Partners can get together and rehearse the steps for the experiment that they are planning to write that day. You will want to teach children how to listen to each other's writing in order to follow the steps laid out and to see if they work. This way, writers can see the effect of their words and steps on a reader and get response that will help them revise their pieces for clarity.

In addition to teaching into the quality of the writing children are doing both in their booklets and their procedural texts, you'll want to make sure children are making use of the wealth of knowledge they're getting from their reading about Exploring Properties through read-aloud. You'll probably want to show children how to supplement their conclusions with factual information. For instance, students writing about the conclusion that all wood will float, but some types are easier to sink than others, might want to add information they got from reading, about how ship and boat builders use certain types of wood for this reason. Then, too, students will use the information they get from reading to design and imagine their own experiments. You'll want students, after reading about particular information in a text to question it and say, "That doesn't seem true. Let's make an experiment and test it."

You'll want partners to support this work as well, pushing each other to be stronger scientists and writers. You'll want to teach them how to compare observations and discuss what they can learn from one another. ("I see that you have all these little details in your picture. Maybe I could make my picture more detailed." Or, "When you did that experiment you found that wood soaked in water floated, but I found that it sunk. Maybe we should try again.")

Putting All of Our Learning Together and Publishing Our “Lab Reports”

In this final part, the children will compile all of the information that they learned about their topics and make informational books that teach others. These books could include chapters about wood, paper, and fabric: for example, before-and-after pages, compare-and-contrast pages, or how-to pages that detail the experiments they did. Children may also elect to include pages with questions they had and the experiments they created to help answer those questions.

You’ll probably want to begin by explaining to the children that part of being a scientist is deciding how you’ll teach the world about what you’ve discovered. Remind them of all they know from prior units, perhaps pulling out old charts and mentor texts. You’ll especially want to refer students back to Unit Seven, Informational Books, and perhaps flip back to that unit plan yourself. Just as in March, you’ll show how it helps to sort information by subtopics, and so you can help children approach their books by creating a web or a picture/word map in which they make plans to divide content so the appropriate information goes onto each page of the book. For example, one part of the book might have information about wood, another part could detail how to do an experiment with wood and yet another part could include the results from one experiment with wood. For instance, one child might write a book titled “All About Wood,” where one page says, “There are lots of types of wood.” Other pages say “Wood is made from trees” and “All wood will float, but some wood is easy to sink.” There may also be pages in this book that detail an experiment, “How to Make Wood Stronger,” and list the steps from this experiment. Other pages might have a before-and-after diagram to compare the results of using sandpaper on a piece of wood. There might also be additional chapters in the book about paper and fabric, or students might decide to author another book just about paper and yet another just about fabric.

Some of the revision work students engage in will come from elaborating on the information they’ve already written. For example, adding what they notice about size, color, or texture, adding what they’ve noticed makes them think and wonder about. Other revision work will involve the experiments they choose to include in their pieces. As students perform new experiments, they can include pages that detail how to do this experiment, what the results were, and new questions they might have. You’ll want to assess as your students are writing these texts and use your findings to inform your whole-class and small-group instruction.

You’ll also want to revisit nonfiction how-to texts as a class and use these as guides for revising and adding features of nonfiction to your children’s own pieces. These books are valuable models for the possible components of a how-to. Some how-to books and manuals include a materials page. Others include *cautions* or *warnings* for the reader. Other books are persuasive, trying to get you to try doing something new: “Haven’t you always wanted to . . . ?” or “Did you ever wonder why . . . ?” Again, you’ll want them to examine their texts for clarity, perhaps thinking more about *how* readers might perform certain steps. For example, a child who writes “Use sandpaper” might ask herself, “How?

Rub the sandpaper back and forth on the end of the piece of wood.” As they revise, young writers can also begin incorporating further conventions of the how-to genre, such as making their pictures teach more by eliminating extraneous details, zooming in on the part of the picture that teaches, and using labels and arrows in their pictures. They might add warnings or advice that steer readers out of trouble: “Make sure not to rub the sandpaper on your fingers or it will hurt.” During revision, partners can also ask each other clarifying questions, like, “What do you mean?” or “How do you do that?” or suggest possible tips or warnings such as, “You should write, ‘Do this experiment outdoors,’ because if the egg breaks it will make a big mess!” You could also invite students to try an ending that brings everything to a conclusion, just like a lot of the books they are reading. For example, “If you are out on a boat, make sure it’s made from the right kind of wood.” Children can learn about these kinds of additions by studying a text, and they can then add the features they like to their own books.

Additionally, you’ll want to encourage your writers to use some of the craft moves they have been working on all year. This might include adding speech bubbles or dialogue, including setting, and using descriptive details to paint a picture in a reader’s mind. Children can also try using sound words, ellipses, and playing with the size of their writing and capitals to emphasize what they are saying. Be sure to refer to the charts that you have in your classroom already.

