



Grade **K**

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

This unit was created to introduce students to writing workshop, to the writing process, and to getting to know why writers write in the ways they do. The mentor texts in this unit of study will help students think about what authors and illustrators are thinking and feeling when they write and draw. They will also encourage young students to notice how authors incorporate personal experiences, emotions, and details to enhance readers' experiences. In order for a writing workshop to run smoothly, students will need to know what is expected of them. Procedural conversations such as how writing workshop will function, what writing tools are and how they will be used, where these tools will be stored, and how students will discuss and share ideas are also presented in this unit.

Personal Narrative

Text Type: Narrative

Personal narratives tell the big and small stories of our lives. Personal narratives are typically the easiest, most natural form of writing for children because the stories are already complete inside their minds, which enables the words to flow more easily onto the paper. It is this easy flow of words that supports students' efforts to produce a complete piece of writing. This allows teachers more opportunities to help students refine their writing because they better understand the heart of their pieces. As teachers surround their students with this natural, life-enriching genre, wonderful opportunities will be presented for students to make connections with themselves and others. Constructing meaningful personal narratives helps students discover important things about who they are and what they hope to be like in the future. This type of writing also helps students make sense of their life experiences and discover that others may share similar experiences, even when they may have little else in common.

Donald Crews Author Study

Text Type: Narrative

An author study is a great way for students to begin to see authors as real people whose writing styles and strategies can be emulated. Donald Crews is a particularly fine choice for a grade K author study because—like your kindergarten writers—Crews is both an author and illustrator. Crews is an especially wonderful writing mentor for the youngest writers because he writes stories around simple topics drawn from his observations and real-life experiences. His work portrays the beauty of the ordinary and familiar using pictures and words. His view of the world contains bright colors and vivid lines that draw young readers and writers into his books. When teaching young writers the importance of drawing representationally, teachers will find that Crews's books provide excellent models. His books appeal to young readers because they contain simple words with strong picture support, and students will connect easily to Crews's topics: parades, harbors, fairs, airplanes, and family. He makes students believe that the best stories come from writing what we know and feel.

Grade **K**

List and Label Books

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

Students are drawn to list and label books because of their accessibility to beginning readers and writers. These books show the youngest writers that there are published books that look similar to what they can write. List and label books contain simple structures that the youngest writers can model with confidence. The texts are usually short and have strong support from the illustrations. Students have success reading simple list and label books, and therefore they have a natural curiosity about how to compose them. Writing in this genre and then reading what they produce provides a venue for students to practice the feel and sound of list and label books from the inside out. The notion that most any topic can be written about in a list or label structure provides a powerful scaffold for young writers. Students will go beyond deciding what they will write about and realize the need to plan how they will write it. “How will this topic or idea look on the page?” becomes an important question for young writers to consider. This unit provides a powerful study for writing the types of books that emergent readers and writers enjoy.

Nonfiction: How-To

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

Because so much of early reading and writing at home and in school involves learning how-to processes, grade K students are already familiar with the structure and purpose of such writing. Therefore, it is an excellent genre for students to immerse themselves in and attempt to emulate. While all the books chosen for this How-To writing unit are instructional and informational by nature, they interpret the genre in creative ways that delight and stimulate students’ imaginations. Several of the unit books are particularly well suited to emergent writers and readers who are just learning about words and structures because they have large, vibrant illustrations with only a few bold words to provide a visual bridge to writing concepts.

FUNctional Writing

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Functional writing is real-world writing. It is practical or persuasive in purpose and intended for a specific audience. Therefore, it is an excellent genre for students to immerse themselves in because they are already involved with and surrounded by functional writing in their homes, at school, and everywhere they go. Functional writing is particularly engaging for emergent writers and readers who are learning about words and reading familiar text in their environments. Schoolwide’s FUNctional Writing unit celebrates many of the different types of functional writing from our daily lives, such as letters and cards, lists and recipes, maps and signs, schedules and invitations, and condolence and thank you notes. The mentor texts are comprised of charming stories with endearing characters, and each book helps teachers emphasize the “fun” in functional.

Grade 1

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

This unit was created to introduce your students to writing workshop, to the writing process, and to getting to know why writers write in the ways they do. The mentor texts in this unit of study will help students think about what authors and illustrators are thinking and feeling when they write and draw. They will also encourage young students to notice how authors incorporate personal experiences, emotions, and details to enhance readers' experiences. In order for a writing workshop to run smoothly, students will need to know what is expected of them. Procedural conversations such as how writing workshop will function, what writing tools are and how they will be used, where these tools will be stored, and how students will discuss and share their ideas are also presented in this unit.

