Dedication

To Carmen Fariña, Superintendent of Region 8 in New York City, who has shown the world what is possible when school leadership and professional development are absolutely aligned.
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When I taught second graders, my children and I sang a song that contained the verse:

What do you do when this dream that you have
Is more than a man can build or plan?
You gather your friends from the ends of the earth
To lend a hand in its hour of birth.

For our hands are strong and our hearts are young,
And the dreamer keeps dreamin’, ages long.

This series of books turned into a dream that was far bigger than anything I could build or plan on my own, and so I did gather my friends from the ends of the earth. Now that the entire series is almost done, I have a very long thank-you letter to write!

Most of all, I am grateful to my editor and friend, Kate Montgomery. Kate and I have shared responsibility for this series, and we’ve worked shoulder-to-shoulder on every step and every page. Kate managed the complex interpersonal challenges of a project involving so many people and dimensions, and did so with grace, tact, and good sense. She also led us in what became a groundbreaking effort to imagine and create a whole new genre of writing. Kate never relinquished her principles—believing always in the intelligence of teachers, the importance of writing that sings with clarity and rhythm—and yet she helped me loosen my hold on a narrative form that has served me well over the years. Kate has been my guide, companion, teacher, counselor—and her capacity to work hard has inspired me to do likewise.

Kate did not work alone. I have published many books with Heinemann, and none have received the attentive, thoughtful care that these books have been given. Mike Gibbons has brought his vision for FirstHand to the series and helped us imagine our form and audience. Leigh Peake has rallied us to work in new ways to make this series open pathways that others can follow. Lois Bridges has contributed her wisdom at so many turns of the road. Lisa Fowler and Jean Lawler helped me countless times with the production of the book. I owe thanks to the entire Heinemann team.

I am grateful to each of the co-authors. You will come to know them in the pages of these books and admire them as I do. What you cannot know are the particular roles they played in this endeavor. I am grateful to Natalie Louis; she produced more than her share of the book we co-authored. I am grateful to Abby Oxenorn; her book was the first one that we wrote, and Abby went on to help with other books as well. I am grateful to Amanda Hartman; Authors as Mentors was a challenging book to write, but Amanda was nevertheless up for more and joined me also in writing two tremendously fun books on conferring. Zoë Ryder White, also a co-author on the conferring books, assisted in many of the books as well. I thank Stephanie Parsons for her verve and imagination as a writer and for her willingness to settle for nothing less than our best. I am grateful to Leah Mermelstein for her sterling clarity. Pat Bleichman opened her classroom to me and to all the co-authors, allowing us to learn from her and her children at every step. Linda Chen and Mary Ann Colbert also contributed to the thinking and writing of this series, and their books will soon join these. Randy Bomer helped us have the courage to break into this new genre of writing; Isoke Nia broadened our image of units of study; Kathleen Tolan lent her wisdom; and Marjorie Martinelli was an invaluable contributor as well.

I could not have led an endeavor of this magnitude without the company and support of the leadership team at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. I am grateful to Beth Neville, Associate Director and co-author of the CD-ROM of resource material in this series, and Laurie Pessah, Deputy Director of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project. Laurie and I wrote Nonfiction together, and laughed and learned along the way. This is a team of dedicated and brilliant people who work tirelessly for a cause we care about very much.

Tasha Kalista has served as my right hand throughout this entire project. She coordinated co-authors, merged files, e-mailed manuscripts, managed student writing, smoothed feathers, set deadlines, and generally shepherded the entire effort along.
This series is being published just as New York City sets out on an effort to bring balanced literacy in general, and the reading and writing workshop in particular, to every classroom across the city. The series feels especially important to me right now because it is coming out just when New York City is rallying to bring these ideas into thousands and thousands of classrooms. When I started this effort, I worried that providing such detailed descriptions of Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday in a writing workshop might confine teachers. But now it is clear that the time has come to open wide the doors to our classrooms and let visitors in on our teaching.

I hope this series of books helps thousands of teachers feel that they have been invited to sit in on writing workshops and hear the details of this marvelous form of teaching. In New York City, those teachers will return to their own classrooms, to a city that says, “This is the approach that all children deserve.” I am grateful to all the leaders of New York City’s schools, but especially to Judy Chin, Superintendent of Region 3, Lucille Swarns, Superintendent of Region 10, Reyes Irizarry, Superintendent of Region 4, Michelle Fratti, Superintendent of Region 7, Irma Zardoya, Superintendent of Region 1, and above all, to Carmen Fariña, Superintendent of Region 8.

It is to Carmen Fariña that this book and this series are dedicated. She has taught me and the entire Project not to be afraid of working in systemic ways and to realize that in the world of schools—as in the world of texts—carefully designed structures combine with detail to create a lasting effect.
This is the first in a series of books designed to help primary teachers teach a rigorous yearlong writing curriculum. The coauthors of these books and I have helped several hundred thousand teachers make their first forays into the teaching of writing. These teachers have told us that writing has given their children unbelievable power as readers, thinkers, and composers of meaning and that the teaching of writing has given them new energy and joy as teachers, reminding them of why they went into teaching in the first place. We understand what these teachers mean, for writing has done all this and more for us and for our children.

Word has spread. As more and more teachers recognize that the teaching of writing can nourish us and our children, and as it becomes more clear that our children's abilities across many disciplines will be judged through the medium of their writing, the demand for professional development in the teaching of writing has skyrocketed, outstripping our abilities to offer this support. This series of books and the videotapes that accompany it are our effort to hand over what we know so that more children can be given the opportunities they deserve to grow strong as writers and to approach their schooling as makers of knowledge and composers of meaning.
An Overview of the Books

We have written seven books, each of which supports a monthlong (approximately) unit of study in the teaching of writing. The books are organized in a sequence, with each book standing on the shoulders of those that go before it. These books combine to provide the curricular support necessary to take a class of young children on a learning journey. Each book contains the words of our teaching for approximately sixteen days across a unit of study, with suggested ways to extend each of those days if this seems merited. We provide representative examples of the work children did in these units of study, guidelines for conferring with children individually and in small groups, and references to the children’s literature that can be a resource during that unit. We detail our goals for each unit and share the assessment rubric that guided our practice and the record keeping we designed to hold us to those goals. We show how all the units of study combine to support children’s progress towards the New Primary Standards developed and published by the National Center for Education and the Economy. These rigorous, internationally benchmarked standards have been influential in state standards across the nation, and they are exactly consonant with this curriculum.

Writing instruction happens not only in minilessons but also in conferences. As children tackle new writing challenges, those of us who teach children need to expand our repertoire of ways to confer with them. In The Conferring Handbook we tell the story of (and give pointers on) a few conferences that will be especially essential during each unit. For each of these conferences, the crucial and replicable teaching moves have been highlighted. A CD-ROM of reproducibles and videoclips accompanies this series, providing you with sample letters to parents, assessment rubrics, record sheets, and the like. Available separately is a more extensive book on conferring, Conferring with Primary Writers: Supporting a Month-by-Month Curriculum. This book contains fifty exemplary conferences as well as guidelines and advice for teachers learning to confer with young writers. Two longer videotapes are also available, showing my colleagues and me working at intervals across the year with the very children and the very lessons you come to know in the books.

Using These Books

In an ideal world, every teacher would have the chance to learn state-of-the-art methods for teaching writing by watching an exemplary teacher instruct her children day to day. Ideally, you would be able to observe these teachers with a coach at your elbow, highlighting the way each day’s teaching illustrates a collection of guiding principles and helping you understand alternative decisions the teacher could and could not have made. Although we do not live in an ideal world, these books can be a next-best substitute. They can give you the chance to listen in on and observe our best teaching. As you watch, I will join you on the sidelines as an ever-present coach, highlighting aspects of the teaching that seem especially essential. My goal will be to
help you watch any one day’s teaching in ways that enable you to extrapolate guidelines and methods that can inform you on another day when you are called on to invent your own teaching.

I know that sometimes you will take the words of our minilessons and bring them verbatim to your own children and that at other times the teaching we describe will need to be altered to fit you and your children. Either way, I know this series of books will keep you company in your teaching of writing and will help you and your children reach new horizons together. The end goal, of course, is not the teaching that we describe but teaching that you, your colleagues, and your children invent together.

**An Overview of this Curriculum**

In the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project community, planning a writing curriculum is important enough that in the schools with which we work closely, teachers across a grade level spend a full day in June working together with their grade-level colleagues to plan curricular calendars for the upcoming year in both the teaching of reading and of writing. Schools try to devise a schedule so that the teachers across a grade level can meet together several times a week as a support and study group around their anticipated units of study. The projected units of study are usually sent home with parents on Open School Night.

When teachers across a grade level collaborate on the teaching of writing, this provides them with important support. Decades of work in the teaching of writing have convinced me that wise methods of teaching usually do not emerge ex nihilo from a single gifted and talented teacher. Wise methods of teaching do not come from our genes alone but from our communities of practice. Those communities of practice involve not only our colleagues but also teachers who’ve gone before us. The units of study in these books stand on the shoulders of many communities of teachers, and we hope they provide you with some shoulders on which to stand.

Before we can teach a class of very young children to write, we need to envision the sort of work we hope they will do. What can we expect five-year-olds to produce when we ask them to write, and what pathway do we envision they’ll travel as they develop? You may ask, “How can my children write? They don’t even know their ABCs,” and the question is a wise one. As you learn about teaching writing in this series, you’ll learn ways to give youngsters training wheels in writing (just as you probably do in reading). With your help, children can travel the world as if they are writers, using whatever they do know to approximate writing while, meanwhile, you provide them with constant opportunities to learn. If children are invited to write each day and if you actively and assertively teach into their best approximations, their development as writers will astonish you, their parents, the school administrators, and best of all, the children themselves.

In order to teach writing, we also need to establish structures that last across every day of our teaching. In this, the
The first book in the series, I help you establish those structures, and I do so by giving very practical, nitty-gritty advice for room arrangements, materials, expectations, and the like. The wonderful thing about learning to teach writing well is that there are just a few teaching methods that one needs to know and be able to do. I try to provide crystal-clear advice on how to lead efficient and effective minilessons and conferences. I do so knowing that my readers will continue learning about these methods as you travel through the series, encountering dozens of transcripts of each. For now, my emphasis is on the predictable architecture behind all our minilessons and conferences and on the management that allows any of this to be possible. I then overview the yearlong curriculum, nesting it inside a discussion of the standards that inform our teaching and of methods of assessment. I also address concerns I know many of you will have, including a concern for your English language learners.

The yearlong writing curriculum itself is divided into monthlong units of study. Many units of study help children learn to write within a particular genre—say, writing true stories or writing all-about books—and other units highlight particular aspects of the writing process, such as revision or learning from mentor authors. Either way, children generally produce many pieces of writing across a unit of study and then, at the end of the unit, each child selects one or two pieces to revise and edit for publication.

These books assume that in your school, writing is truly regarded as one of the basics. When a school system recognizes that writing is a crucial tool for learning to read and to think across every subject area, then time for writing becomes non-negotiable. This curriculum assumes that K–2 teachers devote at least forty-five minutes (and preferably an hour) a day to instruction in writing. Just as children have opportunities each day to read and to learn math, so, too, they need time each day to write. Writing is far too important to be relegated to the status of busy work, with teachers leading one reading group after another while children write without the benefit of instruction.

In the classrooms described in this series, writing time begins with a minilesson in which teachers offer ten minutes of direct and explicit instruction. After this, children work in highly structured yet responsive environments in order to draft and revise their writing in ways that incorporate the instruction they have received. Teachers, meanwhile, confer with their students individually and in small groups. Midway through the writing time, teachers often call the whole class together for a second teaching point. The day’s writing time ends with an opportunity for follow-up with an After the Workshop share about the topic from that day’s minilesson.

The teaching of writing relies on other components of the literacy curriculum. It is crucial that teachers read aloud at least several times a day and that some of the texts teachers read (and reread) resemble those that children write. It is important that children study phonics and spelling, learning to build words and to take words apart, to hear their constituent sounds, and to be resourceful word solvers. It is important that the school day
includes time for reading to, with, and by children and that
children are reading books they can read with confidence, ease,
and above all, with comprehension.

Has This Curriculum Been Field Tested?

For almost three decades, the Teachers College Reading and
Writing Project has been one of the nation’s leading think tanks
and providers of professional development in the teaching of
writing. Most of the best-selling authors on the teaching of
writing were for many years students and/or staff members with
the Project. Every summer several thousand teachers attend
weeklong institutes with us. The Teachers College Reading and
Writing Project works directly and intensely with hundreds of
schools across the nation and especially in and around New York
City. In most of these schools, every teacher in the school teaches
a writing workshop.

The Chancellor of New York City schools recently held a
press conference at P.S. 172, a school in which every teacher
leads a reading and writing workshop. At the press conference,
the Chancellor announced that every child in every New York
City school deserves to benefit from a curriculum that matches
the one the children at P.S. 172 receive. This means that the
writing workshop is being brought to scale in New York City.

The units of study in these books stand on the shoulders
of a great many communities of teachers. They have undergone
years and years of revision. This curricular calendar existed in
oral, hand-me-down fashion for a long while, and as such, has
been field tested and revised and refined. Even so, we hope this
curricular calendar is regarded not as a script but as a starting
point. The community of teachers across a grade level in your
school will want to develop curriculum together. In order to
devise teaching plans, however, you too will want to stand on
the shoulders of other teachers who have gone before you. We
hope these books provide you with shoulders on which to stand.

