



## The Building Blocks to Children's Creative Writing

Curriculum Unit 80.04.03  
by Imma Canelli

### OBJECTIVES

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I have chosen to write a unit about creative writing because I would like to see children do more in the area of creative writing. In reading class, the students practice vocabulary, comprehension, and word skills. In English class grammar is drilled into them. Students do not have time to express themselves freely in writing. They must always follow the daily pattern in reading class or English class. Most teachers do a creative writing project around a holiday season, or when they want a change of pace. For these reasons, I have developed a creative writing unit.

After a great deal of reading and studying, I have devised a creative writing unit which has four building blocks. These four building blocks are the objectives of my unit. The first objective or building block is to expose the students to words. I do not intend to teach the history of words, because this is not a linguistics unit, but I do hope to teach my students that words are fun. I want the students to various activities I set up in my unit how words can be fun. I also want them to see how words can be used. The section on words is not merely a vocabulary lesson. It should make words alive for students.

The second building block or objective is to have students work with sentences. The purpose of this objective is twofold: 1) I would like to have the students study the different arrangements of one sentence that can be made without changing its meaning, and 2) I would like to work with the classification of sentences. Teachers must keep in mind that this section need not turn into a grammar lesson. This work on sentences has already been given to them in the intermediate grades. You are merely refreshing it for them. I have included activities on sentences which will make this section of the unit interesting to them.

I to start my unit with these two objectives of creative writing. Instead they are using words creatively, then using sentences creatively. This sequence will lead gradually into the third building block or objective, which is to work with the different forms writing can take.

In this section of my unit the students will be writing pieces of their own. They will graduate from words and sentences into actual writing forms such as letters, poetry, etc. I believe moving the students along gradually like this will not make them as inhibited as ii we, the teacher, told them at Thanksgiving time: "Today you are to write a poem about Thanksgiving."

In the third section of my unit the students are not left completely on their own. They are continually being guided. But the important fact is that they are producing their own pieces of creative writing. They are guided but not stifled.

The final building block or objective of my unit is the organization of a story. I have chosen this culminating objective because this is a much longer piece of creative writing and also because it will be a group effort.

The students up to this point have worked individually on shorter pieces of writing. Now is the time to lead them to longer pieces of writing without frightening them.

If you follow these four building blocks you will have a successful creative writing year. All my material is presented at a slow gradual pace, designed so that the students will enjoy creative writing. Many methods are not original but have been included because I have tried them and had success with them. I also have included some fresh methods. Read the unit through; then you can pick and choose what is appropriate for your level.

## ***STRATEGIES***

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The process by which a first grader learns to read begins with the child mastering a small group of sight words. Then after some experience, the child connects printed symbols with meaningful language. The process of learning to write is similar. When the teacher and class progress in writing they are ready to delve into some of the basic components of writing.

A child needs a tool chest just as a carpenter needs a tool chest. The essential building blocks of a carpenter are: his nails, his hardware, his pine, and his redwood. The essential building blocks of a writer are: his words, his sentences, the forms writing can take, and the organization of a story.

The unit I have developed can be used with sixth, seventh and eighth grade students. It will last approximately seven to eight weeks. Each child should be provided with a folder where he/she can keep all of the activities done in this unit. You should also make the classroom inviting. Decorate your bulletin boards and displays.

My unit will begin with using the qualities of words. Some words tend to be elusive and writers must use good judgment when using them. Some words can be easily pinned down. Some words have a great deal of emotional coloring and some do not. In the beginning a word chart is to be developed with the class. A word chart will develop a more precise vocabulary in describing objects. This is to be the opening lesson. List the following headings: color, pattern, size, shape, condition, sound, texture, taste, odor and motion. The headings should be written on the board with some describing words beneath them. The students can add to each list. A sample chart would be:

### COLOR SOUND

pale harsh

vivid cushioned

### PATTERN TEXTURE

flowered silky

printed source  
SIZE TASTE  
microscopic bitter  
enormous buttery  
SHAPE ODOR  
tubular rancid  
spherical musty  
CONDITION MOTION  
dull circular  
sparkling swirling

While developing this list, you should explain to children that the length of the word has a kind of meaning. Short words tend to be more forceful and demand more action when used in shorter sentences. Longer words used in more complex sentences can be used to convey a mood, or be used to space out sections of faster action.