Personal Narrative

Text Type: Narrative

Personal narratives tell the big and small stories of our lives. Personal narratives are typically the easiest, most natural form of writing for children because the stories are already complete inside their minds, which enables the words to flow more easily onto the paper. It is this easy flow of words that supports students' efforts to produce a complete piece of writing. This provides teachers more opportunities to help students refine their writing because they better understand the heart of their pieces. As teachers surround their students with this natural, life-enriching genre, wonderful opportunities will be presented for students to make connections with themselves and others. Constructing meaningful personal narratives helps students discover important things about who they are and what they hope to be like in the future. This type of writing also helps students make sense of their life experiences and discover that others may share similar experiences, even when they may have little else in common.

Mem Fox Author Study

Text Type: Narrative

An author study in writing workshop is the time for students to focus on one author's work. In doing this, students will have a new favorite author they will get to know. Together, teachers and students will learn about an author from a reader's and writer's point of view. Mem Fox is a great author to introduce to young writers. Fox is one of Australia's best-known children's authors, having published over thirty picture books. Half the fun of studying books written by Fox is reading them aloud because she writes using rhythm, rhyme, and repetition. Her emphasis on word and sentence fluency provides a model for the importance of word placement in text. Her books profess the importance of living life passionately. The themes of her many books include the power of a mother's love, loneliness, family relationships, curiosity, and diversity—the themes of youth. Through her books, Fox becomes a more tangible person whom students will come to know as a dear friend.

Grade 1



Nonfiction: All-About Books

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

Children are naturally curious about the world. They often question and wonder about things they see, hear, and experience. They love to learn new information and share it with their friends, family, teachers, and anyone else who is willing to listen! How often do we find ourselves listening to students tell us fact after fact after fact about their new pets, the incredible place they visited over the weekend, or their favorite toy? The information they know and the facts they learn are what have inspired the Nonfiction: All-About Books unit. The questions “Did you know that . . . ?” or “Do you want to know something really cool?” are common phrases that echo in classrooms all day long. Writing all-about texts allows students to take the information they know, gather some new “research,” and teach someone all about a topic of interest.

Fiction (w/ Book Review)

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Schoolwide’s Fiction unit (w/ Book Review included) emphasizes the imaginative nature of fiction while encouraging students to see how fiction writers often draw their inspiration and material from real life. The fiction books in this unit are especially well suited for first grade readers because they offer imaginative plots and creative casts of characters that touch on real themes to which your students will readily relate. The problems our heroes encounter and solve and the life lessons they learn are all age-appropriate experiences that mirror feelings and events first grade students are undergoing in their own lives. When young readers feel a connection between themselves and the stories they read, they are much more eager and motivated to create their own stories for others to read. In addition, because so many of the books seem to come from the minds of young protagonists, the story elements are easy for students to recognize and emulate. Teachers will be delighted to see how enthusiastically students respond to seeing their own emotions and experiences reflected in the characters, narrators, plots, and themes of these wonderful books and how confidently they respond as writers to producing texts that mirror the writing strategies and genre features covered in the unit. This unit of study will allow students to not only enjoy many popular pieces of fiction but also form opinions about the books they have read. In their book reviews, students will describe the book they have read, offer an opinion about that book, supply a reason to support their opinion, and provide some sense of closure.

Multi-Genre: A Focus on Text Type and Purpose

Text Type: Narrative, Informational/Explanatory, and Poetry

Examining and discussing the various types of texts that writers compose and why they compose them is an important conversation for writers to have. This unit gives students an opportunity to focus on why and how writers write, which will enable them to think about their own purposes for crafting texts. Additionally, it will allow young writers to analyze how writers match their texts to their purposes. In this unit students will be exposed to a variety of authors, genres, styles, and writing purposes. Students will explore their own personal connections and preferences as they think about various choices writers make. Students will have the opportunity to revisit or discover all that the genres of poetry, letters, nonfiction, personal narrative, descriptive prose, fiction, and others have to offer. Students will also consider how writers think, how they work, the kinds of texts they create, and the decisions they make about content, illustrations, and more.