The Authorship of This Series

I co-authored each of these books with a colleague, and the
process of writing has been collaborative from long before the
moment of inception. Each of the co-authors is either a member
of my staff or a teacher I’ve taught and studied with for years.
One of the co-authors, Laurie Pessah, is the Deputy Director of
the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project and one, Beth
Neville, is Associate Director of the Project. Three of the co-
authors are former primary level teachers who are now full-time
members of the Project staff (Leah Mermelstein, Amanda
Hartman, and Stephanie Parsons), and four are teachers with
whom I work especially closely (Abby Oxenhorn and Zoë Ryder
White teach kindergarten; Pat Bleichman and Natalie Louis teach
In primary classrooms, children sometimes work collaboratively on a shared piece. Some call the activity “Share the Pen.” The phrase aptly describes the process through which these books have emerged. Although the text reads as if one person gave a minilesson and another transcribed and reflected on it, the process was actually much more collaborative. The coauthors and I began by thinking and learning and planning and drafting teaching ideas together. Then one (and usually several of us) tried out the teaching ideas, usually in many classrooms simultaneously. Based on what we learned, we revised the general ideas, made new plans for the route a unit might travel, and tried those plans in yet more classrooms. Finally we’d feel as if the path was mostly established, and one of us would draft the first few minilessons. Early drafts of minilessons were then passed between the coauthor and me, with the details of the minilessons emerging as we took turns working on them. Once the minilessons were fleshed out, I’d set to work adding other components, starting with the italicized sections. Usually I wrote the introductions and the “Time to Confer,” “If You Need More Time,” and “Assessment” sections, but sometimes a co-author shared the pen with me.

Kate Montgomery, a former colleague and an acclaimed author, edited the entire series, and her extraordinary contributions are detailed in the acknowledgments.

How Can This Pertain to Kindergarten, First-Grade, and Second-Grade Writers? To English Language Learners?

This series of books chronicles the teaching and learning that occurred in New York City kindergarten and first-grade classrooms. Some of the units were taught in kindergarten or K–1 classrooms, some in first-grade classrooms. One of the classrooms was both an inclusion classroom and a homogeneously grouped class for at-risk learners; another was a classroom in a high-need area. A teacher who reads these books in sequence will notice that the student work in them doesn’t improve along a steady upward trajectory; the reason the level of work may seem to regress is that one unit may have been taught in a first grade, the next in a kindergarten! The socioeconomic contexts for the units of study also vary. For example, Small Moments is based on a kindergarten, Writing for Readers is based on a homogeneous group of at-risk first graders in a challenging socioeconomic setting, and Revision chronicles the work of predominantly middle-class first graders.

Although the teaching we describe occurred in kindergarten and first-grade classrooms, we would not have altered instruction had we been teaching second graders rather than K–1 children. This is especially true had we been teaching second graders who had not had the opportunity to participate in
this sort of rigorous writing instruction. Writing development relies on and is nourished by prior writing (and reading) experience more than on chronological age.

It is crucial that teachers of kindergarten read the letter I’ve written to you (see the CD-ROM and page 21) about the ways you can alter this sequence of units just a tiny bit so that it supports your children. Mostly, however, we hope you will trust us enough to realize that although the writing you see in this series may seem beyond what your children can do, the truth is that writing reflects instruction. Your children will dazzle you with what they can do if you give them time each day to write and instructions such as we describe.

These units of study have been developed in New York City classrooms; this means they have been designed for classrooms that contain all the diversity one finds in urban classrooms. A teacher whose class is filled predominantly with English language learners will want to deliberately plan for ways to scaffold children as they rise to the language challenges in this rich curriculum. I’ve suggested a dozen crucial ways to do this in a section titled “Supporting English Language Learners.” The most important thing to say, however, is that this curriculum has provided English language learners with extraordinary support and rich language opportunities.
When we teach writing, we are teaching young people to do something. Whether we are teaching someone to swim or to read, to play the oboe or to write, the learner needs to do the bulk of the work. There is very little a teacher can do from the front of the room that will turn someone into a skilled swimmer or oboe player or writer—because the learner needs to do much of the work.

In September, our teaching begins with us sending children off to write and with children proceeding to show us who they are as writers and as people. Once we have invited them to draw things that have happened to them and to write (and tell us) their stories, we will watch closely to see what they do. As we watch and talk with them, we’ll learn what our children understand about literacy and what they can do as storytellers, writers, spellers, and readers. As K–2 teachers, we know that we will have a variety of writers in our classroom. We know there will be a range of ability levels from children who can write “squiggles and
lollipops” to (perhaps) those who can write pages full of conventional sentences. It is our job to accept this range and to find ways to move each individual toward more and more proficiency.

Children progress in fairly predictable ways from scribbling (in lieu of writing) toward writing extended stories. This means that even before we meet a new class of children, we can already anticipate the learning pathways along which those incoming children will probably travel. When we anticipate the learning pathway, we’re more able to move each child along on that journey. Let’s look at these pathways in detail.

**Some Children Draw and Write as Motor Activities**

We launch the writing workshop by asking children to think of something important to them and then to draw that on the page. Before the first week of school is over, we will probably see that some children do not try to make drawings that represent meaning. That is, for some children, drawing and writing are motor activities. During the writing workshop, these children are messing around with a pen. One child may fill the page with squiggles, another may make a small mark on one page after another, but either way, when we ask, “Could you tell me about your drawing?” the child will not have a lot to say about the meaning behind the marks. If we press on by asking questions such as, “What’s happening in your picture?” these children still won’t reveal the meaning their pictures carry. The children will also probably not initiate writing.

How important it will be to help children in this category become immersed in the idea that texts carry messages, that pictures and words hold stories! Our first goal will be to help these children approach the page with an intention to convey meaning. “I like to write about the things I do,” I might say. “Don’t you? What do you like to do?” If the child answers, “I watch TV,” I’ll say, “Do you! What do you watch?” If I hear that every morning starts with cereal in front of the cartoons, I will say, “You need to put that here. Draw the bowl of cereal so people will know.”

We won’t always be present when children draw and write. When children in this category bring us texts that appear to be scribbles, we’ll make a special point of assuming that the texts must mean something. Pointing to a portion of the child’s scrawl, I might ask, “What’s happening over here?” Some children will probably invent stories in response to these questions, making their stories long after they drew the nonrepresentational marks, and this marks progress. Other children will have actually tried to convey meaning, and my interest will lead them to elaborate on those existing stories by talking and drawing more. My goal will be to ensure that the child’s drawings and marks represent meaning for the child, and I won’t worry about sound-letter correspondence for a few weeks.
Some Children Convey Meaning in Their Drawings—If They Write at All, It’s Unclear What Their Marks Say

Some children draw in ways that convey meaning. The meaning may not be readily clear to a reader, but if we ask, “Can you tell me the story?” the child has a story to tell. Although the content of the piece may be incoherent and may also be transient, with a new story made to order each time the author rereads the piece, these children nevertheless regard the writing workshop as a time for making meaning.

If there is meaning on the page but it resides only in the drawing, I try to attend to that meaning and to confer toward the goal of the child recording that meaning accurately and well (even if it is only in the drawings). “So this is your family? Where is your mom?” I might say. Or, looking at the child’s visual description of her mom, I might ask, “Where are her arms? No arms? She has to have arms, you silly, you know that!” I try to help children make their drawings more representational because I want to help children learn that “writing” involves conjuring up images of a subject and then recording whatever is in the writer’s mind’s eye onto the page. This is a basic premise behind all literacy. Learning to add detail to a drawing can be a precursor to learning to add detail to a written text. Learning to tell and draw what happened next (and to move from one page to an extended story) can happen first around stories that are drawn and later around texts that are written.

It’s crucial to convey from the start that stories need to make sense. I listen with great care to children’s stories, making sure I can actually follow the child’s meaning enough to say back a coherent story. If I find a child’s story confusing, I let the child know this and recruit the child to rectify my confusion.

Children in this category may or may not have some print on the page. If there are letters there, I’ll ask the child to read the message (even if I expect it can’t be deciphered), and I will join in to help if the child has trouble. I won’t give up easily on the job of discerning what has been said. The writer will see that I’m intent on deciphering what he or she has written. I focus through the errors to the content.

If the child does read his or her print to me, or otherwise acts as if the writing says something, I’ll be glad. I know that some children write down letters simply to inventory the alphabet letters and the words they know and can produce. It is not unusual for a child who is in the early phases of learning written language to copy or list words rather than to write a message. Sometimes the copied letters mean the child has taken his or her very first step and is trying to assume the identity of being a writer, but other times the copied letters reflect a child’s anxiety and lack of understanding that the letters only matter when they convey meaning. Either way, I redirect the child who has copied or made letters and words without an intention to convey meaning to think of something he or she has done and to draw that subject. Then I respond as I described in the incident when the child told me about watching cartoons and eating cereal in
the morning. My goal will be to help this child learn to write, you first must fill yourself up with content that is important to you and then reach for whatever means possible—drawing or writing—to convey that content.

If a child hasn’t written at all, it is crucial to realize that this doesn’t mean the child is hesitant or unable to write! Until we nudge the child a bit, it’s impossible to draw any conclusions from an absence of print. And so I ask these children to tell me their story and then I say, “That is so cool! Why don’t you write that?” I repeat the words the child said—perhaps the message was “I climbed the mountain”—and then I say with confidence, “Write that.” I say this as if I don’t dream my instruction to write could possibly cause a problem. I point as I speak to a blank space on the page and keep my eyes fixed expectantly on that portion of the page. If the child doesn’t immediately turn his or her attention to writing, I often go so far as to dictate, “I . . .” and again I stare at and gesture toward the page as if certain the word I have just dictated will arrive there very soon. This moment is always a revealing one! If I keep my gaze fixed on the page and wait for the child to act, the child will follow my gaze and an extraordinary number of children will actually write. If a child says, “Is it i?” (or, conceivably, “Is it e?”), I avoid confirming the child’s every guess. “Put down whatever you hear,” I say with a confirming tone. When the child has written something—anything—I wait to see whether he or she will keep going. If the child seems stymied, I coach the child to reread what he or she has written (reproducing whatever the child intended to write whether or not that is, in fact, what is recorded on the page). I help in a way that brings forth the next word—climbed. Again, I direct my gaze to the paper and watch with bated breath.

The child in this instance may produce random strings of letters or letterlike shapes (see the next discussion). Alternatively, the child may spell words by recording the dominant sounds (correctly or not), or the child may appeal for help. The help I’m apt to give is described under the later heading “Some Children Benefit from Labeling Their Drawings.” Whatever the child does when nudged to write will be instructive.

**Some Children Will Write Squiggles Instead of Letters**

If a child uses diamonds, squiggles, approximated letters, or what appear to be random letters, it’s tempting to think, “This child doesn’t know the first thing about writing.” If we look again, however, we can see that such a child may have mastered some essential concepts. These could include the writing concepts shown in the box on page 12.

If the child has only a shaky grasp of the idea that texts carry stories, or if the child’s oral stories are underdeveloped, we may decide to focus for a few weeks on helping these children draw and tell stories that contain several pages of drawings, each accompanied by writing-like squiggles and by an oral text that is coherent and full of the child’s emerging literary voice. This will support the child’s sense of story and grasp on literary language. We will also find opportunities in the school day to teach this
Essential Writing Concepts

• Being able to make gross approximations of the fifty-two geometric forms that constitute the uppercase and lowercase English alphabet (practice is necessary to become proficient with these shapes).

• Knowing that writing involves recurring letters mixed together in ways that make words and that these letters are not reversible. An F is not the same as an ?.

• Knowing how to “read” writing (even if it’s lollipops, not letters) with finger and eyes moving from left to right and top to bottom and—rather than snaking left to right, then on the next line, right to left—making a return sweep.

• Knowing that long utterances are represented by longer chunks of print and that when we read, we make oral utterances that accompany—and in some way match—the written marks.

• Knowing that pages in a book are usually not self-contained, but instead, one page combines with the next to create one coherent text.
child sound-letter correspondence so that his or her spellings during the writing workshop can soon become more conventional. After the child has spent a few weeks studying sound-letter correspondence at other times of the day—during phonics instruction, interactive writing, and shared reading—we’ll move this child toward using sound-letter correspondences in order to label their drawings (this work is described below).

Other children who “write” with squiggles may already produce rich oral stories. These children will profit from being encouraged right away to label their drawings (also see below).

Some Children Benefit from Labeling Their Drawings

Although some children may enter school using lollipops, squiggles, and diamonds to represent oral language, once in school, all children will be immersed in work with alphabet letters. They’ll study their own and other children’s names and talk about the environmental labels in the classroom and in life: “What might this stop sign say? The first letter is s, like in Sam.” Children will read alphabet books and make them too, featuring perhaps just the letters in a given child’s name. They’ll sort and categorize and make letters. Within three or four weeks of the opening of school, kindergarten children will have enough of an emerging knowledge of letters and sounds that we can teach them to label their drawings.

A word of caution! If emphasis on recording letters during the writing workshop isn’t tied to a parallel emphasis on conveying content, some children will merely copy the alphabet chart or anything else they can find. One way to prevent this is to help a child approach writing by first remembering something that happened in the child’s life, drawing that event over a sequence of pages, and only then writing the words that accompany the story.

In order for a child to record letters to represent a word, the child needs to listen closely to the sounds within the word. Children don’t usually arrive in kindergarten knowing that dog (and ship) each contain three sounds (the technical word for these speech sounds is phonemes). Many five-year-olds who are asked to tap out the sounds in cat will hear the initial and final sounds only. When children write, they are learning to hear and distinguish sounds in words (this is phonemic awareness). Children need to not only hear a sound but also match that sound to a letter, recording it. “Let’s say me,” I say to the child. “Say it with me.” Together we say /mmmeee/ slowly. “What sound do you hear at the start of me?” I ask. I may add, “Watch me, watch my mouth,” and together the child and I again say /mmm/ and concentrate on the way our mouths feel as they make the sound. In this way, I help the child isolate the sound at the start of me, which is an important step. Now pressing on, I ask, “What letter makes /mmm/?” If the child suggests any letter, right or wrong, I ask the child to record that letter.

The child may have no idea what the letter could be, in
which case I will probably demonstrate how I think about this. Maybe I will repeat the /m/ sound and think to myself, “Have I seen any words that start with /m/—/m/—me, /m/—Mom, /m/—McDonald’s.” I may continue, “It’s like /m/—Mike,” and point to a nearby m in the name chart. After deciding the /m/ sound can be written by the letter m, I write an m and encourage the child to copy this letter onto his paper. “So let’s read what you’ve written,” I then say, recruiting the child to point under the letter and to read what he’s written.

