



# INSPIRING CHILDREN TO WRITE FOR READERS

## GETTING READY

- ▶ Invented-spelling story on a chart paper booklet with the first two pages readable and the final page indecipherable—make it a cliff-hanger.
  - ▶ Supply of stapled-together booklets of three to four pieces of paper as at the end of the previous unit. Renew the supply every day.
  - ▶ Children disengaged from partners from last unit. Perhaps you'll assign new rug spots; in any case you must disengage preexisting partnerships so that you can later initiate new partnerships (see Session IX).
  - ▶ Each child's set of past pieces of writing—some readable, some not. You'll bring these old pieces out in Session II, but be sure you have them now.
- ⊗ See CD-ROM for resources

DURING THIS UNIT, YOUR TEACHING WILL FOCUS on the conventions of print, but your children, meanwhile, will also carry on with the writing processes they learned in prior units. That is, they'll need to work with some independence to choose topics, plan their writing, and to record small moments of their lives. You'll establish the context for the new work children will tackle in this study by conveying that for the next few weeks, your children will continue choosing topics and writing true stories.

*Although most of the explicit teaching in this unit expands children's knowledge of print, children also need to spend time each day rehearsing for and writing stories. It is crucial that all children, especially children such as those in Natalie's class, have time and opportunities to mess about with story language and story structure. They need to learn that in stories, one thing happens and then the next and the next, and they need to internalize transitions such as then or finally. For some children, one of the great challenges of school is that they are required to use language not only to communicate messages but also to build a world and to re-create life in that world—to tell real stories. Although this unit doesn't explicitly teach storytelling, it is enormously important that children continue to have opportunities to use all they have learned so far this year.*

*In this first session, you will aim to convey the big picture of this new unit. Specifically, you'll inspire children to work harder and in new ways so that others can read their writing.*





## THE MINILESSON

### Connection

**Tell students that in the new unit, their Tiny Moment stories will get even better.**

“Do you remember how on Friday we celebrated our Tiny Moment stories? Do you remember how proud you were of your work? Well, today, we are going to continue to write Tiny Moment stories. And we are going to begin a new unit that will help us make our Tiny Moment stories even better.”

### Teaching

**Tell a detailed story of trying to read your children’s writing. Help your children feel your great yearning to read their stories and your frustrations when you couldn’t.**

“I need to tell you about something that happened to me Friday night. Okay? Ready? Well, on Friday, right after our Tiny Moments celebration, I brought all your writing home with me. (I couldn’t bear to leave it in school!) And so Friday night I started watching TV and then I said, ‘Wait a minute. Why am I watching TV when I have my kids’ stories at home?’ I thought, ‘My kids’ stories would be so much better than this show!’ So I turned off the TV and I got the box of your writing, and some tea, and a blanket, and I wrapped myself up and snuggled down to read, like this.” Natalie reenacted the utter bliss of the moment and showed how she reached for a story. “I started to read.” Turning to the first page of the dummy chart-sized book, Natalie pointed at the words and read, “Me and my sister went on the ropes.”

ME ND MI SITER WNT ON DA ROPS

Still acting the part of her Friday-night-reading self, Natalie said, “Oh, I can’t wait to see what happens next!” Turning the page, she read, “We climbed the bumps. We went high.”



*Notice that Natalie refers to focused vignettes as Tiny Moments. In the previous book, Abby referred to these as Small Moments. Classrooms, like*

*families, develop a private shared language. Invent your own language in your classroom, using some phrases over and over. Notice also that this “connection” is atypical. Natalie does not end by naming exactly what she will teach today.*

*Natalie is wise to couch this reading narrative into the “Friday night at my house” setting, making it a memorable and concrete anecdote. Sometimes when we talk to young children about reading and writing we become highly abstract and metacognitive, talking about in-the-brain strategies in ways that children can’t always grasp. The concrete detail of Natalie’s story provides a welcome alternative.*

*Take the time to paint a scene, to recreate the image of you, snuggling down to read your children’s work. Your longing to read what your children have written will become the force behind this whole unit. This is not window dressing, it’s crucial! Play up your involvement in the first section of this story so that your children empathize when you encounter difficulties and can’t read on.*

WE CIMD DA BMPS WE WNT HI

Turning to the final page, Natalie looked at the print and then stopped in her tracks. She looked very confused:

WIGSDNR DADHSDN.

“Wait a minute! What happened next?” she said and peered at the page. “Oh my gosh!” Turning back through the pages, she reread and retold the cliff-hanger of a story, this time letting her intonation show the rising suspense. “They were on the rope. They had climbed up the bumps, the knots, and they were high. And . . . And . . . I’m left hanging!”

