Second Grade Writers

Units of Study to Help Children Focus on Audience and Purpose

HEINEMANN
Portsmouth, NH
For Christina, Stuart, Stapleton, and the Peanut
## Contents

Acknowledgments .................................................................................................................. ix

Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 1
Chapter One: Becoming a Community of Writers .............................................................. 11
Chapter Two: Writing for Change ....................................................................................... 46
Chapter Three: Writing a Book Review ........................................................................... 73
Chapter Four: Exploring Humor ....................................................................................... 102
Chapter Five: Writing About Research ............................................................................ 127
Closing ................................................................................................................................. 160

Appendix ............................................................................................................................... 161
I am most grateful to the teachers and writers in whose company I have been lucky enough to spend time, absorbing and learning.

I will always be thankful for my time at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Working for Lucy Calkins was an extraordinary gift, whose benefits will always be with me. My colleagues at the project made up one of the most rigorous and inspiring learning communities I have known. More than that, they are true friends.

I thank Pam Allyn and Patricia Vitale-Reilly of LitLife for valuable feedback on my first book. It made writing this one much more comfortable.

From Tom Romano, Katie Ray, and Katherine Bomer I learned so much about writing purposefully, writing to learn, writing to discover, and then writing about all that writing. I so admire their clarity on the topic of writing, infused with a deep respect and understanding of children.

Virginia Lockwood Zisa taught me more about the gifts of building a strong community than I could ever say.

Elizabeth Schmidt, Emily Jenkins, and Aoibheann Sweeney gave me valuable advice about book reviews. Janet Angelillo helped me think more deeply about writing about reading.

I want to thank everyone at Heinemann for all they did to help me write my book, make it look good, and market it well. Alan Huisman combed through this book, fixing, tweaking, rewording, and rearranging so that my ideas could be as clear and elegant as possible. He even made one of my jokes funnier. Kate Montgomery, my friend and editor (frienditor?), gracefully changed roles as the book progressed. First she helped shape my proposal, then
she coached me to set benchmarks. She encouraged me to keep up my pace. Most importantly, she stood at the finish line, cheering me to the end, lest I pass out before reaching it.

Special thanks are due to P.S. 8 in Brooklyn Heights. Principal Seth Phillips gave me a place in his school and trusted me to explore these units of study. Noelle Gentile, Jonathan Garbar, Melissa Browning, Julie Ross, Kristen Jennings, and Jeremy Manger graciously opened their classrooms to me, working tirelessly with their students to troubleshoot and fine-tune these units. Precious Jones-Walker and all of the parents were a great support to this work. Of course, the true stars are the children whose work you will see in these pages. My affection for them has grown exponentially as I have watched them jump into every unit, some more enthusiastically than others, of course, but always with conviction.
Introduction

My early experiences with writing, particularly in school, were a mixture of happiness and frustration, purpose and boredom, self-worth and discouragement. When I look at the common denominator of the good times, it comes down to purpose. I was never one to enjoy a task or assignment without knowing why I was doing it. A few years ago, while helping my mother move, I found a big box in her garage that contained all my old school photographs and report cards. As a teacher, I am very good at reading report card comments and knowing exactly what they mean. Was it a coincidence that the teachers who complained of my “inability to work to potential” were the same ones whose assignments seemed to have no purpose? And that the ones who raved about me are the ones I so fondly remember giving me work I could sink my teeth into? I don’t think so. In a way I wrote this book for the younger me and for those teachers who gave purposeless assignments and whom I must have frustrated to no end. Work has to be done in second grade, certainly. But we can invite all children to participate in it joyfully and purposefully.

The five units in this book develop children’s abilities to identify and connect with a purpose for writing comprehensible, complete pieces. The first unit, on setting up a strong community, supports the work in the remaining units—writing for change, writing a book review, exploring humor, and writing about research. Each unit requires students to consider their audience and write to achieve a specific purpose with that audience. Naturally, a writing workshop includes other units that develop other writing skills. Many of these units are contained in the Units of Study in the Primary Writing Workshop series, by
Lucy Calkins and the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Figure 1 is a calendar showing one possible way that all these units can work together.