Celebrating

The Common Core State Standards emphasize the importance of researching and presenting knowledge. The Standards invite kindergartners to participate in shared research and writing projects. Essentially, that is the work your students have done this month. Your students have completed a shared research project around the experiments they’ve been conducting and writing how-to texts, where they have not only gone through the writing process but have simultaneously also been through the scientific method of research. You will want to celebrate their work in a way that honors both. Many teachers in the past have held a science fair, where students set up booths with their experiments, “lab reports,” and findings. Not only are they available to comment on their work to those attending the fair, but they can conduct live experiments and work on their oral presentation skills as well. Of course, you may have students sitting alongside a little table or desk with all of the necessary materials needed to conduct the experiments on hand. Whatever the device used to show how to conduct the experiments and present the findings, you will also want to coach kids on how to present and talk to a live audience. You will want to teach kids how to refer to their documents and materials, as well as ask for and address questions from the audience.



UNIT TEN

Poetry and Songs

JUNE

As you approach this unit, you will need to decide whether you want to spend the entire month of June on poetry, songwriting, or a combination of the two. We think the poetry unit described in *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* in *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum* (Heinemann, 2003) is a very special one and well worth exploring for a full unit. On the other hand, it's a somewhat challenging unit, so you might decide to save it for first and second grade and to instead teach songwriting to kindergartners. This is a reasonable choice, especially if your kids are emergent writers and readers. One of the advantages of writing songs is that it lures kids into writing with a lot of repetition, including that of sight words, and into rereading often. This is invaluable fluency work for emergent writers, and it's fun, too!

There are many ways this unit might unfold, leaving lots of room for improvisation. We've angled this write-up with the idea that you'll focus your kindergarten poets on songwriting and sharing. How many times have you watched a child tap her knees and chant to the beat, or look at the world with wide-open eyes spotting a rabbit in a cloud, or draw a swirl in the cement on the sidewalk? Poetry and songwriting also let children practice all they've learned thus far in the year—finding significance in the ordinary details of their lives, drafting with the intention of capturing life onto the page, employing strategies of revision, and learning from mentor authors in order to write. A unit of study on poetry and songwriting, then, can teach children to write not only in that particular genre but also to write better in general. This unit is tied to Common Core State Standards and the need for kindergartners to speak and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly as well as be able to recognize, distinguish, and discuss poetry as a common type of literature.

Immersion in Songwriting and Poetry: Setting the Stage to Write a Huge Variety of Songs and Poems

Young children are natural poets, and the poems they know first and most often, are the poems embedded in song. From the time they're babies, our children are lulled or roused by the lullabies their grandmas sing to them, the songs they hear on the radio, or the themes that accompany television shows. Most children can recite the lyrics of a song before they are able to remember their own addresses! Think about how easily you recall the simple songs you learned in childhood. We all know "Row, Row, Row Your Boat" and "Baa Baa Black Sheep" by heart. There are reasons we hold onto these songs: they have catchy tunes, the words are repetitive, they're soothing, and they convey distinct, lovely images.

If we remind children that songs and poems *are* literature, just like the stories and information pieces they write in the writing workshop, then we can use the melodies, language, and rhythms in songs to draw our children toward the world of literary language as also mentioned in the Common Core State Standards. We can energize our classrooms so that our children are clapping, humming, and memorizing the literary language from each other's songs. It is so very important to teach kids that they, too, can create beautiful and powerful lyrics—and that these lyrics can reflect the truths of their own lives.

To start, you'll want to copy songs and poems onto chart paper and use these to read, sing, and teach a wide variety of songs and poems to your students. The more you read, and the more different kinds of songs and poems your students hear, the more their heads will be filled with the rhythms, sounds, and ideas of poetry. Some of your shared reading work may focus on noticing how songs and poems look on the page—verses, line breaks, repeated lines, and white space. Together, you'll notice that songs and poetry are not written in full sentences and that songwriters and poets use white space and line breaks to tell people how to read the poems and how to sing the songs. They also use the sounds of words to convey feelings and ideas. You will also want children to notice that songs and poems can be about anything—some songs tell stories (like "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star"), while others are more like lists ("The Farmer in the Dell"). Be sure to read a variety of songs and poems to your children so they sense the breadth of the genre's possibilities. If you read only rhyming songs or general lullabies or ditties, for instance, then that is all the children will write. Fill their heads with lots of different kinds of poems and songs, but above all, with poems and songs that capture life's rich and beautiful details with precision, sung to one of these tunes. The Common Core State Standards do ask that kindergartners begin to differentiate between genres, and so all of this work on the structure of poems will be moving kids toward this goal.

