

Piece-by-Piece: Constructing Creative Nonfiction Writing in Kindergarten

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Introduction

My goal in writing this unit is to develop an approachable framework for teaching kindergarten students to craft creative nonfiction writing pieces. When approaching this unit, I was forced to reflect heavily on the questions, “Where do I begin?” and “What do my students need to know? As a kindergarten teacher, I have personally found that teaching writing is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. It can present itself as a daunting task and is often overwhelming for both teachers and students alike. Each “piece” of the writing process must be taught and modeled by teachers, connected to previous learning, and practiced repeatedly by students. Research shows that teaching the writing process is most effective when it is broken down into components.¹ Therefore, it is my objective to approach the task of writing creative nonfiction by instructing my students in one skill at a time and systematically building their knowledge.

School Demographics

I teach kindergarten at Brader Elementary School in the Christina School District. There are approximately 575 students at Brader. Our students come from a variety of ethnic and economic backgrounds (41% Caucasian, 35% African American, 13% Hispanic, and 11% other or undefined). Over 60% of our students receive free lunch and thus are living at or below the poverty level. For many of my kindergarten students, they begin school not knowing what a letter or word is and need to be taught school readiness skills such as listening, cooperation, and following directions. Some students are also dealing with a variety of environmental stressors at home. As a result, forming positive relationships and keeping the lines of communication open with both students and guardians is critical. We use Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to reinforce character traits such as respect and responsibility. The staff works hard to engage students in the curriculum and to differentiate instruction to meet the needs of each student.

Content Objectives and Goals

Before my kindergarten students can write a story, fiction or nonfiction, they have to understand the components of a story and how those components work together. In order to help students understand the elements of a story, this unit will address the teaching of main idea, supporting details, characters, setting, and main events. Students will also be taught to formulate and ask questions when making observations and when responding to texts or writing pieces. These objectives are drawn from the kindergarten Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in reading and writing. The reading standards require that kindergarten students, with prompting and support, be able to ask and answer questions about key details in a text and identify characters, settings, and major events in a story. The writing standards require that, with guidance and support, students collaborate with peers, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed. The CCSS require that, in addition to knowing how to read and write, students be able *think* like readers and writers. By teaching students to think about and question what they are hearing, reading, and writing, students are able to take ownership of their learning.

In a collaborative learning environment, students and teachers take an active role in teaching themselves and each other. In the text *Collaborative-learning: Cognitive and Computational Approaches*, Pierre Dillenbourg broadly defines collaborative learning as a situation in which two or more people learn or attempt to learn something together.² Dillenbourg also points out that pairs do not learn from each other because there are two, but because they perform activities that trigger specific learning mechanisms. Research on language and literacy development by Anne Haas Dyson has concluded that a child's first experiences with narrative story construction are not grounded in writing but rather in social exchanges³. Based on her observations of young children, Dyson found that children are collaborative story makers. Children do not learn to construct and tell stories individually but rather do so by observing, listening to, and interacting with others. A child's first experience with narratives is through the spoken, not written, word. Children learn to construct stories through dialogue that they share with peers and adults when engaging in play. Children's language skills develop when they are given opportunities to talk about their experiences and discuss their knowledge. This research has led me to reflect heavily on my own approaches to teaching writing and to ponder the question, "How can I make the experience and process of writing more social and collaborative for my students?" In a child's world, the act of story writing is collaborative and social. To further support research on the links between social collaboration and writing, based on findings from the text *Mosaic of Thought*, when children are given the opportunity to share and discuss questions and topics with a partner and are later asked to write, ideas and writing flow⁴. Therefore, this curriculum unit will focus on providing collaborative learning opportunities through think-pair-shares, oral story telling, and shared writing.

In order to avoid students confusing creative nonfiction with fictional stories, this unit will draw strategies from Lucy Calkins' *Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grade K*.⁵ Students will be taught to think about, discuss, and

question each other about small moments in their lives. They will be introduced to the concept of developing a small moment writing topic through shared writing lessons. Research on the use of oral story telling, discussion, and shared writing as pre-writing strategies show that they improve student writing in terms of content, organization, and voice, and also improve student motivation and creativity toward writing.⁶

Students will listen to and study kindergarten level mentor texts written in a creative nonfiction style. A mentor text can be defined as any text that can be used as an example of good writing for students. Students will draw on the writing styles used in mentor texts to inform and improve their own writing. I have selected seven mentor texts to aid in teaching students the art of creative nonfiction. These texts were selected because they are all written in a creative nonfiction style and are appropriate to read to 5-7 year old children in one sitting. Each story tells about a real-life small moment and has a unique style and voice. The students, with my guidance, will study each text and will draw on the variety of writing styles used. We will study the voice, organization, dialogue, use of onomatopoeia, and emotions conveyed in the mentor texts. Research on the use of mentor texts with young writers has concluded that mentor texts increase students' writing interests, collaboration, and allow students to take ownership of their learning.⁷ The mentor texts selected for this unit are:

1. *The Best Story* by Eileen Spinelli
2. *Ralph Tells a Story* by Abby Hanlon
3. *The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers
4. *"Let's Get a Pup!" Said Kate* by Bob Graham
5. *Fireflies* by Julie Brinckloe
6. *Roller Coaster* by Marla Frazee

