Ms. Meinke teaches seventh-grade language arts, and her students often participate in literature circles. One group of six students is reading *The Great Gilly Hopkins* (Paterson, 1987), the story of Gilly, an angry, mistrustful, disrespectful foster child who eventually finds love and acceptance. To begin their 3-week period of literature circles, the students sign up to read one of the six books that Ms. Meinke has introduced. The students divide into groups, after which each group selects a group leader and sets its schedule for reading and discussing the book. Students also construct reading logs by stapling paper into booklets and adding construction paper covers.

Ms. Meinke meets with *The Great Gilly Hopkins* group to talk about the book. She explains that the story is about a girl named Gilly Hopkins who is a foster child. They talk about foster care and how children become foster children. Several students mention that they know someone who is a foster child. She also passes out a list of topics for reading log entries, and students place the sheet in their reading logs. A copy of the topics sheet is shown on page 000.

Ms. Meinke varies the types of entries that she asks students to write in reading logs. She does this for two reasons. First of all, she believes that each chapter is different and that the content of the chapter should determine the type of activity. Also, she has found that students tire of writing straight reading logs because of their repetitiveness and predictability.

The students read in class and at home, and every two days, they meet to discuss their reading. Often Ms. Meinke sits in on at least part of their discussions.
During the discussions, students ask questions and clarify misunderstandings, share their favorite excerpts, and make predictions about what will happen next. Sometimes, too, they share their reading log entries or talk about how they will write their entries.

Timothy wrote this simulated-journal entry after reading Chapter 2:

Dear Diary,
I can't live here, it's a dump. I have to live with Miss Trotter and that colored (or black) man Mr. Randolph. I will have to get out of this dump and fast. Today was the first day Mr. Randolph came and I can't escort him every day to dinner. I don't belong here, even Mrs. Nevin's house was better than here.

I cannot believe Miss Ellis took me to this awful place. I got to find a way to call Courtney Hopkins. She'll take me outta this place. Everyone's trying to be nice to me but I'll show them who's the boss, and I bet there is something wrong with W. E.

After reading chapter 6, about how mean Gilly is to her teacher, Miss Harris, Steven wrote this simulated letter to Gilly:

Hey Gilly,
That was the best note you have ever written. That was cool because you actually made Miss Harris curse. I bet you none of the kids at this school could ever make a teacher do that. I wish I could write cards like that and make teachers curse. You are also very brave because you wrote that to a teacher. No kid is crazy enough to do something like that. That is how crazy I think you are.

Your classmate,

Steven

Johanna wrote this response about whether it is ever right to lie and steal after reading Chapter 7:

I think she shouldn't be forgiven. I know she has...
# Reading Log Assignments for *The Great Gilly Hopkins*

**Chapter 1 “Welcome to Thompson Park”**
What is a foster child? How do foster children feel and behave? Why?

**Chapter 2 “The Man Who Comes to Supper”**
Write a diary entry from Gilly’s viewpoint.

**Chapter 3 “More Unpleasant Surprises”**
Write a double entry with a quote from the chapter and your response.

**Chapter 4 “Sarsaparilla to Sorcery”**
Write a diary entry from Gilly’s viewpoint.

**Chapter 5 “William Ernest and Other Mean Flowers”**
Do a character study on Maine Trotter. Identify and list three characteristics. Then locate and copy two quotes as evidence for each characteristic.

**Chapter 6 “Harassing Miss Harris”**
Write a letter to Gilly telling her what you think of what she did to Miss Harris.

**Chapter 7 “Dust and Desperation”**
Gilly does two things that are considered immoral: she lies and she steals. She has had a rough life, so maybe doing these things is excusable. Perhaps, however, lying and stealing are wrong under any circumstances. Take a position and support it with evidence from the book.

**Chapter 8 “The One Way Ticket”**
Draw a scene from the chapter and write a brief description of the scene.

**Chapter 9 “Pow”**
There is a definite change in Gilly’s behavior and feelings in this chapter. Describe how she changes and then describe the causes of these changes using examples from the book.

**Chapter 10 “The Visitor”**
Draw a picture of Gilly and her family at Thanksgiving dinner. Then, in a paragraph, describe Gilly’s foster family and how they make each other feel needed. Or, draw Nonnie, Gilly’s grandmother. Then, in a paragraph, tell what she looks like, what kind of person she seems to be, how she behaves, and how she gets along with her daughter, Courtney.