The units in this book deal with the writing skills I most want to share with you, but they are not the only choices! You may want to create a unit of study of your own based on your needs and those of your students. If you do, I highly recommend Katie Wood Ray’s amazing book *Study Driven* (2006). With great clarity, Katie will inspire you to lead your children to exciting places in their writing.

In choosing which units of study to teach, we must consider balance, standards, our favorite literature, and the life of our classroom. A curriculum needs balance. Some units will be genre based (poetry, for example), while others will focus on a skill (perhaps revision). We may also want to vary the pace, following long units with short ones and vice versa. Of course our curriculum must also address the requirements set forth by our school, district, or state. Then, too, we should all be allowed to teach what we love, if for no other reason than to model for children how loving something makes it more fun to learn about. Finally, the life of the classroom should be a factor in some curriculum decisions.

Of necessity, much of our year is mapped out before we really know our students, but flexibility is essential. Here’s a case in point. A friend of mine was going to help me do research for this book by teaching the humor unit to her class. A week before she was going to begin, one of her students lost a parent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH</th>
<th>UNIT OF STUDY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>Becoming a Community of Writers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>Personal Narrative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>Writing for Readers or Revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>Writing for Change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>Nonfiction: Topics of Personal Interest or Experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>Exploring Humor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>Author Study or Personal Narrative Again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>Poetry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>Writing About Research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>Realistic Fiction</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 1–1* Possible Calendar for Writing Workshop
Humor at this time would have been totally inappropriate. She chose instead
to create a unit on writing to heal and come together. It was a worthwhile unit
and one the class could fully embrace. It will probably never be part of any
standard curriculum, but it belonged completely in my friend’s class.

How the Units Are Set Up

Every unit of study in this book is presented in a similar way: a brief overview
followed by a more detailed description of the steps in planning and teaching
it. These steps are discussed below.

Goals/Outcomes

The goals for each unit are divided into four categories: writing quality, writing
conventions, writing habits, and community. These goals take into account not only
children’s ability to write with a conscious purpose but also some other be-
liefs about young writers, namely that our classes must be communities and
our children must become independent if they are going to write authentically
and from the heart. Deciding the goals of any given unit of study can be diffi-
cult. As teachers, we want to teach it all at the same time. It’s hard to wait to
teach something that we wish our kids could do now. That’s why this step is
so important. We can’t teach it all at once! We have to set goals for each unit
that are realistic and that build on the work of prior units so that we are able
to teach it all by the end of the year.

Getting Ready to Teach

Before we begin a new unit of study, we need to prepare physically and men-
tally for the demands posed by the curriculum. We must identify the materials
we will need and think about what lessons will be best for these particular chil-
dren. This preparation requires reflecting on the unit that came before, looking
at how we guided our students toward the goals we set there, and planning how
we will continue to guide them toward the goals of the next unit. Understand-
ing our students’ needs and the kind of literature we are studying will help us
design writing paper for children to use.

Gathering Materials

We then gather and study mentor texts—literature that can serve as models of
good writing in a particular genre or with a particular structure, both for our
students and for us. We may of course refer to other books during the unit,
but we must have these core books to which we can return again and again as we teach skills and qualities of good writing. We should see strong and clear qualities of good writing in the books we choose, as these will become the examples we use to teach children how to develop those same qualities in their own writing. A book makes a great mentor text when we see lots of teaching possibilities in it.

After we gather these books, we must read them all carefully, looking for possible teaching points. Thoroughly understanding what our mentor texts have to offer gives us a greater vision of what our students can do. We need no longer be bogged down with that old standby admonition to “add details.” From a single book we might want to show examples of how a writer chooses words to create mental images, uses punctuation to build tension, or includes dialogue to help the reader feel part of the story. We decide which of these many qualities to teach based on the needs of the current unit of study and the readiness of these particular children to learn them. For example, we needn’t teach children about using dialogue early in the year, when they may be using only a few simple sentences to tell a story, or in a nonfiction unit.

A helpful technique is to keep sticky notes inside each book on which we have written the page numbers of good examples of quality writing that will help us as we do the following:

- **Plan lessons.** Since we have some ideas about what we want to teach based both on the needs of the class and the unit of study, we can look in the books for lesson ideas and possible examples. Knowing the books at our disposal is essential to being able to plan lessons that will meet the children’s needs as closely as possible.

