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Communicating Life Experiences through Words and Verbal Images

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For me, it is essential that children are deeply involved in writing, that they share their texts with others, and that they perceive themselves as authors.

-Lucy Caulkins , *The Art of Teaching Writing*

Objective

This unit will be presented to students of all abilities who are attending fourth grade at Davis Street Interdistrict Magnet School where writing is co-taught by certified special education teachers and certified elementary school teachers. Fourth-grade literacy instruction includes: reading comprehension, reading fluency, narrative writing, spelling and grammar. Narrative writing is the focus of the Direct Assessment of Writing on the Connecticut Mastery Test, which is administered in March.

Connecting the arts to academics is part of the mission statement of Davis Street Interdistrict Magnet School. Therefore, collaboration between classroom teachers and art teachers will also contribute to the success of teaching this unit.

Those who work with younger children often experience that they are very eager to express the details of their lives by creating images and relating their stories orally. However, transforming these stories and experiences into cohesive narrative pieces is a challenge for many young writers. The goal of this unit is to teach students how to recreate those images and oral expressions in writing while realizing the relationships among their visual expression, their oral expression, and their written expression.

Background

Narrative Writing

Narrative is synonymous with story. As most children are familiar with hearing stories, telling stories, and reading stories, the teacher is in a good position to begin the instruction necessary to write a narrative piece. What are the critical components of a narrative? What does narrative writing need to have to attract readers?

All narrative pieces of writing, works of visual art, music or dances can be composed and analyzed according to the "Composition Toolkit" as described by Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade in *Seeing and Writing 4*. The toolkit contains: purpose, structure, audience, point of view, tone, metaphor, and context. Written work produced by fourth graders will use a modified version of the toolkit, mainly purpose, structure, tone, point of view and audience. ¹

Structure and Purpose

Above all, the purpose of a narrative piece is to tell a story. The story can be written as a first-person or third-person narrative, where the writer tells of his or her experience or the experience of another, respectively. It does not necessarily have to be completely true or even partially true, although many of the most compelling narrative pieces are direct expressions of a person's experiences and deep inner feelings. The experience described should also have a reason for being told. It could teach a lesson, or simply reveal a truth that allows the reader to know the writer in a deeper and more personal way. ² Quite often while instructing children, teachers will hear students say, "What's the point in learning this?" A narrative piece of writing will provoke the same question if its purpose is not clear. Children will most likely be amused if the teacher can playfully mimic this question and then warn the emerging authors that they surely would not want anyone to say that about their pieces! Also, encourage them to write as if they were famous authors themselves. Lucy Caulkins recommends telling children that when they are creating written compositions, "they are doing the same thing Wilson Rawls did when he wrote *Where the Red Fern Grows*, or Roald Dahl did when he wrote *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*." ³ Ask students if *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* would have been such a wonderful story if Charlie had been selfish or spoiled instead of generous and humble. Would he have discovered the golden ticket in the first place? Would he have made it to the end of the factory tour or would he have gotten trapped by one of the strange components of the factory? The lesson of *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* is that obedience, humility, patience and kindness bring long-term rewards whereas selfishness gets you in trouble. The selfish, spoiled children became entangled or injured in factory equipment when they greedily sought out their desired item despite warnings from Willy Wonka, but Charlie in his humble obedience triumphed in the end. If Charlie had also been selfish, he probably would have met a similar fate as the other children experienced, making it a depressing and uninspiring story.

There are many tools used by writers that attract and keep the attention of readers. Writing often begins with a "hook" that you "hang" your piece upon for display. An enticing opening will increase the likelihood of a reader taking interest and reading the whole piece. Here are two famous examples: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendía was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice." This first sentence from *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez (trans. Gregory Rabassa) provokes the reader to ask, "Why was he being executed and what does that have to do with discovering ice?" From 1984 by George Orwell comes another example: "It was a bright cold day in April, and the clocks were striking thirteen." Readers may take a moment to realize, "Hey, clocks don't strike

thirteen!" 4

Hooks can bring a question to the mind of the reader, be humorous, mysterious, dramatic, or they can simply take in the reader by provoking genuine feelings, as is the case with the following excerpt from a narrative I wrote based on my experience volunteering in a nursing home:

There was a colorful, new, handmade quilt on Jean's bed and a matching miniature quilt on the wall outside her room under her nametag.