If the child required this much help with that first sound in the word me, I would not be apt to try for other letters within the word. The child will probably reread the one letter as if it says the entire word—me. Then I’ll direct the child’s attention to another part of the drawing and we’ll repeat the process of labeling something else. Chances are good that again we’ll record only the initial or dominant consonant. Soon I’ll move to another child, leaving the first child with instructions to continue labeling the cat, brother, or sun. Soon children will begin to hear more than one sound in many words. I don’t aim for correctness when children are labeling. Once labels report the dominant consonants in a word (sn for sun), I move the child toward writing stories that are carried by a one or two sentence caption under the drawing on each of several pages.

**Some Children Will Soon Write Sentences**

Just as it will be clear right away that some children will need support before they can even label, it will also be clear that with just a bit of encouragement and support, some children can soon write “I ride my bike” using letters to convey at least the initial or dominant sound in the words: I rd mi bk.

At first, we may be at the child’s side to initiate and support this process. “What’s happening in your picture?” I ask, and when the child answers, I say, “You need to write that!” Then I dictate the first word. “I . . . .” After the child has written, I help her regain the momentum needed to press on by helping her reread in such a way that she generates more text. “Okay, let’s reread what you have written so far. ‘I . . . .’ Now what?”

Although this sort of scaffolding can be helpful and necessary at first, it is equally necessary for us to pull back some of our support so that the child is nudged to continue as best he or she can. Of course this will mean that the child bypasses a word or two, uses incorrect letters, and generally messes up. That’s the price of independence. Our goal must be to withdraw our scaffold in such a way that the child continues voicing the next word, saying it slowly, and recording letters. We need to be ready to accept the child’s approximations. If we jump in to be sure the child’s approximations are correct, we keep the child in a dependent relationship to us, and the child will only write when we are on call.

Once a child has written one sentence, we often feel exhausted and our tendency is to signal, “Great, now you are
done.” It is wise to remember instead that if a child can write one sentence, he or she can write two sentences. If the child can write a few sentences on one page, the child can easily move on to a second page.

Some Children Write Stories (And a Host of Other Genres, Too!)

Depending on the grade level we teach, there will be, at the start of the year, some children who write sentences easily. Remember that every child deserves to start where he or she is as a writer and to be challenged to go farther. On the fourth day of first grade, Omid’s folder showed three papers, each featuring a rather conventional drawing and fairly conventional text. One said, “I like school. We riyt at school. We reed at school.” Meanwhile Omid had drawn a conventional picture of a butterfly, rainbow, and flower.

“What’s your writing about?” I asked. Omid looked momentarily startled by the question but rose to the occasion and said in a staccato sentence that sounded like dictation, “The—uh—the—whatjamacallit—the—butterfly—loves—the—flower.”

“Tell me about you and butterflies,” I said, trying to bring Omid toward content that mattered more to him.

“I never saw one,” he answered. He was silent and I
waited, waited, waited. Brightening up, Omid said, “But I saw a moth! I was trying to get it out of my house. I took a box and I put it very close to it and I pushed it in and I let it go in the air.” He gestured to show me how the adventure had gone.

“Omid,” I responded, “you’ve got to write that!” Then I said, “It’ll probably be a long story. You are going to need a few pages!” I stapled three pages together. Then touching the first, I asked, “What will go on this page?” Omid wasn’t sure. “Can you remember how your story about finding the moth went?” I asked and looked up into the sky as if I were mentally reaching to re-create the event. Omid joined me and said, as if dictating the story, “A moth was in my house and. . . .”

“Okay, write that,” I responded, pointing to the page. I dictated his words back to him, “A—moth—” Within fifteen minutes of writing, Omid had written the pages shown in Figure 2-1.

Although Omid had initially written lists of attributes (“Dinosaurs are big. Dinosaurs are nice. I love dinosaurs”), he had soon written a coherent story that spanned several pages. If a child is able to write a story, over time that child can learn to develop a setting, to show the internal as well as the external events, to write with literary language, to include dialogue, to decide which moments in the story are especially important and to magnify those, and to incorporate techniques other writers have used. Children can not only write stories but can also write in a full range of genres for a full range of purposes. Attribute books can become information books with chapters elaborating on different aspects of a subject. There is no particular sequence to these developments, and most of them are within grasp for children at a surprisingly young age, as long as children are explicitly taught what they need to know, given opportunities for approximation with scaffolding, and encouraged to work toward greater independence.

Lucille Clifton, the great American poet, once said to a colleague and me, “It’s important to nurture your image of what’s possible. We can only create what we can imagine.” It’s crucial that we teachers nurture our image of what’s possible for young writers. Figures 2-2 and 2-3 are pieces of writing written by first graders in the spring of the year. These represent the horizon we need to reach toward as teachers of young writers. As you read these pieces, guard against the very human tendency to dismiss them by saying, “Those children are gifted.” These pieces are well written but are not beyond the reach of many first graders (let alone second graders!), assuming those children are gifted with the opportunity to study with teachers whose expectations are high.
When we went to the hospital to bring Dad home, Dad was happy to see us. The nurse brought a wheel chair. Dad hopped into it. Soon she was steering Dad to the elevator. I had a good look at Dad's knee. I kept away. I felt as if he was as delicate as a butterfly's wing.

When we got home I raced to Dad's room to help him. I brought him my fluffy, bouncy, big huge pillow. I framed his bed with tables and I brought the thousands of medicines and lined them up. I felt like I was the grown up and he was my child.

I brought him coffee and I brought him his shoes. I brought him his socks. I brought him a blanket and more. Dad fell asleep. I wanted to play cards and play checkers with Dad. I couldn't. I did the dishes. Soon Dad woke up. I asked if I could play with him but Dad said no. I was sad but no one was there to comfort me.

The next day I did the dishes again and put them away. I brought him his juicy lunch and I washed the clothes and folded them. We tried to keep the pain away. Dad was grumpy and miserable. I felt miserable but tried to hide it.

Now Dad can hobble and he doesn't say no when I ask him, "Can we play cards?" and he does not say no when I ask, "Can we play checkers?" and I got my fluffy pillow back and when he tucks me in to bed I feel like I am the child and he is the grown up.
I sank to the bottom of the pool.

But then . . . I let go of the wall! And then slowly and slowly I swam away from the wall.

But then for a second my head dunked under the water. In the middle of the water where the pool was so deep.

I felt as though I was a tiny little fish that had just gotten eaten . . . by a shark. But then . . . I jumped . . . so I could get out of the bottom of the pool in the deep water.

I did. I got out of that horrible dungeon! I swam back without going underwater.

My swimming teacher said in astonishment, “great.” I was so proud of myself.

One day Roberto told me that it would be time for me to go across the pool all by myself!

One, two, three,” he said. I knew what that meant. It meant that I would have to go across the pool. I let go of the wall. But then I clutched the wall with an enormous amount of fear.

But then . . . I let go of the wall! And then slowly and slowly I swam away from the wall.

I felt as though I was a tiny little fish that had just gotten eaten . . . by a shark. But then . . . I jumped . . . so I could get out of the bottom of the pool in the deep water.

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I did. I got out of that horrible dungeon! I swam back without going underwater.

My swimming teacher said in astonishment, “great.” I was so proud of myself.

I was four years old. I took swimming lessons.

My teacher’s name was Roberto.

I sank to the bottom of the pool.

But then . . . I let go of the wall! And then slowly and slowly I swam away from the wall.

But then for a second my head dunked under the water. In the middle of the water where the pool was so deep.

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I did. I got out of that horrible dungeon! I swam back without going underwater.

My swimming teacher said in astonishment, “great.” I was so proud of myself.
In the teaching of writing, curriculum comes from both the ongoing structures that last across the year and from the changing units of study that provide learners with their course to travel. The ongoing structures include minilessons, conferences, partnerships, writing folders, work time, and the like. Together, these structures provide the continuity of daily practice and coaching that allows learners to exercise and improve their skills. This is necessary whether the learner is a gymnast, a programmer, a mathematician, or a writer. The units of study, on the other hand, allow teachers to plan and organize a sequence of instruction so that over time students successfully tackle new and often increasingly difficult challenges.

Too many teachers provide either the ongoing structures or the changing units of study, but not both. Those who err on the side of providing only the ongoing structures tend to be child-centered in their approach to schooling, suggesting that children be allowed to write and that teachers watch from the sidelines, ever ready to seize teachable moments as they fly by. Those who err on the side of providing only the changing units of study tend, on the other hand, to be teacher-centered in their
approach to schooling, suggesting that teachers should actively plan, compose, and carry out their teaching and that the children will join in if they can, in hopes that their teachers’ hard work will rub off on them. What’s necessary is education that requires high input from both children and their teachers. This rigorous balance is best achieved when curriculum involves both ongoing structures and changing units of study and when the curriculum provides the context for constant assessment-based instruction.

In the schools where I work closely, the teachers across each grade level in a school spend a day toward the end of the school year planning a shared curricular calendar for both reading and writing instruction throughout the upcoming year. These teachers use curricular calendars that the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project publishes as a starting place, revising our suggestions based on their own passions and knowledge and based also on the information they glean about their incoming children. The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project’s recommended calendars are designed with New York State’s rigorous assessments and the National Center for Education and Economy standards in mind, and teachers from other states sometimes need to alter the curriculum to take into account their state’s standards and assessments.

If teachers across a grade level feel confined by the prospect of moving in synchronicity through shared curricular calendars, they designate particular months as times for divergent units of study; that is, perhaps everyone agrees to go separate ways in January and in May. The good news, then, is that for much of the year teachers can still benefit from being able to work together. When teachers across a grade level agree to travel in synchronicity, they are able to plan and reflect collaboratively.

Grade-level meetings can become a time for teachers to swap ideas for their minilessons, to wrestle with shared problems, and to function as a curricular support group. This structure also allows professional development to be aligned with instruction. A staff developer, for example, can work for a month in four schools, one day a week in each, then spend one day a week in a second cluster of schools, and return during the third month to the first schools. While the staff developer is working with a school, he or she helps groups of teachers at one or two grade levels plan and teach new units of study. Early on, the staff developer provides demonstration teaching and coaching to support that unit of study; over time, he or she provides coaching and guided practice as teachers assume more and more responsibility.

For example, a staff developer might work Wednesdays at P.S. 260, starting each day with an 8:30–9:30 “lab site” class of third graders, with all the second- and third-grade teachers participating. Later in the day, the staff developer might work similarly with all the kindergarten and first-grade teachers and then with all the fourth- and fifth-grade teachers. The staff developer would also need to lead a study group for each of the three groups of teachers, helping them plan their teaching for the upcoming week. As the unit of study nears an end and the staff developer prepares to leave to spend the next month with different schools, he or she helps the study groups plan for and perhaps launch the upcoming unit of study, which these groups of teachers will teach on their own. Perhaps when the staff developer returns, the teachers will collaborate and construct the unit of study so that now the staff developer can lead a parallel unit of study for teachers on a topic such as designing more assessment-based instruction or using small-group instruction across a unit of
study. When teachers across a grade level share curricular calendars, it is easier to ensure that professional development directly supports classroom teaching.

Beginning on the next page, I will give an overview of and an explanation for the sequence of units we recommend across a year of K–2 writing instruction. Each of these units is described in detail in one of the books in this series, seven of which are being published in the original set and several others of which will come later. I will also overview the process and share the principles we draw on when planning any unit of study.

Dear Kindergarten Teacher,

I know there is a world of difference between kindergartners and first graders and that you will be tempted to surmise that these units weren’t tailored for your little ones. I want you to know that my colleagues and I developed these units exactly for your very young children. We have taught these units to as many kindergarten children as first-grade children. I promise that if you trust enough to hang in there, the work your little ones do will astonish you and them and everyone who peeks into your classroom.

Meanwhile, your children will be the talk of the town and they will enter first grade with strengths no one dreamt were possible. In the schools I know best, this has happened again and again. Often these are schools brim-full of English language learners and children who didn’t have the chance to attend nursery school, and yet for these children, as for others, the writing workshops transform our expectations.

You will notice that I do not tarry long before nudging children to write using conventional sound-letter correspondence. Let me explain my rationale. I also want to tell you about ways I alter the sequence in these units when I believe children need more time, which is sometimes the case.

First, here is my rationale for nudging children to begin writing with letters and sounds as soon as possible. One reason is that I have expectations for their writing. For example, the Primary Literacy Standards published by the National Center on Education and the Economy suggest that by the end of kindergarten, most kindergarten children should be able to write long texts—perhaps six pages long, with a sentence or two on each page. These texts should be fairly easy for you and I to read even though they aren’t spelled conventionally. I helped to author those standards and they match what I see in classrooms where there is a daily writing workshop and teachers teach into that writing.

I also keep in mind that by January, most kindergarten teachers launch most of their children into reading little books (Levels A and B). I embrace the research by Elizabeth Sulzby and Marie Clay that suggests that before children are ready to profit from this sort of reading, they should be able to write with enough sound-letter correspondence that you and I can decipher much of what they write. Equally important, they should be able to reread much of their writing conventionally, matching what they say with what they have written in such a way that they notice and self-correct when the oral and written texts deviate.

But most of all, I encourage kindergartners to spell as best they can because I believe that when children need a knowledge of letters and sounds in order to write their own important stories, their investment in learning about print skyscrapers. And so, even if a child doesn’t know any sound-letter correspondences at all, I will encourage that child to find a picture he or she wants to label, say the word slowly, listen to the sounds in it, and then try writing the sounds onto the page. If the child is going around asking, “How do I write /ssss/?” I think this is the greatest possible context for teaching that child about the letter s.

For these reasons, then, I try to make sure that by the end of September every kindergarten child is writing his or her name on every story and is at least labeling items from the drawing. I hope each child will label by saying the word slowly, listening to the sounds, and trying to hear and record the first sound, then other sounds. I know that listening to and isolating sounds is phonemic awareness at its best, and I expect kindergartners to do other work with phonemic awareness as well. I also expect that every day these children will learn something about sound-letter correspondence during a daily ten-minute interactive writing session (see the CD-ROM) and during shared reading. I will meanwhile teach children to hear and record more and more sounds in words and to rely on a handful of high-frequency words—Mom, I, me, and their own name.

