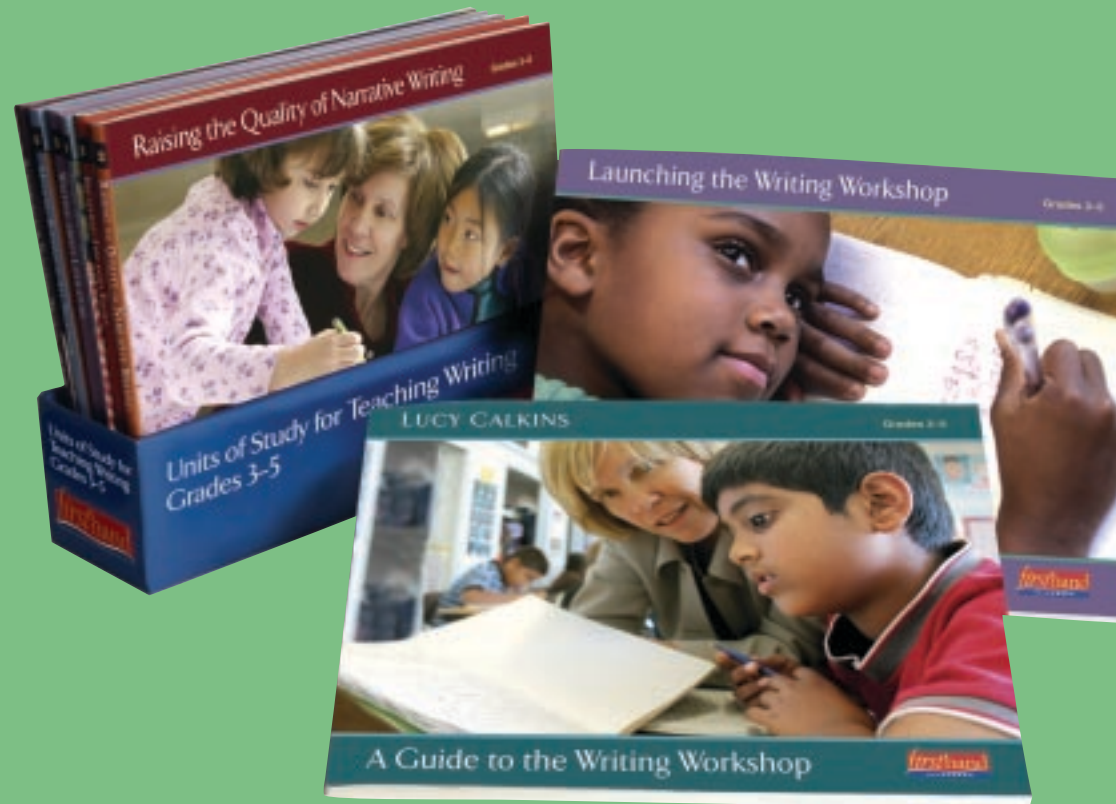


# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5



**LUCY CALKINS & COLLEAGUES**  
FROM THE TEACHERS COLLEGE READING AND WRITING PROJECT

## Authors

- **Lucy Calkins**

- Professor of Children’s Literature at Columbia University’s Teachers College
- Founding Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project
- Author of many books, including two foundational texts,  
*The Art of Teaching Writing* and *The Art of Teaching Reading*

- **Colleagues from the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project**

- Teachers, researchers, and professional development providers of state of the art teaching methods

## Philosophy / Sensibility

- **Workshop approach**
- **Student lives and abilities are starting points**
- **Consistent, coherent framework**

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

- **Student lives and abilities are starting points**

“The easiest way to help children love writing is to invite them to write about subjects they care about. When children have the opportunity and responsibility to choose their own subjects, they are not only much more apt to be invested in their writing, they are also much more apt to be knowledgeable about their topics. In addition, they can learn what it means to rediscover subjects through the process of writing about them.”

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

- **Consistent, coherent framework**

“If the writing workshop is always changing, always haphazard, children remain pawns waiting for their teacher’s agenda. For this reason and others, I think it is so important for each day’s workshop to have a clear, simple structure. Children should know what to expect. This allows them to carry on; it frees the teacher from choreographing activities and allows time for listening. How we structure the workshop is less important than that we structure it.”