Many teachers build students' excitement by deciding to launch the unit with a few days of both song and poetry centers. Usually each child works with a partner in a different center each day, so that they rotate to all the different centers over the course of the week. During this interval, children do not actually have to write poetry or songs;

instead, they immerse themselves in the sights and sounds, images, language, and tone of songs and poetry and practice seeing the world with the eyes of a poet. Of course, if they feel inspired, they may write, so make sure that paper and pens are available at each of the centers!

You may try beginning with poetry and songwriting centers to help children get ready for the work of writing these new genres. Perhaps in one center children will listen to popular songs. In another center, they can work on creating their own rhythms and use instruments to keep the beat. If your school doesn't have instruments, children could tap two pencils like drumsticks, or bang their hands on pots and pans, or blow into bottles. Get creative! In another center, children could sketch pictures to accompany the images and scenes they hear in the lyrics of the songs. Perhaps in another center, children could listen to catchy tunes that don't have lyrics and think about the feelings that music inspires. They could again sketch pictures or even jot down a few words.

Another center could focus children's attention to look with fresh eyes at everyday objects: a crayon, a backpack, a chair. You can find poems that show children how poets see everyday objects with different vision. You may teach children that poets see, and then re-see, and then see again, each time noticing something more. You might suggest that poets sometimes draw what they observe as a way to slow down and pay very close attention. Then, just as poets try to write about what they see and depict in new ways, so the children can write about what they observe and draw in new ways too. With your encouragement, children can begin to jot down notes about whatever they have been studying and drawing, trying to see these objects in different ways, as aligned with the Common Core State Standards. For example, a child might say a stapler is like an alligator's mouth, or a class plant is like a tree for ants. In another poetry center, children might be stationed at a window with a view to practice looking at the world through the eyes of a poet and recording what they see. In another center, children might listen to a poem on a tape recorder or on a podcast, and then try to write another stanza for that poem. You may choose to provide the students with drums and tambourines so they can "play" along with the beat of the poems they listen to. The possibilities are endless.

Getting Started: Tapping into the Shared Experience of Knowing and Writing Poems and Song

After a few days of song and centers, your children are ready to start filling their folders with their own important songs and poetry. They'll first look back on all they have written during their time in centers, and ask themselves, "Did I already write a song or a poem? Or did I write an almost-song/poem?" If so, that work can be the starter material for their poetry and song folder.

You may want to begin by teaching children to listen to a familiar tune and to imagine their own lyrics. You have probably been singing all year. If not, you will want to sing a number of simple songs with your children. Songs such as "Twinkle, Twinkle Little

Star," "The Wheels on the Bus," "Happy Birthday," and "Mary Had a Little Lamb" have melodies that are easy to remember. You may also want to write class songs through shared or interactive writing.

You may decide to channel all your children to write observational songs and poems, with each piece sparked by studying an object through the eyes of a poet. *Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages* contains several minilessons that can help you with this. You can teach children, for instance, that songwriters and poets look closely at objects and turn them around to examine them from different angles, writing what they see when they look one way, then another way. You'll definitely want to encourage your students to use all of their senses as they write. Many young writers tend to rely primarily on the sense of sight when describing; by encouraging them to pay attention to different senses, you'll help them broaden their repertoire for written description as they deepen the ways in which they experience the world. Encourage them to pay attention to the way a soft cotton shirt, or a kiss from a puppy, or running through wet weeds feels on their skin; or how lemonade tastes like summer. Have them close their eyes and imagine the patter of rain on the window and then ask them to try to think of words that could capture that precise sound. As children write, you may want to give them paper that has been cut long, channeling them toward shorter lines. Expect your children to write tons of songs and poems, possibly three to five a day! Their folders will undoubtedly be packed full. Songwriters and poets (and partners) might go back and reread their poems, thinking about how certain songs go together (school songs, songs about things I like to do, or my beloved dog) and staple or clip them together and then write even more on a particular topic. Many teachers have found that encouraging children to write anthologies (or albums!) increased stamina and volume in the latter part of the unit.

The idea isn't for children's own song lyrics to be more elegant than their poetry (in fact, it is likely that they will be far less so), but for children to be energized by writing new words for their favorite songs and creating songs from rhythms they themselves dream up. A child might write new words for "Happy Birthday" that go like this: "Happy summer to me, Happy summer to me, I get to eat ice cream, Happy summer to me." Another option is for children to write adaptations of familiar songs. For example, "The Wheels on the Bus" becomes "The Wings on the Airplane."

Another suggestion is to teach your budding composers to tap out their own individual beats and rhythms. Some kids may write out their lyrics and then add a tune or beat that seems to match the song. Others may make up their own tune altogether. Most likely, children will be tapping their fingers on their desk, or skipping and singing as they head home at the end of the day. They may tap their pencils, clap their hands, or play actual instruments. You can then teach them to think of what they want to say and how to put words to their beat.