The units we propose depend upon most children, by mid-October, being able to label sun as “sn” and rabbit as “rbb,” in which case I graduate children to writing sentences under their pictures, leaving spaces between words.

My hope is that by mid-November, most of our children will be able to write a lot of text in such a way that at least you (and hopefully they) can read much of what they write. The time frame will be too ambitious for some kindergartners, and if this is the case, I suggest you add a detour study in October on Labels and Labeling books. I describe this briefly in my overview of the yearlong curriculum.

I hope this helps get you started off on the right foot!

Sincerely,
Lucy Calkins

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Sincerely,
Lucy Calkins
A Recommended Curricular Calendar

In this unit, we help all children see themselves as authors. We ensure that each child can carry on during the writing workshop, choosing topics, planning for writing, and drafting as best as he or she can. It is essential that during this first unit of study, writers learn the rituals and structures of a writing workshop so they can carry on with some independence while their teacher moves about, conferring with individuals and small groups. The only way to be sure all children can carry on with independence in the first month of the school year is for us to lower our expectations for the actual writing students will do.

We begin the year by telling children they will all be authors. Then we help all children think up stories to tell, to draw, and perhaps to write. All children revise, if only by adding details into their pictures. Within a week or two, they revise also by drawing what happens next on a second page (which creates the very exciting chance to staple and literally grow books). Soon we point out that picture books have a place for drawings and a place for words, and we nudge every child to write words as best they can. (Some will have written words from the start, others will need our scaffolding.)

We then use the Pathways (from Chapter 2) to inform us as we nudge writers from scribbles to random strings of letters, from random strings to labels, and from labels to stories.

Whether writers write just a few labels on items in their pictures or write paragraphs, by the end of this unit all children know that in order to write, a writer fills him or herself with an idea, plans how the text will go, and then draws and writes as best he or she can, working to make the page match the writer’s vision.

Optional Unit

This is an optional unit recommended for some kindergarten classes and for some classrooms filled with English language learners. The unit provides a way to help children focus both on the fact that writing represents the world and has real-world purposes and on the graphophonics involved in turning oral language into print. We launch the unit by saying, “Now that you are writers, I wonder if you’d help me fix up this room. We need to write labels on our meeting area and our library and our math area so people know what these places are for.” The actual amount of writing required in a label is limited, so this gives children an opportunity to focus on recording sounds they hear in a word. Children first write functional signs for their classroom. They label the block area, perhaps labeling even the big blocks and the little ones. They might write a sign for the hamster’s cage, or a sign saying “Please throw trash away” beside the trash can. These pieces are put to immediate use. The sign telling the hamster’s name is prominently displayed beside the cage, the rules for using the trash can or the paints are prominently displayed.

Children are soon also labeling pictures in their own books. You may decide for a time to continue steering them to write (tell) about real events in their lives, labeling the objects in their pictures as they do so. Alternatively, you may shift to writing label books in which they name, page by page, the parts of something bigger. These books resemble many of the very earliest books children read. Now their books might proceed like one of these:

- *My Family: Mom/Dad/Joline/Tiger/Me!*
- *The Baseball Game: the players/the fans/the ball/the game*

In this way, students learn that writing serves a purpose and matches the picture, and they also receive intense help with sound-letter correspondence.
We help children value tiny moments from their lives and know that writers hold these moments in their minds and hearts, then make a story out of them, one that stretches across a sequence of several pages. Instead of writing about the whole move from the old house to the new one, a child writes about saying good-bye to Annie. The story begins with the writer knocking on her friend’s door, then the good-bye, then the writer’s feelings as she walks away. We encourage writers to reread what they’ve written, to see details they may have overlooked or confusions they may have created or feelings they want to bring out. Writers revise as part of writing, easily and in an effort to tell the truth and to put life onto the page in ways that match reality and make sense.

This unit of study emphasizes certain qualities of good writing, including focus, detail, sequence, and writing with a sense of story. Alongside the emphasis on content and craft, there must be ongoing work on hearing and recording sounds, using known words, tackling words, leaving spaces between words, and being a risk taker with spelling.

This study begins with us confessing to our children that we had a hard time reading their writing. Prior to now, we will have acted as if children’s invented spellings are fine and dandy. We’ve reveled in their approximations. Now, we let the cat out of the bag. “I took your wonderful books home last night,” we say, “And I sat down to read them. But do you know what? I read a bit and then I got stuck. I couldn’t figure out what the story was supposed to say! Has that ever happened to any of you?”

Until now, we’ve so wanted our children to feel good as writers that we have hidden our struggles to translate their spindly letters into meaning. The problem with this is that the only reason children will care about spelling, punctuation, or white space is that these conventions make it easier for others to read and to appreciate their texts!

It’s crucial, therefore, that as soon as a child can conceivably stretch himself or herself enough to be able to write in ways that others can read, we let kids in on the truth. If we’re going to let kids in on the fact that sometimes we can’t read the writing that we’ve until now accepted with such open arms, we need to do this in a way that doesn’t cause children to despair. Our goal is to spotlight the importance of spelling and punctuation by designing a unit of study that makes word walls, blends, and capital letters into the talk of the town—and to do this while safeguarding children’s focus on meaning and their love of writing.In this unit, the child first aims to write for the teacher, who tries mightily to read what children are writing and asks them to help by writing left to right and top to bottom, by including more sounds, by leaving spaces between words, and by incorporating word wall words into their texts. Children soon write also in hopes that they can reread their own writing. When writers are ready, we encourage them to write in a way that a partner can read their writing.
A commitment to revision is part and parcel of a commitment to teach writing as a process. Writing is a powerful tool for thinking precisely, because when we write, we can take fleeting memories, insights, and images and hold them in our hands. When we talk, our thoughts float away. When we write, we put our thoughts onto paper and can stick them in our pocket. We can come back to them later. We can reread our first thoughts and see that we have more to say. We can look again and see that our story has gaps or that our points are undeveloped. We can see that our sequence "jumps all over the place," or that our readers will think, "Huh?" Through rereading and revision, writing becomes a tool for thinking.

Watch a child at work making something—anything—and one sees revision. The child pats a ball of clay into a pancake to make a duck pond, and then revises the duck pond by creating a fingertip rainstorm that dapples the water surface. Young children revise block castles to add protected hiding spots for archers, and they revise pictures of spaceships to add explosions. They revise clay rabbits to make one ear droop. Young children can revise their writing with equal ease and enthusiasm—as long as we don’t expect their revisions to look like those a grown-up would make. First graders can revise—as long as we expect their six-year-old best!

In this unit, children learn that revision is a compliment to good work. They select their best pieces from the fall and put these in a special revision folder and then revise one after another. They learn to use strategies (cutting, stapling, adding into the middle of a page, resequencing) in combination with goals (making sense, answering the reader’s questions, showing not telling, adding detail, developing characters). The unit ends with children learning that they can revise writing also by thinking. "How else could I write this?" and then by turning their narratives into poems, stories, directions, or letters.

The most important message we give to children during a writing workshop is this: "You are writers, like writers the world over." It makes sense, then, that for at least one unit of study, children are invited to look closely at the work of one writer and let that writer function as a mentor.

When deciding on the whole-class mentor author, a teacher needs to decide if he or she wants this unit to continue the emphasis on writing personal narratives (or small moments) or to broaden the class’s repertoire and launch other kinds of writing. Many teachers in our community decide to select an author who has written a few texts that are rather like the Small Moment stories the children have been writing, so that the author serves as a mentor in this work. But it is wonderful if the author writes other kinds of texts, too. The unit of study, then, can begin with studying an author’s Small Moment stories and then move to studying other kinds of writing the author has written, opening the doors to the children, also, to create a whole range of kinds of writing.

We especially recommend K–2 children study Angela Johnson, Ezra Jack Keats, Joanne Ryder, or Donald Crews, although there are other wonderful possibilities. It is important to search for an author whose texts seem to children to be within their zone of proximal development.

In an author study, the class explores how this author lives as a writer, the themes the author tends to write about, but above all, the author’s craft techniques. We first encourage children to look very closely at one text, pointing to sections they like and then asking, "What did the author do to create this nice part?" Soon children can also ask, "Did the author do that same thing anywhere else in this book? In another book?" Children find it thrilling to find three or four places in a text where an author uses the same craft technique differently, and these different instances in which one technique has been used help children see that they, too, can put the techniques into effect. Children tend to notice and emulate first the very concrete, obvious techniques, such as ellipses, but good teaching can help children realize that the ellipses creates dramatic tension (although we don’t necessarily use that term!), which is a fundamental feature in effective stories.

After participating in a shared author study, each child is invited to choose his or her own mentor author, again noticing not only the author’s writerly life and topic and genre choices but also her or his craft techniques. Students then develop their own writing projects, nourished by their own mentor author. The final portion of this study especially encourages independence.
This unit opens with us inviting children to become not only writers but also teachers and then suggesting that they use writing as a way to teach others. First, we help them teach others how to do something by inviting them to write books in which they draw and then tell a sequence of steps they hope their readers will take. Procedural writing requires explicitness, clarity, sequence. This is a genre that requires writers to write with an especially keen attention to their audience, anticipating what their readers will need to know and when they’ll need to know it.

Then the unit shifts so that for the remaining few weeks each child writes just one, very long All-About book on a topic of his or her choice. The experience of writing these books will introduce children to the format of information books and lead them toward report writing, but we think it is best for children to write in this genre first around topics in which they have personal experience (soccer, baby brothers). Some teachers bring children through this unit twice, with the second cycle supporting each child writing on one instance of a whole-class theme (for example, each writes on one insect).

When children write non-narrative texts, we need to teach them to impose an organizational structure on their “pile of stuff.” These books are written in chapters, with children sorting information by means of tables of contents. If a child is writing “All About Dogs” and one page is on “Training Your Dog to Heel,” we teach the child to use paper formatted to support procedural texts. Other pages will be formatted differently to support other ways of organizing informational writing. Teachers also teach children to notice and emulate a few text features of nonfiction writing (diagrams, charts, a table of contents, sub-headings, etc.).

In the poetry genre study, children practice and consolidate all they’ve learned so far, and do so while working with more independence. They find significance in the ordinary details of their lives, draft pieces that are filled with specific detail, employ revision strategies in the service of qualities of good writing, emulate techniques other authors demonstrate, and edit their work so that others can read and enjoy it.

Meanwhile, much of our instruction is designed to help children explore and savor language. We encourage them to live as poets, seeing the world with fresh eyes and reaching for the precisely honest and carefully chosen word. We stress that poets write for the ear and listen to the music in their words. We help children realize that language can create images and that there’s a world of difference between fry and sizzle, shine and sparkle, cry and weep. We also try to find child-appropriate ways to introduce children to figurative language, knowing that some of them use metaphor and simile naturally and could benefit from using them deliberately as well.
The urge to write fiction begins when children are very young. Allowing children to satisfy this urge taps an energy source that is something to behold. In this unit, we help children tell and plan stories, perhaps "across their fingers" or as they turn five or six pages in a book. We help students internalize the rhythm and structure of stories and anticipate how stories tend to go. "Usually your story has a character who feels something and tries for something, but then there’s trouble and the character has to work, to try, to struggle," we say. And then we let students draft a bunch of stories, selecting their best to revise.

In this unit, we remind children of all the kinds of writing that exists in the classroom, the school, and their homes. "You can write in all these ways!" we say, issuing a grand invitation for them to write for a variety of purposes, including recipes, invitations, pamphlets, songs, book reviews, etc. We add new varieties of paper to accentuate the new possibilities and hope that the writing projects children do in school spill over into their homes. The emphasis is on learning how genres look and sound and on writing all day long, across our whole lives, for real purposes. ("Look at what you read in your life and let it inspire you to write in similar ways.")

Children in this unit may begin to keep a class mailbox, to write a real magazine that is published for the whole school, or to take on a service project that involves real-world functional writing.

This unit comes at the end of a yearlong study of writing and it reminds children that they can be the authors of their own writing lives. The year ends with us saying to children, “You all are writers—go to it!” and then encouraging youngsters to imagine and pursue writing projects of their own.

