

Use a Thematic Focus



THINKING Focus is crucial. A student who finds her own slant/angle will be able to write with voice. Identifying a theme can be a way to focus writing.

TEACHING We're going to be thinking about how to find the right focus for what you're writing. Finding the right focus makes it much easier to write with voice, to make the writing come alive and sound like you.

Let's look at a piece of writing by Nicole, a fourth grader. This is a character sketch of her little sister.

- Read "My Sister's Silly Questions" aloud.

Let's talk about Nicole's piece. What did she do well?

Discuss.

Nicole's piece has humor, voice, and interesting dialogue. She could have written all about her little sister—what clothes she wears, TV programs she watches, favorite foods, etc. Instead, she picked one thing about the little sister—her silly questions—and focused on that. Those questions are the "theme" or main idea of the story. It's fair to say that she picked those questions because they revealed a lot about her sister.

Notice that Nicole's story isn't a series of events you'd find in a story. It's more of a character sketch. A thematic focus like this (when you focus on one idea) works well if you're writing a character sketch instead of an actual story.

Today when you write, and whenever you write, get in the habit of asking yourself, What angle do I want to take? What's my focus going to be? Once you figure that out, you need to try to keep your writing focused on that.

FOLLOW UP *Birthday Presents*, by Cynthia Rylant, is a fine picture book to model thematic focus.

This lesson is part of a series of lessons on "Focus." But it would also fit nicely in a study of how to bring character alive in writing.

Conference Questions:

- What angle will you take on this topic?
- What will your focus be?

PREP
point

- "My Sister's Silly Questions"

My Sister's Silly Questions by Nicole

My sister's questions are s-o-o-o-silly. Once she asked me "how cold is cold?" I said to my mother "I'm going to faint." Sometimes my sister is a pest. But! I still love her. Once she asked my mother "why do birds fly?" So my mother said; "That's how they get exercise." That's not really true. But! what do you say to a child who is four years old? I like my sister's questions because they give me something to do. Sometimes it's fun, answering my sister's questions, other times it's not. Once she asked me, "How come you were born first?" Another time she asked me, "Why is the summer called summer?" Sometimes I get s-o-o-o-mad, I'd like to scream! Other times I don't know what to say! Now my sister is getting older and the questions are getting harder!