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Units of Study

- **6 units**
- **Sequentially organized**
- **12–15 sessions per unit**
- **4–6 weeks of instruction**
- **teach narrative and expository writing with increasing sophistication**

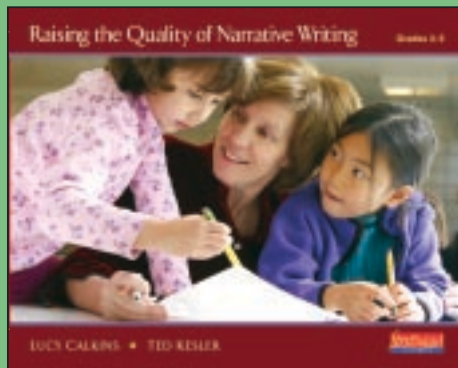


## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Units of Study



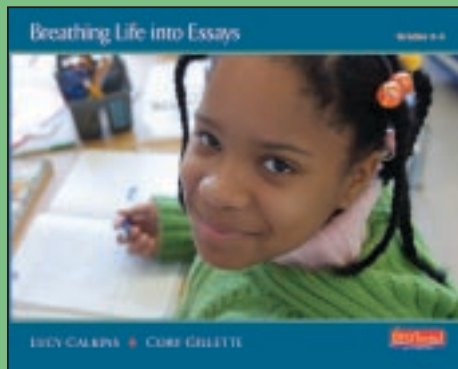
**Launching the Writing Workshop** initiates students into the structures and rituals of the writing workshop while it reviews and teaches the essentials of writing—collecting, drafting, revising, editing, and publishing.



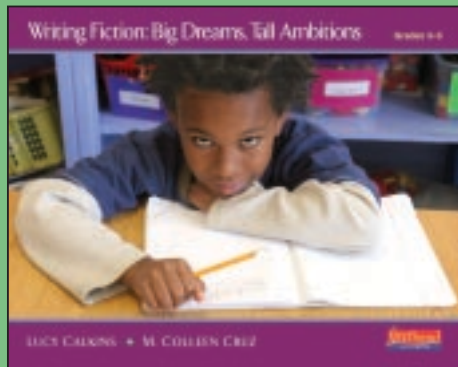
**Raising the Quality of Narrative Writing** helps students write more significant, graceful personal narratives. Students learn how to focus their writing and how to turn timelines into cohesive, engaging story mountains.

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Units of Study



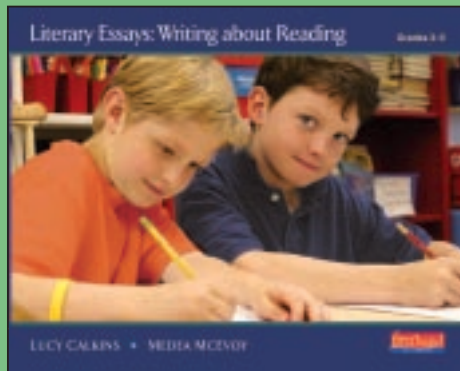
**Breathing Life into Essays** focuses on expository writing as students learn how to collect seed ideas, develop a thesis statement, organize their thinking into subordinate ideas, and use a range of evidence to support their argument.



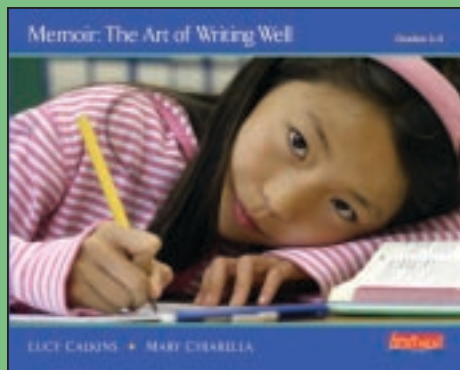
**Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions** encourages students to live like fiction writer: to collect story ideas by observing their own lives; to create characters with wants and struggles; and to use story arcs to create rising action.

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Units of Study



**Literary Essays: Writing About Reading** models how literary essayists observe a text closely; craft a thesis statement that reflects their personal view of a story; and collect evidence from the text to support their argument.



**Memoir: The Art of Writing Well** invites children to search for Life Topics, the recurring themes found in their writing, and then consider ways to write in greater depth and to create meaning from tiny details.

## Session Structure

- **Introduction**
- **Minilesson**
- **Writing and Conferring**
- **Mid-Workshop Teaching Point**
- **Share**
- **Homework**
- **Tailoring Your Teaching**
- **End-of-Session Feature**
  - **Mechanics**
  - **Collaborating with Colleagues**
  - **Assessment**
- **Assessment Rubric**

# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## Introduction

- shares thinking behind each session
- explains sessions place in larger curriculum
- lists needed materials

### SESSION XV



IN THIS SESSION, YOU WILL TEACH CHILDREN THAT WRITERS REVISE BY ASKING, “WHAT’S THE MOST IMPORTANT PART OF THIS STORY?” AND DEVELOPING THAT SECTION.