The goal in reading mentor texts will be that students will emulate the story development and description of small moments from the mentor texts in their own writing pieces. The students, with the guidance of the teacher, will study each mentor text as a whole and will then examine each text to see what we can learn from the authors about narrative writing. The mentor texts will be used to teach small topic selection, organization, development, onomatopoeia, dialogue, and details. In order to guide my lessons toward the desired goal, I will focus on the guidelines set forth in the Delaware Department of Education's kindergarten narrative writing rubric (See Appendix 1), which is based on the kindergarten CCSS in writing. Students will identify a personal narrative writing topic and will detail this real-life event in their writing. Their creative nonfiction writing will include an introduction, details that describe an event sequentially, and an ending that provides a sense of closure. Students will provide a reaction to the event(s) by inserting appropriate feelings into their writing pieces.

Teaching Strategies

Students will be taught to ask questions about texts, writing samples, and the writing of their peers to help deepen their comprehension and critical thinking. I will draw upon techniques for student questioning from the text *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*” by Dan Rothstein and Luz Santana. Research on the importance of questioning has found that when students are taught and expected to ask questions, they learn to think for themselves, take ownership of their learning, and become more metacognitive, meaning that they are aware of their own knowledge and learning.⁸

A think-pair-share strategy, which is a collaborative learning strategy in which students think about a topic or question individually and then discuss it with a partner, will also be used throughout this unit. In a think-pair-share, students first ponder a topic or question, then collaborate together by discussing it as a pair, and finally share and discuss their thoughts and the thoughts of their partner(s) with the class. Research on collaborative learning and the use of think-pair-share in the classroom has found that they increase student participation, the quality of responses, and the comfort and confidence of students during class discussions.⁹

Anchor charts will be used to explain a variety of concepts throughout this unit. Just as the name suggests, an anchor chart “anchors” learning by focusing on one skill and explaining it on the students’ level. An anchor chart should be made in front of the students and should include visual aids. Research on anchor charts shows that they help students make connections between concepts, build on prior learning, and provide visual cues to develop independence.¹⁰

Graphic organizers will be used to teach story elements and will also be used as pre-writing tools to help organize and develop student writing. Graphic organizers allow students to organize information and can assist students in generating ideas. Research has shown that the use of graphic organizers as pre-writing tools helps to improve student writing¹¹. Story map graphic organizers will be used to organize the story elements of characters, setting, and the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Students will use story maps to deepen their comprehension of stories and as pre-writing tools for organizing their own stories. It is very important that young children have a strong foundation in story elements before they are asked to write a story of their own. The students will use their knowledge and understanding of story elements to develop their writing topics that include a setting, characters, and events. Finally, writing journals will be used for students to practice and hone their writing techniques throughout this unit. Because a writing journal is typically used over the course of several months, it is an effective tool for monitoring student progress and for conferencing with students on their writing.

A variety of strategies will be used to teach creative nonfiction. Mentor texts will be used to provide examples of exemplary writing for students to emulate in their own writing pieces. In the book *Nonfiction Mentor Texts: Teaching Informational Writing Through Children's Literature, K-8*, the authors state that “mentor texts can help writers notice things about an author’s work that is not like anything they might have done before and empower them to try something new”.¹² In addition to utilizing mentor texts, I will draw on the research of Lev Vygotsky and his work on scaffolding and a child’s zone of proximal development.¹³ The zone of proximal development is the area in between what a child can do independently and what he or she cannot yet do. Based upon Vygotsky’s research, a child will acquire skills within the zone of proximal development with repeated scaffolding. The scaffolding of student writing will take many forms, including modeling, teacher think-aloud, questioning, prompting, shared writing, and joint composition. Research on the use of scaffolding in narrative writing for kindergarten to second grade students has found that they learn to produce more well-formed writing pieces.¹⁴ Repeated modeling by teachers, with student participation in constructing the piece, is a powerful instructional tool in writing.

Questioning

With the adoption of the CCSS, there has been an increased push to teach students to ask questions in response to literature (See Appendix 2). Teaching students to ask and answer questions about a text engages them in the author’s message. Asking questions about what is being listened to or read leads students to think critically about the text and improves their comprehension.¹⁵ Asking questions about a text is not something that comes naturally to many young readers and needs to be explicitly taught. Seasoned, experienced readers ask questions about what they are reading automatically, but the skill of asking questions should be introduced and modeled at the kindergarten level. In the text, *Make Just One Change: Teaching Students to Ask Their Own Questions*, the authors suggest that a list of question starters (who, what, when, where, why, how, is, do, can) be provided for students. Kindergarten students may need to be prompted when learning to ask questions, so it is helpful to explicitly teach them how to start a question. To ensure that students learn to differentiate statements from questions, Rothstein and Santana state that, when eliciting questions, the teacher should change any statement from a student into a question in front of students. When I teach students the concept of questions and questioning, I explain that a question is an asking sentence. It is something you wonder and people ask questions to learn information. To help students visualize the concept, I like to create an anchor chart about questioning that defines what a question is and that provides a list of question starters. I have found that some young students also find it easier to place the words, “I wonder” before the question starters. Throughout this unit, students will be expected to not only ask and answer questions about texts that are read to

them, they will also be expected ask and answer questions about their peers' writing topics and writing pieces.