I stood by her bed, barely able to see the outlines of her emaciated body under this exquisite covering. On the dresser was an opened box of Marlboros, missing the one cigarette she had smoked last Sunday during my visit. The oxygen equipment had been moved to the corner, instructions taped across the controls, "DO NOT RESUSCITATE."

The reader may ask, "What happened to Jean? ...Is she in a hospital? ...Nursing home? ...Is the writer a friend of Jean?" The reader may relate to the writer or the subject, "That reminds me of my grandmother....I wish I could quit smoking....I wouldn't want to be resuscitated either."

Readers may also connect to the image of a quilt, which may bring about the feelings of comfort and warmth that it represents. A quilt can also stand for the sewing together of ideas and experiences as in the many textures and hues of life.

The narrative continues as I use more details to expand and clarify the purpose of the story, although I do not state the purpose directly. As the reader continues, the piece will answer some of the questions provoked.

I said, "Hello." Her head turned slightly towards me and I thought I saw her eyelids attempt to open. Her breathing was loud and labored. I held her hand in mine examining every bone and vein that appeared shrink-wrapped under her dry, speckled skin.

I asked the nurse about the quilt. "That's how we indicate those who are on Hospice care." She smiled. I'd felt Jean was close to dying for weeks now and seeing the quilt brought me comfort, the peace of knowing.

Several months ago the recreation director introduced Jean to me. Through the whirl of the oxygen machine, Jean spoke of fond memories of a childhood home, a daughter, who lived minutes away but did not visit, prayer and cancer.

The next evening after the quilt arrived I received a call, "Jean will most likely not

make it through the night," the nurse informed me. I drove quickly to the Home and sat with her until nearly dawn. There was no change in her condition. Weeks passed but still her corpse-like body breathed its struggling breath without a sign of giving up....

As the story proceeds, readers are given the explanation of the purpose of the quilt. In addition to being an item that brings comfort and protects from the cold and elements, it is being used to communicate, without spoken words, that Jean is actively dying. Those working at the home have this common knowledge, and the quilt creates an atmosphere of respect around the dying person. The quilt can also now become a metaphor, being seen as a visual object in its completion, sewn together over many years to reach its present state, like the person's life that is reaching its completion now.

The narrative should conclude with a paragraph that sums up its purpose, providing insights and lessons learned from the author's experience. The story of Jean ends with a meeting between Jean and her daughter Susan. The two had been estranged for several years, and a few days after their tearful reunion in which they are able to forgive each other, Jean dies peacefully. The lesson learned from this story is that healing and peace can come through forgiveness.

When the purpose is demonstrated clearly in the closing paragraph, the details and the questions provoked by the opening lines are usually answered and brought into relationship with the lesson of the story. Readers may reconnect with the feelings of comfort and warmth from the quilt at the beginning of the story with the comfort and peace of forgiveness and reconciliation at its end. This will give the piece a feeling of completion, of coming full circle.

Teaching Narrative Writing

First teach the children the meaning of the word *narrative* using a tool they are most likely familiar with, an online dictionary. Ask, "What is narrative writing?" After they give explanations that may or may not be correct, record the answers without telling them the actual meaning. Then, send a few students to the classroom computers and distribute dictionaries to the others to see how close they were to the official definitions.

Dictionary.com defines the word *narrative*, originating between 1555 and 1565, in several ways: as a noun, "a story or account of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious." It is also, as an adjective, one definition stating, "representing stories or events pictorially or sculpturally: *narrative painting* ." ⁵ With this definition in mind, students can be asked to look at an image and tell its story linking the use of images to the writing process.