#### GETTING READY

- Instructions on chalkboard telling children to bring their writer’s notebooks to the meeting area
- Sample draft of a child’s piece of writing that needs revision, written on chart paper
- Guest speaker—the child whose piece needs to be revised (prepare the child ahead of time so the child knows what to expect)
- Child’s version of the class story you used in the timeline session, written on chart paper
- *Shortcut* (Donald Greene)
- Scissors and tape
- Chart paper and markers
- See CD-ROM for resources

## DEVELOPING THE HEART OF A STORY REVISION

*The day the very first copies of my book *The Art of Teaching Reading* arrived, a few teachers were beside me watching while I, with trembling hands, opened the box and brought out one copy of the book. My hand ran over the glossy cover with delight. I clasped the book against me, loving its heft. “I can’t imagine you wrote all those words!” one of the teachers said. I remember thinking, “If she only knew.” The words that I held with such pride were just the tip of the iceberg. In making that one book, I had written hundreds of thousands of words that no one would ever see. When people build houses, they fill a truck-sized trailer with the rejected materials. When I write, I need one of those trailers parked next to my desk.*

*In life, I go through my days knowing that the work I do will go into the world, good or bad, as it is. In life, I can’t take back my words. As I move through my days, if I am clumsy or hurtful or obscure, I can’t rewind and make myself into a more agile or lucid or savvy person. I can’t call back a speech I have given, a workshop I have led, a meeting I have facilitated, a conversation I have participated in. But I can call back my writing, and I can take whatever I’ve done and make it much, much better. Revising my writing (and in doing so, revising myself) is a great and powerful opportunity. Revision is my favorite part of the writing process. It is pure pleasure to be able to stand back, scan what I’ve written, and think, “How can I make my best work better?”*

*Children, however, often come into our classrooms dreading revision. We cannot tarry a moment, then, before inviting children to see revision in a whole new light. In this session you let children know that revision begins with selection. Writers reread and say, “This is my best work.” We revise because the work merits the compliment of revision. And then revision itself is all about giving a piece of writing the respect, the*



# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## Minilesson

- 10–15 minute lesson
- rally students to apply strategy
- 4-step plan—connect, teach, apply, link



### MINILESSON

Developing the Heart of a Story

#### CONNECTION

**Remind writers of the work they've been doing; rally their energies toward revision.**

"Writers, you have been using timelines to develop your ideas, you have been paragraphing and elaborating on each paragraph, you've been experiencing the writing process that writers go through with every piece. Now many of you are about to finish drafting your second story. When writers have a collection of drafts, writers often look over the drafts of several stories (you have two) and select the best piece to really delve into and revise.

I talked to a few of you earlier today about revision and I learned something surprising. I learned some of you don't like to revise! Some of you actually think of revision as something you have to do when you aren't writing well enough! So today I want to set you straight. When your writing is lousy, you throw it out. When your writing is alive and beautiful and full of potential, you revise it. Revision is a compliment to good writing!"

**Name the teaching point. In this case, tell writers that revision is not about fixing errors; it is about finding and developing potentially great writing, sometimes by adding more to the heart of the story.**

"More specifically, I want to teach you today that revision is about finding and developing the potential in your piece. This means, first of all, that when we revise, we return to drafts that seem promising to us. So today you'll reread both the stories you've written and decide which one has special promise; that will be the piece you revise and publish."

"And then, once it is time to settle into serious revision, you again need to reread, asking, 'Which section of this do I think works especially well?' That is, after looking for the piece that is good enough to revise, you look for the *section* that is the heart of it!"

"Usually in any story, there will be a part where the readers should pull in to listen—the part that really matters, the heart of a story. And one important thing you can do when



#### COACHING

*Stories often begin by setting a character into a setting and in a sense, this minilesson (like so many others) establishes the setting, the content, for today's teaching. If your students seem to have no resistance around revision, you will not want to begin the minilesson this way. If they have no reason to have reservations about revision, why offer them any? On the other hand, if you know there is resistance to revision in the air, acknowledging it may be the best way to begin.*

*In the K-2 Units of Study, the fourth unit is Revision and the unit starts with me asking children if they are very proud of the piece they just published. After children respond with the resounding 'yes,' I tell them, "Because when writers really like a piece of writing, we revise it." In that unit, children not only revise their recently published piece, they also go back and scour their folders for other pieces "that are good enough to be revisited."*

# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## Writing and Conferring

- tips and ideas for small-group conferences
- model and personalize writing strategies



### WRITING AND CONFERRING

Getting Children Off to a Strong Start

In today's minilesson you sang praises to revision, but the real sales job will need to occur now, during the work session. Today your children will reread their two stories and choose the one they like best. Once they've made a choice, affirm their decision. "I can tell this story is really important to you, isn't it?" you can ask. You may not be able to discern this from what's on the page, but clearly the writer has weighed in on this story. Then help each writer decide what he or she wants to do to revise. Many children will decide to locate the heart of their story, and to use all they know about writing strong narratives to stretch out this section. When you talk with children, you can make this revision much more powerful if your conferring is informed by two principles.

The first is this. If the writer can determine what it is she really wants to say in a piece, then this decision needs to steer her efforts to elaborate. This means that it helps if you ask, "Why do you think this is the story you decided to write? What do you really want to say to the world through this story?" You can help a writer realize that her story about bees descending on a class picnic is really a story about a week when everything seemed to be a disappointment. Alternatively, the same sequence of events could really be a story about how three best friends make even a class picnic into an adventure. In a conference, you can show a child that the same story can be told in different ways. Once a writer has decided what he or she really wants to say, this decision can inform the writer's choice of where and how to elaborate.