Story Elements

At the beginning of the school year kindergarten students are learning letter names, letter sounds, letter formation, and conventions and concepts of print. The vast majority of students are learning how to draw a detailed picture and label it, but they are not yet writing sentences, much less an entire story! However, this is the perfect time to use children's literature to teach story elements such as main idea, characters, setting, and plot. Providing students with a strong foundation in the various elements of a story lays the groundwork for students to begin organizing and developing stories of their own later in the school year. I like to use literature from a variety of genres (poetry, fiction, and nonfiction) to teach story elements. When the students begin the process of writing their own creative nonfiction pieces, I will use mentor texts strictly written in a creative nonfiction style.

Main Idea and Supporting Details

Before you can write a story, you need an idea! Therefore, I like to begin story elements by teaching the concept of main idea and supporting details. Based on the CCSS, kindergarten students are expected to ask and answer questions about key details in a text (See Appendix 3). Teaching main idea and details should be a process that spans a few weeks. Finding the main idea of a text is a key to understanding what you read¹⁶. To begin teaching this concept, start with important vocabulary words such as main idea and supporting details. Create an anchor chart with the class that defines and explains the concept of what a main idea is. As the students' understanding of main idea and supporting details deepens, more information about the main idea and supporting details can be added to the chart. With young students, I like to teach the concept of main idea on a basic level. Students should be taught to ask the question, "What is the book mostly about?" to help them identify the main idea.

Before asking students to identify the main idea from a text, I find it helpful to give them some basic strategies that good readers use when looking for the main idea. Add the strategies to your main idea anchor chart. Three helpful strategies to teach are for students to look at the title and the pictures, to look for words used over and over again, and to ask yourself, "What is this book mostly about?" A good text to use is a simple nonfiction book that will make it fairly easy for students to identify and understand the main idea and supporting details. *What Makes a Family?*, by Pam Munoz Ryan, is a good

example. Students should be able to identify the main idea, that every family is special, and the supporting details, what makes every family special and unique. To incorporate collaborative learning, allow students to think pair share about what they believe the main idea is and why they think so.

Identifying Characters, Settings, and Main Events

A kid-friendly way to explain the story elements of characters, setting, and events to kindergarten students is to compare the elements of a story to the ingredients in a recipe. Just like you need all the right ingredients to make, for example, a cake, you need special ingredients to make a good story. I usually spend several weeks introducing important vocabulary words such as characters, setting, and plot and create an anchor chart to define and explain each element. Kindergarten students need to be explicitly taught that a character is a person or animal in a story (See Appendix 4). After defining characters and allowing students to practice identifying characters from a text with a think-pair-share, I ask students to look for and cut out people and animals from magazines. My students glue them on a “Characters” poster and we hang it in the classroom as a visual reminder that characters are people or animals in stories. Renee D. Faulk presents a wonderful framework for teaching story elements in kindergarten¹⁷. In her framework, she suggests teaching story elements by encouraging students to think about and ask questions. By teaching students that good readers ask questions about who is in the story or who the story is about (the main character(s)), where the story takes place (the setting), and what happens (the plot, which has beginning, middle, and end), students are learning to think independently about the components that make a good story. When reading a text to students, questions that good readers ask themselves should be restated throughout the read aloud by the teacher and by the students.

After listening to a text, students can retell the main events by putting pictures and/or sentences in the correct order (sequencing). To incorporate collaborative learning, students can think-pair-share to help identify and discuss story elements and can sequence pictures of story events with a partner. I frequently model the use of a story map graphic organizer with my students and I use a shared drawing and writing strategy as I think aloud, draw, and label the setting, characters, and main events from the beginning, middle, and end of a story. Research from Flory and colleagues suggests that story mapping is an effective comprehension strategy, particularly for students with short attention spans, because the visual support lowers the demand on working memory and assists students with organizing and making connections between story elements¹⁸.

Classroom Activities

Research shows that the most effective teachers ensure that students acquire, practice, and connect small amounts of knowledge at a time¹⁹. Therefore, students will be taught to construct nonfiction narratives piece by piece. I will use a combination of anchor charts, graphic organizers, mentor texts, think-pair-shares, shared writing, joint composition, and student writing journals to teach topic selection, organization, and development. After learning the “nuts and bolts” of narratives, students will learn how to give their narratives a personalized voice by learning about onomatopoeia, dialogue, details, action, and emotion. In these lessons, anchor charts and mentor texts will target the CCSS in writing to teach students how to identify and write about a small moment, organize, and develop it (See Appendix 5). I will create a variety of anchor charts with the students: a small moments chart, a chart that defines and explains personal narrative writing, another with examples of how to write strong leads that “hook” the reader, and a chart that provides transition words that can be used at the beginning, middle and end of a narrative. These charts will be created slowly with the students as I work through the various mentor texts and lessons. Students will also be introduced to new vocabulary words: small moments, narrative writing, onomatopoeia, dialogue, action, emotion, and details. These vocabulary words should be posted in the classroom and should be defined with pictures and words.