Grade 2

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

This unit was created to help students understand the writing process and get to know how and why writers write in the ways they do. Students will find out all of the different reasons why we write and have the opportunity to build their own writing identities. The books in the study will help students read closely, think about the authors' purposes, and understand them as people as well as writers. The texts span multiple genres, styles, structures, and themes. The topics will allow students to connect to the authors' experiences and share their own. For a writing workshop to run smoothly, students need to know what they are expected to do. Procedural conversations—such as how the writing workshop will function, what the writing tools are and how they will be used, and what students should do if they think they're done writing—are also presented in this unit.

Personal Narrative

Text Type: Narrative

Personal narratives tell the big and small stories of our lives. Personal narratives are typically the easiest, most natural form of writing for children because the stories are already complete inside their minds, which enables the words to flow more easily onto the paper. It is this easy flow of words that supports students' efforts to produce a complete piece of writing. This allows teachers more opportunities to help students refine their writing because they better understand the heart of their pieces. As teachers surround students with this natural, life-enriching genre, wonderful opportunities will be presented for students to make connections with themselves and others. Constructing meaningful personal narratives helps students discover important things about who they are and what they hope to be like in the future. This type of writing also helps students make sense of their life experiences and discover that others may share similar experiences, even when they may have little else in common.

Gail Gibbons Author Study

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

Gail Gibbons is a wonderful writing mentor for second grade writers. Gibbons writes nonfiction, which is arguably the genre that students will encounter the most not only in their educational careers but also in their vocational careers. Her books, of which she has written over one hundred, center on her inquisitive nature, or her desire to know “why?” This natural inquisitiveness is something students will readily recognize in themselves. Her books portray the beauty and workings of the ordinary and familiar using pictures, charts, and words. Her interpretation of the world and the things in it includes brightly colored pictures and lots of explanation. Charts, graphs, and other supplemental illustrations draw young readers and writers into her books. They appeal to both young and more advanced readers because they contain a mixture of text and picture support, and they are typically an introduction to a specific topic. Students will connect easily to Gibbons's choice of topics represented in this unit: submerged ships, planet Earth, building a house, honeybees, recycling, caves, and rain forests. She will help students discover that the world around them is full of opportunities to explore, question, ponder, and investigate. Gibbons shows us that writing in order to think, question, and learn is something we should do every day.

Grade 2

Letter Writing

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Letters have been written for about as long as humans have been able to communicate through writing. Besides actual face-to-face conversation, for a long time letters were the only way to establish and maintain relationships with those who were not immediately available. Reading letters helps us learn about how lives were lived and what people believed and knew in the past. Today writers—any writers—are able to share their thoughts through emails, text messages, and posts on the Internet that reach a wider audience than a letter to a friend or even a small group of friends. And writers are able to reply instantly, keeping up a correspondence over days and changing topics. Letters can have a multitude of purposes. They can be informal when written between friends or formal when written for business purposes. They can be requests for information, offer complaints or praise, or share opinions (e.g., when sent to editors of newspapers or magazines). More formal letters can be meant to persuade a reader to action or to request the cessation of action. The need for humans to communicate has not gone away even as technology has changed modern life. As a genre, it's likely the letter itself—in all its many forms—will be with us for a long time.

Folktales, Fairy Tales, and Fables

Narrative

Folktales, fables, and fairy tales are always fun stories to read aloud to students, as they were originally intended to be told orally and are filled with rich imagery and lots of action. As an oral art form originally, most tales use discernible patterns of language and plot that make them easy for students to remember and retell. Even a tale that is told for the first time will have a structure that is familiar and comforting to readers of all levels. The humor, adventure, and magic that typify the unit books will keep students enthralled, and the variety of stories and countries of origin represented will exemplify for your students how these tales pervade human society, culture, and history. In this unit you will find fairy tales, folktales, and fables from across the globe (e.g., Russia, Africa, Asia, America, and Western Europe). Vocabulary, regional expressions, folkways, geographical details, and place names all add life to the tales and serve to differentiate them from one another, yet they tellingly share common themes and purposes—the passing on of important values and mores. The inherently didactic purpose of these tales makes them a perfect genre to both delight and instruct your class, providing excellent examples for students to emulate in creating their own fanciful tales and adding new twists to old ones.

Grade 3

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

This unit was created to help students understand the writing process and get to know how and why writers write in the ways they do. Students will find out all of the different reasons why we write and have the opportunity to build their own writing identities. The books in the study will help students read closely, think about the authors' purposes, and understand them as people as well as writers. The texts span multiple genres, styles, structures, and themes. The topics will allow students to connect to the authors' experiences and share their own. For your writing workshop to run smoothly, students need to know what they are expected to do. Procedural conversations—such as how the writing workshop will go, what the writing tools are and how they will be used, and what students should do if they think they're done writing—are also presented in this unit.