- **Prepare for conferences.** There are going to be as many needs in a primary class as there are children. One student may need to see an example of a certain way to organize ideas, another may need a book from which to do some research, while a third may need to see a variety of ways to break away from a format that has become habitual. Knowing a wide variety of books helps us meet all these needs better and more quickly.

- **Prepare for small-group work.** Often, a conference that benefits one child will also benefit a few others. We can assemble multiple copies of a book, get an enlarged copy of it, or photocopy a given page or passage and then gather a small group of children and use the selected material to teach them the strategy or technique.

We can then use the sticky notes to find clear examples of each writing skill or strategy we teach. We may not use every single example we find, but
if something comes up and we need to change direction a bit, we’ll be prepared.

**Considering the Students**

Next we look at the students’ work not just as an assessment of the unit they are finishing but as an assessment of their needs in the unit to come. Both their published work and the daily writing that accumulates in their folders give us information about what they will need in lessons and conferences to facilitate their progress.

Published work tells us how students shape a piece of writing. We can learn how much ownership they take of their writing and how they use writing and revision strategies:

- Did this child love this piece of writing or did she choose it for publication because it was getting close to our celebration date?
- Is her voice apparent in this writing? Does it seem as though she developed the work according to her own ideas?
- Is there evidence that she made changes—carets, cross-outs, additions? What kinds of changes—single words, whole sentences, entire pages added or removed, spelling changes, wording changes?
- Did her revisions make the piece more focused, clear, and complete or less so?
- Has she corrected spelling and punctuation she has learned since the piece was first written?

It is important to consider the daily writing that builds up in children’s folders as thoughtfully as we consider their published work. This is how we learn about their writing habits, their willingness to take risks, and their comfort with new skills and strategies.

- Does he try new kinds of writing or new topics? Does he have a favorite topic to which he returns often? If so, does he write about it in the same way, or does he try to approach it differently in new pieces of writing?
- Does he make changes to the writing as he goes?
- Does he return to writing? Does he have any ongoing projects, such as a book or a long story?
- Does he seem to have fun? Does he seem to want perfection? Does this help or hurt him?
- Does he use new skills or spelling words I have taught? Can I read the writing better than I could last time I looked?
- Does the use of conventions improve over time?
Preparing Demonstration Materials
Demonstrating makes all the difference. In fact, according to Brian Cambourne (1988), it is a condition of learning. When teaching skills or strategies, we need to keep in mind that we are not modeling but demonstrating. Demonstrating is more deliberate and focused and has certain qualities that make it an effective method for teaching strategies. Following are the important principles of a demonstration:

● **One thing is being demonstrated or highlighted.** A demonstration is most clear when we clearly define the skill or strategy we are teaching. If a strategy has more than a handful of steps or is too elaborate, we need to break it down. It can be difficult, but we must strive to name the strategy or skill being taught in every lesson. We want students to know what they are about to learn, but we also know that putting a strategy into words forces us to be clear and succinct about what that strategy actually is and how it can be done. For example, *being a good partner* cannot be clearly demonstrated. It is vague and means different things to different people on different days. The small steps that children need to take to become good partners, though, can be demonstrated. *Sitting hip-to-hip with the book between you* can be shown clearly and unambiguously in the space of a few minutes.

● **The demonstration is accompanied by a verbal description.** A demonstration without an accompanying description of the action is like magic. We watch the trick and are impressed and amazed but could not possibly repeat it on our own. The purpose of the accompanying description is to demystify the process of reading and writing by sharing our insider’s knowledge. Imagine the magician telling his audience, “There’s a hidden compartment here and that’s where I get the second coin. See?” Some people call this verbal description *thinking aloud*, a phrase that aptly implies a private viewing into the mind of the expert. We are naming and describing a process that has become second nature to us but is still a challenge for our students.