To help guide students in writing and developing their own personal narratives, I will introduce them to mentor texts written in a creative nonfiction style and will take time to dig deep into the characteristics of each text. The purpose of reading mentor texts is to help students identify and develop new topics for writing and to learn writing strategies that they may not have otherwise thought of or been aware of. Suggested mentor texts to use are *The Best Story* by Eileen Spinelli, *Ralph Tells a Story* by Abby Hanlon, *The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers, “*Let’s Get a Pup!*” *Said Kate* by Bob Graham, *Fireflies* by Julie Brinckloe, and *Roller Coaster* by Marla Frazee.

Topic Selection

I introduce topic selection by asking students to think about and discuss with a partner the essential question, “What can I write about?” I write their responses down and then explain that good storytellers zoom into and develop a small moment. In order to help teach students to properly develop their voice when writing, they need to be explicitly taught the difference between a broad topic and a small moment. When students write about a broad topic rather than honing in on a small moment, their writing tends to become a disjointed laundry list that lacks organization and development. By teaching students to develop a small moment topic, it helps to prevent repetitive stories that list events but lack focus, development, and voice. A visual aid can be very helpful when explaining this concept to students. In Lucy Calkins’ *Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grade K*, she defines a small moment story as an

important and interesting piece of writing that stretches across pages²⁰. Calkins explains the concept of small moment writing by using a metaphor to teach students the difference between a big idea or big moment versus a small moment. Any metaphor that has whole and smaller parts, such as a watermelon and the seeds or a cookie and the chocolate chips, will work to explain this concept. The whole object (the watermelon or chocolate chip cookie) represents a big idea; the smaller parts (the seeds or chocolate chips) represent small moments. The goal is to teach students to look at a big idea (for example, a whole school day in kindergarten), to think about the small moments that make up that big idea, and then to choose one small moment to write about (for example, building with blocks). A “small moments” anchor chart should be created to help students differentiate big ideas from small moments.

To further introduce topic selection to young students, I like to read a relatable text about the writing process, such as *The Best Story* by Eileen Spinelli. This book tells the story of a girl who wants to write the best story ever, but she is not quite sure how to get started. Each member of her family is quick to give her advice, but none of the advice is quite right. Finally, with the help of her perceptive mother, she comes to the realization that the best story is one that comes from her own heart. This book really helps to bring the writing process to life for my students by getting them thinking about what is close to their own hearts.

After reading the story aloud, I refer back to the responses that I recorded from the essential question that the students pondered, “What can I write about?” We refer back to our small moments anchor chart and work together to break the writing topics down into small moments. I record the small moment topics onto a heart shaped poster as a visual to remind students that good writers choose topics that they care about. If a student named a broad topic, such as “playing” or “going to the beach”, it presents a teachable moment to help the student zoom in on a more focused small moment memory about playing or the beach, such as dressing their doll or building a sand castle. This whole group lesson is a wonderful way to start a meaningful discussion about small moments and special memories. As a follow-up activity, students can complete a “map” of their hearts. Give students a heart shaped piece of paper and ask them to draw and label people, places, and/or things about which they could write a personal narrative. This activity is an excellent catalyst to get the students thinking about potential personal narrative writing topics that they care about. It is important to allow students time to share and discuss their “heart maps” with peers. I also suggest extending this lesson to a second day by having students select one of the topics that they identified and allowing them to write about in their journals.

After teaching my students about topic selection, I will work with them to add what we learned to a personal narrative anchor chart. Students should be able to identify that personal narrative writing tells about a small moment that happened to you in real life. You tell about a small moment that is important to you. I will refer back to the mentor

text, “The Best Story” when adding to the anchor chart to help students connect the text to their own learning.

Organization

To further explain the concept of writing and organizing a small moment story to students, I find shared writing to be very effective. Research on the use of shared writing as a pre-writing strategy shows that it improves student writing in terms of content, organization, and voice, and also improves students’ motivation and creativity towards writing²¹. Shared writing is a process where I, the teacher, show my students how to do something in writing that is new, or difficult, and then help the students make progress. Shared writing is done in front of the children and I often use a think-aloud strategy throughout to reveal my thought processes and rationale. Essentially, the children are witnessing a writer at work. As I write, the children offer comments and suggestions so that they are fully engaged and not passive observers.

In the text *Creating Young Writers: Using the Six Traits to Enrich Writing Process in Primary Classrooms*, Vicki Spandel explains a shared writing questioning strategy that can help an author think about how to organize important details in his or her story²². She suggests that the teacher present the class with an illustration and a few opening sentences for a small moment personal narrative. After reading the beginning of the narrative, the teacher has students ask questions to help organize and develop the story. For example, I could present an illustration and the topic of writing a story about my cat waking me up on a Saturday morning. My strong lead could be, “*Scratch, scratch, scratch. I woke slowly from my deep sleep to the sound of someone scratching at my bedroom door. I knew just who it was!*”. After presenting the introduction to the students, they will naturally want to know who it was, why they were scratching, and what happened next. I will allow them to ask questions freely and will write their questions down. I will use some of the questions to discuss my story with the class. This discussion will help me to create a story map about my story in front of the class. I will explain that when I make a story map, it is like I am making a movie in my mind and then drawing it on paper. I will include important words and pictures that represent the things I will need to think about when writing my story: “Who is the story about?”, “Where does the story take place?”, “What happens first, next, and last?” and “How do the characters feel?” My story map will include illustrations and simple labels and phrases of my characters (my cat and I), my setting (my house), and what happened at the beginning (my cat woke me up), the middle (I got out of bed) and the end (I went downstairs and fed my cat). It is very important to teach students to map out a small moment in pictures prior to putting it down in words. Research shows that when students are allowed to draft their ideas in images first, it allows them to explain and organize an event with more detail²³.