From Reading and Speaking to Writing

Teaching the narrative writing process begins with reading or listening to someone else reading a narrative piece. Most children, by the time they have reached fourth grade, have heard and read many stories. After the dictionary lesson, hold story-telling sessions in which the teacher and the students have the opportunity to share their favorite stories. These stories can be from books, from their own personal experiences or even from television or movies. The purpose is to have students feel the flow of telling a story fluently.

Instructors can use their experiences with reading and listening as a starting point by choosing models from written works to teach each component and each step of the narrative-writing process. These introductory sessions are important to learning the writing process, and they are also important to building the confidence of the emerging writers. In my experience of teaching writing to children, I have found that when children feel comfortable with their knowledge and skills and when they feel safe and in positive relationships with their peers and their teachers, they will take the risk of revealing themselves through writing. Writing narratives involves a degree of exposure of a student's life experience, and often the most difficult groups to teach are not necessarily those who lack experience or skill, but those who lack trust, holding back their inner feelings from those whom they will share their writing.

Once students are able to identify the parts of narrative works from reading them or hearing them read, they can begin to critique different pieces and hold peer discussions in which they share their preferences and experiences relating to the stories read. They can also begin practice writing by using the opening lines of their favorite stories to create a new middle and a new ending. Their understanding of the parts of the story can be displayed in a chart such as the one below:

Title	Opening Lines	Beginning	Middle	End	Purpose or Lesson
<i>Shiloh</i>	"The day Shiloh come, we're having us a big Sunday dinner." ⁶	Marty Preston wants a dog but his parents can't afford to have a pet	Marty finds an abused dog, names him Shiloh and keeps him secretly, and lies to his parents about it.	Shiloh's owner eventually gives him to Marty after Marty works for him and they get to know each other.	Lying usually brings disastrous results, but being truthful brings about an ending that satisfies all involved.

Children who may have some difficulty or resistance to writing can practice the narrative form by telling a story into a recording device before writing it down. Gradually as these students work through the writing process, they can be weaned off the recording device and produce their work directly as writing.

Audience

The immediate audience for the children's writing will mainly be their teachers and their peers. Eventually they will write a narrative in the Direct Assessment of Writing in which the audience will be the people who score the test. However, the students can be motivated to imagine themselves as adult writers and decide who they would want to read their stories and why. Children can also ask themselves, "Would I want to read this story?" As they become more confident, they can also ask their peers the same question.

During the reading portion of the unit, the students can engage in discussion regarding the author's choice of audience by asking several questions: "Why did this author write books that fourth graders would read?" "What kind of people are these authors and what inspired them to write?" "How do these authors know that we, fourth graders, like reading their books?" "Do these authors have their own children?" "Have these authors ever been fourth-grade teachers?" As in any thought-provoking question-and-answer discussion group, one question will lead to another and often motivates students to write with enthusiasm.

Descriptive Writing

Another important component to creating a written piece that will be appreciated by readers is the ability of the author to describe people, scenery, feelings, and mood. Description creates images in the minds of the readers or reminds them of images stored in their own memories. A description may set the scene, as in this example from an account of my recent experience of entering a temporary space to teach while a new school building was being completed:

The bricks were certainly stacked upon each other in an orderly fashion, although the mortar seemed to be 82% dust. Orb weaving spiders and carpenter ants were living there happily despite the grayish, green water that was dripping through multiple cracks. I turned the corner in the dim hallway and spotted room 207, which was to be my classroom for the next nine months.

Description is best used in a story when the author pauses just long enough from the action to give details. Very long descriptions as well as those without enough sensory details can distance readers from the story line and lose their attention. In *After the END* Barry Lane quotes Carolyn Chute to bring this point across:

Writing is not writing skills, but knowing how to see. There are people who can't read or write who are novelists. They've got two lenses. Telephoto lens for big pictures and a lens a dentist would use. What they do to show the big picture is to use details they see with the small lens. ⁷

Balance among plot, description and character development will keep the readers reading. Teaching children description, as an enjoyable way to liven up their stories, is an excellent topic for a mini lesson.