Now stepping back out of the role play, Natalie said to her class, “I had to stop reading this great story without learning how it ended because I couldn’t read it.” She speaks with woe. “I was so sad that the writer hadn’t written in a way that let me read the whole story.” Today, I want us to realize that it can be a really sad thing to not be able to read a story, and that’s true if it’s our own story or someone else’s story.”

## Active Engagement

**Tell the children to turn and talk to a friend about what made the last page harder to read than the first two. Listen in to and coach these conversations.**

“Could you turn to a friend and tell your friend what made that last page so difficult to read?”

Alain and Sebastien, twin brothers, turned to talk. Alain said, “That last page has some crazy writing! Sebastien, look at it! I think I write like that sometimes. With some crazy stuff.”

Sebastien nodded, “Yeah, I think you write crazy.”

Listening in, Natalie interjected, “Boys, I know you think that writing is crazy, but could you talk to each other about *why* it is crazy?”

*Notice that Natalie’s example of readable prose isn’t perfectly spelled. She isn’t setting the goal too high for her children, and the work is carefully chosen to inspire, not demoralize. Notice also that the story is a brief Small Moment story. Natalie isn’t addressing the nature of this text in her minilesson, but her story, nevertheless, functions as a model. And her teaching is cumulative, building on the preceding unit of study.*

*Imagine every child in the class turning to talk with his or her friend, and Natalie and I crouching among the pairs of children, listening in on their conversations. Very often we draw from what we hear in these partnership conversations to cite one example of the sort of thing we hope children are saying. We do not have the whole class report on what they said to each other!*

Alain looked at the page, “Well, it’s all smushed together. You can’t have all of those letters smushed up like that.”

Sebastien agreed, “Yeah, I think so too.”

## Link

**Urge the children to write so that readers can read their writing. Ask them to remember that you’ll be sitting at home, hoping to read all of the pages of their better-than-TV stories.**

“As you go off to write today and for the next few weeks, try really hard to keep me in your mind. I want you to remember that I am at home, dying to get to the end of your amazing stories, and I am hoping that your writing has given me the help I need to get to the end. Your writing is so, so much better than TV . . . and I can’t bear to have to stop halfway through it.”

*Alain and Sebastien say that letters can’t be all scrunched up, but they still have a difficult time un-scrunching letters in their own writing. When a child doesn’t have white space between words, it’s not necessarily enough to tell the child, “Add white spaces.” The problem may be that the child doesn’t yet have a strong concept of what a word is.*

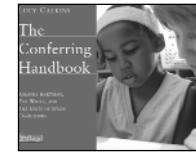
*Eventually, of course, you will ask your children to keep a broader range of readers in mind—but for now, the easiest-to-grasp and most tangible goal you can give your children is for them to write in a way that you can read their stories. This will be an appealing goal because your children no doubt adore you and long to please you. Eventually, you’ll encourage children to reread their own writing and to write also for their peers, but don’t mention these audiences now. Let that come in time. . . .*

*Obviously, Natalie knows that simply telling her children to write for readers isn’t going to do the job . . . but it’s a start.*



## TIME TO CONFER

Look for children who know that their writing is not as readable as it could be. Celebrate this awareness. Your goal will be for them to want to write so that others can read it, and to be willing to work toward this goal. So yes, you are asking them to look at the writing and to say, with some sadness, “I bet NO ONE can read this!” Your goal will be to transform discouragement into resolve to do more to help readers. Be ready to celebrate and name any productive activity a child takes toward the goal of writing for readers. In most of your conferences over the next few days, you will help the writer hear and record a sound, and then the next sound . . . The differences between conferences will be in how they start rather than in what you accomplish. Sometimes the beginning will be the child’s recognition (or yours) that the writing is an illegible string of letters (see “Let Me Help You Put Some Words Down”). Sometimes, it will be a child’s nervousness to write unknown words. Sometimes it will be a child who is stymied by a difficult word. In any case, you will coach the child to isolate a sound, find and record letters to match it, then to reread, and to articulate the word again, to hear the next sound. . . . The last thing you want is for children to become so intent on spelling well that they compromise their content. This means you’ll also continue to hold conferences such as those in your last unit of study. Although most of your conferences in this session will help writers record sounds, your real message will be that writers plan out great stories . . . and then use letter-sound knowledge to write in ways others can read.