A second principle is this: everything you know about effective stories can inform your conferring. For example,

**MID-WORKSHOP** *Inserting Paper to Help Revision* "Writers, can I have your eyes  
**TEACHING POINT** and your attention? As I watch you work today, cutting your draft apart and adding more space into it, I am reminded that writing is more like playing in clay than inscribing in marble. You are all realizing that drafts can be cut and spliced. Ellie did something smart. She realized that she didn't like her lead sentence, so she wrote a new lead and taped it on top of the old one! And Isaiah realized that he needed to expand not just one section of his draft (the heart of it) but also another section where things weren't that clear. So he sliced open his draft in two different places, inserting some extra paper into both spaces."

"I want to remind you of another system for making drafts malleable. Remember how Michela put little numbers into her draft and then, on another sheet of paper, wrote what she wanted to add next to that number? You can do something similar, if you want."

"Okay, writers, you can return to your work now."

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

### Mid-Workshop Teaching Point

- mini-minilessons halfway through writing time
- extends what students are working on –or–
- corrects the course of student work

hat it is she really wants to say in a piece, then this decision

ns that it

ory you

y to the

realize

picnic is

ned to be

ce of

est friends

story can

led what

form the

w about

example,

ems at a

always point out that he is writing a story, and like the

needs to have a setting. Similarly, the child might consider

em real?

azing, and children feel this when you read what they've

**MID - WORKSHOP** *Inserting Paper to Help Revision* “Writers, can I have your eyes  
**TEACHING POINT** and your attention? As I watch you work today, cutting your draft  
apart and adding more space into it, I am reminded that writing is more like playing in  
clay than inscribing in marble. You are all realizing that drafts can be cut and spliced.  
Ellie did something smart. She realized that she didn't like her lead sentence, so she  
wrote a new lead and taped it on top of the old one! And Isaiah realized that he needed  
to expand not just one section of his draft (the heart of it) but also another section  
where things weren't that clear. So he sliced open his draft in two different places,  
inserting some extra paper into both spaces.”

“I want to remind you of another system for making drafts malleable. Remember  
how Michela put little numbers into her draft and then, on another sheet of paper,  
wrote what she wanted to add next to that number? You can do something similar, if  
you want.”

“Okay, writers, you can return to your work now.”

# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## Share

- students regroup for closing point
- celebrates exemplary student work
- fosters conversations with writing partners



### SHARE

Expand Key Sections By Bringing Out the Internal Story

**Highlight a child who took the minilesson to heart. Tell the story of that child's work in a way others can learn from.**

"Writers, today many of you tried to find and develop the heart of your story. Let me show you how Michela stretched out the important part of her story. First she wrote her story step by step. Listen to this first version." [Fig. XV-2]

First Version

It was the night before Halloween, my Mom comes in the door. "Mommy, Mommy, Mommy," I shout. I run to her giving her a hug and a kiss. Then I notice she's carrying a little tiny brown box. "Pitter pat, pitter pat." Something's moving around inside of that box! I squeeze her arm. "What is it Mommy, what is it?" My mom slowly opens the box as if she was afraid something would pop out. I peer into the box. An animal with black beady little eyes, a small orange beak and a pair of wings looks up at me with its head cocked to one side. "It's a bird!" I shout. "A bird?" my sister Alex comes running. She peers into the box. "He's sooo cute," says Alex. "What should we name him?" I ask. "I've got the perfect name, we'll name him Twinkle." Twinkle whistles. "Then Twinkle it is!" says Alex. Then we hurry off to bed and go to sleep dreaming of our new pet.

"Then Michela realized she'd rushed past an important part—the suspense of opening the box. So she rewrote that section of the story, using number one as a code to show where she'd add the new section. What I want you to notice is that Michela stretched out the important section of her story by telling not only what she and her mother did, but also





Fig. XV-2 Michela

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

### Homework

- **miniature minilesson & sometimes exemplar work**
- **suggests ways students can extend the concept at home**
- **also provided in a modifiable format on CD-ROM**

 **HOMework** *Telling Essays* Earlier this year, I told you that fiction writer Robert Munsch says he tells a story a hundred times before he ever writes a draft. Today I want to teach you that essayists seize every opportunity they can to teach people about their subjects. So tonight, find two different people and teach each one of them, just as some of you just taught your classmates today. Become accustomed to talking about your information as if you were teaching a class, because writing essays has a lot in common with teaching. Then tomorrow we'll all draft our essays. Come to school tomorrow ready to write with authority, clarity, and precise information!