Describing Character Development

Good stories have interesting characters, and a good description of characters includes their physical appearance, emotions, words, actions, and relationships with other characters. A new character being introduced into a story requires some description:

From where I was crouched in the corner, Roger looked nine feet tall and his muscles were probably composed of concrete, but when he turned and smiled at me I felt safe, calm and protected.

As the story progresses, these descriptions will change and evolve although they will continue to be related to the point being made by the author.

I'll never forget the earthquake that shook my kindergarten class, not just because of the chaos, but because it was the beginning of my friendship with Roger.

Using Details, Adjectives and Names

Teaching the use of details can be a lesson disguised as a game. On chart paper or the board in front of the classroom, write a very bland sentence with a generic verb and a generic noun: for example, ***The child walked into the room***. Students should be prepared to write either at desks or in a writing-circle group, and they should have writing utensils and notebooks ready. Meanwhile have another adult or a trustworthy student waiting just outside the classroom with a box of costume materials such as: hats, scarves, odd-looking shoes, colorful jackets and a few props. Send a student out of the door to be costumed and then instructed to enter the room making sure not to walk in a boring way. Tell students to copy down the boring model sentence and be prepared to write a more interesting one, using details and adjectives based on the person they see coming into the room. Some possible descriptions might be:

The tall, crazy boy rushed into the fourth-grade classroom tripping over a desk and spilling all of the colored pencils off the art table.

With a sweet smile on her face, Rachel tiptoed into the secret attic room.

Looking lost and unhappy in the bright-green, oversized corduroy jacket, the ten-year-old girl dragged her feet as she came into the room and cried, "I want to go home."

After a few students have entered and sentences have been composed, it's time to share and give positive feedback. Then, as time allows, those who have been inspired after hearing what other students have written can have a chance to revise any sentences they are not happy with. If the entire lesson is presented on chart paper, the sentences produced can be posted in the classroom to motivate descriptive writing during other lessons.

Relating Images to Writing

Children usually pay a lot of attention to images by talking about them and relating their experiences to them. Autobiographical pieces that are coupled with images work well as models for children to imitate as they begin to create their own written works. A good example comes from *Seeing and Writing 4*, called *This is Daphne and those are her things*. Tujillo-Paumier presents a photo collage of some of Daphne's favorite personal items and a brief (fewer than 150 words) narrative from Daphne's life experience. Most of the items, although not all, relate directly to the narrative that describes Daphne's career path as a musician.⁸ There are musical keyboards, string instruments, horns and the equipment to perform music electronically. Although Daphne is thirty-one-years old, and her life experiences are obviously more developed than a fourth grader's experiences, young readers may look up to her as a role model or relate to her by seeing that she reminds them of an older sibling, cousin, aunt, etc. A similar collage and narrative created by the instructor about the instructor or about a person closer in age to the students would also be a useful model. Once students have been presented with the model pieces and have been instructed on the components necessary to create their own stories, they can begin working on individual pieces.

To expand the image-writing connection for the next piece, the teacher can use a series of images of an autobiographical nature that are presented in sequential order, whereas in *This is Daphne and those are her things*, the images were presented randomly. Seeing the images presented sequentially will also model the formula for writing narrative pieces in the Direct Assessment of Writing on the Connecticut Mastery Test which requires that the student's piece have a clear beginning, middle and end.⁹

The brief narratives modeled after *This is Daphne and those are her things* can then be separated into one-sentence or two-sentence ideas and used to create a graphic organizer in which the students elaborate on each idea separately. To complete the piece, they will then assemble these parts into a sequential narrative.