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### Principles that Inform the Plans for Every Unit of Study in the Primary Writing Workshop

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<th>Plan for children to write a lot.</th>
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<td>Within any unit of study in a primary writing workshop, children work on a lot of pieces of writing. A unit on how-to writing, therefore, doesn’t culminate in the production of a single how-to book. Instead, children generally write at least two texts a week. At the end of a unit, children may be asked to select just one text to perfect for publication, but they will have written many more texts. During the unit on revision (and conceivably other units), children revise previously written pieces rather than generating new pieces.</td>
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<th>Plan for the entire unit, with all its parts.</th>
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<td>When we plan a unit of study, it helps to think of the unit as a journey with bends in the road. Although we can’t imagine each of the small steps in the journey, we approach the journey with a general plan for the bends in the road. We can describe our plan for a unit by saying, “First we’ll spend a few days on . . . , then we’ll . . . , after that we’ll . . . .” In a sense, a unit of study is like a story, and we need to approach any unit with a clear plan for at least its beginning, middle, and end.</td>
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<th>Plan what we’ll do for each part of the unit and what children will do.</th>
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<tr>
<td>When planning a unit of study, it is helpful to think about what children will probably be doing as writers as they travel along any one bend in the road and also to think about what we will probably be teaching during any one bend in the road. These two things will not always be exactly aligned. In a spring unit on poetry, for example, children will do a lot of work they have learned to do from other units. They’ll choose topics, draft and revise poems, scissor apart texts, add details. Meanwhile, we may focus instruction on a few new aspects of the work—the importance of patterns, for example, or of figurative language.</td>
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<th>Plan for continuity—in texts, metaphors, and language.</th>
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<td>Before a unit begins, it’s helpful to anticipate the threads of coherence that will run through the unit. For example, you will want to think about whether there will be a shared metaphor in your unit so that you don’t talk one day about the ingredients of a poem, the next day about the importance of growing poems, and the next day about the lens for looking at poems. If you can stay with one way of talking about your subject, children are more apt to internalize the language and concepts you teach. Think also about whether you’ll want to revisit a single text often during a unit. If so, what will you attend to in that text early in the unit, later on, and later still? Will your children be able to read this text? How will they—and you—mine it for its teaching potential? In many units, the text that travels across the unit and gives it coherence will be a text you (or you and the class) write. This text will probably begin as a very brief text and it will probably be about an experience the class shared.</td>
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<th>Plan to support ongoing writing goals as well as unit-specific goals.</th>
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<tr>
<td>We approach each unit with a set of goals, but there are also many goals that endure across all units. Over time, it is important for writers to learn to plan for what they’ll write, to write in ways that are increasingly conventional, then to reread and revise their writing. Eventually it is also important for writers to study exemplar texts and try out techniques other authors have used. Writers of any age can learn to cycle through all these stages of the writing process without a teacher prompting them along. Plan to instruct children in the use of a new writing tool in every unit.</td>
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<td>Each new unit of study can be embodied in a new tool. During a unit on “Can you read this?” children will be given personal copies of the word wall. During a unit on revision, children work with scissors, tape, and a revision pen. During an author study unit, children begin to use a seed-idea booklet and a chart in which they name techniques they see other authors use. Each of these tools remains with writers after the unit is over as a visual reminder that the units are meant to make lasting impressions.</td>
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<th>Plan to end the unit with a celebration.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Each unit ends with a few days to “fix up and fancy up” the work children have done, culminating in an authors’ celebration. These celebrations are done differently for different units, but in general, across the year they become more elaborate.</td>
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<th>Plan to SAVE some of every child’s writing and to start new pieces or kinds of writing with every unit.</th>
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<tr>
<td>After a unit ends with a celebration, some of the work is sent home, save for selected pieces that are transferred to children’s cumulative portfolios. Sometimes you’ll decide to keep children’s writing because you plan to have children revisit it in an upcoming unit of study. (Keep the work from the fall until the revision unit is completed.) Either way, however, children enter a new unit of study with a cleaned-out writing folder, planning to write new pieces or planning new work with selected former pieces.</td>
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Launching the Writing Workshop

Dedication

To Carl Anderson, with appreciation for his respectful attention to quiet voices and small moments.

FirstHand

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Series Components

- The Nuts and Bolts of Teaching Writing provides a comprehensive overview of the processes and structures of the primary writing workshop.
- You’ll use The Conferring Handbook as you work with individual students to identify and address specific writing issues.
- The seven Units of Study, each covering approximately four weeks of instruction, give you the strategies, lesson plans, and tools you’ll need to teach writing to your students in powerful, lasting ways. Presented sequentially, the Units take your children from oral and pictorial story telling, through emergent and into fluent writing.
- To support your writing program, the Resources for Primary Writers CD-ROM provides video and print resources. You’ll find clips of the authors teaching some of the lessons, booklists, supplementary material, reproducibles and overheads.
Welcome to the Unit

PART ONE: Working Independently in a Writing Workshop

Session I: Starting the Writing Workshop
In this session, you will model the process of choosing a topic, sketching it, and then writing a tiny bit about it.

Session II: Carrying On Independently as Writers
In this session, you will show writers how they can keep working by adding more to their picture, by adding more to their words, or by starting a new piece of writing.

Session III: Using Supplies Independently
You’ll move your students towards independence by teaching them where to find and how to take care of the tools they need for the writing workshop—cans of pencils, boxes of markers, the date stamp, and their writing folders.

Session IV: Telling Stories In Illustrations
This session will teach students that writers can decide on a topic, envision it, and then record that meaning on the page with drawings that are representational.

Session V: Drawing Even Hard-to-Make Ideas
In this session, you’ll encourage students not to be held back by not being able to draw exactly what they are thinking but instead to draw the best they can and keep going.

PART TWO: Using Writing, Along with Pictures, to Tell Each Story

Session VI: Using Both Pictures and Words, Like Famous Authors
You remind children in this session that authors write pictures and words, and you will nudge them to do the same.

Session VII: Stretching and Writing Words
In this session, you will help writers separate out the many sounds they hear in words and write down the letters that correspond to those sounds.

Session VIII: Stretching and Writing Words: Initial Sounds
For now, you will show students how to listen hard to how words start so that they can get those first letters down on the page for their readers.

Session IX: Spelling the Best We Can . . . and Moving On
In this session, you will teach writers to accept their own approximate spellings in order to tell more about their stories.

Session X: Using Writing Tools: The Alphabet Chart
You will show students in this session how to match the sound they hear in the word they want to write with a letter that represents it, using an alphabet chart with pictures for help.

PART THREE: Writing Longer, More Varied, More Thoughtful Pieces

Session XI: Creating a Place for Writing-in-Progress: Long-Term Projects
After this session, children will see that they can add more writing to the same piece, and they’ll use a system to separate finished from unfinished work.
Session XII: Introducing Booklets
This session will allow you to teach children to plan for and write a book with several pages.

Session XIII: Widening Writing Possibilities: Lists and Letters
This session will invite children to write in a range of genres, for a range of purposes.

Session XIV: Widening Writing Possibilities: Real-World Purposes
In this session, you’ll help children realize that during every section of the room and part of the day, there are reasons to write—and you’ll invite children to do that writing.

Session XV: Fixing Up Writing
In this session, you will teach children that writers fix up and revise their writing so it says everything they mean it to say before it’s sent out in the world.

Session XVI: Editing and Fancying Up Writing
You will teach students how to reread, check, and edit their writing to make sure it’s readable. Then, mid-workshop, you will teach them to fancy up their work by adding details with colored pencils.

Session XVII: Reading into the Circle: An Author’s Celebration
In this session, children will read a favorite part of their writing to the whole class, then all of their writing to a small group, then will enjoy refreshments and post-unit talk.
Welcome to the unit

Launching the Writing Workshop

Authorship of the Series
In primary classrooms, children sometimes work collaboratively on a shared piece. Some call the activity “Share the Pen.” The phrase aptly describes the process through which these books have emerged. Although the text reads as if one person gave a minilesson and another transcribed and reflected on it, the process was actually much more collaborative. Always, the co-authors and I began by thinking and learning and planning and drafting teaching ideas together. Then one (and usually several of us) tried out the teaching ideas, usually in many classrooms simultaneously. Based on what we learned, we revised the general ideas, made plans for the general route a unit might travel and tried these plans in yet more classrooms. Finally the transcripts of a few minilessons began to emerge. These were then passed between the co-author and I with the details of the minilessons and the precise words to use with children emerging as we took turns working on them. Then we’d reassess the overall plan and set to work on yet more minilessons. Each book had its own support-cast and its own evolution.

About the Series
This series is for people who learn best by simply getting started. We hope teachers will regard the series as a sort of demonstration-teaching, and find companionship and comfort in its classroom specificity. It begins with Monday morning, with the decisions, words and insights that some of the nation’s most respected teachers of writing make when we step past philosophy (and the place where everything is possible because no decisions have been made yet) and put ourselves on the line. We describe the days and weeks of a yearlong writing curriculum. We write in minute-by-minute detail so you can envision the words we actually say and the actions we actually take when we work with tiny writers.

We hope that by sharing our words and our decisions in all their specificity, we help you feel at home enough with teaching writing that you gather your youngsters close, and begin. For a time, you will probably adopt and adapt words and ideas you find here; know that each of us learned that way as well.

Because we have taught within a research and teaching collaborative, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, we’ve each listened in on and adopted the teaching language of mentors and colleagues, and drawn strength from the details of each others’ teaching. This book is for teachers who may not be lucky enough to have the same daily opportunities to peek in on the teaching of mentors. We hope our teaching ideas slide on like new jeans, to be worn and shaped by you over time in ways that make them comfortable, inviting, endlessly functional and uniquely yours.

The series is comprised of nine small books and a CD-ROM. The first book, The Nuts and Bolts of Teaching Writing will equip you to teach a productive, well-managed writing workshop, introduce you to the methods that underlie all writing instruction, and help you plan a yearlong curriculum in the teaching of writing. Then, each of the seven unit books will support four to six weeks of that yearlong curriculum, helping you plan goals, minilessons, and shares for that unit. The Conferring Handbook offers you support in your conferring in each unit, and the CD-ROM offers resources and reproducibles to support you throughout the year’s writing workshop.
USING THE SESSIONS

1 SESSIONS

Sessions Each unit of study is divided into approximately fifteen teaching sessions; some sessions last a day; others need to be followed up with more minilessons in response to our children’s needs and may involve two or three days. The session title identifies the topic of study.

Getting Ready The details of teaching matter. We list needed materials for each session.

The Introduction All teaching begins with research and deliberation. Here we share the thinking that led us to decide upon the particular emphasis for the day. In this way, we uncover the rationale for our decisions and reveal the beliefs that guide the day-to-day work we do with children.

2 THE MINILESSONS

We provide a ten-minute long minilesson that enables you to listen in on our actual teaching language and our children’s responses. Each minilesson is divided into four components:

  Connection: children access prior knowledge and hear the teaching point

  Teaching: instructional language of the actual lesson

  Active Engagement: children try or discuss what they’ve just been taught.

  Link: we situate what we’ve taught into the larger context of all they’ve been doing.

These teaching moments are described both in concise statements in bold font, and in longer descriptions that capture the language and dynamics of real classrooms.

Commentary Alongside the teaching moments is your in-the-classroom literacy coach throughout the Unit of Study. In these comments, as in the introduction to each session and in other recurring sections throughout, we add more theory and professional advice to the teaching we have presented in the lessons.

3 TIME TO CONFER

As a unit of study progresses, the support you’ll need to provide in one-on-one conferences is predictable. In this section, we set you up for success with one-to-one conferences, whispering key reminders to you as you head off to teach in response to what your children do and say and referring you to two additional resources for conferencing. In your Units of Study package you will find a separate book titled The Conferring Handbook. Available separately is Conferring with Primary Writers, a larger guide to writing conferences. On this page we refer you to the specific conferences in both books that are most applicable at this point in the unit.

4 AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE

Every workshop ends with a reflective sharing session. After the Workshop Share helps you elicit reflections from students, or push them further, as they gather to talk about their work.
Each unit is divided into approximately fifteen sessions. In each session, we provide a detailed description of one day’s teaching, and share ways in which that one day could be extended into several days.

This series grows out of the work that the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project does as staff developers in classrooms across the nation. We’ve found that some of the most powerful staff development occurs when we teach alongside other teachers, coaching into the nitty-gritty details of teaching. I’ve tried to bring this sort of coaching into this book. Often in the midst of a minilesson transcript, readers will find the words, “Notice especially the way . . .” or “This was a crucial move because . . . .” I hope that these comments help you glean larger principles from the fast-paced details of this teaching.

Why This Unit?
This book is for September. It is based on the premise that at the start of school, we mustn’t waste a minute before issuing a broad and generous invitation to be sure each child feels at home in the world of written language. If children begin school by seeing themselves as the kind of people for whom the code of written language matters, they will be eager learners, taking in all they see.

Recently, I helped my three-year-old nephew slide each finger into the proper slot in his winter gloves. As I gave a final push to the last glove, Hugh pointed to the brand name label prominently displayed along the bottom of his glove. Running his finger slowly across each of the letters, he said, “That says baseball glove,” and he gave me his
melting smile. An hour later, Hugh was back, this time needing help removing the very same layers we had added earlier. As we worked, he confided, “I’m gonna make my cousin a police ticket. He was speeding.” When Miles came in from the slopes, Hugh’s efforts with marker pen and paper were underway. One glance told Miles that he could be in for some serious trouble with the local law, and soon he was on his knees beseeching the delighted three-year-old for mercy.

Hugh is growing up immersed in literacy. Even though he is only three years old, he is already a member of what Frank Smith refers to as the literacy club. He is an insider in the world of reading and writing, interacting with print for his own important purposes. Too many five- and six-year-olds watch people read and write and think, “That stuff is for someone else. I’m not even close to being the kind of person who can read and write,” and so they mentally stand back from reading and writing. If a child has decided that writing is for other kids, not for him, then the child can be immersed in demonstrations of writing that barely enter his consciousness. The issue of identity, then, has everything to do with engagement.

In a similar way, it is easy for some teachers to read and hear about writing workshops, and to think, “Never, not in a million years of learning, could I teach that way.” Leah Mermelstein, a colleague at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, and I have worked together to co-author this book on Launching the Writing Workshop because we believe that teaching writing shouldn’t feel off-putting. We hope to provide the detailed and practical guidance that will help you feel as if you can approach the teaching of writing with the same verve and delight with which my nephew Hugh approaches literacy.

**About the Unit**

To an observer it will seem magical that by late September in a primary writing workshop, a teacher can convene her class on the carpet for a minilesson by simply saying, “Let’s gather,” or “It’s time for writing,” and within a few minutes children will have gathered around the teacher in an orderly cluster. It will seem magical that the teacher says, “Eyes, please,” and children all (well, all but one or two!) look at her. Most of all, it will seem magical that teachers send children off to draw and write, and lo and behold, the miracle happens. Children take their pens or markers, and they put themselves onto the page. They draw turtles and tall buildings, they make writing-like squiggles, alphabet letters that float across the page, or words that pin stories onto paper. Some sign their names; others label their drawings; some record long stories. No matter what they do, our children put themselves onto the page. The writing workshop is off and running. The important thing to know is this: none of this happens as a result of magic.

In September, we induct children into the structures and expectations of a writing workshop so that even in its opening days, children carry on with independence, making decisions without a teacher micro-managing their every step. This is only possible if the work is accessible enough for all children to do it easily and happily. The trick is to start the year with low expectations for the amount and quality of writing our students will do.

In early September, we have no alternative but to begin with what our children can do easily. We need to approach the first weeks of school determined that we will be perfectly happy if, at the end of the first few days, the workshop is a well-managed place, full of children who work with independence and initiative, even if no one has yet done much actual writing! During the very first days of a writing workshop, then, it is important to avoid focusing on letters and sounds. Your teaching won’t prevent children from writing conventionally, but it should lessen the pressure and allow every child to carry on, doing whatever they can do easily (even if this is only drawing). Then, once the workshop feels like it is humming, you can intervene and teach in ways that lift the level of your expectations and of your children’s work.