 **TAILORING YOUR TEACHING**  
**If your students seem overwhelmed with the task of organizing the writing in their folders into a rough draft . . .** you'll want to offer a couple of solutions, depending on the origins of the problem. For some students, the volume of material they've collected could be at the root of the problem. Perhaps they've gone through the folder a few times already to make sure the entries match the idea of the topic sentence, but they may still be left with lots of material to work with. For these students, you'll want to support them as they cull through the entries yet again, this time selecting a few things that 'best' support the topic

### Tailoring Your Teaching

- **reinforce session's concept or strategy**
- **helps adapt minilessons to differentiate instruction**
- **deepen understanding 2nd or 3rd year of instruction**



#### TAILORING YOUR TEACHING

If your students seem overwhelmed with the task of organizing the writing in their folders into a rough draft . . . you'll want to offer a couple of solutions, depending on the origins of the problem. For some students, the volume of material they've collected could be at the root of the problem. Perhaps they've gone through the folder a few times already to make sure the entries match the idea of the topic sentence, but they may still be left with lots of material to work with. For these students, you'll want to support them as they cull through the entries yet again, this time selecting a few things that 'best' support the topic sentence. You'll want to teach them that they need to pick what they consider to be the very best evidence they have that supports their claim. You can also suggest that sometimes our favorite entry may not be the best evidence, so we need to reexamine our entries with essayists' eyes and minds.

# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## End-of-Session Feature: Mechanics

- deepen understanding of writing conventions
- teaches spelling, punctuation, syntax, and vocabulary
- strategies for writing workshop and word study time



### MECHANICS

At this early stage in the school year, we need to determine our priorities regarding the conventions of written language that we will teach our children. High on my list would be conveying that conventions matter enough that children should take the extra ten seconds to stick a period at the end of what they believe to be a sentence, and should recall, for just a second, that *said* and *say* are the same words, really, and that the spelling of *say* is a good reminder that *said* contains the vowel *a*.

But while I'm playing Tough Guy Enforcer with bottom-line mechanics and spelling expectations, I also want to demonstrate that as a writer, I'm ravenously hungry to learn interesting and wonderful ways in which other writers use the conventions of written language. I want to model that sometimes I read a sentence that an author has written, and I just gape over the sounds of it, and the punctuation that created those sounds.

Crews' story *Shortcut*, which opens with some inventive and effective punctuation is a perfect place to begin. Ellipses aren't threatening to anyone. Children haven't usually been subjected to years of drills on ellipses, or seen their papers scrawled with red because they've gotten ellipses wrong. So marvel at the ellipses at the start of Crews' story:

We looked . . .  
We listened . . .  
We decided to take  
the shortcut home.

Invite kids to join you in speculating over why Crews decided to use ellipses. How would the story have been different had he written it like this:

this instance, the ellipses represent time going by, and they convey that the children stood still on the train tracks, looking and listening, for a long time. They deliberated. Had the text not had those ellipses, I think I'd imagine the children took a quick, fleeting look up and down the tracks and, after seeing and hearing nothing, made their decision.

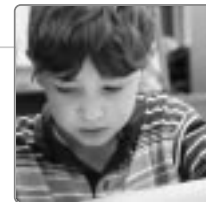
Then, too, I love thinking about why some of Crews' paragraphs are longer and some are incredibly short. While the children did lots of things, simultaneously, as they walked down the tracks, Crews' writing looks like this:

We laughed. We shouted. We sang.  
We tussled. We threw stones.

When the sound of the approaching train makes time freeze and hearts stop, Crews' paragraphs (and pages) are incredibly abrupt:

"I HEAR A TRAIN!"  
Everybody stopped.  
Everybody listened.

If you invite children to speculate with you why Crews varied his paragraph length or used ellipses, children will have their own theories. That's great. There is nothing magical about my theory. But I suspect there will be something magical about asking children to study the ways in which an author has used punctuation and paragraphs artfully. Your real goal is to change children's concepts of themselves and of the conventions of written language so that they are thinking, "I'm the kind of person who needs to understand how writers use punctuation to create effects in their stories." My hope is that this change in perception can matter more than



## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# End-of-Session Feature: Collaborating with Colleagues

- strategies for teacher study groups
- helps teachers develop as writing teachers & writers



### COLLABORATING WITH COLLEAGUES

I know that during the first unit, I encouraged you to spend time writing together with your colleagues. If you resisted taking that plunge then, you have a new chance to do so now. My hope is that all of the talking you've been doing with your children about writing will lure you toward the idea of your own writing. I promise you, you won't regret it if you and your colleagues devote a grade-level meeting or two to your own writing workshop. My mother recently had seven hours of back surgery, and I returned to the old family manse to help her in the week after her surgery. I won't forget that first moment, after we'd carefully maneuvered things to get her into the kitchen, walker and all. She shifted onto the edge of the kitchen chair, pulled herself up by leaning on her walker, and said, "So now I'll try going to the bathroom," and she started shuffling off toward the john. As I watched my tough, all-powerful mother inch from the kitchen toward the bathroom, I thought, "Is she going to need my help?" And I thought also about how I'm not ready for a change of roles, and how odd it felt to have this woman who is the strongest force in my whole life in a vulnerable position.

