In this eagerly-anticipated teaching resource, master teachers Gretchen Bernabei, Jayne Hover, and Cynthia Candler share writing lessons that are healthy for kids, promote lifelong literacy, and coincidentally, will help your students blow the roof off their writing test scores. Organized around the writing process—selecting topics, crafting drafts, and polishing finished pieces—explicit lessons engage student writers while shoring up the gaps between learning and testing. Growing out of their own work in Title I schools, Gretchen, Jayne, and Cynthia’s strategies have proven to be especially effective in helping ESL and special education students, not only pass the test, but achieve commended performance. In addition to providing classroom-tested strategies that help students grow as writers, Crunchtime also provides a wealth of crunchtime tools (rubrics, reproducibles, and writing samples), minilessons, and lesson plans that will help you teach strategically and position your students for success on the test and beyond.

About the Authors

With over 75 years of combined teaching experience, Gretchen Bernabei, Jayne Hover, and Cynthia Candler have extensive experience teaching across the K–12 grade span. While teaching a range of students in very different settings, all three teachers share a passion for writing and a passion for teaching writing to young people. All three have also honed their teaching craft in an environment of high-stakes testing. In Crunchtime they share with you the strategies they have developed for helping students be successful in the literate world and on the test.

What teachers are saying about the writing strategies in Crunchtime

“I grabbed your ideas and ran with them…. Our students earned more ‘3’ TAKS [Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills] scores than the previous year and we were exemplary across the board in writing! ‘Crunchtime’ was exactly where we were! I know we can do even better if we use the strategies the entire year! You are contagious! We are looking forward to next year and starting the year using FIT, the kernel essay, and lightning in a bottle.”

—Stephanie Pendola
Grade 4 Language Arts Teacher/ESL Liaison, Lamkin Elementary, Houston, TX

“Our Minnesota results are back. My ninth graders had a passing rate of seventy-eight percent compared with fifty-eight percent schoolwide. I wanted one hundred percent of course, but I’m convinced that next year we can get close using the trail of breadcrumbs method and other strategies. Thank you so much for what you taught me!”

—Dianne Lee
English Teacher/Writing Coach, Arlington Senior High, St. Paul, MN

After your presentation I went back to my classroom and implemented truisms, different genres of writing, and borrowed various ideas from your book throughout the year. My students took the TAKS test in April and I was very nervous in the fact that I had strongly encouraged them to be more creative in essay writing and try their hand at a genre instead of a standard 5 paragraph composition. I had 100% passing rate! I have forty-two 7th graders and 19 of the students got commended performance. I remember the first nine weeks of school I saw most of my students as very poor writers, not able to get their ideas across in an effective and coherent manner. It has been amazing seeing the progression and growth of their writing. I am so proud of my students.

—Marie Webb
Grade 7 English Teacher, Wolfe City Middle School, Wolfe City, TX

“My last class just left the classroom and they were not happy. Why? The bell rang! They wanted more! Today we devolved an essay, ba-do-binged, and jerk talked. Six classes were in the palm of my hand the entire period! They left confident and ready to write. My students are empowered!”

—Nancy Palmarchuk
English/PAL Sponsor, Springtown Middle School, Springtown, TX

“After Gretchen’s workshop I jumped right in the very next day and did a kernel essay. I had students read their fifth sentence and their responses gave me chills! Today’s flip books are going well too. I have not been this excited about teaching in a long time.”

—Sarah Turner
Language Arts Teacher, Ottman Junior High, St. Paul Park, MN

“Today in my sixth grade class we did the memory list and the kernel story about a memory they chose. I just had to email you and tell you that it was a BIG HIT! You should have seen the looks on their faces. So many of them were re-living their moment as they wrote and it was apparent on their little faces! They even said, as they were leaving class, ‘Now, THAT was fun writing today!’ I can’t wait to see what these stories develop into!!!”

—Sheila Layman,
ESL/ELA Teacher, Schindewolf Intermediate, Spring, TX

“I attended your workshop at the CABE conference and was excited about coming back and teaching ba-da-bings to my students. I tried your technique with first grade and above. The students loved it and they want to keep writing badabings. Thank you so much.”

—Shobha Tejwani
ELD Specialist (K–5), Dublin Unified School District, Dublin, CA
Master teachers share their proven strategies for helping students blow the roof off writing tests—AND become better writers in the process.