● **The language is clear and consistent.** While thinking aloud, we must remember to use language that children understand. Too many metaphors or digressions will cloud the process rather than make it clear. Where possible, we must use consistent language to describe the strategies we are demonstrating. If we say sometimes, “Sound it out,” and sometimes, “Get your mouth ready,” and sometimes, “Think about the sound that letter makes,” it can be confusing. It is easier to cue children to use a strategy when we describe that strategy with a consistent phrase.
Teaching the Units

Each unit is divided into comparable sections (with an occasional variation). We know that keeping our daily schedule consistent helps children accomplish more. The same holds true for units of study. Consistently encountering the same components, children get better at the skills of studying writing as well as at the skills of writing.

Understanding the Genre/Reading Like Writers

Each study begins with reading the kind of books we are going to be writing. When we know the books well as readers, we will be able to read them the way a writer might, looking at the author’s craft. We look at how writers use words and punctuation and at how they put their books together. Two fantastic resources that offer information on this concept and on studying the craft of writing are Wondrous Words, by Katie Wood Ray (1999), and Authors as Mentors (from Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum), by Lucy Calkins and Amanda Hartman (2003).

Organizing Ideas

As they get older, children start to make drafts part of their writing process. In second grade, most children are not quite ready to rewrite entire pieces into new drafts. They are ready, however, to plan and organize their pieces before they start writing. As a precursor to drafting, we help them make ever more substantial plans, to which they will refer as they write.

Writing

When we write, it is for a purpose and an audience. We want to communicate an idea. It is important that children discover that their voices matter and that it is for their purpose, not ours, that they learn to write well. When children consider their audience, they are motivated to convey their ideas clearly and explicitly and to pay attention to conventions. When they take this initiative, they look inside themselves for the messages they want to send, choosing topics and genres that support their needs. We teach them how to support their needs and their growth rather than how to do better on an assessment. The beauty is that most children who have a vested interest in their writing lives do perform better on standardized assessments.

Revision

We continue each unit by choosing the piece of writing that the children think best represents their growth as writers. They then learn a new strategy for
revising this piece of writing. We often think of revision as making our writing better, but a more helpful and friendly definition is this: revision is the act of making the writing match more closely the ideas and feelings of the writer. In school I always thought I had to revise because my writing was not good enough the first time around. Now I tell children they revise their work because it is good enough. Good writing deserves to be revised. “Bad” writing is also an important part of the process, but it might not merit a lot of extra labor.

Revision is part of the process of all writers, not just adults or older children. Revision can be as simple as adding a smile to a face in a drawing to make the emotion more clear. When we teach children to revise as we teach them to write, it does not become the chore it was for many of us as we were growing up. Each unit introduces a new revision strategy, which becomes part of the children’s repertoire of writing skills.

Editing
Put simply, editing is what children must learn to do to make their writing readable. Editing may mean putting spaces between words, using more letters (or the right letters) to represent the sounds in words, correcting spelling and punctuation, or making sure all of the intended words are written on the paper. As soon as children are writing (or approximating) words, they can learn to edit. Each unit contains an editing lesson, but only you will know which editing strategy is appropriate for your class at any given time. If your class is just starting to write words, it may not be appropriate to expect the children to use periods and capital letters correctly. It may be better to teach them to read their writing while pointing a finger under each word. Whatever lessons you present, it is important to get children looking at their work critically and thoughtfully.

Publishing and Celebrating
Now that their work has been revised and edited, it is ready for some final sprucing up. This could mean giving it a pretty cover, coloring the illustrations nicely, writing a dedication, telling readers about the author, or adding a blurb to the back cover. When we send our work out into the world, we make it more special than the work that stays in the folder. We are ready to celebrate! This is the reward for all our hard work.

Teachers are often overwhelmed by the thought of celebrating each published piece of writing (say, nine or ten a year). But not every celebration has to have balloons and parents and cupcakes. Most, in fact, will be simple and intimate: just the class gathering in a circle and sharing favorite pages from their
writing or offering a compliment to each writer as her writing is posted on the wall or bulletin board. We may make a toast with a cup of juice, congratulating ourselves for the achievement and launching ourselves into the next challenge. Of course, sometimes (maybe twice during the year) we will want to pull out all the stops and invite the children’s families and the school community to share in the joy and pride that comes from a job well done.