Before this first unit of study we, as teachers, need to be able to picture every detail of the writing workshop. We need to decide, for example, on the words or the signal to use to convene children in the meeting area. We need to imagine how our children will sit—perhaps cross-legged, shoulders facing forward, eyes towards us. We plan to explicitly teach these and other expectations. I know I’ll give lessons on putting the cap back on markers, on taking just one marker at a time from
the can, on moving quickly from the minilesson to one's writing spot. I know I'll need to follow-through on the routines I teach so that I turn words into practices, practices into habits.

Once children have begun to carry on independently and resourcefully, I don’t hesitate to tell them that during writing time they must draw and write. There are educators whom I respect who do not share my belief that kindergarten children should be writing as well as drawing within a few weeks of the start of kindergarten. Usually these people will say that young children must begin the year with a focus on storytelling. I agree; in fact, this unit and the one that follows it are designed to help children sketch stories that span several pages and to tell and write these stories using story language. But, I also want children to have plenty of time to approximate working with print before they are expected to read and write conventionally. If a child has drawn a booklet full of pictures and told an accompanying story, it doesn’t take anything away from the child’s oral language work for that child to return to the picture and label bike, me, and store as best the child can. If the child hears only an l-p for lollipop, the effort to do this has still put the child into the place of wanting and needing to know letters—and this is a good thing. If the child hears the /b/ in bike and writes a squiggle in place of a letter, this is better than not stopping to hear the /b/. This means, then, that across the first unit of study, there will be changes in the work children do. Over time, children will begin to do more writing, and to write more conventionally.
To launch this unit and the yearlong writing workshop, we will demonstrate writing. Our goal is to offer children the opportunity to bring their lives to school and to put their lives on the page. At first, we’re especially cultivating rich conversations, lots of storytelling, and detailed drawings. We definitely don’t want children to limit what they say and think because of a concern for spelling or penmanship. We want to teach all children that the writing workshop is an opportunity to make and convey meaning.

We’ll start by demonstrating the whole act of writing and by inviting children to do likewise. We don’t begin by breaking the process of writing down and asking children to do just one small part of that process. We believe it helps learners to have an image of the whole thing they’ll be trying to do, even though it can feel ambitious to show them the whole thing and say, “Get started doing this.” We know all children won’t be able to do all of what we do on this, the first day of the writing workshop, but we want to give them the whole picture of what writers do.

By giving children a wide-open invitation into the whole act of writing, we also give ourselves a chance to see how much they can do without prejudging that they are ready only for one small step. Later we will slow down and show them aspects of the writing process that we trust will be especially accessible to them.

In this session, we will model the process of choosing a topic, sketching it, and then writing a tiny bit about it.
Connection

Explain that every day children will work in a writing workshop and that the workshop will always begin with a meeting. Tell the children they are going to become writers.

“Writers, today we are starting something very exciting in our classroom called writing workshop. Every day at the start of writing workshop we will gather right here for a little meeting. We gather here because this is the most special place in the room.” Leah gestured to all the beautiful books on the library shelves surrounding them. “We’re wrapped in books. Every one of those books was written by an author, and this year you will all be authors too.”

“We are going to write books like these,” Leah held up a book, “and we will write songs like the ones we have been singing in our class,” she gestured toward the words of a song, “and we will write letters.” Leah held up stationery and an envelope.

“Today we are all going to be authors, and I will show you what authors do.” Leah said this with a happy smile and an excited, confident tone.

Your confidence and enthusiasm will carry most of your children along. No matter how tentative and insecure you may feel, role-play your way into being confident of yourself and your children because they will hitch a ride on your enthusiasm.

The “visual aids” help more than you may realize—but only if you have the stuff on hand.

It’s scary to begin. But across the nation, thousands of teachers bravely send children off to draw and write, and, lo and behold, the miracle happens. Children draw squiggles and turtles and tall buildings, they make writing-like graphics or alphabet letters that float across the page, and some record long stories. No matter what they do, children put themselves onto the page.
Teaching

Show children how you go about choosing a topic you know and care about.

“Watch what I do when I write.” Taking hold of a marker pen, Leah cocked her head, pretending to search her memories.

“Hmmm. What should I write about?” Pausing, she said, in an unenthusiastic voice, “I could write about rainbows...” Shaking her head as if to dismiss that very bad idea, she said, “But you know what, I never did anything with a rainbow! I want to write about what I do and what I know. Hmmmm.”

“I know! I go running every morning, and funny things happen to me when I’m running. I can tell about what happened one day on my jog.”

Show children that you begin by thinking about your subject, and then you sketch it from the image in your mind.

Leah looked at the marker pen in her hand. “Let me draw my story. Hmmmm.” Again Leah looked up pensively, she was remembering one time when she was running. Then Leah started to make a quick sketch. As she drew, she said, “Yesterday I ran across the Brooklyn Bridge. I splashed in a puddle and got mud all over my legs, so I am drawing about that time.”

Leah made a drawing of the bridge, puddle, mud, and herself. While still intent on the quick sketching, she said, “Now I’ll write my words.”

Next, show children that you say the whole idea that you’ll write, then you separate one word, or one part of a word, and then record it.

Looking at the picture, Leah said, “That’s me so I’ll write me.” Then she said, “Me, me, /m/” and wrote an m. She repeated, “me, me” and completed the spelling.

“That’s the bridge so I’ll write bridge.” Then Leah said, “Bridge, bridge, it starts like this,” and she wrote a b beside the bridge in her picture.

Notice how Leah thinks aloud, highlighting the kind of thinking that she hopes her students will do.

Some children will be apt to select topics they can draw—like rainbows—so Leah anticipates and tries to avoid a predictable problem.

You won’t want to use Leah’s topic. Find one from your life. A story about a day when your dog ran away would be better than a story about your trip abroad since the latter would be broad and removed from most students’ experiences. You’ll work with the story you choose again in later minilessons. It should be about an ordinary and small event, chronologically ordered, bare-bones, and brief.

Notice that Leah chooses a story that is short enough to tell, draw, and write in just a couple of minutes.

Leah knows many of her children may not know enough about graphophonics, the way letters and sounds work, to be able to do as she does, but she doesn’t withhold from them the fact that writers draw and then write. She wants all her children to do the same, and she expects them to write as best they can. She knows some will end up making letter-like squiggles, but this doesn’t stop her from modeling how a writer listens to a word and records the sounds.
Then turning to the line under the drawing, Leah began to write her story. “I ran on the bridge,” she said, then repeated, I and wrote it. This continued until she’d quickly written, “I ran on the bridge. I got muddy.”

Tell children what you hope they saw you doing as you wrote and drew.

Turning now to talk to the children, Leah said, “Did you see what I just did? Did you notice that I first thought about something I did—running—and got it in my head? (At first I thought I could write about rainbows, but then I realized I never did anything with rainbows!) Did you notice how I thought about the times when I run in the morning, and I smiled because I love to run, and I remembered one recent time when I was running?”

Explain to the students that what you’ve demonstrated is what they will now do.

“I’m telling you about this because today (and every day) you can do the very same thing. You can think about things from your life, and you can write about them. I wrote about how I splashed in a puddle when I was running and you are probably not going to write about that, but you will think of something you do, something that has happened in your life recently. It could be something small, like maybe today when you were getting ready for school you lost your shoe. Or maybe your baby brother likes you to pretend you are a horse. Or maybe your baby sister spit up on you. Or you watched a driller blasting up chunks of pavement. Or your mother forgot to put the jelly on your peanut

This is sort of story Leah and I would use with New York City kindergarten, as well as first-grade, children. If you are concerned that this model is well beyond what your own kindergarten children can possibly do, continue to tell the rich story you tell, but—if you’d feel better doing so—write only labels and not sentences.

You are demonstrating the whole process of writing, but each child will attend to only the parts of this demonstration that he or she can use. Some children will take in only the fact that you drew something and made little marks called “writing” here and there. Only some will pay attention to the print at the bottom of the page. If you break this into steps and do a lot of explaining, your minilesson will become too ponderous to be effective, and it will cease being a model. Trust in the power of demonstration.

Notice that Leah asks rhetorical questions and answers them herself. She does not invite the children to answer at this point because she wants to keep her lesson short and focused. She will encourage children to participate in the next section of the minilesson.

Notice that Leah suggests two or three possible topics, each a very ordinary everyday occurrence. With all these examples in the air, it is less likely every child will decide on a running story!

Early in the passage above, Leah says a phrase that you will want to borrow verbatim. “I’m telling you this because today and every day you can do the very same thing.” This can become like a mantra in your classroom for this minilesson and for the rest of your minilessons to come.
butter and jelly sandwich. If your life holds adventures like these, you definitely have stories to tell. These are all wonderful topics for writing. You can write about any little thing that happens in your life.”

**Active Engagement**

*Ask children to think of a topic they’ll write about and to tell someone that topic.*

“Can you close your eyes right now and think of something from your life that you could draw and write about?” After a moment’s pause, Leah said, “Would you open your eyes and tell someone what you might write about today?” For a few moments, the room echoed with chatter.

**Link**

*Ask children to begin writing on their own.*

“Wow!” Leah said over the din as a way to say, “May I have your attention? May I have your eyes up here?” she whispered, as always waiting until the children seemed ready to listen.

“Writers, when I call on you, would you come up and get your writing paper and your writer’s marker, and then you can go back to your desk and get started doing what writers do. I’ll come around to admire the good work you are doing.”

Eventually you’ll have children in partnerships and you’ll be able to say, “Tell your partner” but like many structures, you haven’t set up partnerships yet. For now you just say, “Tell someone what you might write about,” and you know that if your children have never experienced this ritual, some will sit there gaping, unclear why the room has erupted with noise. Crouch low and talk to a child or two, and get them talking to each other. Before long children will know what’s expected and use this time well.

After two minutes, you will need a signal to help them get quiet again. The transitions will get easier as children become more accustomed to this structure.

For now, to minimize chaos, Leah dolies out the materials and keeps them very simple—one page, one marker. She will dole out the materials for the first few days of writing workshop.
Time to Confer

Today, your children will probably be able to write for twenty-five or thirty minutes. During that time, you’ll want to conduct brief and, most important, warmly supportive conferences with six or seven writers. Plan to move all over the room. You’ll probably want to carry a tiny chair with you so you can slip in alongside writers, sitting at eye level with them.

- Begin by asking the writer, “What have you been working on?” and “Will you read it to me?” Do this even if the “story” appears to be a scribble. If the writer can’t recall, shift and ask, “What do you want to put down on paper?” or “What would you like your writing to say?”
- As soon as you hear the writer’s message, whether it was written or not, respond with interest to the content. For now, your writing conference will sound very much like the conversation you have at the start of the day, when children come to you with their news and treasures. The only difference is that after showing interest, you’ll also say, “You should put that on the page!” For now, it doesn’t matter if the child draws or writes the content.
- You can find a model for the conference you’ll have today by looking in The Conferring Handbook (see first conference at right). Try to notice the rhythm, the flow of that conference, and to let your conference follow similar patterns. It will help you and your children if you move to more ambitious conferences only after becoming accustomed to the components of conferring you see in Zoë’s work with Bryanna.

Notice especially the way Zoë tries to teach this child about what writers often do.

This conference in The Conferring Handbook may be especially helpful today:
- “What’s the Story in This Picture?”

Also, if you have Conferring with Primary Writers, you may want to refer to the conferences in part one.
End the children’s work time, ask them to put their work away, and gather them to share their work.

“Writers, will you put your writing into the folder that I’ve just put next to you? That is your writing folder.” Leah held a folder and a piece of writing up to illustrate. “Then will you join us, folders in hand, on the rug? Every day after you have time to write, you’ll put your writing in your folder,” Leah demonstrated as she spoke, “and every day you’ll come join us on the rug.”

Ask children to share their work by holding it up for the world to see.

“How many of you put something on the page?” Leah asked. “Great! When I point to you, hold your writing up high so we can all admire it.” Leah next acted like a conductor, with children proudly hoisting pictures and writing overhead.

Point out what you hope they will do in their writing—include details, depict a small, important moment, write words, and do more you admire.

“Writers, would you all admire what Liam did. Liam, show the class your work [Fig. I-1]. Do you see that Liam put details in his picture! He has himself,” Leah pointed to herself, “and a flower because he was in a garden, and a sun.” Leah pointed to the sun. “Liam told me his story and it goes, ‘One day I went to the park with my Dad. We saw flowers. It was sunny.’ Liam—are you going to add your dad? Because I don’t see him on the page.” Liam nodded.

Our workshops are brief during the first week. It won’t be long before we ask for the class’s attention. Just before we do this, we will pass out two-pocket folders, one to each child.

The folders are a way to set children up to work on pieces for more than one day, and to not necessarily progress in sync with each other, starting and stopping work on particular pieces at the same time. In later sessions, we’ll encourage children to work on pieces for more than one day and we’ll remind them to store their work in folders.

On this day, the share session will need to feel especially celebratory to set the tone for the year of writing workshop.
“Writers, would you admire Mikey’s work too—Mikey, hold your story up [Fig. I-2]. Mikey has written some words (do you see them?) and they say, ‘Me (and my) Mom (were) fixing . . .’ and soon he’s going to tell us what they were fixing. The lines in the story are rain because Mikey and his Mom were sitting under the trees (see that in the picture?) and it started to rain!”

“Mathew did something very special [Fig. I-3]. He made his brother (see, it says B for brother) and he decided to make his brother talking. Have you ever seen in comic books, how they have speech bubbles and each bubble contains the words someone says? That’s just what Matt did. His brother is saying, ‘Want to go to the beach?’ and I bet tomorrow, Matt will tell us what his brother answers.”

“Emma wrote a story that has two pages. She put a picture of a Mommy duck here, and a baby duck, and wrote words that went with the pictures. She wrote this.” [Fig. I-4]

“I can’t wait to learn what happens next, can you?”

*End the writing workshop time with an exclamation of excitement for the writing to come and the start the children have made.*

“Wow, look at all you’ve done! I’m so excited and interested to see what you all will choose to write about next!”
We call each component in this book a session, not a day, because we know that fairly often you’ll devote two days to one session. There are lots of ways you could devise a second minilesson to reinforce today’s points.