Patricia Polacco Author Study

Text Type: Narrative

No one can tell a story like Patricia Polacco! She is a consummate storyteller who draws upon family history and ritual for many of her tales. Her books, of which she has written over one hundred, center on the stories she learned from her family. Polacco is also an artist; her illustrations portray the beauty and workings of the stories of her life and of those she cares deeply about. Her interpretation of the world and the things in it includes lush, broad, vibrant illustrations that are both humorous and poignant. Her books appeal to both young and more advanced readers because they contain a mixture of text and abundant illustrative support that will encourage them to read deeply and reflect upon the many issues addressed. Students will connect to Polacco's choice of topics represented in this unit. She will help students discover that the world around them is full of opportunities to explore, question, ponder, and investigate not only within their own communities but also within the community of the world, past and present. Polacco shows us that writing to think, question, learn, and honor is something we should do every day.

Literary Nonfiction

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

A nonfiction book can be a reference book, or it can share information through a story. This unit serves as an introduction to the purpose, style, and structure of the literary or narrative nonfiction genre. The books chosen for this unit offer excellent examples of how a variety of fact-based texts can be conceptualized, organized, developed, revised, and published. In this unit students will discover the features of nonfiction writing, including that nonfiction is fact based, has an informative purpose, uses data and specific details, involves and compiles research, uses graphics and other visual aids, and employs content-specific vocabulary. Students will also explore their own interests, passions, and areas of expertise to generate ideas for writing; use creative devices to entertain as well as inform readers; and collect information on their topics from multiple sources including books, magazines, and web sites.

Grade 3

Biography

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Biographers write about people who interest and inspire them. People they admire and respect from the past or present are worthy subjects for students' biographical writing. In this unit students will form opinions about the various people studied based on the accomplishments and attributes discussed. Students will explore the features of biographies and examine the differences and similarities between these features and how they influence readers. Students will also see how different biographers present the important events, accomplishments, struggles, and character traits of a person's life, as well as how they use word choices and tone to convey their admiration for and opinions of the people they write about. The biographies selected for this unit give students a chance to explore inspirational people who lived during various time periods, came from different cultural backgrounds, and had various influences on a variety of topics and/or issues such as sports, politics, human rights, the environment, literature, and more. The books in this unit of study can be used seamlessly within your social studies, science, art, and reading curricula, as well.

Multi-Genre: A Focus on Text Type and Purpose

Text Type: Narrative, Informational/Explanatory, and Poetry

Examining and discussing the various types of texts that writers compose and why they compose them is an important conversation for writers to have. This unit gives students an opportunity to focus on why and how writers write, which will enable them to think about their own purposes for crafting texts. Additionally, it will allow young writers to analyze how writers match their texts to their purposes. In this unit students will be exposed to a variety of authors, genres, styles, and writing purposes. Students will explore their own personal connections and preferences as they think about various choices writers make. Students will have the opportunity to revisit or discover all that the genres of poetry, letters, nonfiction, personal narrative, descriptive prose, fiction, and others have to offer. Students will also consider how writers think, how they work, the kinds of books they create, and the decisions they make about content, illustrations, and more.

Grade 4

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

For a writing workshop to run smoothly, students need to know what they are expected to do. Procedural conversations—such as how writing workshop will function, what writing tools are and how they will be used, and what to do if you think you’re done writing—are presented in this unit. Rituals and routines are necessary components of writing communities wherein students move about the classroom effectively and use their tools and time wisely. As students become familiar and comfortable with writing workshop, they will become more independent. When students are independent, it allows the teacher the time necessary to confer with individuals or small groups of students who need additional support. Writing workshop is the time when we think about how writers work so students can emulate this process. This unit was created to help students understand the writing process and get to know how and why writers write in the ways that they do. They will find out many different reasons for writing and have the chance to build their own writing identities. Fourth graders will explore new and familiar ways to use a Writer’s Notebook and be encouraged to write in their notebooks daily. At the end of the unit, students will publish a text that will provide a baseline or benchmark assessment to help monitor progress through the year. The books in the study help students read closely and think about the authors’ purposes and inspirations. The texts span multiple genres, styles, structures, and themes. The topics will allow students to connect to the authors’ experiences and share their own.