We shouldn’t skip celebrations. Even a small celebration is important to the future of our writing communities. A celebration at the end of a unit of study is akin to graduation. We acknowledge and validate the progress we have made and name the new skills we have mastered or at least begun to master. We also prepare mentally for a new unit, unknown territory into which we can venture with the certainty that all our efforts will be rewarded with new learning. Celebrating is a way to help us be aware of our learning, and it helps children follow our lessons more fearlessly than they otherwise might.

Reflection

Sometimes as children are sharing their work and usually at the end of a unit, we need to encourage them to reflect on their learning. We might ask them questions orally or in writing. The major things we want to know are what they say they have learned, what they think they have done well, what was difficult for them, and what they wish they had done better. This tells us whether we are getting our point across and helps us understand how the children perceive our teaching. More important, it encourages the children to find words to describe what they are learning to do as writers. When they can name their intentions, it becomes possible for them to judge for themselves whether or not they are successful. Their decisions are now motivated from within, not by us.

Predictable Problems

No matter how complete our planning, how pure our intentions, how deep our knowledge, how great our experience, or how energetic our approach—no matter what—there will always be problems. Our job is not to teach without trouble, but to recognize and respond to that trouble effectively. Some problems are impossible to predict, but others are easy to imagine. The lists in the chapters are not complete. Your students may present challenges I haven’t mentioned. We inevitably become frustrated from time to time, but we must remember that these obstacles are part of the work, not an impediment to it.
The way we approach difficulty will resound in the hearts and minds of our students for a long time. I try always to remind myself that my job is to help children solve their problems in a way that makes them feel loved and successful.

**Assessment**

Assessment of student writing is critical to effective teaching. Each unit suggests goals to keep in mind as we look at student work. Rather than thinking of our students as high, middle, and low, we can see them as individuals with a balance of strengths and needs. When we use this information to help us plan what we teach to the whole class, to small groups, and to individuals, we are spending our time much more effectively. Carl Anderson’s book *Assessing Writers* (2005) is a great resource on the topic.

I am amazed by the things second graders are able to accomplish. The teachers and children I have worked with, in many schools, in many parts of the country, have achieved impressive results by increasing their focus on purposeful writing as part of their curriculum. The units in this book are the result of years of field testing with the help of generous teachers and children, reflecting on what worked well, and improving what could have worked better. I hope you find them helpful and that I have left room for you to find your own voice within them.

**Professional Resources**


www.stephanieparsons.com (author’s website).
confession: I used to avoid asking second graders to respond to literature in writing. “They’ll do it next year,” I thought, much to the chagrin of my upper-grade colleagues. I have awful memories of having to write summaries and book reports in second grade, which seemed to have no other purpose than to allow Mrs. W. to use her red pen, slashing my breathless run-ons to bloody ribbons. Of course, her real reason for these assignments was to make sure I had read the book. She didn’t know about my talent for writing a great book report without jumping that particular hurdle. I never wanted to subject my own students to this waste of time. Luckily, there are richer, better ways to respond to literature in writing.

The good news is that second grade writers can respond to what they read in thoughtful and meaningful ways. A key factor is an effective reading workshop with an emphasis on comprehension and discussion as well as on decoding and fluency. (For information and inspiration on setting up a great reading workshop, refer to the resources at the end of this chapter.) Read aloud a variety of books, taking time to talk about them. Make sure that your book talks do not turn into question-and-answer sessions, but leave room for children to develop their ideas about literature. Give reading partners time to talk about their books together, teaching them strategies to develop ideas together.

A book review is just one way to respond to reading. We can have children write and produce plays based on favorite stories, write jacket copy (blurbs) for books, create graphs or time lines that correspond to a character’s emotional
journey, or all of the above. Whatever we choose to do, our introduction to reading response must be gentle, with lots of support and encouragement. We must explain what we expect children to do clearly and with simple demonstrations.