- Instead of demonstrating your own writing process, you could demonstrate how a child in the class wrote. For example, you could say, “Jonathan started like this. He thought, ‘Hmm. What should I write about?’” You can add in the story of his thinking. “He thought, ‘I could write about battles, but I’ve never really been in one.’” After a few minutes of reenacting what Jonathan did the day before, get all the writers to imagine what they’ll write about that day. “Writers, put on your thinking caps. What will you draw and write today?” Allow for a moment of silence. It is important for children to approach the page with a topic in mind rather than drawing whatever they can draw and then improvising a written text to accompany the art.

- Your minilesson might start, “Writers, I noticed yesterday that some of you sat down and thought, ‘Hmmm—what can I draw?’ and pretty soon you had a paper with flowers and rainbows. Today I want to teach you something. Writers don’t start by drawing, we start by thinking. We remember things we’ve done. Watch. ‘Hmm. I think I’ll write about my sister’s birthday party. I remember she had a huge cake. Let’s see, I can remember the cake—it was flat. . . .’” Now you’d shift out of the role and list aloud the process: “Think first, picture it, then put it on the page. Right now, writers, will you think of something that happened to you, that you know about. Do you have the idea? Now picture it. Put a quiet ‘thumbs up’ if you are ready.”
The writing workshop provides us with an amazing window into our children's understandings of written language. After even just one day in the writing workshop, we can bring our children's writing home and pore over it. Each piece of writing helps us develop a theory of the writer and his or her knowledge of literacy.

Margay, for example, relies on a few high-frequency words [Fig. I-5]. I will be interested to see if this is a pattern. I’m interested that she has fearlessly tackled words such as read, draw, and spell, representing each sound (including the vowels) with a letter. She seems able to invent spellings but may be hesitant to do so. I notice that her text is brief for someone with her skills. What would her writing have been like if she did it on lined paper? I plan to nudge her to write more.

When Ryan colored in his whole picture space [Fig. I-6], was he trying to represent nighttime? On the lines, he copied the alphabet. I wonder what he thinks he has done. I long to ask, “What’s your writing about?” or “Will you read me your writing?” and to learn whether he believes his print carries meaning.

I plan to suggest we write something together and then elicit some content from him. Then I’ll ask him to write the first word and I’ll learn more about this mystery.

Sebastian’s drawing seems to contain a whole drama [Fig. I-7]. I don’t know if this is one guy who’s gotten into lots of predicaments or if it’s a flock of guys. I wonder what Sebastian will do when I ask, “Will you read me your writing?” I wonder if he thinks he has written a story, or if he regards this as only the illustration and plans to write a text.
S E S S I O N  VI

USING BOTH PICTURES AND WORDS, LIKE FAMOUS AUTHORS

Some of your children probably tell and draw their stories but do not write them. Your first goal was to help children put their important stories onto the page, however they conveyed their meaning. You deliberately helped your children become fearless communicators of meaning, so your first lessons were constructed to support children in telling their stories the best they could. Often, this was without print.

By now, nearly every child should find it easy to choose a topic, envision it, and record it on the page—by some means—working with some independence and tenacity. If this is not yet true for your class, spend a few more days teaching variations of the minilessons in Sessions I to V either following our suggestions or building your own. However, don’t postpone this session more than a week or you’ll lose momentum. If your main concern is with whether children are writing or writing enough, continue onward with this session.

Today’s minilesson encourages children to write as best they can. If, for one child, this entails listing letters, lollipops, and numbers then that’s what you are asking them to do. You can’t ask for more than their best!

Children need frequent instruction in sound-letter correspondence to write the letters they need. During other times of the day, you’ll teach children to study, admire, and talk about the letters in their names; you’ll sing the alphabet song, notice environmental print, and collect items that begin with certain sounds; you’ll teach children a few precious sight words such as me and mom. Meanwhile, in the writing workshop, you’ll teach children that letters can spell the messages they’re dying to get across. As you teach children letters, teach children they need letters.

In this session, you’ll remind children that writers write with pictures and words and you’ll nudge them to do the same.

GETTING READY

- Two familiar books, one that has a picture on each page and a sentence or two accompanying it (perhaps Corduroy by Don Freeman) and one that has labeled drawings (like many of Donald Crews’ or Richard Scarry’s books)
- Writing paper to give each child as he or she comes to the minilesson—the paper needs a place for drawing and a place for writing (for kindergartners, probably just one line for writing, for first graders, about four lines)
- Tray of new paper available at each workspace
- See CD-ROM for resources
Connection

Celebrate that your writers have put their lives onto the page in detailed drawings.

“Writers, I have loved taking your writing home and learning so much about you from your writing. I learned that John plays football and that Anne has a scooter. During writing time, each of you thought of things that you do and that you care about, held those in your mind, then put them on the page. And I can look at your pictures and your stories and learn real details about your life, which is so great!”

Tell children that writers write.

“Now today, I want us all to learn that writers use pictures and words when they write.”

Teaching

Show two texts, pointing out that in each the author includes writing.

“Do you all remember this book?” Leah held up Corduroy by Don Freeman, a book these children knew well. “You can see that the author, Don Freeman, uses pictures and words to tell this story. Where are the pictures?” They pointed. “Where are the words? Sasha, will you come up and show us where the words are?” She did. “You are right. This author uses pictures and words to tell his story.”

“I am telling you this because you can do the same exact thing as this author has done. You can write pictures on the top of your pages and words on the bottom of your pages.”
“Let me show you how another author uses pictures and words. This is one of Donald Crews’ books, and I am going to hold it up and ask you to look closely at it. In this book, Donald Crews does it a little differently. He doesn’t put his pictures on the top and then his story underneath, does he? He draws his picture and then goes back and he labels some of the important things in the picture. And if you want, you could do what Donald Crews does. You can draw and then write your words as labels. You can do either of these, but you need to have pictures and words in your writing.”

Active Engagement

Ask children to point to the place on their pages where they will draw and to the place where they will write.

“You have a new piece of writing paper in front of you. Everyone point to where you will draw your picture. Everyone point to where you are going to put your words.” They do.

Link

Remind children to use pictures and words.

“So writers, today I am hoping that each of you will use pictures and words to tell your story.”

Leah purposely chooses these two different ways of writing so that all writers in the room have exemplars within their reach. If you are teaching first graders who are experienced writers, you may not need to include labeling as an option. Some children may feel confident about writing more like Don Freeman and others may be more comfortable labeling like Donald Crews does. The second author and second exemplar makes this minilesson multileveled, establishing a range of ways in which children can incorporate print into their texts. The goal is to help all writers feel included in the world of writing.

You will have already handed out paper to the children. If you forgot to do so, hold up a page and ask children to point to the place of that page where you’ll draw and then to the place where you’ll write.

Leah does not dwell on how the children will get the words down on the page. The purpose of today’s lesson is instead to invite children into the world of writing words. Subsequent teaching will address the myriad ways of helping the students in your room become proficient at writing words.
In this conference, it will be important to pay attention to whether all your children are attempting to write as best they can. Encourage them to do so, following Pathways for guidelines. Remember that every child can write each of the letters as lollipops and diamonds, and remember that whatever the child does when you nudge that child to write is a window onto what that child knows and can do.

You won’t have time to work one-to-one with every child, but you’ll want every child to know that pressure is on to write. You can take some time to just move among writers, crouching at a table, and saying, “I want to admire the way you are all writing both pictures and words. Would you each point to your picture? Would you point to your words? Congratulations for having both.”

These conferences in The Conferring Handbook may be especially helpful today:
- “What’s the Story in This Picture?”
- “Where Is Your Writing?”
- “Let Me Show You How to Write More”

Also, if you have Conferring with Primary Writers, you may want to refer to the conferences in part one.
When children have gathered together again, ask one student to read his or her writing to the rest of the class.

Leah gathered the children on the carpet, and each child sat in his or her rug spot. “Today I saw so many of you doing what writers do.” Leah kept Deleana and Liam near her and signaled to Deleana to stand beside her, facing the class. Deleana held her work for all to see.

“Would you read it to us?” Leah asked, fully aware that Deleana hadn’t written with sound-letter correspondence.

Deleana pointed to her letters (a good step), and, as she pointed to each line, she “read” a line. [Fig. VI-1]

Ask the students to talk to each other about what they noticed about that student’s work.

“Writers, would you tell your partner the smart work you saw Deleana doing?”

After a bit, Leah bypassed raised hands, “I heard some of you notice that she has a place for her pictures and a place for her words, and you are right. That is smart work. And Deleana reread it with her finger, paying attention to her writing. Thank you, Deleana.”

Select a few more students to read their writing. Make sure all children in the class realize that they have the ability to write as best they can.

“I’m so happy to see the writing you all have put on your pages. So many of you tried to not only draw, but to write like Don Freeman or Donald Crews! Next time we have a chance to write, we can all put our writing on our page with our pictures!”
Your children will certainly need more help recording words, and you will certainly devote more minilessons to this. You could move onto the next session or develop another minilesson.

- You might tell the class that you will work together to do some shared writing. “Today, we are going to write a whole-class piece of writing, and we’ll include both pictures and words. Let’s write about the cat we saw run across the playground yesterday. So I am going to get started with the picture. I need to draw the cat. And the playground. What else?” After eliciting a response or two, you might say, “Okay, now, let’s start our writing—let’s do what Donald Crews does and put a label or two. What should we label?” You would elicit several responses and write a label or two. “Okay, now let’s write a sentence at the bottom. Hmmm. Let’s write, ‘We saw a cat run across the playground.’” You would need to do this quickly, without laboring over the words too much.

- You could say, “Lots of you have been working hard to add words to your pictures. I have noticed that many of you have tried to label, like Donald Crews. That is wonderful.” You could show a couple of examples from kid’s work on previous days. “I did some labeling, just like Donald also.” You could show prepared writing, with labels only. “Here I am brushing my hair. Now I want to stretch myself as a writer and add some words, a sentence, just like Don Freeman did. I think I’ll write, ‘I am fixing my hair.’” After you do this, you could ask, “I’m wondering how many of you feel that you could really stretch yourselves as writers today and try adding some words under the pictures, like Don Freeman did in Corduroy? Raise your hands if you think you can. It’s great to see so many of you with your hands raised! I can’t wait to see your work!”
Your instinct may be to gather your children's texts and to look them over, categorizing children into groups based on what they do with print. Some, like the child we studied in the preceding session, will write with random strings of letters. Don’t push Deleana’s piece [Fig. VI-1] aside as if it shows nothing. You will want to observe how a child who writes random strings reads this sort of writing. Does she have a sense that texts are read left to right, top to bottom? Does she seem to think that more marks on the page means a longer utterance? When she “reads” a message, does it sound like a written text, or does it sound conversational? Is the text stable, so that each time she “rereads” it, the text says roughly the same things?

In this instance, Deleana reveals that she has a sense for many print conventions. She has some sense of literary language (although it is unclear how or whether her text fits together as a cohesive whole). It’s important to keep in mind that Deleana’s text does not suggest that she has no ability to make sound-symbol correspondences. She hasn’t made sound-symbol correspondences in this instance, but I’d want to ask her if the big figure in the picture is her mom, and to get her to say mom slowly, to think, “What sound do you hear first?” and to record that sound—because I have a hunch she could do so just fine!

Jordan [Fig. VI-2], of course, is in a very different place than Deleana when it comes to print.

His spellings are quite conventional. It’s impressive that he spells apple, lunch, and outside correctly. It is intriguing that he finds the concrete word apple easier to spell than more nebulous words such as then or had. Although Jordan’s spellings are quite well developed, he often writes with uppercase letters. I’d tell him not to do this. More significantly, he seems to think that writing involves captioning pictures. (“This is the lunch. I am having bread.”)
Earlier, you taught children that even when they think they are finished, they can go back and work more. This is at the heart of teaching children to work in rigorous ways. As part of this, we need to teach children to plan that their work will take multiple days.

The following three sessions all help writers write more. Today, you’ll introduce a system that encourages children to work on pieces for a sequence of days: You’ll teach them to tape or staple more paper onto the bottoms of their stories, to let these one-page stories become as long as Chinese dragons. After several days, you’ll want to nudge children to approach writing with a plan to write in booklets of several pages, as we do in Session XII. Finally, in Session XIII, you’ll encourage revisions.

Materials carry messages. At the start of this unit, we gave children blank paper, then we added a line for the writer’s name and a line or two or three for the message. We did this knowing that changing the paper, in and of itself, could nudge children to change their expectations for their work. Today, we’ll again use materials to convey a message. This time, the new materials will be just two sticker dots, a red one and a green one, for each child’s two-pocket folder. These stickers create a system for differentiating finished (red-dot pocket) from ongoing work (green-dot pocket).

After today, children will see that they can add more paper to their pages, and when children store their work in their folders, they’ll put finished work in the left pocket of their folder—behind the red dot—and ongoing work in the right pocket—behind the green dot.
Connection

Tell the story of one child who realized she had more to say, stapled a paper tail onto her page for the rest of her words, and then stored her writing in a special place so she could come back to it tomorrow.

“The best thing happened yesterday. Lindsay wrote her story, look it says ‘I’m on a motorboat. It went very fast.’ Then she decided, ‘Wait! I have to tell what happened next!’ so she got another piece of paper and stapled it on like this.” I held it up.

“This is exactly what grownup authors do! We add on! We say more! Our one-page stories grow . . . and grow . . . and grow!”

“But writers, what happened next is that I said, ‘Put away your work. Time for share,’ and Lindsay looked like this.” I reenacted an oh-no-what-am-I-going-to-do-my-story-won’t-grow-after-all look and shoved the piece into the folder. “But then Lindsay and I decided, ‘No, she’s not going to stop work on this story just because writing time is over!’”

Tell children that today you’ll teach them a way to keep working on the same story for several days.

“So I want to show you what Lindsay did to keep working on her story—because I’m hoping we’ll all do this.”

Teaching

Show children the way one child uses dots to separate folder pockets for finished and for ongoing work.