Expanding Points of View

Once students are comfortable with the autobiographical narrative form and have produced several adequate pieces, they can begin to write from other points of view. In an oral sharing group, the teacher can read or tell short fictional stories that involve two or more characters who are fourth graders. Have them identify the main character, whose point of view is emphasized in the story. Then have them identify the other characters and retell parts of the story from another character's point of view. After the students have been able to retell the narratives from different points of view, have them return to their own completed stories, so they can try to imagine the thoughts and feelings of another person in these narratives. I tried this exercise myself by imagining my story about Jean's death written from her daughter's point of view:

"Good riddens!" I thought as I hung up the phone. "It's about time that chain-smoking, alcoholic finally died." My mother had been at the Nursing Home ten miles away from me for eight years now and I could not see any reason why I should visit her after all the pain and trouble she'd caused me. Then I received another call. It was from a woman I'd never met. I think she might be a nursing home volunteer or something. Apparently she has been visiting my mother every Sunday for over a year now. I told her I didn't feel well and thanks for being with my mother. But, there was something gnawing inside me....

Then I imagined Jean's point of view:

"Oh why did I have children? They only break your heart. I'm so sorry I was such a bad mother. Even if I could see them again, how would they know that I am so sorry, I can't speak, and I can hardly open my eyes. Please, God, don't let me die until I see Susan again...."

Writing from another point of view would also change the images that the students would choose and how those images would be arranged. Students can also be introduced to another tool from the toolbox, tone, by answering simple questions about the different feelings expressed by various points of view. Why does the story sound different from Susan's point of view? They can be taught to describe how the tone of the composition changes as the point of view changes

Revision

Creating a written composition, like any of work of art or science, involves practice and repetition. However, most fourth graders like to be finished with their work, as they hope to be free to have fun afterward. Convincing them of the joy of the writing process is another challenge for teachers. Barry Lane named his book about revision *After THE END* in honor of his experience with students who simply wrote "THE END" in uppercase letters at the bottom of the paper when they felt they had done enough work. ¹¹

Lane mentions a seven-step writing process: brainstorm, map, free write, draft, revise clarify, edit. Then, he goes on to say that his seven-step process looks more like this: "revise, revise, revise, revise, revise, revise, and revise." ¹² Knowing that adults and especially adults who are well-known artists, musicians, choreographers and published authors, revise throughout the creative process is the first step in opening young writers' minds to the idea that change is necessary as we write. Writing is not a math problem that gets solved and then it's done.

Because children are usually reluctant to change anything they produce creatively, the process of revising can be first practiced by the children with artwork done on an erasable surface such as a white board. Teachers can also show their students the steps taken by an artist as a work of visual art changes and reaches its final draft in a series of photographs. In addition, children can create a dance together by practice and repetition and revision until they are satisfied with the final product.

There is another factor to be considered when convincing young writers to learn to love revision. Children like to be seen, heard, and appreciated. Honoring their written work through each step of the process will encourage them to rewrite. This can be modeled by the teacher at first; and then, as the children become familiar with it, they too can contribute positive comments in sharing circles. Below, I've created a worksheet with easy-to-remember phrases that the students can learn to follow. It is a three-column chart with the following headings: "*I liked...*, *I want to know more about...*, *If I could change one thing it would be....* " At first the teacher will model the use of this chart in a group lesson after the children have listened to a peer's piece of writing, being careful not to use judgmental words such as *right*, *wrong*, *good* or *bad* . For future lessons, students will have this chart as a template ready for use when revising in conference sessions with the teacher and with peers. The goal for students is to be able to independently hold these honoring circles with their peers while the adults in the room are teaching other small groups of children. Below is the sample chart:

SHARING CHART				
Reader's name		Author's name		Title of story (so far)
Julia		Maria		<i>My New Pet Bunny</i>
date	I liked...	I want to know more about...	If I could change one thing it would be...	Is there anything else I would like to say to the author?
5/31/2011	That I could imagine how soft their fur felt.	How did you take care of them?	Did your family like the bunnies as much as you did?	Hearing the story makes me want to have a bunny.

Editing

It is important to teach children that editing is different from revising. Both are important steps in the writing process. Often in classrooms editing and revising are lumped together, and little teaching happens. When students are told, "Find a partner and edit each other's work," the activity does not produce very effective results. Inexperienced writers will just guess or, worse yet, give incorrect editing advice. Editing is best done in small teacher-directed groups.