The next activity is to have students become familiar with the use of words. The students can write words so that they look like their meaning or definitions. Show the class some examples such as:

*(figure available in print form)*

Then have them make up their own. I tried this and the results were outstanding.

A good activity to use with advertisements for color words. The way to do this is to use a newspaper and note the differences among car ads, clothing ads, cosmetic ads, grocery ads, etc. This idea I have also tried and found to be successful. You must be creative in extending this activity.

Depending on the capability of your class, you should encourage each child to have a thesaurus. At this point a lesson on how the thesaurus works is to be given. You should make certain that the students understand that not every synonym given for a word can be used. It depends on the context. Once you have explained the thesaurus thoroughly you can divide the class into two groups and have contests naming synonyms for a word. This will not only be challenging but will enable students to enlarge their vocabulary.

Even though lessons in the use of verbs, adjectives, and adverbs have been used often, I feel they would be beneficial at this point. You can play, "How did the girl get to the market? (She walked, skipped, jumped, etc.) Or, you can spend time with, "What words will we need for a detective story"? Headings such as: Peeling, 50pnds, Smells, Characters, Atmosphere, etc. are to be put on the board. Have the class come up with words to be placed under these headings.

One last activity to use in working with words is the alliteration. Alliteration is the use of the same beginning sounds in a series of words. Children can have fun with this, and it will help them use and hear words. An example of an alliteration is: A butterfly can fly, flap, flutter, flop, flitter, flick, float, flipflop and "floop" in a loop. Have the students make up silly sentences and write them on cash register tapes. Then put them on the bulletin board.

A week should be spent on WORDS! If you devote that much time to words and present it in an exciting way, students will remember their first week!

The second part of my unit will deal with sentences. The class with sentences and the effects sentences can have. First of all, many things can be done with the arrangement of a sentence. You could play around with the order of a sentence. For example:

I went to the store quickly.

Quickly I went to the store.

To the store I went quickly.

Quickly to the store I went.

Then you could get into sentences which have three different actions in them and arrange the actions. For example:

After Mary washed the dishes, John  
dried them, and Paul put them away.

Paul put the dishes away after Mary  
washed them and John dried them.

John dried the dishes after Mary  
washed them, and then Paul put them away.

Rearranging sentences is a fun class or group activity. It gives students some encouragement. You must emphasize that some changes will change the meaning. If the class works on this as a group and understands it then you will not have that problem. Students can practice sentence patterns in their own work.

Another form of sentence practice for whole class work is "sentence building." For example:

He can walk.

He can walk slowly.

He can walk slower than you.

Let's have a contest to see if he can walk slower than you.

Although this kind of practice covers only a small portion of what can be done with sentences, it is a good starting point. When the children have had enough experience with and enjoyment from playing around with sentences they can be led to a more comprehensive study of sentences.

You can now go into classifying sentences. The students should be taught classifying according to types of sentences: declarative, interrogative, exclamatory and imperative. It is not necessary to give a detailed lesson on each type of sentence. They should have been exposed to these types by this grade level. You can basically review each type and have a relay race identifying each type. Divide the class into four teams. Have one person from each team go to the board. Say the sentence. The student at the board must write what type

of sentence it is. Continue in this way. Have a student keep score. You can have many variations of this type of activity.