**Chapter 11 “Never and Other Canceled Promises”**
So where should Gilly go? List three reasons why she should stay with Trotter and list three reasons why she should go with her grandmother Nonnie. Then write a short paragraph telling where you would like her to go and why.

**Chapters 12 and 13 “The Going” and “Jackson, Virginia”**
Select eight to ten images, details, interesting phrases, or parts of sentences from the book and arrange the “found” parts into a poem.

**Chapters 14 and 15 “She’ll Be Riding Six White Horses” and “Homecoming”**
In this final response, write about your feelings. What did you like? dislike? Why?

---

had a horrible life, but it’s never right. It is one thing to steal and it’s another to steal from a blind man. That is just mean. I kind of feel bad for her because of everything she’s been through. She lies, cheats, and steals. I am not sure which side to take because in one way she should be forgiven but on another side she shouldn’t be because she’s done too many bad things. Especially stealing from Mr. Randolph.
Sarah wrote about how Gilly has changed after reading Chapter 9:

*Gilly changes because she sees that Trotter really cares for her. Trotter got in an argument about what Gilly did. Miss Ellis wanted to take Gilly back but Trotter wouldn’t let her. Gilly becomes more liking toward Trotter. Gilly even starts liking W. E. Gilly doesn’t think he is dumb any more. Another example is “Look, W. E.,” she bent over close to his ear and whispered hoarsely into it, “I’m going to teach you how to fight. No charge or anything. Then when some big punk comes up to you and tries to start something, you can just let them have it,” said Gilly.*

After reading Chapters 12 and 13, Timothy wrote this found poem:

*He tore a piece of him and gave it to you. Don’t make it harder for us, baby. This was supposed to be a party, not a funeral. Sometimes it's best not to go visiting. You make me proud. Why would anybody leave peace for war? Stop hovering over me. Inside her head, she was screaming.*

Steven reflects on the book in his last entry:

*I thought that at the end Gilly was going to go with her mom. I also thought Gilly’s mom was going to be nice and sweet. I thought this was very good because it had an unexpected ending. I didn’t think that Gilly’s mom would be so rude and mean. Now I wish that Gilly would go back with Trotter because Courtney is mean. Those are my reasons why she should be with Trotter.*

Ms. Meinke is especially interested in the students’ responses in this last entry. She finds that many students, like Steven, want Gilly to stay with Trotter, but she is pleased when they realize that Nonnie, who never even knew of Gilly’s existence, is family and is delighted to provide a home for her only granddaughter.

Ms. Meinke collects the students’ reading logs twice—once halfway through the literature circle and again at the end—to grade them. She has found that students appreciate the opportunity to pace themselves as they read and write the entries. She awards points for each journal entry, and these points are part of students’ grades for the literature circle.

*All kinds of people—artists, scientists, dancers, politicians, writers, and assassins—do personal writing. They write letters and keep journals. People record the everyday events of their lives and the issues that concern them. The personal writing of some public figures has survived for hundreds of years and provides a fascinating glimpse of their authors and the times in which they lived. For example, the Renaissance genius Leonardo da Vinci recorded his daily activities, dreams, and plans for his*
painting and engineering projects in more than 40 notebooks. American explorers
Meriwether Lewis and William Clark kept a journal of their travels across the North
American continent, more for geographical than personal use. Dutch artist Vincent
Van Gogh wrote more than 1,000 letters during his lifetime, many to his brother Theo;
these letters, which often contained striking drawings, document the artist’s tragic life.
Anne Frank, who wrote while in hiding from the Nazis during World War II, is
probably the best-known child diarist.

Children write journals and letters for many of the same reasons that public
figures write—to record events in their lives and to share information with others.
And, there are other reasons for using personal writing. Young children use personal
writing to develop writing fluency. As they write, they practice writing conventions,
handwriting skills, and spelling high-frequency words. Students use personal writing
as a tool to enhance their learning in language arts and across the curriculum. They
write in learning logs, for instance, as part of thematic units, and as they write, they
learn to take notes, summarize, and reflect on learning.

As you continue reading about journals and letters and how to incorporate
personal writing in your language arts program, think about these questions:

- What types of journals do students use?
- How do students use journals as tools for learning in language arts and across
  the curriculum?
- What types of letters do students write?
- How do teachers incorporate letter writing in their instructional programs?