You might teach children that one way to describe something they see is to liken it to something else. You'll want to have read many songs and poems containing examples of this to your students. Practicing together by writing group songs and poems where each child compares an everyday object—say, an apple or a hat—to something

else can be a wonderful way to lure children toward making comparisons independently. You'll be surprised to discover how many ways your students come up with to describe that apple: it's a fireball or a giant's button, and its stem is like a tiny tree trunk! You'll find that children love incorporating this technique into their own songs and poems—all of a sudden, a pencil is like a magic wand that makes things come to life! Later in the unit, you can help writers learn that their poems can be filled with meaning by writing about topics that inspire strong feelings. Songwriting poets dig deep within themselves to think about the things they love and find the reasons they have such strong feelings for an object (or person, or place).

As the Unit Progresses: Exploring the Craft of Poetry

As children continue to draft and revise, teach them how to experiment with powerful uses of language—for instance, how using line breaks can convey meaning. You might put each word from a class song created during shared writing on index cards, and then show the class through a pocket chart that changing the placement of the words changes the feeling—or even the meaning—of the song or poem.

Another way is to study and write songs that teach something, such as counting songs, alphabet songs, how-to songs, or environmental awareness songs. Choose songs that you and your children like and respond to. They can write their own versions, thinking about their audience. Ask them, “To whom do you want to sing this song?” Perhaps they could write a new alphabet song and sing it to the pre-kindergarten children, or invite their younger siblings in for a special singing celebration. If you write a new counting song together, they could illustrate it and make copies to keep in the classroom for next year's kindergartners.

Partnerships are a powerful tool in this unit. Writing partners can support each other in revision, asking questions and offering advice. During this unit, one partner might ask, “Why did you put that word alone on that line?” or “Why did you write about this topic?” By posing these sorts of questions, your children are actually learning ways that we as teachers talk to our young writers. They can help each other to imagine how the poem will look on the page and to think about the words they want to include. In this role, partners will be encouraged to ask each other to say more, developing both their oral language skills and their writing craft.

Further Revision, Publishing, and Celebrating

After the children have written many songs, you will want to teach them ways to further craft their songs. You may teach the kids that a “chorus” holds the song together. You may also teach that many important words or lines in songs—sometimes called the “refrain”—are repeated. Children love repetition; it not only helps them recall something, it's also fun. Think about the pleasure of belting out the refrain, “Fa la la

la la la la la la," or "Old MacDonald had a farm, E-I-E-I-O!" Children may want to include sound words like these, or dialogue. Continue to teach what makes for good writing and carry over things you've taught in previous units: details, the look of the songs, specific marks so others know *how* to sing their songs, and the importance of hearing and writing the sounds in the words. After children have created many songs, you may decide to invite each child to choose a few songs with which to create his or her own "album." Children can celebrate by passing out lyrics and teaching each other how their songs can be sung, or by putting their songs to music using those wonderful xylophones that some schools still have! Some teachers hold little concerts in which children perform for an audience.

By the end of this unit, your kindergartners will have many, many little songs and poems bursting from their folders. At this point in the unit, you'll want to decide how many you'd like for them to publish. Most teachers choose to have children pick a collection of songs or poems that they know they can read and can imagine performing. You might remind your children of a strategy or two for getting their work ready for readers, perhaps double-checking spelling and spacing between their words. It will be important to once again remind children of this work. As children prepare for this, they may reread their songs and poems aloud with a partner to practice their movements and intonations.

Poetry and songwriting can make for a wonderfully celebratory last unit of the year. In addition to whatever end-of-unit celebration you and your class dream up, you may want to leave some time for children to look back at all of the writing they have accomplished. Independently or with a partner, they could look at their published pieces and reflect on all the different kinds of writing they have done and on how much they have grown as writers. You could even set aside a day for students to read aloud their favorite piece, to a partner or to the whole class. You may decide to keep their writing energy going by talking to them about the kinds of writing they will be doing next year. June is a time for both reflection and celebration of all that they have done and all the ways in which they have grown as writers.

Poetry is a genre meant to be read aloud. Perhaps this unit will conclude with a poetry performance where other children can snap or clap their approval at the end of the show! Or, maybe you'll have kids make "albums" of their songs. Go for it! Let the children record and burn their recordings onto CDs for the songwriters to share with others.

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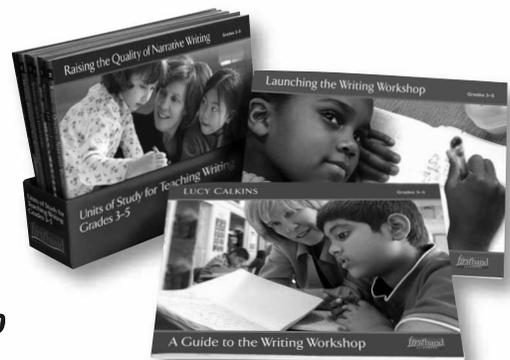
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