Cynthia Rylant Author Study

Text Type: Narrative

Cynthia Rylant is a renowned author with a great breadth of published works. She writes about the topics she loves most and knows best. Fourth grade writers can easily link her life to the themes in her work. These connections serve as an impetus for young writers to dive into their own rich experiences as food for thought when envisioning their pieces. Rylant is an exemplary mentor author because she inspires students to write about their passions. Fourth grade writers love her lyrical, soulful texts and heartfelt remembrances. The collection of literature in this unit models a variety of craft strategies for students to try out in their own pieces: sentence variety, description using one’s senses, interesting verbs, the choice of proper nouns over general ones, personification, and repetition to create rhythm. Rylant structures her pieces into artful forms that students can emulate. She observes people in her world to create characters and empowers others to discover their own voices. Knowing how her stories come to life becomes a lesson to fourth grade writers. Rylant’s works chant, “Listen to your life; it has stories to tell.”

Grade 4

Nonfiction

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

This unit introduces students to how nonfiction writers think, how they work, the kinds of books they create, and decisions they make about content, including illustrations and charts. Students will learn to identify common nonfiction text features—tables of contents, headings, subheadings, glossaries, bibliographies—and use one or more of these in their own writing. Students will discover and apply different structures with which to organize informational writing, including using an overarching question to explore, using a sequential list of questions to explore, using a journey structure, and using a “how-to” structure. Students will explore how to use their own voices in their nonfiction writing and discover ways to find informational topics they are interested in writing about. The books in this unit allow students to examine both text structures and writer’s craft. Students will research, learn, and then impart knowledge to their readers.

Feature Article (w/ Editorial)

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Feature articles are informative, explanatory pieces that profile people, examine a topic, analyze events, explore trends, evoke an emotional response, and cover in-depth stories. Feature article writers begin with an introduction that captures readers’ attention, provide a unique point of view or perspective, often state an opinion or make an argument, employ a variety of research (books, reference materials, interviews, etc.), and end with a concluding section that provides a sense of closure or finality. In this unit students will determine the purpose of feature articles as well as their prevalence and importance in our world. Students will read and analyze the characteristics of feature articles and then publish a clear and coherent feature article of their own. Following publication of their feature articles, students will then write an editorial essays, thereby replicating a familiar real-world process in which feature articles often appear in newspapers, in magazines, or on web sites and then prompt subsequent editorials in which the editorial writers state their own opinions, claims, and/or arguments.

Grade 5

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

For a writing workshop to run smoothly, students need to know what they are expected to do. Procedural conversations—such as how writing workshop will function, what writing tools are and how they will be used, and what to do if you think you’re done writing—are presented in this unit. Rituals and routines are necessary components of writing communities wherein students move about the classroom effectively and use their tools and time wisely. As students become familiar and comfortable with writing workshop, they will become more independent. When students are independent, it allows the teacher the time necessary to confer with individuals or small groups of students who need additional support. Writing workshop is the time when we think about how writers work so students can emulate this process. This unit was created to help students understand the writing process and get to know how and why writers write in the ways they do. They will find out many different reasons for writing and have the chance to build their own writing identities. Fifth graders will explore new and familiar ways to use a Writer’s Notebook and be encouraged to write in their notebooks daily. At the end of the unit, your students will publish a text that will provide a baseline or benchmark assessment to help monitor their progress throughout the year. The books in the study help students read closely and think about the authors’ purposes and inspirations. The texts span multiple genres, styles, structures, and themes. The topics will allow students to connect to the authors’ experiences and share their own.

Memoir

Text Type: Narrative

Memoir is a short recounting of a portion of a person’s life (unlike a biography, which is usually the story of a person’s whole life). A memoir can be told in retrospect but is almost always told in the first person. This unit will introduce students to what memoir is all about, how memoir writers think, how they work, the kinds of books they create, and decisions they make about content, illustrations, and more. In this unit students will identify how authors use their own life experiences, interests, and observations of the world to generate memoirs; discover the features of memoir writing, such as reflection, use of memories, and sharpening of focus to a brief period of time; publish their own memoirs while studying mentor texts; and identify and discuss the similarities and differences among cultures, experiences, emotions, and ideas as conveyed through memoirs.