I will use my story map as a guide to help me narrate and write down my story with the students. I will point out that I showed how I was feeling with my illustrations: “See how my mouth is frowning when I get out of bed...what does that tell you about how I am feeling? Why do I feel that way?” I will challenge students to think about how I could put those feelings into my writing: “What could I say in my writing to show that I feel happy, sad, mad, etc.?” I will refer back to the student questions when I am finished and we can have a discussion about which questions I answered in my narration. I will explain to the class that all of their wonderful questions and our discussion helped to me to think about important details to include in my story.

After I complete the lessons on development, I will work with the students to add what we learned to our personal narrative anchor chart. Students should be able to identify that personal narrative writing tells about a small moment that happened to you in real life. You tell about a small moment that is important to you. You tell what happened first, next, and last. I will also create a separate anchor chart to provide examples of transition words for writing about what happened first, next, and last. Students should be able to provide some transition words on their own. I add to the chart slowly over time. When reading a text aloud to my class, I bring attention to transition words that I notice the author using, and then we add them to the chart.

Development

After introducing nonfiction narrative topic selection and organization, I like to read the mentor text *Ralph Tells a Story* by Abby Hanlon. It is a relatable story about a boy named Ralph who does not know what to write about. Every day at writing time, he engages in all kinds of avoidance behaviors instead of writing. I have certainly had my fair share of “Ralphs” in my classroom over the years! He does not know where to start and is feeling very frustrated and defeated. Finally, with the help of some curious friends who have lots of questions, Ralph identifies a small moment that was important to him (playing with an inchworm at the park) and successfully tells a wonderful story and becomes a more confident and competent writer. There are many lessons for students to learn from this text, but I am very drawn to the fact that Ralph’s story is made better when his friends ask him questions about it and help to draw important details out of him. The very idea that asking questions about a story can help make that story better is a wonderful discussion to have with students! When sharing his story with his peers, he does not write his story down in words, but rather tells it aloud first. This is because children are in fact collaborative story makers and writing is a social process. According to the text *Mosaic of Thought*, when children are given the opportunity to share and discuss questions with a partner and are later asked to write, ideas and writing flow²⁴. This strategy allows young writers to think more critically about their topic and to focus on important details. In the text *A Place for Wonder*, Georgia Heard and Jennifer

McDonough further argue that the use of student questioning increases critical thinking, curiosity, understanding, and engagement²⁵.

After discussing the mentor text, I will work with the students to add what we learned to our personal narrative anchor chart. Students should be able to identify that personal narrative writing tells about a small moment that happened to you in real life. You tell about a small moment that is important to you. You tell what happened first, next, and last. Good writers talk about and tell their stories out loud. Good writers ask and answer questions about a story. I will refer back to the mentor text, *Ralph Tells a Story* when adding to the anchor chart to help students connect the text to their own learning.

Next, students will practice a writing process through a series of collaborative learning activities that should span over several days. It is important for me to note that this is a process that I have my students go through every time they write a personal narrative. Students will identify a small moment personal narrative topic, discuss the topic with a peer, ask each other questions about their respective topics, illustrate and label a story map, and then tell their stories orally with a partner. Students will then write their narratives in a journal. I find that kindergarten students are most successful when they are allowed to write a piece of their narrative a day at a time; therefore, the beginning, middle, and end of each narrative can be written on separate days. I allow students to think-pair-share with a partner about their beginning, middle, and ending each day before writing. By chunking the narrative into pieces, students are able to focus on a small piece of their writing and become less overwhelmed by the process.

Onomatopoeia

Onomatopoeia words represent sounds. Many picture books that are written for kindergarten and first graders include onomatopoeia. Therefore, I believe it is important to bring my students' attention to this stylistic word choice when listening to a text. Before I introduce my students to this big vocabulary word, I first like to play a variety of sounds and have my students simply listen. Then I ask, "What did you hear?" Next, I ask, "What did it sound like?" and finally, "How could I write that down?" I then use their suggestions to write the sounds they heard down in words. I tell the students that when you write a word to tell about a sound you hear, it is called onomatopoeia. I will create a vocabulary poster with pictures and words about onomatopoeia to hang in the room. I also suggest creating an anchor chart at this time that focuses on examples of how to write strong leads that "hook" a reader. I will add a section to the "strong leads" anchor chart about onomatopoeia. To help teach onomatopoeia with literature, I will read the mentor text, *The Listening Walk* by Paul Showers. After listening to a few pages, students will identify the small moment that Paul Showers is zooming in on and I will refer back to the vocabulary word "onomatopoeia". I will then re-read a page from "The Listening

Walk” with and without the onomatopoeia words. We will discuss the questions, “Why did Paul Showers use onomatopoeia?” and “How does it make his story better?” Students will identify the onomatopoeia words that they notice from the text. I will write the sound words and also record, with student input, what sounds the words reference.