■ Overview

This unit is approximately four weeks long. At the beginning of the study have children participate in whole-class conversations about familiar texts (a common activity during a read-aloud). During these conversations, help children develop ideas about literature by looking at a few common story elements, such as character development, conflict, or plot. You will also read some book reviews with your students, discussing their qualities and how they are written. Children then choose a book or two to review. Give them time to write expressively about their impressions of the book, encouraging them to discover new thoughts and feelings. They can then plan their review orally with a partner. As children start to write their own reviews, they should refer to the mentor texts for inspiration. Each student should also decide the purpose of her review and how best to publish it. You might create a book review newsletter to distribute to other students, teachers, parents, pediatricians’ offices, after-school programs, or anywhere else young readers might be found.

■ Goals/Outcomes

It is important to have a clear idea of what you want the children’s work to look like before starting the unit. If your students met (or were close to meeting) the goals of the last unit, you will want to stretch them a little further in this one. The new challenge here is writing expressively or using writing to discover what they are thinking. While in prior units you expected your students to hash out their ideas orally, you are now prompting them to do some of this discovery work in writing. You want children to understand that sometimes their best ideas come after writing about them for a while.

Remember to consider not just the writing but also the students’ work habits and their sense of community. Continue to raise your expectations of the way children approach their writing and one another.
Writing Quality

We hope children will

- clearly state an opinion or idea about a text
- organize their thoughts to support this statement
- keep their writing focused
- support their ideas with evidence from the text, using quotes appropriately
- use some elements of a book review
- choose words carefully to communicate their ideas
- continue to develop their voice as a writer by trying to make the work engaging

Writing Conventions

We hope children will

- spell frequently used words correctly
- spell words particular to their topic correctly
- use end punctuation, quotation marks, and capitalization properly
- use commas, perhaps not always correctly
- try to attend to grammar conventions, such as subject-verb agreement

Writing Habits

We hope children will

- participate in class conversations about literature
- get to work quickly
- manage their own writing tools and supplies
- talk to one another about their reading or writing
- make and use a plan to write
- read and reread their work often
● refer to their reading as they write
● revise their work independently as they write
● edit their work

*Community*

We hope children will

● volunteer ideas, listen, and respond to others
● work with a partner to develop and improve writing
● show respect for all members of the community and their work, regardless of ability
● express disagreement in a way that promotes conversation rather than shuts it down
● ask for help when they encounter problems and offer to help classmates with problems

*Getting Ready to Teach*

Start assembling a collection of good book reviews well before the study. Include some written by and for adults about books with which your students are familiar, planning how to simplify or paraphrase them (perhaps leaving out portions) so that your class will understand them. Search the Internet for reviews written by children. Ideally you should find enough reviews at appropriate reading levels so that each partnership in your class can have one.

*Gathering Materials*

Set up an easel and chart paper on which to itemize the conventions of a book review. Make sure you have plenty of sticky notes and paper. Children will do some of their early work on plain paper, sticky notes, and sentence strips. Later in the unit, they will need lined paper, some sheets of which include room for a picture.

*Considering the Students*

Your observations and rubrics from the last unit will help you determine how to teach this one. If a majority of your class had trouble with particular con-
cepts, review them in this unit instead of moving on to something new. As you glance over the possible teaching points for this unit, decide which are appropriate for minilessons, which to spread over a few days, which to use in conferences with individuals, and which to ignore.

**Preparing Demonstration Materials**

Choose one or two favorite books that you’ve read aloud to your class several times and, on sticky notes, make notes about how you will use them in your demonstrations and as you write a shared review with the class. Practice retelling the book in different ways: concise, detailed, interpretive, personal response. Doing this ahead of time ensures a smooth demonstration.

Expressive writing is probably new to your students, and it may be new to you, too! If you try some of this kind of writing yourself ahead of time, it will be easier for you to understand what your students will experience. Settle down in a comfortable place and write whatever comes to mind about your book. Keep pushing thoughts onto the paper. If you do not know what to write, write *that*. Give yourself permission to write stuff that does not make sense or sound elegant and to repeat yourself. It’s for your eyes only. As your mind loosens up, ideas will bubble to the surface, ideas you may not have known you had! Writing like this also helps when you have an idea but do not quite know how to put it into words. Your children will not be able to do this as quickly or voluminously as you, but now that you have done it, you will be able to teach expressive writing clearly. (Figure 3–1 is a bit of my expressive writing about *Pretzel*, by H. A. Rey.)