Grade 5

Biography

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

Biographers choose their subjects with a variety of purposes and intentions, often selecting people who interest and inspire them. The grade 5 Biography unit focuses on purpose and audience, research, integrating facts and opinions, and well-crafted language. Students will explore the features of biographies. As students closely read the mentor texts, they will examine the differences and similarities between these features and how they influence readers. Students will also see how different biographers present the important events, accomplishments, struggles, and character traits of a person's life, as well as how they use word choices and tone to convey their admiration for and opinions of the people they write about. The biographies selected for this unit give students a chance to explore inspirational people who lived during various time periods, came from different cultural backgrounds, and had various influences on a variety of topics and/or issues, such as sports, science, politics, literature, and the arts.

Persuasive Essay

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Perhaps more than any other genre, essay will be required writing throughout students' educational careers. Essays can be written to explain, explore, or argue ideas on a specific topic. An essay genre study creates the opportunity to familiarize students with the features of essays and helps them build confidence with and knowledge about the genre. Some of these features include clear organizational form, including a thesis statement and introductory sentence; tight focus on a topic; details and facts to support the writer's point of view or claim; and a concluding statement or section. Critical to the study of any genre is taking time to explore, enjoy, and respond to the genre as readers. Essays are written to be read and reacted to. The experience of reading essays and responding to them naturally is crucial to appreciating and internalizing their features and functions. In addition, developing an appreciation for essays and essay writers will help entice students to want to write essays of their own. In this unit students will listen to and read essays, identify features of essays, gain an appreciation for the forms and functions of essays, and publish a persuasive essay of their own.

Multi-Genre: A Focus on Text Type and Purpose

Text Type: Narrative, Informational/Explanatory, and Poetry

This unit will introduce students to how writers think, how they work, the kinds of books they create, and decisions they make about content, genre, and purpose. As writers (and readers), students will be delighted by the books in this collection. The texts will help students imagine various possibilities for their writing and encourage them to take on new identities as writers. This unit asks students to think about why writers write and then asks them to begin to craft a text based on their own intent as writers. In this unit students will describe different intentions that authors have for writing (to instruct, inform, persuade, express emotion, and entertain), discover the possibilities of using their own voices and experiences in their writing, demonstrate an awareness that writing is crafted for multiple purposes and audiences, generate topics for writing (using strategies such as brainstorming and composing research questions), and begin to develop precision with wording (using specific and descriptive details and making deliberate vocabulary choices).

Grade 6

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

This unit was designed to help middle school students understand the writing process and examine how and why writers write the way they do. They will have opportunities to apply those observations to their own writing while exploring different genres, text types, and purposes for writing. In this unit students will understand the rituals and routines of writing workshop, learn how to keep a Writer's Notebook, examine mentor texts, discover craft techniques, apply techniques to their own writing, and strengthen their writing by revising and editing. At the end of the unit, students will publish their first text, which will provide a baseline for their writing and help monitor their growth throughout the year.

Personal Narrative

Text Type: Narrative

We all have stories to tell. Personal narrative writing is a form of writing in which the writer retells an event, incident, or experience in his or her own life. Personal narratives allow writers to share their lives with others and re-create experiences for readers to feel. It can also help the writers relive a meaningful moment from their lives. Personal narratives are generally written in the first person and tell a story, big or small, from the author's life. They help the writer make sense of life experiences and uncover universal truths, discover lessons learned, or gain insight into the experience. Constructing personal narratives also helps writers learn important things about who they are and who they would like to be. In this unit students will identify several ways authors gather ideas for personal narratives; recognize different features of personal narratives, such as flashbacks, inner thoughts, and attention to a brief period of time; understand the connection between storytelling and writing; write their own personal narratives, experimenting with techniques learned from the mentor texts; and learn about themselves through listening to, discussing, and writing personal narratives.

Feature Article

Text Type: Informational/Explanatory

Feature articles are a type of nonfiction. They cover true or real information just like other informational or explanatory texts, but they have some unique characteristics. Feature articles begin with an introduction designed to grab readers' attention, provide a unique point of view or perspective, often state an opinion or make an argument, and end with a concluding section that provides a sense of closure or finality. Feature articles often appear in magazines, newspapers, newsletters, web sites, reference works, and collections of writing. In this unit students will discover the characteristics of feature articles, including that feature articles are informative and entertaining, include facts and details, use research and expert opinion, use interviews, profile people, explore events or trends, and illuminate intriguing aspects of a topic; identify the strategies employed by feature article writers; and apply those strategies in their own writing. They will use their own expertise and areas of interest to generate ideas for writing, employing a variety of research (books, reference materials, interviews, etc.) to inform readers and/or entertain readers with intriguing and unusual approaches to topics. They will also develop plans to write and organize their research and writing to help readers achieve a deeper understanding of the topic.