“Look at Lindsay’s folder. You know how traffic lights use a red light to say ‘stop’ and a green light to say ‘go’? Lindsay decided to use these dots in her writing folder. This side of her folder is for finished—stopped—work. And look! Her motorboat story is over here, in the green side for ‘go.’ She is still working on this story.”

Notice that in order to teach the process, I don’t summarize the events but retell them, bit by bit. Notice also that I involve Lindsay in the actual carpentry of adding on. Instead of creating the longer papers ourselves, we need to tap into the special energy created when children staple pieces of paper together to make more room for their writing. Before long, you will distribute several-page-long booklets in the writing center, but meanwhile, for a few days, kids love the chance to literally construct longer stories.

In teaching writing, you’ll find yourself repeating certain powerful phrases. During the first month of school, I find myself saying, “Your story is growing!” often.

Your children will be so thrilled to see their writing literally grow that another year, you may find yourself tempted to hurry into this phase. Don’t do this. Postpone the day when children begin to construct ‘the longest stories ever,’ because when this comes just as energy in this unit has begun to wane, it can give your children a second wind.

Lindsay didn’t come up with the idea of red and green dots alone; she had help inventing it, from me, the day before. It isn’t unusual for us to take an idea we, or a child, invented years ago and act as if that day a child invented it. We do this to help children feel like they are coauthors of the community and to give the new policy social power.
Active Engagement

Recruit children to help you sort your writing similarly.

“Will you help me do this with my stack of writing? I’ll tell you about the piece, and then you tell the person beside you if I should put it in the red-dot section,” I pointed, “or the green-dot section.”

“This is the piece I wrote about the wooden boat I made, and I already went back and added about how I had it in the park, and I put more details in my drawing. Tell the person beside you if you think this should go in the green section or in the red section.”

“This is a story I started with a few of you about my baby rabbits, but I didn’t tell that I had ten of them, and I gave them all away. Tell your partner where you think this story should go.”

“This is a story I wrote about when I got an ice cream from the ice cream truck. But I didn’t tell that as soon as the man gave it to me, I took one lick, and all of the ice cream fell off the cone and plopped onto the street! Tell your partner where you think it belongs.”

“What I heard you kids saying is that I have more work to do on two of my stories and you are right. So that’s what I’ll do today.”

Link

Tell children that today they’ll need to sort their writing into categories: finished or ongoing writing.

“Today, let’s put our pieces in either the red section of our folders if the work is finished, stopped, work or in the green section if the work that is still ongoing. So today, before you write, you will need to go through your stack of writing from the start of the year and look at each piece and decide, ‘Is this stopped? Is this ongoing?’”

“Today, writers, when you get your folders you’ll see all your work is in a pile in the middle (not in the pockets) and you’ll see you have a red-dot stop pocket and a green-dot keep-going pocket, like Lindsay. The first thing to do today is to go through your writing like I’ve just done and to divide it into the two piles—one for finished, stopped, work and one for ongoing work. Okay, writers?”

We say, “Tell the person beside you,” because then more children are actually engaged, doing the work. Calling on one or two children is not active engagement for all.

Although my explicit goal is to teach children how to use red and green dots to categorize work as “finished” or “ongoing,” I’m meanwhile reminding children of the importance of writing stories that contain details, and of the fact that writers revise by telling more.

This could serve as the active engagement phase of the minilesson, but it entails a whole class of children spreading out the contents of their folders, all while sitting squashed on the carpet. We’re apt to do this with older children, but for kindergartners it’s too complicated in the midst of a minilesson.
At the start of the writing workshop, you’ll want to refrain from conferring for just long enough to let all the children settle into their work. This gives them a few minutes to initiate some work and it gives you an opportunity to study the patterns in the class without targeting your attention on any one child yet. After a bit, you’ll pull alongside a writer as he or she works. Get into the habit of first listening and watching without intervening. You don’t want every child to learn to stop work whenever you draw close! Then you can intervene. In this session, your conferring will involve lots of conferences—see “What’s Happening in Your Piece?” in the Conferring with Primary Writers book geared toward helping children say more—and then your conferring will involve teaching about stapling to add a second or third page.

These conferences in The Conferring Handbook may be especially helpful today:

- “What’s the Story in This Picture?”
- “Where Is Your Writing?”
- “Let Me Show You How to Write More”

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

- “What’s Happening in Your Piece?”
Before children gather on the rug, show them how you filed your current writing in the appropriate pocket of your folder.

“It’s time for writing to end. Before you come to the rug, watch me. See what I do.” Role-playing, I said, “Hmmm. I’m trying to think if I’m done with this piece or if I want to keep working on it. Let’s see. I think it’s keep-going work.” I pointed to the green sticker. “It’s green light work, not stopped work. I have more to add to the piece so I’m going to put it here, on this (the right) side of my folder.”

Ask children to file their work in the appropriate pocket of their own folders.

“Will each of you look at the work you are doing and decide where you, as a writer, need to store that work? After that, will you bring your folders to the rug?”

Offer students the story of how one child filed her work today.

“I wanted to share how Allison used her folder today. She was writing this story, I hold it up, “about her bag breaking. First, her mom didn’t fix it. Allison didn’t have time today to end her story by saying her mom finally fixed it, so Allison put her story on the green side—the green, still-going side. That was smart work, Allison.”

Let children talk over their filing decisions of today with a partner.

“At the end of every writing time, you need to decide where you want to put your piece. Will you each show the person beside you where you put today’s work, and tell that person why you made that decision?”

Throughout these units, we often suggest you ask your students to do something rather than tell them to do something. Some students know that asking can be a polite way of telling, and some students may take your question literally and believe they can choose whether to do as you ask. These students may need you to either tell them to do something using very direct terms or else to explain that when you ask, you don’t mean that this is optional—you are using questions as a means to suggest (or to tell).
Tell the story of how a child decided on which side of his folder his writing should go. You could give two examples, one of a red dot side and one green. “Yasir, could you tell us why this piece is on the red side? And could you tell us why this piece is on the green side.” After Yasir explains, you could say, “Great. It was so smart of Yasir to decide to put the writing about his dog on the red side, since he does not know what else to add. And he wants to write more words, like authors do, in his baseball piece so he put that under the green dot. I love it. Good decision! Let’s all check our folders. Is the writing we are going to work on today on the green side? Knowing this should help us all get to work right away. I’m going to watch and see how quickly we can get to our writing.”

“Writers, I was so excited yesterday. During choice time, Sasha and Talia were making a barn and first they made it in a quick fashion—just a square for horses. But then they looked at it and said, ‘Wait! We should have a place for the saddles and the hay—a place where the horses can’t go!’ They added that. Then they got the idea to make different stalls for different horses. But the sad thing was it was time for lunch. Then, they got the idea—to put a green dot on a paper and leave it here beside their barn as a ‘still-working-on-this’ message to the rest of us. And today during choice time they went back to their barn. I know that yesterday, at the end of writing time, some of you did the same thing—you put your writing in the still-working-on-it section. Thumbs up if you did that!”

“I was looking at your precious writing last weekend, and I saw some of you had jammed your writing into your folder like this and it was all scrunched up!” You could then talk about how to use your hands to straighten your pieces of writing into a neat pack and then slide them into the pocket.
In this, the first unit of your writing workshop, it is especially important to induct each child into the identity and life of being an author. Publishing one’s writing is an absolutely crucial part of this, and it’s especially important now when you are helping children learn what writing is for and why it merits so much hard and loving work. Today, you’ll tell your students that writers send work out into the world, that we write for real readers. Writers don’t publish everything they write—we look through it, choose our best, and then make our best better.

There are lots of ways to publish student work. You can bind it into small booklets, make cassettes full of children reading their stories aloud, invite parents or other classes in to celebrate, have readings on stage in the auditorium complete with the PA system. Our suggestion, however, is to imagine gradient of publication methods and to be sure this first publication is as simple as it can be. That way, over the course of time, things can gradually escalate, and you won’t find yourself needing to unroll the red carpet every time.

You’ll want to expect less fixing up and fancying up at this stage, too. Whereas eventually you may ask children to write “about the author” sections and dedication pages, for now, we suggest that fixing up involves adding to the picture and the words, and fancying up means adding a cover or a bit of color (of course, any child can surprise you by doing more).

In this session, you will teach children that writers fix up their work and revise it so it says everything they mean it to say before it’s sent out in the world.
Connection

Tell students that writers do all they have been doing—and that writers publish their writing.

“Writers, since school began, you all have been doing just what writers do. Writers think of ideas to write, they plan their writing, they pick paper to match their plans, and they write as best they can and keep going. But yesterday we learned writers also publish their work, and today I’ll show you how to do that because in a few days we need to be ready for a publishing party.”

Teaching

Remind children that when it is time to publish, a writer looks over everything he or she has written and chooses one text to fix up and fancy up.

“All through this school and all across the world, when writers know that it will soon be time to publish, the writer rereads what he or she has written and chooses the best, saying, ‘This is the piece I’m going to publish.’ We did that yesterday. Then, writers get the piece ready to go out in the world.”

“Have you ever seen a person getting ready to be married, or to graduate, or to go to a show, or to a birthday? Usually the person fancies himself or herself up. The same happens with writing.”

“Before writers send our writing out for real, true readers to read it, we fix it up and then we fancy it up.”

As the unit draws toward a conclusion, this is a good time to name what children have learned to do. I essentially say, “Writers do all these things . . . and you have done them also!”

I do two things to make this minilesson memorable. First, I use a metaphor that may be memorable for some children. They’re getting their pieces ready to go out in the world just like people get ready to be married or go to a party. And the phrase “fix up and fancy up” has the rhythm and alliteration to make it stick. I continue to use this phrase throughout the year.
Active Engagement

Ask children to help you fix up—revise—a story you’ve written about an event the class knows well.

“So I was hoping you’d help me fix up my story. I’ll read it and would you think, ‘Does this make sense? How can Lucy fix it? What does Lucy need to add to have it say everything she means?’ Here’s the story.”

Yesterday when we got to art, no one was. So we came back. We had free time.

“Would you tell the person beside you if you have ideas for how I could fix up my story?”

The children talked together. After a minute, I called on a few.

Noreen: “You left out a word. You gotta say, ‘No one was there.’”
Zane: “You should tell why. Tell how she had a baby!”

“These are great ideas. So before I can publish my piece, I’ll add the missing word and I’ll reread what I’ve written and see if I can fit that other stuff in, too. Thanks a ton!”

Link

Let the students know they can try to revise their own writing today.

“So writers, today you’ll take the piece you decided to publish and you’ll reread it and fix it up. Ask, ‘Does this make sense?’ ‘How can I fix it?’ ‘What can I add?’”

Notice again that I deliberately produce a tiny story, one that is easily improved, because my point is to show children how a writer rereads and revises. I wouldn’t gain anything if the piece was longer and more elaborate. Notice also that I’ve written a story about a moment the class experienced together. This makes it easier for the children to imagine revisions.
Many of your conferences in this session will need to support revision. The easiest way to do this is to read the child’s writing (“I love my rabbit. He kisses me.”) and then to say back what the child has said as if it’s the most interesting story in the world. “Wow! You really love that rabbit! He kisses you?” Most children will respond by saying more. Listen for a minute — then say that back too, asking, “Where will you add that?” as if, of course, this vital information needs to go in the writing. As the child revises by adding on, make a fuss about how this is what professional writers do. Remember as you confer that revision is a compliment for good work, not a way to repair inadequate work. If a child hesitates to revise, reveal your attitude toward revision by saying, “But this is such a great story. It deserves to be revised, to be made even better!” See the conferences cited at right in the Conferring with Primary Writers book.

Use your conferring chart to help you remember all the ways in which you could confer.

These conferences in The Conferring Handbook may be especially helpful today:

- “What’s the Story in This Picture?”
- “Where Is Your Writing?”
- “Let Me Show You How to Write More”

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

- “What’s Happening in Your Piece?”
- “Is This a Story About Your Life?”
Select some pieces of student writing to share with the class. The pieces should demonstrate what you hope the children will all try to do.

“Writers, will you bring your piece with you and come to the carpet? Let me show you the smart ways in which you all have been fixing up your writing. Derrick decided he wanted to publish his story about his gerbils. [Fig. XV-1] He looked back over it and saw that he had writing on the first page,” I showed it, not pointing out that the writing consisted of random strings of letters, “but he hadn’t written anything on the other page! So he added more writing. On the last page, he wrote about his gerbils taking a nap.”

“And Margay [Fig. XV-2] had decided to publish a piece she wrote on the very first day. Do you remember it? It went, ‘I can read. I can write. I can spell.’ Well, she decided that it was too short and that she should turn it into a book, so she named the book *Myself* and she added this page.”

“Annabel has written about camping with her dad but she decided she wanted to add on that she and her dad came home, so she took out the staples in her book and added a page right in the middle, then stapled it back together again.”

Remind children that they too can try these kinds of revision.

“Now, think to yourself which of the things these writers did would you like to try? Tell the person next to you what you might try tomorrow.”

Make sure at least one of the examples you choose is something that you believe everyone can do at this stage. Don’t showcase only the most advanced pieces of writing.
“Often when writers revise their work they revise the words, just like we have been doing. I am so happy to see so many of you working to add more to your writing. I wanted to share another way that writers revise. Sometimes they also look at their drawings and say, ‘What else could I add to make it even better?’ and they add a detail to the drawing. Sarah did that the other day. Look at what she added. You can try that too.”

“Lots of you have been adding on to your writing to make it even better. Some of you found that you needed an extra piece of paper to add on to the end. I am so glad to see that. I noticed that a few of you wanted to add on to the middle part of your writing and you tried to squeeze in the words really tiny. I want to show you something else you can do if you want to add on to the middle.” Gesture to a piece on the easel. “Here is the piece I have been working on.” You read it. “I wanted to add on to this part here, but I don’t have any more room. So, look what I can do. I can take this piece of paper, cut the bottom part off and tape the lines to the bottom of my piece. Then, I can add whatever words I want. If you think this would help you today, please raise your hand. Okay, you folks stay here on the rug and I will help you get the paper you need. When we come back together, we will see how these children revised their writing.”
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