When you work with the type of classifying I just discussed you should pay closer attention to the declarative sentence. Show the three main types of declarative sentences. 1) The sentence which contains a subject and a verb. For example Mary ran. 2) The sentence which contains a subject, verb and object. For example: John caught the bass. And 3) the sentence which contains a subject, a form of the verb to be and a predicate nominative or predicate adjective. For example: Mary is a girl. Different activities are to be used to reinforce these types of sentences. One activity is to play a domino sentence game. Cut pieces of poster board 4" X 2." Make a domino game by making dots on each piece of the poster board. On each side of the domino write either a sentence with a subject and verb and a sentence with a subject, verb and object; or on each side of the domino you can write a sentence with a subject, a form of the verb to be, and a predicate nominative or predicate adjective; on the other side of the domino write a sentence with a subject and verb.

(figure available in print form)

Make many Dominos placing of sentences on each. The players must match like numbers of dots and like types of sentences together. A number of dominos can be made.

Place all the dominos face down. Two players draw five dominos each. Taking turns they try to match like number of dots to like types of sentences. The dominos may be matched in any direction. When each player has used or cannot use any of the remaining dominoes, he may draw from the dominoes that are placed face down in the center. The score is kept by adding the number of matched dots. You can play this game using teams so that the whole class can be involved.

(figure available in print form)

It would be a good idea after about a week of playing around with sentences for the students to make a resource list, which is to include the different ways to arrange a sentence and the different classifications of sentences. This list should be kept in their folders and referred to during writing projects. This section on sentences is not to be a detailed lesson on the study of sentences and their types. I have included this section because I want the students to see that you can do something with a sentence. You can be creative in writing a simple sentence just as you can be creative when you are working with words. Now to be creative when you use various writing forms.

The third building block of my unit is to work with some different writing forms. In this section I will explain five writing forms. As a teacher you can decide whether you'd like to use all five writing forms or not. I think three weeks should be spent on this section. In this portion of the unit, the students are actually producing the five forms in their written work. In this section, I will explain each writing form and give you some suggestions on how to present and develop them. In the third section of my unit on sample classroom lessons I will give some specific lesson plans to use.

The first writing form I think should be introduced is an autobiography. If this unit is used in the beginning of the year, an autobiography is an excellent way to get acquainted, As a teacher, you can decide whether or not to limit the scope of this topic. I have done this in the past and found it helpful to give the students some leading questions such as:

Where were you born?

Where do you live?

How many brothers and sisters do you have?

What schools did you attend?

What are the names of your parents?

What are your hobbies?

Tell us about the people in your family.

What is the earliest thing you can remember doing?

In what ways have you changed?

What would you like to do in the future?

Why did you choose this occupation?

All of these questions can lead to an interesting autobiography, one not too difficult to write. To make your autobiography more interesting, something I've tried is to write it in booklet form. This booklet could include illustrations or actual photographs of yourself as a baby, with your pet, your first day of school, your favorite hobby, etc. The autobiography does not have to be long. It could be if you were going to put it into a booklet you could have one or two sentences on a page. Be creative!

The second writing form which should be introduced is the biography. You could have this correlate with your science or social studies. Have the children, write in their own words about the life of someone you are studying. Give the children many people to choose from. They could write a biography from their own textbooks or use an encyclopedia. A biography does not necessarily have to be about a human being; it could be about an animal.

To make the writing of a biography more exciting, the children could make something which the person is famous for or something that is a symbol for that person. For example if they were to choose George Washington they could make a cherry tree to go along with him. Have the students use clay, wood, boxes, toothpicks, sugar cubes and any other building material they can think of. In doing this they have not only written a biography but to go along with it. Again, stress to your students that the biography does not have to be lengthy, One page is sufficient. Many times children become too concerned with the length and spoil the piece of writing. They are not writing a report; they are writing a brief biography.