Grade 6

Persuasive Essay

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Writers write for a variety of reasons. They write to entertain, inform, and communicate thoughts, feelings, and ideas to their readers. In persuasive essay writing, the author shares his or her personal thoughts about issues important to him or her. More specifically, the goal is to be influential and align readers with the author’s way of thinking. The books in this unit of study offer various forms of persuasive writing, from authors sharing personal stories about issues they care about to communicating opinions on global topics like war and the environment. Students will identify current issues and themes in persuasive writing; learn to recognize the author’s opinion, argument, or claim in a piece of writing; generate ideas for their own persuasive essays; become familiar with the structure and organization of persuasive essays; strengthen their writing as needed by revising and editing; and realize their opinions are important and can influence other people’s views.

Grade 7

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

This unit was designed to help middle school students understand the writing process and examine how and why writers write the way they do. They will have opportunities to apply those observations to their own writing while exploring different genres, text types, and purposes for writing. In this unit students will understand the rituals and routines of writing workshop, learn how to keep a Writer's Notebook, examine mentor texts, discover craft techniques, apply those techniques to their own writing, and strengthen their writing by revising and editing. At the end of the unit, students will publish their first texts, which will provide a baseline for their writing and help monitor their growth throughout the year.

Memoir

Text Type: Narrative

Memoir is a short recounting of a portion of a person's life rather than a biography, which is a chronological telling of someone's life from childhood to adulthood. A memoir is usually told in the first person and is often how one remembers one's own life. This unit of study will introduce students to what memoir is all about, what memoirists write about, where they find their ideas, and what kinds of texts they create. The mentor texts in this unit can serve as inspiration. Some of them are collections of individual memoirs written by one author or several different authors, and some are picture books, collections of poems, or informational books about memoir. In this unit students will identify how authors use their own life experiences, interests, and observations of the world to generate memoirs; recognize features of memoir writing, such as reflection and change, use of memories, point of view, use of vivid and authentic details, and a focus on a brief period of time; apply what they have learned to their own writing; find similarities in experiences and emotions across cultures as expressed in memoirs; and identify variations of style and structure in memoir writing to help them make decisions about their own memoirs.

Grade 7

Photo Essay

Informational/Explanatory

Why Photo Essay?

The current age of technology exposes us to multiple visual images throughout our day. Middle school students are called upon to react to and/or interpret what we see in these split-second bursts of time. With the evolution of technology and the Internet has come the ability to capture images much more easily. This ability, combined with the skill of interpreting these images, leads to the exciting creation of photo essays.

A photo essay (or “photographic essay”) is a collection of images that are placed in a specific order to tell the progression of events, emotions, or concepts. As with a written essay, the elements of a photo essay should be structured in a way that easily conveys a story to the viewer. Each individual photo contributes to the overall story, theme, and emotions of the essay. Photo essays can be sequential in nature, intended to be viewed in a particular order, or they may consist of non-ordered photographs which may be viewed all at once or in an order chosen by the viewer. The photos that are chosen for the photo essay must not only be compositionally and artistically strong, but also informative and educational.

Writers often use the essay form to try out new ideas or explore things they are interested in. The word essay comes from the French word “to try,” so it makes sense that student writers would be exposed to this type of writing when working with informational or explanatory text. In this photo essay unit, we also want students to experience the ability to capture or locate images for the purpose of interpretation, appreciation, new learning, sharing information, telling a story, or attaining deeper understanding of topics. We want them “to try” out this genre as a means to meet the demands of our ever-changing, technologically savvy world, while also practicing and applying their skills in a variety of text types, or forms of writing.