After discussing the mentor text *The Listening Walk*, students will complete a shared writing project. We will go on a listening walk. Upon returning, we will discuss the sounds we heard on our walk and I will create a t-chart that lists the sounds we heard on our listening walk and how we could write those sounds down with words. After we are done discussing the walk, I will ask students to think about which sound was their favorite. The students will think-pair-share with a partner about their favorite sound. The students will then illustrate the small moment they chose from our walk (for example, hearing a bird) and will then use onomatopoeia to add, in writing, the sound they heard (tweet, tweet) to their picture.

Students can then be challenged to write a personal narrative about our listening walk. I will repeat the collaborative learning process for development that the students were taught after reading *Ralph Tells a Story* (identify the topic, ask questions, discuss illustrations and the narrative, write) and will review the personal narrative anchor chart with students. Students should be able to identify that personal narrative writing tells about a small moment that happened to you in real life. You tell about a small moment that is important to you. You tell what happened first, next, and last. Good writers talk about and tell their stories out loud. Good writers ask and answer questions. Referring back to the text *Ralph Tells a Story* when adding to the anchor chart will help the students make connections from the text to their own learning.

Dialogue

Dialogue helps you understand how the characters are feeling and captures a reader’s attention because of the added insight the dialogue provides. That is why it is so important to add dialogue when writing personal narratives. I will create a vocabulary poster with pictures and words that defines dialogue to post in the classroom. Starting a personal narrative with dialogue can be a very effective strategy to “hook” your reader. I will add a section to the “strong leads” anchor chart about dialogue. I will use two mentor texts to bring my students’ attention to dialogue. I will ask students to think about the essential question, “How does dialogue make a story better?” We will revisit the mentor text, *Ralph Tells a Story* in order to bring attention to Abby Hanlon’s use of dialogue with speech bubbles. We will have a discussion about her use of speech bubbles and how they made the story better. Next, I will read the mentor text “*Let’s Get a Pup!*” Said Kate by Bob Graham. Again, I will ask students to think about the essential question, “How does dialogue make a story better?” This text will be used to illustrate how dialogue can

bring a small moment story to life. *“Let’s Get a Pup!” Said Kate* is both a humorous and touching tale and it is full of description and dialogue. While reading the text, I will draw attention to the dialogue between characters.

After reading the mentor text *“Let’s Get a Pup!” Said Kate*, students will identify the small moment that Bob Graham zoomed in on. I will use shared writing to further explore the essential question, “How does dialogue make a story better?” with my students. I will tell the class, “I’m going to illustrate and tell two small moment stories. At the end you are going to vote on which story was better.” I will illustrate the first story (for example, lining up in the classroom) by including characters and a setting. I will tell the story without dialogue. I will illustrate the second story (for example, helping a friend zip their coat) by including characters and a setting and will include speech bubbles in my illustration. I will tell this story using dialogue. Students can think-pair-share about what they noticed about each story and can then vote for their favorite story. Students will be guided toward answering the essential question, “How does dialogue make a story better?” by noticing that the second story was much better because the dialogue that was added helped to bring the story to life, helped us understand what the characters were feeling, and captured our attention. That is why it’s so important to add dialogue when writing personal narratives. I will add the students’ observations about dialogue to the personal narrative anchor chart.

Next, students will complete a shared writing activity. Students will help me add dialogue to my first story. I will add speech bubbles to my illustration just like Abby Hanlon did in *Ralph Tells a Story*. Students will then help me to rewrite the first story by including dialogue. I will refer back to the essential question by asking the students, “Why is it so important that we add dialogue when writing narratives?” Students will then be asked to think about a small moment during our kindergarten school day about which we could incorporate dialogue in a narrative. By asking each student write about a shared experience, it ensures that students will be writing about a topic that happens to them in real life. Students will brainstorm topics, I will record their ideas, and then I will guide them toward choosing a shared small moment that will lend itself to writing a narrative that includes dialogue. I will tell my students to pay close attention to what happens and what they hear during this time of our school day the next time we experience it together because they will begin a small moment story about this time of our school day tomorrow.

To begin the writing process for incorporating dialogue into our shared experience, I will ask students to think-pair-share about it. I will record their answers. To help organize the small moment, I will use a combination of drawing and writing to complete a story map about the small moment as a shared writing experience with the students. As I work with the students to complete the story map and organize the small moment, I will ask students questions to help them think about important events and any dialogue we could add to the story. Next, students will draw an illustration to represent the small moment.

Students will share their illustration with a partner and will think-pair-share about how they could add a speech bubble to their illustration. Then, students will add at least one speech bubble to their illustration. Again, students will share their work with a partner and discuss similarities and differences. Students will then be given several days to write a narrative; the beginning, middle, and end of each narrative can be written on separate days. I will allow students to refer to the story map we created and to think-pair-share with a partner about the beginning, middle, and ending each day before writing. By chunking the narrative into parts, students are able to focus on small pieces of their writing at a time and can then work toward their finished product.