The third writing form I would introduce is letters or greeting cards. If you choose a letter you should go over the correct form of writing a letter. Some suggestions to give children about whom to write are: a friend, a baseball player, a relative, a letter to the editor, etc. An idea I have never tried but plan to have the class write to their If you have a friend who is a teacher you could exchange class lists and addresses. If not, ask around or write to the various teaching magazine publishers. I'm sure there are many other teachers who would enjoy this idea,

I have found that in letter writing the students should bring in their own stamp and envelope. You could spend time helping them address an envelope. Then you could mail the letters to make sure they are all sent out,

For more suggestions on letters, see Chris Angermann's unit on *Letters and the Postal Service* . (1978, Volume 1)

If you'd like the greeting card the students with the necessary materials: drawing paper, crayons, paints, etc. A greeting card can be written to an ill student, teacher, custodian, your mother on Mother's Day, a dear friend during the holidays, or whatever you'd like, Use your imagination. A greeting card is a good idea to use because it is less demanding of language arts skills and more demanding in terms of creativity,

The fourth writing form is poetry. I have chosen writing cinquain and writing haiku, I have chosen these two forms because I have found success in them, I like working with cinquain and haiku because they have a set pattern and the children can use descriptive words, The children do not have to worry about making words rhyme. They are only concerned about expressing an idea.

To get writing started bring something to class: a flower, a blade of grass, a tennis ball or anything else you can think of. Then ask the class to list as many words or phrases as they can about the object. Promote the discussion by asking: is it beautiful, is it ugly, etc. Then review the list with the class. Have the class as a whole pick out unique and appropriate contributions. Then the class is ready to put the ideas in poetic form, At this point you can use the work which was done on arranging and classifying sentences to help.

Then you can introduce writing cinquain. The form of cinquain is as follows:

First Line: one word, giving title

Second line: two words, describing title

Third Line: three words, expressing an action

Fourth Line: four words, expressing a feeling

Fifth line: one word, a synonym for the title

You can now compose a class poem about the object you identified. Then they should write their own cinquain poem. An example of one of my student's poem is:

Bacon

Crisp, delicious

Frying and spattering

Waiting to be eaten

Breakfast.

After the class is comfortable with the use of cinquain, you can introduce haiku. Haiku is a Japanese verse form consisting of three lines totaling seventeen syllables. Usually its subject is nature. The first line has five syllables, the second line has seven syllables and the third line has five syllables. You can now compose a class haiku. Then have the students write their own and display them. Display them around the classroom. An example of one of my student's haiku is:

The bright dragon fly

Moves swiftly over water

Racing his image.

These two writing forms should not be introduced on the same day. Let the children experiment with chinquapin one day and haiku the next day. My class enjoyed it. I hope yours will.

The last writing form I would introduce is advertising. In all of my teaching years I have found this to be the most exciting and enjoyable for the children. There are hundreds of ways to use advertising in the classroom. For example, have them make up a product and write an ad endorsing their product. It would be a good idea to use posters. The children love drawing their products and writing their slogans. These can be displayed in the classroom. A resource idea would be to contact an ad agency to send one of their representatives. You could contact McLaughlin, DeVecchio and Casey, an inventive New Haven ad agency, to send one of their partners to speak to the class and bring their material.

The fourth part of my unit is the organization of a story. I have chosen this as a culminating activity to my unit because it can be a group project. Children tend to work better in a group. So, for their masterpiece, the entire class will work on it. I feel the class as a group can enjoy preplanning a story.

One of the easiest ways to start a story is to decide who the people in the story will be. Then make up a complete description of each major character. You should, as a class, list the characters' vital statistics, then go on to personality traits and the way they are expressed. It would also be a good idea to write one character's attitude toward the others.

The next step should be writing the plot of the story. A good way to do this is simply to list the sequence of events. As the teacher, make sure the story has a good beginning which leads to the important action and the ending quickly following.

One way to get the entire class involved in this project is to have a class discussion when you choose the characters and the plot. Once everyone in the class has given their ideas then the class as a whole can decide on what they would like in their story. Spend one session working on the characters. By the end of the session you should have your list of characters. Do the same with the plot. Spend one session discussing the plot and come up with the final sequence of events by the end of the session.

Next, establish the mood and setting. worked on the plot the setting should be easy to decide on. During one session plan the physical setting in detail. Decide on the clothing, the transportation, etc. Also establish the mood or atmosphere of the story and its pace — will it be swiftmoving, or more quiet, or possibly sad or romantic.