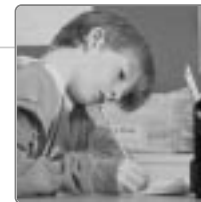
Later, at my desk, I began to write the story of just that one small moment. All the techniques that we talk about become so dear and so huge when we use them to bring our moms to life on our pages, and to wrestle with what it means for us to grow old, to need each other, to face those huge life issues.

If you and your colleagues are reluctant to actually write entries alongside each other, at least use the strategies I've suggested to generate ideas you *could* write, and storytell one or two of these to a partner. That, alone, will give you a feel for this work's vibrancy and significance when our own life stories are at stake.

If you storytell together, I know that after leaving your meeting, in the privacy of your own home or your classroom, many of you will write.

So write. Write alone, without your colleagues, or write with each other. And write about your mother, your son. Write about your last times, your first times, and about the turning points that have given shape to your life. Your teaching will be utterly and totally different if you take the plunge and try all that you are asking your children to do. As you write, don't aim to write *well* so much as to write *true*. Don't aim for colorful or fancy words. Aim to put the truth of your story on the page, using the words that come first and most easily to you. You'll find that without trying to write well, you'll end up doing just that.

If you share your writing with your children, something magical will happen between you and them. I promise. Don't wait—that magic will mean more than any minilesson!



# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## End-of-Session Feature: Assessment

- highlights developmental markers
- strategies for monitoring student work
- tips for guiding instruction



### ASSESSMENT

One beautiful spring day a few years ago, I brought my sons to visit Harvard Square in Cambridge, Massachusetts. The day glistened in sunshine, and so I bought a Frisbee and we played catch in the quad outside Harvard's library. Then I got the bright idea to rent roller skates and skate along the Charles River. I think I imagined that my sons and I would weave our way among the walkers, skating in those long, effortless gliding strokes that I'd seen others make. From the moment I strapped on the skates, it was clear to me I was in for trouble. I stood, and whomp! I was sprawled on my backside. I gingerly got to my feet and my skates took off with me riding shakily above them. We—the skates and I—rattled down the sidewalk. (I'd completely forgotten my sons, who were engrossed in their own life-and-death travails.) A cross street approached: how to stop? I careened into the people who were waiting on the curb, knocking a few of them down. Soon I was mopping blood off my knees and elbows, reexperiencing the road burns I hadn't felt since my childhood.

Whenever any of us try something new, we mess up. Until we get the hang of the new enterprise, we flail about. This is absolutely true for roller skating, but it is also true for essay writing.

When children begin to draft essays, their drafts will be full of mechanical problems. As teachers, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by all the errors we see in our children's drafts. It's important to understand that once they get the hang of this new enterprise, many of those errors will go away.

Jumping on every error will not instill confidence; however, there are a few mechanical errors you're sure to spot that do deserve speedy intervention. As I've mentioned before, you may find many drafts are mired in pronouns with unclear antecedents—as in this example from Becca.

*My sister is spoiled by my mother because she is a*

adopted—the sister or the mother. That is, in the first sentence there is no clear antecedent for the pronoun *she*.

I recommend teaching writers to control pronouns by asking either the whole class or the children who need help with this to work together on some shared reading of a published text. I'd ask them to insert parenthetical antecedents for each of the pronouns. For example, the class could read aloud *Gorilla* by Anthony Browne, and the lead of the book would sound like this:

Hannah loved gorillas. She (Hannah) read books about gorillas, she (Hannah) watched gorillas on television, and she (Hannah) drew pictures of gorillas. But she (Hannah) had never seen a real one (gorilla).

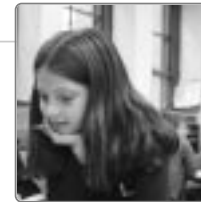
Her (Hannah's) father didn't have time to take her (Hannah) to see one at the zoo. He (Hannah's father) didn't have time for anything.

Then children could try to read each other's drafts in a similar fashion. If one reader found that a pronoun reference wasn't clear, the writer could either substitute a name for the pronoun or add a more specific reference.

Language will be less redundant if the writer introduces a person using more than one identifying term. For example, Becca revised her draft like this:

*My sister, Star, is spoiled by my mother because Star is going through the process of being adopted. My sister was close to her old foster mother, Mrs. Luke, and Mrs. Luke was very nice.*

But despite your work with pronouns, you'll probably see that children's essays are either repetitive or they sprawl all over the place. If you have a chance to show children how to eliminate redundancy in an essay, by all means point this out. But you probably won't get to all children, and it really



# Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

## Assessment Rubric

- unit-level assessment
- presents clearly specified goals
- assess student progress and your teaching

ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR *Writing Fiction: Big Dreams, Tall Ambitions*