When *revision* is shown to students as *re-vision* and explained as seeing again, students are taught that they are taking another look at their work and making changes that will make the piece more appealing to readers, whereas editing can be described as "fixing" or "checking your work." Children often do not realize that editing is mainly for the mechanics of writing, such as the correction of grammar, spelling and punctuation errors.

As with all of the steps in the writing process, students will need to have the teacher model the editing and present mini lessons on editing techniques. In fourth grade children are expected know how to correctly capitalize, use end punctuation, use commas, use quotation marks, underline book titles and be able to distinguish between run-on sentences, sentence fragments and complete sentences. More advanced punctuation and editing, such as the use of colons, semicolons, use of italics, parenthesis, etc., can be directly applied by the teacher if needed.

Activities

Unit activities begin with an introduction to the components of a narrative through listening to stories and viewing images. Students will then create their own image narratives that they will use to begin writing their stories.

Author's craft lessons that teach basic skills of written expression such as descriptive elements and literary devices will be presented each week and incorporated into the original modeled piece. Writing-process lessons that teach students what to do when you are stuck, how to choose a place to write, what to do when you are writing on one topic and get an idea for a different piece, how to use your favorite author's work to influence your own, etc. There will also be mini lessons in basic grammar and sentence structure that help to build

students' confidence.

Naming Lesson

OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of the lesson is to enhance the students' ability to write richly descriptive paragraphs within their narratives.

LESSON TIMING:

10-15 minutes to introduce and model.

5-7 minute writing intervals alternated with 5-7 minute sharing sessions

15-20 minute post-lesson writing to follow up on skill and apply skill to previous drafts

MATERIALS:

Actual items, or large, lifelike images or photos of specific brand-name items and specific items from nature typically found in the environment of fourth-grade children (i.e., iPod Nano, Nintendo Wii Fit, sugar maple tree, Labrador retriever, etc.)

Writer's Notebooks

Pencils and Pens

Display Board or Easel

PROCEDURE:

Step one : Gather children into writing area of the classroom with their notebooks and writing instruments ready.

Step two : Choose an item or image to display and begin a discussion about the object, having students share their experiences or lack of experiences with the item.

Step three : Compose a sentence with the item as subject, using as little description as possible (i.e., "The flowers were in the garden."). Then ask students, "Is that a boring sentence? What could make it better?" If they're stuck, suggest adjectives, actions, feelings and names. What color is the flower? What kind of a flower is it? What is it doing in the garden? How does the observer of the flower feel?

Step four : After the discussion, give the students five-to-seven minutes to write at least two different sentences describing the item by using the specific name of the item and other descriptive language to make the sentences interesting.

Step five : Have students share aloud to the group their new sentences.

Repeat steps three, four and five with another item.

Close the lesson with an extended writing period in which students can apply this skill to previous drafts or compose new short pieces with ideas generated from the lesson.

Revision Practice using Primary Reading Texts

OBJECTIVE:

The purpose of the lesson is to familiarize the students with revision in a non-threatening manner.

LESSON TIMING:

10-15 minutes to introduce and demonstrate revising a brief passage.

5-7 minute writing intervals alternated with 5-7 minute sharing sessions

10-15 minute post lesson writing to follow up on skill and apply skill to previous drafts

MATERIALS:

Primary reading books:

These are chosen for their simple style of writing, Barry Lane suggests using text from early Basal readers like the type used in many classrooms in the early to mid-twentieth century. ¹³ In the lesson below, I used sample texts that I found online at Gutenberg.org. ¹⁴

Writer's Notebooks

Pencils and Pens

Computer-based teaching board or easel and chart paper (having the completed lesson on chart paper is useful if you want to use examples from this lesson to display in the writing area of classroom).

PROCEDURE:

Step one : Gather children into writing area of the classroom with their notebooks and writing instruments ready.