The last thing to plan is the uniformity of style. Is the story to be told as it already happened (past tense) or as it is happening right now? Flashbacks can be used here. The class should also decide who tells the story, or in whose thoughts and reactions the action takes place. This is the point of view. The story can be told in the first person by one of the characters or in the third person. These are usually the easiest ways.

The organization of a story which I have just gone through involves one session for each part: characters, plot, setting and mood, and uniformity of style. By the end of each session a decision should have been made about product will include. Write your final decision on the board after each session. Have one student copy it



down for you. At the end of all four sessions place the final decisions on a ditto to be distributed to each student. Once you have done all this preplanning your group is now ready to get the story written. The final writing should be done on the board as a class effort. It may take a couple of days to complete it but it will certainly be worth the effort. Spelling, punctuation and grammar should be corrected at the end with the class. Once the final story is completed a copy should be displayed.

In conclusion, this unit using the four building blockwords, sentences, the forms writing can take, and the organization of a story — is an excellent beginning for writing in the classroom. If this unit is started in the beginning of the year the students will not be as inhibited at expressing themselves as we find most students today. At the culmination of the unit, do not stop writing in the classroom. Keep it going until June. I'm sure they own stories in no time. Have fun and enjoy the unit.

## **SAMPLE CLASSROOM LESSONS**

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A Lesson on letter Writing—Gertrude's Gossip

*Purpose* : After completing the activity, the students should be able to write a creative solution to an imaginary problem in letter form. .

*Preparation* : *Enlarge the following newspaper page on your bulletin board and arrange attractively.*

(figure available in print form)

Dear Gertrude,

My mother won't let me eat candy before lunch. What should I do?

Sweet Tooth

Dear Gertrude,

My teacher gives too much homework. I have no time to play. Help!

Fed Up

Dear Gertrude,

I have to be in bed at 8:00 each night. My friends are allowed to stay up until 9:00. What's wrong with my parents?

Wide Awake

Dear Gertrude,

Grandmother is coming and Mother says I must get my hair cut. How can I escape the scissors?

Shaggy

Dear Gertrude,

My brother calls me “Shrimp”. I hate that name. How can I make him stop:

Shortie

Dear Gertrude,

I am planning to run away. Any suggestions?

Hobo

Dear Gertrude,

How could I get Doug to notice me?

Cutie Pie

Dear Gertrude,

My job is washing dishes every night. How can I change jobs?

Chapped Hands

*Procedure for Implementation:*

1. Instruct students to pretend they are Gertrude and write a solution to one of the problems.
2. Allow students to spend as much time as they wish.
3. Make provisions for sharing and displaying Gertrude’s solutions.

*A Lesson on Writing an Autobiography—VIP’S*

*Purpose :* After completing the activity the student should be able to write a creative autobiography.

*Preparation :* Secure a cardboard refrigerator box in a corner in the classroom. Make a door large enough for a student to enter, and a place for a chair inside the box.

*Procedure for Implementation :*

1. Introduce the activity by leading a group discussion about autobiography.
2. Instruct students to write an autobiography including elements from their past, present and future life.
3. The writing can be done in the VIP room. (the room made out of the refrigerator box)
- 4, Make provisions for sharing and displaying autobiographies.

5. Provide art supplies for students to use to create a self portrait.
6. Portraits can be autographed and pasted on the walls in the VIP room.

### *A Lesson on Advertising—Commercial Rehearsal*

*Purpose* : After completing this activity, the student should be able to create a song or poem that advertises a newly developed product.

*Preparation* : Arrange your room to stimulate interest in advertising. Many products should be enlarged and mounted on the bulletin board.

*Procedure for Implementation* :

1. Introduce the activity with a discussion about various types of advertising.
2. Provide time for students to listen to radio commercials.
3. Instruct students to select a product from the bulletin board, name the product, and then write a song or poem to advertise it.
4. Encourage originality by asking students to create a new product. For example:  
(figure available in print form)  
A poem or song is to be written to advertise the newly created product.
5. Make provisions for sharing and displaying the commercial.

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