NAME \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

		1	2	3	4	5
<i>Content</i>	The child has a repertoire of strategies for generating ideas for realistic fiction. He rereads his notebook and lives his life looking for story ideas. He easily collects ideas in his notebook about topics he's interested in and characters he cares for. He understands short fiction—the story he plans has just a few scenes and characters.					
<i>Planning</i>	The child plans by living like a writer, by re-developing entries into a short story ideas, and by writing about her central character's internal and external characteristics, traits, motivations, and struggles. She uses a story mountain to plot her story.					
<i>Stance</i>	The child tries to live inside his story, in his character's skin, writing the story down as it happens. The writer believes he can create a suspenseful, interesting story, and when he learns tools for developing any of the elements of his story, he tries them with enthusiasm.					
<i>Independence</i>	The child draws on all that she has learned from two previous units of study on narrative writing as she plans, writes, and revises. She gives herself assignments, choosing strategies appropriate to the work she needs to do. She progresses through the writing process without needing to stay in sync with others in the class.					
<i>Qualities of Good Writing</i>	The child takes great care in developing the characters for his story. He writes entries to explore each of his characters' self-image, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, struggles and actions. The scenes he writes represent turning points for the main character. He creates a setting to ground the action and characters. He writes leads appropriate for what's to come and endings well-connected to the rest of the story.					
<i>Genre</i>	The child understands that short fiction is often comprised of several scenes glued together with exposition. He knows that a story generally involves a character who has specific traits and wants who ends up struggling more and more until finally there is some resolution. The child understands that writing fiction involves showing, not summarizing, the unfolding plot from a consistent point of view.					
<i>Productivity</i>	The child works efficiently, producing at least a couple pages of writing each day. She has stamina for writing in longer passages of thought. She writes in her notebook at home each day. By the end of the unit, the student has written a short story of several pages with well-developed characters and a realistic plot. She will have produced many multiples of that number of pages in order to write that story.					
<i>Mechanics</i>	The child understands that anything he's learned about the mechanics of writing need be applied early in the writing process. The spelling and punctuation in the student's writing notebook is now more accurate than earlier in the year. The child uses paragraphs automatically and uses commas in a variety of ways. He uses dialogue more frequently, punctuating it conventionally. The child works to write with varied sentence structure to bring out tension and tone in the story. He edits for accuracy as he writes rather than waiting until the end of the process. He edits with various lenses—for spelling, for craft, and for sense.					
<i>Writing Process</i>	The child understands and moves through the writing process to write her short story. She collects entries that are not small stories (as she did when writing personal narratives) but are, instead, plans and notes for the story. For example, the writer will gather details about the character, ruminate over the setting, and try out various leads. She begins revising early in the process and, with support, revises more substantially than in previous pieces.					
<i>Language</i>	The child will write with end punctuation and paragraphs from the start. He will work on using consistent tenses, specifying pronoun references, and					

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Instructional Design / Features

- **boldface guidelines frame instructional steps**
- **running texts model teaching language**
- **Lucy's coaching commentary**



### MINILESSON

Developing the Heart of a Story

#### CONNECTION

**Remind writers of the work they've been doing; rally their energies toward revision.**

"Writers, you have been using timelines to develop your ideas, you have been paragraphing and elaborating on each paragraph, you've been experiencing the writing process that writers go through with every piece. Now many of you are about to finish drafting your second story. When writers have a collection of drafts, writers often look over the drafts of several stories (you have two) and select the best piece to really delve into and revise.

I talked to a few of you earlier today about revision and I learned something surprising. I learned some of you don't like to revise! Some of you actually think of revision as something you have to do when you aren't writing well enough! So today I want to set you straight. When your writing is lousy, you throw it out. When your writing is alive and beautiful and full of potential, you revise it. Revision is a compliment to good writing!"

**Name the teaching point. In this case, tell writers that revision is not about fixing errors; it is about finding and developing potentially great writing, sometimes by adding more to the heart of the story.**

"More specifically, I want to teach you today that revision is about finding and developing the potential in your piece. This means, first of all, that when we revise, we return to drafts that seem promising to us. So today you'll reread both the stories you've written and decide which one has special promise; that will be the piece you revise and publish."

"And then, once it is time to settle into serious revision, you again need to reread, asking, 'Which section of this do I think works especially well?' That is, after looking for the piece that is good enough to revise, you look for the *section* that is the heart of it!"