Details

Students will listen to the mentor text *Fireflies* by Julie Brinckloe. The goal in listening to this text is for students to identify and discuss the ways in which the author brought the story to life by telling about what the character sees and feels. Without showing any illustrations to the students, I will read the text aloud. I will ask the students to visualize the small moment by making pictures or movies in their heads as I read the text. Students will think-pair-share about what they visualized. What do they see as they visualize? How did the text make them see that? Students will draw a picture as I read a section the text from *Fireflies* and can label their illustration with a sentence if they like. Remember, they have not looked at Julie Brinckloe's own illustrations yet. We will discuss how we were able to "see" the story in our heads (the author described what the characters were seeing and feeling). I will then re-read the story and will show the illustrations to the students. After listening to the text, students will think-pair-share to identify the small moment that Julie Brinckloe zoomed in on. I will introduce the vocabulary word "details". They can compare and contrast their own illustrations to Julie Brinckloe's.

I will add to our personal narrative writing anchor chart. Students should already be able to identify that a personal narrative tells about a small moment that happened to you in real life. You tell about a small moment that is important to you. You tell what happened first, next, and last. Good writers talk about and tell their stories out loud. Good writers ask and answer questions about their stories. You add details by telling about what you see and feel. I will also add a section to the "strong leads" anchor chart about describing the setting.

To further practice adding details, we will complete joint composition lesson. Joint composition is very similar to shared writing, except the children begin to take control of the story and the teacher dictates the students' thinking. If shared writing can be explained as, "I'll show you how to write and I will explain my thinking", then joint composition can be defined as, for example, "I'll support you with writing and questioning while you develop and explain your story". There is a shift from the teacher

taking on the role of author toward the children doing more of the thinking, composing, explaining and working as writers. In joint composition, my role as a teacher is to write down what is said by students. I will also support students by guiding, prompting and challenging their thinking so that the writing remains focused.

To begin the joint composition lesson, I will present a four-square graphic organizer. The students will decide upon a small moment topic that we have experienced together. It is important to give students some ownership of the joint composition topic. Studies in behavioral psychology indicate that providing a choice of academic tasks usually affects students' classroom engagement²⁶. Students will most likely need to be gently guided toward thinking about shared experiences, but I am always intrigued to see what they come up with on their own first. A small moment story about recess, such as swinging on a swing, is an excellent prompt. I will write whatever small moment the class agrees upon in the middle of the four-square organizer. If it is a nice day, I will take the class outside and will give each student a turn to swing (or will do my best to allow them to experience and pay close attention to whatever small moment they agree upon). I will tell them to notice the details that they can write about as they experience the moment. What do they feel? What do they see? When we return to the classroom, we will think-pair-share to discuss words or phrases that tell about what saw and felt. I will make a list of all of the student suggestions by drawing a simple sketch and labeling it with their details. The students will then complete their own four-square organizers by adding up to four details. Some students may only be able to add four details, and this is fine. The students will then use their four-square graphic organizers to write a detailed narrative that describes the small moment. Prior to having the students write their narratives, I will model with shared writing how to turn details into a sentence or sentences. Remember, the writing of a narrative (a strong lead, a beginning, a middle, and an end) should span over several days, and each piece should be reviewed and discussed as a class and then discussed again with a partner before the students put the narrative down in words.

Action and Emotion

Students will listen to the mentor text *Rollercoaster* by Marla Frazee. The goal in listening to this text is for students to identify and discuss ways in which the author brought the story to life. While reading the text, I will ask students to visualize the story by making pictures/movies in their heads as I read the text. I will ask the students questions such as: "What do you see as you are visualizing? Did you feel like you were on the rollercoaster? Why? How did the characters feel? How do you know?" I will ask my students to look closely at the text on each page and will ask them to think about what they heard or saw in the text that made them feel like you were on the rollercoaster (capitalization, dashes, onomatopoeia). After listening to the text, students will think-pair-share to identify the small moment that Marla Frazee zoomed in on. I will ask my

students what questions good readers need to ask to identify the characters, setting, and what happened first, next, and last in the story. I will make a story map as a shared writing experience with the students, being sure to incorporate time for think-pair-shares as we work through the story elements.

I will refer to the “strong leads” anchor chart that is being used to teach students how to grab the attention of their reader. Students have already been taught that onomatopoeia, dialogue, and telling about the setting are good strategies to “hook” a reader. I will add that we can also write a strong lead by using action to tell what the character or characters are doing. I will also review the personal narrative anchor chart with students. Students should be able to identify that personal narrative writing tells about a small moment that happened to you in real life. You tell about a small moment that is important to you. You tell what happened first, next, and last. Good writers talk about and tell their stories out loud. Good writers ask and answer questions about their stories. You add details by telling about what you see and feel. I will add that good writers bring a story to life by telling what the characters are doing. Good writers tell how the characters are feeling.

Students will practice bringing a narrative to life by completing a joint composition assignment with me. “We can write a small moment story when we felt excited or even a little scared just like Marla Frazee did in *Rollercoaster*. We want it to be something that is important to us just like when Ralph told his story in the book “Ralph Tells a Story”. To begin a joint composition writing lesson, I will ask students to think-pair-share about potential nonfiction narrative writing topics that we have experienced together as a class where we felt excited or even scared. Wonderful shared experiences that can be broken down into small moments include writing about a fire drill, a field trip, recess, or going on a walk. I usually help to guide the students toward choosing a big topic that the majority of the class is engaged and invested in. “I know that you feel surprised and maybe even startled when we have a fire drill. We could write a small moment story about a fire drill. Let’s see, what ingredients do we need to tell a story? That’s right, we need characters, a setting, and we need to know what happened first, next, and last. Today we will think about the characters, setting, and about what happened first”. I will have my students think about what questions good writers need to ask themselves when thinking about these elements and then pair share about the characters, setting, and how to begin the story. The students will refer to the ‘strong leads’ anchor chart to help them decide how best to ‘hook’ the reader. We will brainstorm ways to start the story and I will write down all suggestions. If they need prompting, I may ask the students, “Should we use onomatopoeia, dialogue, describe the setting, or use action to start our narrative?” We will continue the joint composition process to for a few days until the narrative is complete.