Grade 7

Book Review

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Book reviews introduce a reader's opinion on a piece of literature to a general audience. When reviewing the literature, the goal is not simply to recite details from the work but rather to convince the reading audience of one's opinion about the piece. Book reviews require ample research, organized thinking, and strong voice. Book reviewers must garner followers of their craft, building an audience who depends on them to let them know which extraordinary texts have been published and which texts might be avoided. In that spirit book reviewers discuss the accuracy of the facts presented in a book, the flow of the written piece, and the author's overall presentation of the text. This unit of study will allow students to enjoy many popular pieces of literature and form independent opinions of the books they have read. They will describe the book(s) they have read; consider and reflect on the author's opinions and intentions; and fact-check and review the accuracy of the author's work. Students will explore the issues their books raise and relate those issues to larger issues. They will develop critical reviewing skills and strong opinions about what they like, and perhaps dislike, about a text. With the many different forms of reviews out there today, whether it be blogs, televised opinions, etc., it is very important that teachers provide students with the basic processes and structures necessary to form an educated opinion or make an argument. It is also important for students to have the opportunity to talk about their opinions in a group setting so that they can gain experience sharing some of the issues they have with the literature they read and are able to confidently discuss their thoughts in a safe and respectful place. In this unit students will identify various approaches to book reviews; recognize the different elements contained in a book review; understand the importance of including facts and supporting ideas and presenting the book review in a strong, passionate voice; write their own book reviews, experimenting with various techniques they learned from the mentor texts; and learn about themselves as readers and writers by listening to, discussing, and writing book reviews.

Grade 8

How Writers Work

Text Type: Launching

The writing process will be explored thoroughly in this unit, beginning with “seed planting,” in which students generate ideas for their pieces. After being guided through selecting a topic, genre, and form for writing, they will learn to collect ideas to use in their first drafts. Then they will be guided to strengthen their pieces using revision techniques; to edit their pieces, focusing on grade-level grammatical errors; and to publish final copies. A culminating activity has the students assessing their own work. The texts in the unit cover a broad spectrum of genres and forms of writing as well as age- and grade-level appropriate topics that adolescents will find intriguing. These touchstone texts will serve as “mentors” throughout the unit and will be revisited again and again during the steps of the writing process. Students will read, reflect on, and analyze each mentor author’s purpose as well as the deeper reason why the piece was written—the author’s message or theme. In this unit students will learn how to work in a writing workshop environment by following the structures, routines, and procedures of the unit; become part of a community of writers who listen to, share, and respond to each other’s thoughts, writing, and ideas; explore their own interests as writers by creating lists of possible topics and the types of writing they would like to research; become aware of where published authors get their ideas; understand the different reasons for writing and become familiar with different genres and forms; learn how to keep a Writer’s Notebook; select a topic, genre, and form and create a first draft; read mentor texts to discover revision techniques and apply them to their own writing; refine their pieces by editing for grade-level grammatical errors; and create a published piece of writing.

Multi-Genre Memoir

Narrative

Why Multi-Genre Memoir?

It is human nature to have a desire to talk about our past. Middle school students are no different. They love to tell stories about their summer experiences, trips far or near, and ill-fated friendships. When these stories take on a certain poignancy because of a pivotal change, or even, personal growth, we call them memoir.

Memoirs are narratives which typically focus on a period of time in an author’s life, reflecting on the implications of this time or experience. This unit of study demonstrates how memoirs can be presented in different genres or forms of writing, while giving your eighth graders time to explore meaningful topics and publish a memoir with purpose and audience in mind.

The books that were chosen for this unit of study reflect a wide variety of interests and content. They also represent genres that will engage students to learn from and emulate. Careful thought was put into selecting books that will be shared with the whole class: photo essay, short story, graphic novel, picture book and novel. It is through the lens of these multiple genres that students will be able to select the form that they feel best reflects their purpose while also strongly considering their audience. As with any kind of memoir study, students will also consider how memoir helps them to determine how to make sense of who they are, who they once were, and what values, people and experiences have helped to shape them.

Grade 8

Research Report Informational/Explanatory

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Persuasive Essay (Content Areas)

Text Type: Opinion/Argument

Persuasive pieces in the content areas usually revolve around passion for a particular topic. In this unit students will explore many social issues in their world. They will discuss racism, anti-Semitism, war, bullying, animal rights, protecting the environment, and other serious and important topics. Content area persuasive writing requires ample research, organized thinking, and strong voice. It also requires the writer to be respectful of readers—winning them over using facts and details as well as thoughtfulness and empathy. It is important for eighth grade students to get the opportunity to first talk about these issues amongst their peers and teachers in a safe and respectful place. The classroom will become a sanctuary where students can share their own personal experiences with these serious topics as well as their thoughts about how the world around them responds to these issues. In this unit students will identify various strategies for gathering ideas for content area essays; recognize the different elements and techniques contained in a piece of writing that effectively makes an argument; understand the importance of supporting claims and ideas with facts and details; write their own content area persuasive essays, experimenting with various techniques they learned from the mentor texts; and learn about themselves as readers and writers through listening to, discussing, making arguments, and writing content area persuasive essays.