Step two : Display about three or four lines, but no more than twenty-five words of the text from the selected primary reading book to be revised. If you are using Basal Reader text, take a moment to explain where the text comes from. Here is an example from McGuffey's *First Reader* :

A fat hen. A big rat.

The fat hen is on the box.

The rat ran from the box.

Can the hen run? ¹⁵

Step three : Have students copy the text into their notebooks.

Step four : Model aloud some questions a reader might have concerning the text. Write the questions on the chart paper or board.

How fat was the hen?

How big was the rat?

Was the rat as big as the hen?

Where did the rat run?

Did the hen cluck while running?

Step five : Have students copy the questions into their notebooks.

Step six : Give students 5-7 minutes to quietly write the answers to the questions and elaborate in any way they are inspired to by the questions. They can add illustrations to their written elaborations as well.

Step seven : Have students share the elaborations aloud to the group.

Step eight : Give students 5-7 minutes to quietly rewrite the original paragraph as they have revised it.

Step nine : Have students share aloud to the group their new paragraphs.

LESSON EXTENTION:

Direct students to a paragraph of their own drafted work and ask them to follow steps four, six and eight independently.

Completing the Unit

Integrated into the unit will be sharing of personal experiences both verbally and through student-created images or student-acquired images for those who are less confident with their own artistic ability.

The final activity will be the "publishing" of their work. Each child will select two or three of their favorite pieces that will get a final round of editing, be typed, bound and reproduced so that all members of the class will have a booklet. The class can brainstorm together to create a title for the collection of work. Holding an event so that other teachers, administrators and parents can be invited to hear the stories from the collection read aloud by the authors will be the grand finale of the unit.

This unit can also be modified and adjusted to work for children who are still mastering basic written expression skills and for children with specific IEP goals. They will require more adult assistance than is needed for the exercises above. In the composing stage the teacher can offer sentence starters that require the student to insert only a few key words, as in this example: The day I felt happiest (saddest, silliest, most

excited, very scared, etc.) was when _____, because I _____.

As the lessons progress, these students may also need an adult or more advanced peer to script for them in order to fill out the sharing chart. The teacher can also provide them with additional assistance during the editing process as well.

Writing Standards Relevant to this Unit

The Connecticut State Department of Education Common Core State Standards for writing from the state website is presented in this general statement:

The English language arts standards require that students systematically develop literacy skills and understandings through reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Connecticut's Common Core of Teaching standards are stated as follows:

Writing: English language arts teachers help students consider the many elements which influence a writing process—among them the writer's purpose and audience, models in the genre, and conventions of standard Written English—and work through the steps which are part of a complex composing process.

Connecticut Mastery Test

A more comprehensive expectation of student writing is outlined in the Direct Assessment of Writing on the Connecticut Mastery Test Overview:

The Direct Assessment of Writing (DAW) subtest of the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) provides students with a prompt and students are directed to provide a written response.

- Students are given exactly 45 minutes to provide a written response.
- Directions suggest that students take the first part of the 45 minutes to plan before writing the actual response.
- Each student's writing sample—the only part that is scored—is captured on no more than the three pages which are provided for this purpose in the test booklet.

No additional pages are considered when scoring.

- The written response is scored holistically, which means that the score represents the overall strength of the paper as judged by trained scorers.
- Each scorer assigns a score on a scale from 1 to 6. However, two different trained scorers will score each paper and their scores will be added together, resulting in a final score in the 2 to 12 range.

- Scorers are trained to read through errors in spelling and writing mechanics.

These errors are not considered as part of the holistic score.

Goal-level work in writing for CMT 4 will be determined by a combination of the score on the DAW (60% weight) and the score on the Editing and Revising Subtest (40% weight).

THE MODES OF WRITING

Writing prompts are developed at each grade level to be appropriate for students in terms of interest and experience. Third and fourth graders will be asked to write a narrative piece; fifth and sixth graders will write an expository piece; and seventh and eighth graders will write a persuasive piece.

Narrative (Grades 3 and 4)

The narrative mode will consist of prompts designed to elicit both personal narratives and fictional narratives.