"Usually in any story, there will be a part where the readers should pull in to listen—the part that really matters, the heart of a story. And one important thing we can do when



#### COACHING

*Stories often begin by setting a character into a setting and in a sense, this minilesson (like so many others) establishes the setting, the content, for today's teaching. If your students seem to have no resistance around revision, you will not want to begin the minilesson this way. If they have no reason to have reservations about revision, why offer them any? On the other hand, if you know there is resistance to revision in the air, acknowledging it may be the best way to begin.*

*In the K-2 Units of Study, the fourth unit is Revision and the unit starts with me asking children if they are very proud of the piece they just published. After children respond with the resounding 'yes.' I tell them, "Because when writers really like a piece of writing, we revise it." In that unit, children not only revise their recently published piece, they also go back and scour their folders for other pieces "that are good enough to be revisited."*

## Instructional Design / Features

### Student writing samples

- highlight how students revise their work
- in-text transcripts fluidly integrate into the narrative

Al, had died. I told him that what I usually do after I've finished a draft is reread it, thinking, 'What's the most important part of this story? What's the heart of this story?' So Gregory reread his draft. I copied it onto chart paper so you can see it." [Fig. XV-1]

#### Al is Dead

Dead. Ever since I had fish, I had Al: the best algae-eater in the world. Once I heard he was dead, I did not cry. I just was still. Then I asked, "Where is he?" My Dad said, "In the trash." I asked to see him. I saw it was true. My Dad put him back. For a second, I thought, then I said, "We can give him a funeral." My Dad looked doubtful for a minute but I picked him up and said, "He was special." Then I cried. Al was gone.

"Gregory reread his story, looking for what he thought was the heart of the story; then he motioned to a line in the middle of the draft: 'I asked to see him. I saw it was true.' Gregory said, 'That's the most important part. That was the saddest part!'"

"Gregory," I said. "After I find the most important section in a story, I cut my page apart like this." At this point I started cutting the chart-paper version of his story into two at the place he'd identified. "Then I tape a lot more paper into that important section of the draft." I taped a half page of chart paper into his story. "Then I reread up to those blank lines, and try to make a movie in my mind of exactly what happened. And I write the story of that moment, trying to tell it with more details." To get Gregory started, I read his draft aloud to him, stopping at the section he'd identified.

Then I imagined aloud what Gregory might say for just another sentence or two, trying to give him an idea for what I meant by stretching out the important part. "I walked over to the trash can and looked in. I saw ..." Then I said, "Take it, Gregory."

"... lots of trash ..."

"Be exact. What exactly did you see? If you can't remember, make it up," I said, and repeated what I'd already said to give him a new jump start.

telling the class what he did to make his writing better. Knowing this list of options should enable you to invent minilessons more easily, and to realize that you could teach the same content about writing in any one of many different ways. In this Teaching component, I retell the story of one child's process of revision.

Notice that I copied this story onto chart paper for the purposes of this minilesson.

This draft is a great favorite of mine. Read it aloud well. Your children should get goose bumps!

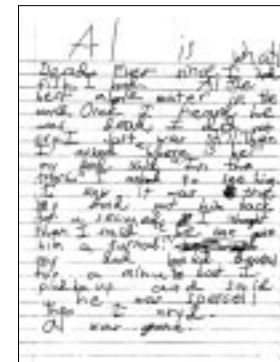


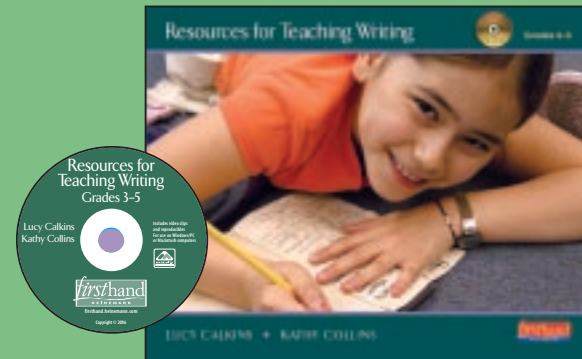
Fig. XV-1 Gregory

## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Professional Development Support

### Built-In Resources

- **Guide provides overview, writing workshop guidelines**
- **Resources CD-ROM provides yearlong print and video support**

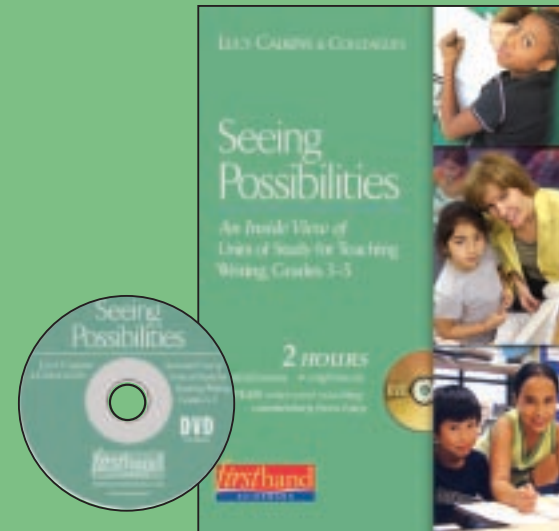


## Units of Study for Teaching Writing, Grades 3–5

# Professional Development Support

### à la carte options

- **DVDs show live-from-the-classroom teaching**
- **seminars and workshops by Heinemann PD**
- **Teachers College affiliation**



for more information visit  
[www.unitsofstudy.com](http://www.unitsofstudy.com)