■ Teaching the Unit

This unit begins with some work on reading comprehension and discussion and moves into understanding and identifying key features of book reviews. You are asking children to do two kinds of reading: reading for enjoyment and reading like writers. It may be tricky balancing these, so your students will need clear demonstrations and support. They will then plan, organize, write, revise, edit, and publish a review of one of their favorite books. Figure 3–2 shows one way to organize this unit.

**Reading for and with Ideas**

A dynamic, efficient reading workshop is vital to the quality of children’s written responses to literature. This section of the study depends on how comfortable...
SECOND GRADE WRITERS

students are with talking thoughtfully about literature and the experience they have had doing so. You will teach them to talk about books as an oral rehearsal for their written work. They will then need to flesh out their ideas, explain them clearly, find supporting details in the text, retell parts of the text as needed, compare or contrast the text with another one, or draw connections between the text and their own lives. While they might have done all of these things in past conversations, they now need to learn to do them in writing.

Start by reading aloud a richly evocative story, such as Jamaica’s Find, by Juanita Havill, and have the children discuss their ideas about it as a class. Ideally, the book will already be familiar so you can move beyond content and talk about its qualities. You might show the class some of your expressive

Figure 3–1 Expressive Writing Sample
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME FRAME</th>
<th>SECTION OF STUDY</th>
<th>WHAT CHILDREN DO</th>
<th>WHAT YOU TEACH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3–5 days   | Reading for and with Ideas | • Deepen conversational skills to include adding to classmates’ thoughts and combining several comments into an umbrella idea  
• Learn more sophisticated ways of discussing a story, such as how a character responds to issues, conflict, or change  
• Listen to and enjoy a few great stories  
• Understand, think about, discuss, and re-tell these stories  
• Notice themes, issues, styles, or authors’ messages  
• Choose a book or two to review  
• Write to explore and discover ideas about books  
• Jot thoughts on sticky notes | Guiding question  
• What makes our favorite books so good?  
Minilessons, conferences, or midworkshop focus points  
• In a conversation about literature, we may learn more by adding to one another’s ideas than by bringing up lots of new ideas.  
• Writing down (and talking through) all the things we think about a book can help us discover more ideas.  
• People who write about books know how to retell in a way that is both concise and complete.  
• Writing down (and talking through) the big things we remember happening in a book can help us discover our own thoughts and feelings about the book.  
• Keeping track of themes, issues, styles, or authors’ messages helps us develop ideas.  
• Telling about changes in the story can help us explain our idea. |
| 2–3 days   | Organizing Ideas         | • Read and discuss book reviews  
• Plan how their review will go  
• Sort and group thoughts that support elements in their review  
• Find examples in text that support their comments | Guiding question  
• What do good book reviewers do (and not do) in their writing?  
Minilessons, conferences, or midworkshop focus points  
• When we write about a big idea, it helps to describe the steps that got us to that big idea.  
• It helps to decide, before we start writing, which elements of a review we want to use and how they might sound.  
• Right before starting to write the review is a good time to sort through our sticky notes. |
Guiding Question

What makes our favorite books so good? It may seem limiting to focus only on good reviews. After all, some books do get bad reviews out in the world and we are teaching children about writing for a real purpose. Nevertheless, it is easier to start with books children like. They can identify what makes a book enjoyable, valuable, and worth the time it takes to read it. Knowing this will eventually enable them to write negative reviews, too, but not just yet. Invite, challenge, and guide them to try to name the qualities of the books they love. This discussion will help them develop a language for talking about books beyond “I liked it.” If you make a chart like the one in Figure 3–3, add to it.
Things We Love About Books

- Characters who surprise us
- Characters who are active, who think and change
- Characters who do things their own way
- Details that help us see the story inside our mind
- Something crazy or unexpected that happens
- Characters who talk back and forth
- Vividly imagined things that couldn’t really happen
- Not knowing what’s going to happen

We love different kinds of books

Funny books

Books that express strong feelings

Factual books

Mysteries

Adventure stories

Figure 3–3 Chart of Book Qualities
throughout the study as children read more and develop a more specific or sophisticated vocabulary for talking about books.