The scorers will be using one narrative rubric to help them determine a score for each paper. A holistic impression of the quality of the writing is the guiding criterion for the score.

DIRECT ASSESSMENT OF WRITING GUIDELINES AND RUBRICS

Grades 3-4: General Guidelines

- The CMT 4 Grades 3 and 4 written responses are first drafts written in 45 minutes in reaction to a prompt designed to elicit narrative writing. Trained readers score these timed responses holistically, which means that they determine a score based on the overall impression most often gained from one reading of the response.
- This rubric outlines a six-point scale. Each score point on that scale is described by an overall statement which captures the essence of the response. The elements of the response (elaboration, organization and fluency) that are typical for that score point are described below the overall statement. Individual responses may be stronger in one feature and weaker in another. Therefore, the list of features at each score point, while helpful, cannot perfectly describe every response in a score-point category.
- A committee of expert readers uses this rubric as a guide to select anchor papers for each score point. Anchor papers are examples of actual student work. The committee prepares an anchor set composed of several papers at each score point. They deliberately select papers to show an appropriate range of writing skills for each score point and to represent the variety of approaches students take when addressing the writing prompt. Trained readers rely heavily on these anchor sets to guide their scoring.
- Errors in spelling, punctuation, grammar and usage are not to be considered as part of the criteria for scoring CMT 4 writing samples. Also, papers receive a score based on the work the student did complete even if the response seems to be unfinished. Because the writing sample is a timed response, it is generally assumed that these errors and omissions could have been corrected if the student had been given an opportunity to revise and edit. Readers, therefore, are trained to read through these errors when they score student papers.

Grades 3-4: Rubric

Score Point 1: An undeveloped response

Typical elements:

- Contains few or vague details
- Is too brief to indicate sequencing of events
- May be difficult to read and understand

Score Point 2: An underdeveloped narrative

Typical elements:

- Contains general, unelaborated and/or list-like details
- Shows little evidence of sequencing of events
- May be awkward and confusing

Score Point 3: A minimally-developed narrative with little expansion of key events and characters

Typical elements:

- Has little elaboration with more general than specific details
- Shows some evidence of an organizational strategy with some sequencing of events
- May be awkward in parts

Score Point 4: A somewhat-developed narrative with moderate expansion of key events and characters

Typical elements:

- Is adequately elaborated with a mix of general and specific details
- Shows a satisfactory organizational strategy with satisfactory sequencing of events
- May be somewhat fluent

Score Point 5: A developed narrative with mostly effective expansion of key events and characters

Typical elements:

- Is moderately well elaborated with mostly specific details
- Shows generally strong organizational strategy and sequencing of events
- May be moderately fluent

Score Point 6: A well-developed narrative expanding on key events and characters

Typical elements:

- Is fully elaborated with specific details
- Shows strong organizational strategy and sequencing of events
- Is fluent

Notes

¹ Christine McQuade and Donald McQuade. *Seeing and Writing* 4. 16.

² Fact Monster Homework Center: " *Narrative Essays* ."

³ Lucy M. Caulkins. *The Art of Teaching Writing* ,18.

⁴ Pearson Education, " *Infoplease: 100 best first lines of novels* ."

⁵"Narrative." *dictionary.reference.com* .

⁶ Phyllis R. Naylor. *Shiloh* . 1.

⁷ Barry Lane. after *THE END Teaching and Learning Creative Revision*. 31.

⁸ McQuade and McQuade. *Seeing and Writing* 4. 122.

⁹ McQuade and McQuade. *Seeing and Writing* 4.122.

¹⁰ McQuade and McQuade. *Seeing and Writing* 4.122.

¹¹ *Barry Lane. after THE END Teaching and Learning Creative Revision*. 2.

¹² *Barry Lane. after THE END Teaching and Learning Creative Revision*. 3.

¹³ *Barry Lane. after THE END Teaching and Learning Creative Revision* . 148.

¹⁴ *Project Gutenberg* .

¹⁵ *Project Gutenberg* .

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