When the joint composition is finished, I will ask students to repeat the process to write their own narratives. Students will select a small moment topic of their own

choosing, question and discuss with a peer, make a story map, tell the story to a peer, and then write a strong lead and then a beginning, middle, and ending. Remember, this will span over several days and students should be allowed time for discussion and questioning on each day. When the narrative projects are complete, I will allow the students time to share their work with each other.

Notes

- 1 Dunn, Dana and Cranney, Jacquelyn, *The Psychologically Literate Citizen: Foundations and Global Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).
- 2 Dillenbourg, Pierre, Collaborative Learning: *Cognitive and Computational Approaches* (Bingley, West Yorkshire: Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 1999).
- 3 Dyson, Anne Haas: *Social Worlds of Children Learning to Write in an Urban Primary School*
- 4 Keene, Ellin Oliver: *Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2007).
- 5 Calkins, Lucy: *Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grade K* (New Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2007).
- 6 Dorfman, Lynne R. and Cappelli, Rose: *Mentor Texts, 2nd edition: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature, K-6* (Portland, MA: Stenhouse Publishers, 2017).
- 7 Dorfman, Lynne R. and Cappelli, Rose: *Mentor Texts, 2nd edition: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature*.
- 8 Rothstein, Dan and Santana, Luz: *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Education Press, 2011).
- 9 Raba, Ahmed Amin Awad: *The Influence of Think-Pair-Share (TPS) on Improving Students' Oral Communication Skills in EFL Classrooms* (Wuhan, CHN: Scientific Research Publishing, 2017).
- 10 Miller, Debbie: *Reading with Meaning, 2nd edition: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades* (Portland, MA: Stenhouse Publishers, 2012).
- 11 Miller, Debbie: *Reading with Meaning, 2nd edition: Teaching Comprehension in the Primary Grades*.
- 12 Dorfman, Lynne R. and Cappelli, Rose: *Mentor Texts, 2nd edition: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature*.
- 13 Vygotsky, Lev: *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
- 14 Kamberelis, George and Bovino, Thomas D., *Cultural Artifacts as Scaffolds for Genre Development*, (Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 1999), 138-170.
- 15 Rothstein, Dan and Santana, Luz: *Make Just One Change: Teach Students to Ask Their Own Questions*.
- 16 Flemming, Laraine, *Reading for Results 12th Edition* (Boston, MA: Cengage Learning, 2013)

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- 17 Faulk, Renee D., *Story Elements for Kindergarten, Understanding by Design: Complete Collection* (Washington, D.C.: Digital Commons at Trinity University, 2015): 306.
 - 18 Flory, K., Milich, R., Lorch, E. P., Hayden, A. N., Strange, C., and Welsh, R.: *Online Story Comprehension Among Children with ADHD: Which Core Deficits are Involved?* (New York: Springer, *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 34, 2006) 853–865.
 - 19 Rosenshine, Barak, *Principles of Instruction: Research-Based Strategies That All Teachers Should Know* (Washington, D.C.: American Educator, 2012).
 - 20 Calkins, Lucy: *Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing, Grade K*
 - 21 Dorfman, Lynne R. and Cappelli, Rose: *Mentor Texts, 2nd edition: Teaching Writing Through Children's Literature, K-6*.
 - 22 Spandel, Vicki: *Creating Young Writers: Using the Six Traits to Enrich Writing Process in Primary Classrooms* (New York: Pearson, 2011).
 - 23 Olshansky, Beth: *The Power of Pictures: Creating Pathways to Literacy Through Art* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2008).
 - 24 Keene, Ellin Oliver: *Mosaic of Thought: The Power of Comprehension Strategy Instruction*.
 - 25 Heard, Georgia and McDonough, Jennifer: *A Place for Wonder: Reading and Writing Nonfiction in the Primary Grades* (Portland, MA: Stenhouse Publishers, 2009).
 - 26 Flowerday, T. and Schraw, G.: *Teachers' Beliefs About Instructional Choice: A Phenomenological Study* (New York: Springer, *Journal of Educational Research*, 96, 2003) 207-215.

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For Teachers

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For Students

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Appendices

1. [Delaware Department of Education Kindergarten Narrative Writing Rubric](#)
2. Speaking and Listening. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.K.2](#)
Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.
3. Reading (Literature). [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.1](#)
With prompting and support, ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
4. Reading (Literature). [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.K.3](#)
With prompting and support, identify characters, settings, and major events in a story.
5. Writing. [CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.K.3](#)
Use a combination of drawing, dictating, and writing to narrate a single event or several loosely linked events, tell about the events in the order in which they occurred, and provide a reaction to what happened.