This conference in *The Conferring Handbook* may be especially helpful today:

- ▶ “Say and Record a Word, Then Reread”

Also, if you have *Conferring with Primary Writers*, you may want to refer to the following conference:

- ▶ “Let Me Help You Put Some Words Down”





## AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE

**Tell the children about a writer who did something to make his or her writing more readable. In this instance, Juliser has reread her own writing often in the midst of writing.**

“Hey everyone, today Juliser did the coolest thing. Juliser finished writing the first page of her story, and she realized that she could not read what she had written. She remembered that I would be reading her story while I’m home alone tonight, without her. She knew she had to do *something* so I could understand her story. So she started over. She crossed out what she’d written and this time, after she wrote a little bit, *she reread her own writing*. Then she wrote some more and *then she reread her writing again* like this. Let me show you how she did this.”

(Natalie had made an enlarged copy of the start of Juliser’s story on chart paper.) Stepping into the role of Juliser, Natalie put her finger under the letters and reenacted Juliser reading the words she had written and articulating what she wanted to write next “Me *and*.” Now Natalie wrote *and*, and went back to reread “Me and.” Soon she’d voiced “mommy” and had written her approximation of that.

“I bet a lot of you found ways to make sure that when I’m at home tonight, I won’t get totally stuck trying to read your stories. How many of you wrote in ways that will help me read your writing?” Across the room, children signified that yes, indeed, they’d done this. “I’ll be taking them home tonight and I can’t wait to read them.”

*Notice that Natalie retells what Juliser did in a way that recollects the main lesson from the day and that makes Juliser look like she worked with independence, without relying on Natalie. The true story could have been said this way, “I helped Juliser to use a strategy . . .” but Natalie wisely downplays her own role in the account, saying instead, “Juliser decided to . . .”*

*Notice that Natalie doesn’t just talk about what Juliser did. She reenacts it. That is, instead of giving an explanation, she gives a demonstration. The demonstration is deliberately tailored to highlight the one thing Natalie wants to emphasize, which is the process Juliser went through as she voiced the word she wanted to write, isolated a sound, recorded it, reread, and then voiced it again.*



## IF CHILDREN NEED MORE TIME

In Session II you will journey over the same terrain as this session and will do so in a similar way. For this reason, there is no advantage to lingering with this session. Remember also that your goal for this session isn't to equip your children with the skills necessary to write for readers. Instead, your goal is to help children yearn to write in such a way that you can read their writing. If all that your children learn in this session is that they want to write for you as their first reader, this alone would be a grand accomplishment. You can't expect miracles.

## ASSESSMENT

After school, lay out this first day's writing. Make two piles: the easy-to-read writing, and the not-so-easy-to-read writing. Take the not-so-easy-to-read pile and try to identify why each of these pieces is difficult to read. What common trouble spots does your class have?

For the next workshop, you'll need to set aside four to six pieces from each child's work, starting at the beginning of the year. Now is a good time to look at the growth you can and cannot see from the first piece to today.

Natalie's children's writing at the start of this unit might not look great, but when we set her children's work at the start of this unit against the backdrop of their writing histories, we were struck by how much growth had taken place. You will be able to see growth in your children, too, as you look back at their writing. You need to notice what your children *can do*.

Sebastien began the year writing scrawls, then progressed to labeled drawings. Now, he had written a sentence on each page of a two-page booklet. His writing looked at first glance as if it was random strings of letters [Fig. I-1] but in fact, a close look showed that Sebastien was actually representing most of the consonant sounds in words. (See the translations.)

Shavon's word choice sparkled with originality (I walked in the park. My mom brought my brother bitsy boy.) but it, too, could easily have been pushed aside as nothing more than a random string of letters. [Fig. I-2]:

IWINThPOCMIMBUTMI drrBBUY

We decided to keep each child's first few samples of writing from early in the year in his or her folder throughout this unit as a tangible reminder to us *and to the child* of the journey that child had traveled.

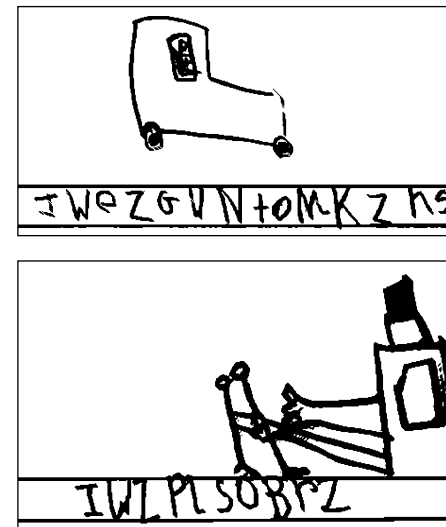


Fig. I-1 Sebastien

I was going to my cousin's house.  
I was playing snowboards.



Fig. I-2 Shavon

I walked in the park. My mom brought my  
brother bitsy boy.