Possible Teaching Points

● **In a conversation about literature, we may learn more by adding to one another’s ideas than by bringing up lots of new ideas.** The art of conversation sometimes eludes enthusiastic young readers. Make sure your students know how proud you are that they have so much to say about what they read (or what you read and they listen to). Gently suggest plumbing one topic in depth rather than floating on the surface of many topics. They can write down ideas they’d like to discuss in future conversations about the same text.

● **Writing down (and talking through) all the things we think about a book can help us discover more ideas.** It can be so hard to write without having an image of what it is we are supposed to be writing. Usually most of us sit down to write something specific, such as a note, list, or plan. Those of us who keep journals have an easier time making sense of this. The idea is that children sit down and just write what they are thinking about a book and see where it takes them. The quality of this writing may not be great. It may meander from one idea to the next without a clear order or structure. However, the point is not to make sense to a reader but to help the writer shape ideas. Many children will find that after a bit of writing, they’ll get to a sort of **aha** moment. These discoveries become the basis for writing that is meant for readers. (Children who have a hard time getting a lot of words onto paper quickly can do this same work orally.)

● **People who write about books know how to retell in a way that is both concise and complete.** When asked what a story is about, children sometimes say things like “a boy” or “being good.” When pressed, they can often say much more. If they are going to learn how to respond to literature in writing, you need to help them say much more **without** being pressed. In this lesson and the next, you will show them a couple of good ways to say what a story is about. Giving the plot of a story means telling, in sequence, the main events. You could demonstrate how you might do this with **Jamaica’s Find:** “One day in the park, Jamaica finds a toy dog. She wants to keep it, but her mother tells her she should turn it in to lost and found. She is sad to give up the dog, but she does it anyway. Jamaica sees the dog’s owner, Kristen, get her toy back. The girls become friends and are both happy in the end.” Point out that this kind of retelling is short and leaves out most of the details.
Writing down (and talking through) the big things we remember happening in a book can help us discover our own thoughts and feelings about the book. While some children retell a story in a word or two, others retell every single detail and the plot gets lost. It will take more than one lesson for your students to reach a happy medium: Have children practice a few retellings, with feedback and support. Once they can do a basic, no-frills version, children can learn to include certain important parts of the book in greater detail. A character’s struggle or change, the introduction of a new character or setting, and the evocation of strong feelings are story elements that require a more detailed retelling.

Keeping track of themes, issues, styles, or authors’ messages helps us develop ideas. Instead of sticking to the plot, children can talk about what ideas or themes they think the story addresses. This skill will be especially important for texts without a real plot, like nonfiction articles and poems. In relation to Jamaica’s Find, you might say, “This story is about how important it is to do what’s right,” or “Sometimes it’s hard to do the right thing, but you should anyway,” or “You feel better about yourself when you are honest than you do when you are selfish.” In order to identify themes or ideas, children must get beneath the surface of a book, go beyond literal comprehension into more interpretive and responsive thinking.

Telling about changes in the story can help us explain our idea. Many of the ideas that strike readers most strongly in stories have to do with the changes that take place. In Jamaica’s Find, the change that Jamaica has in her attitude toward returning the toy dog is closely connected with the big ideas children tend to have about the story. You could say, “After I say what my idea is, I can talk about the change. Here’s my idea: Jamaica’s Find is about how doing what’s right even when you don’t want to makes you feel better than being selfish does. Now I’ll talk about the change: In the beginning, Jamaica doesn’t want to do what’s right. She knows she should return the dog, but she wants to keep it. Soon, looking at the dog makes her kind of sad. I think that’s where she starts to change. In the end, Jamaica is happy when Kristen gets her dog back. She learns that doing what’s right can make you feel happier than having something you want. That’s what this story is really about. See how talking about the change helps me make my idea more specific?”

Student Work
Athena wrote her thoughts on sticky notes as she read her book. After reading each chapter, she pulled them out to write more about her ideas (see
Thank you for sampling this resource.

For more information or to purchase, please visit Heinemann by clicking the link below:


Use of this material is solely for individual, noncommercial use and is for informational purposes only.