WRITING IN JOURNALS

Students use journals for a variety of purposes. Seven types of journals are described
in the LA Essentials box on page 000. In most types of journals, the focus is on the
writer; the writing is personal and private. Students’ writing is spontaneous and
loosely organized, and it often contains mechanical errors because they’re focusing
on thinking, not on spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. James Britton and his
colleagues (1975) compare this type of writing to a written conversation, which may
be with oneself or with trusted readers who are interested in the writer. Here are some
of the purposes for journal writing:

- Record experiences
- Stimulate interest in a topic
- Explore thinking
- Personalize learning
- Develop interpretations
- Wonder, predict, and hypothesize
- Engage the imagination
- Ask questions
- Activate prior knowledge
- Assume the role of another person
- Share experiences with trusted readers
TYPES OF JOURNALS

Personal Journals
Students write in personal journals about events in their own lives and about other topics of special interest. These journals are the most private type. Teachers respond as interested readers, often asking questions and offering comments about their own lives.

Dialogue Journals
Dialogue journals are similar to personal journals except they are written to be shared with the teacher or a classmate. Whoever receives the journal reads the entry and responds to it. The entries are like written conversations.

Reading Logs
Students respond in reading logs to stories, poems, and informational books they are reading. They write and draw entries after reading, record key vocabulary words, make charts and other diagrams, and record memorable quotes.

Double-Entry Journals
Students divide each page of their journals into two columns and write different types of information in each column. Sometimes they write quotes from a story in one column and add reactions to the quotes in the other, or they write predictions in one column and what actually happened in the story in the other.

Language Arts Notebooks
Students take notes, write rules and examples, draw diagrams, and write lists of other useful information about language arts in these notebooks. Students use these notebooks during minilessons and refer to the information during literature focus units and reading and writing workshop.

Learning Logs
Students write in learning logs as part of thematic units. They write quickwrites, draw diagrams, take notes, and write vocabulary words.

Simulated Journals
Students assume the role of a book character or a historical personality and write journal entries from that person's viewpoint. They include details from the story or historical period in their entries.
Journal writing gives students valuable writing practice. Kindergartners use a combination of drawing and writing in their journal entries (McGee & Richgels, 2007). They write scribbles, random letters and numbers, simple captions, or extended texts using invented spelling. Their invented spellings often seem bizarre by adult standards, but they are reasonable in terms of children’s knowledge of phoneme-grapheme correspondences and spelling patterns. In first and second grades, children gain fluency and confidence that they can write through journal writing. Older children experiment with writing conventions that must be considered in more public writing. If they decide to make an entry “public,” they can later revise and edit their writing.

**Personal Journals**

Personal journals are usually the first type of journal writing that young children do. Kindergartners begin writing in journals early in the school year, and their writing becomes more conventional as they learn concepts about print, letters of the alphabet, and phonics skills. Hannon (1999) recommends beginning with personal or dialogue journals. Two kindergartners’ journal entries are presented in Figure 6–1. In the left entry, a 5-year-old draws a detailed picture of a football game (note that the player in the middle-right position has the ball) and adds five letters for the text so that his entry will have some writing. In the entry on the right, another child writes, “I spent the night at my dad’s house.”

**FIGURE 6–1**

Two Kindergartners’ Journal Entries
Students often keep personal journals in which they recount events in their lives and write about topics of their choosing. They choose to write about a variety of topics and explore their feelings in these entries. It's normal for students to misspell a few words in their entries; when they write in personal journals, the emphasis is on what they say, not how correctly they write. It's helpful to develop a list of possible journal-writing topics on a chart in the classroom or make copies for students to clip inside their journal notebooks. Students choose their own topics for personal journals. Although they can write about almost anything, some students will complain that they don't know what to write about, so a list of topics gives them a crutch. Figure 6–2 shows a list of possible journal-writing topics developed by a class of fourth and fifth graders. They continue to add topics to their list so that it may include more than 100 topics by the end of the school year. Referring students to the list or asking them to brainstorm a list of topics encourages them to become more independent writers.

Privacy becomes an important issue as students grow older. Most young children are willing to share what they have written, but by third or fourth grade, they grow less willing to read their journal entries aloud to the class, although they are usually willing to share the entries with a trusted teacher. Teachers must be scrupulous about respecting students’ privacy and not insist that they share their writing when they are unwilling to do so. It is also important to talk with students about respecting classmates’ privacy and not reading each other’s journals. Also, many teachers keep personal journals on an out-of-the-way shelf when they are not in use.

**FIGURE 6–2**

**Fourth and Fifth Graders’ List of Writing Topics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Things to Write About in Personal Journals</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>my favorite place in town</td>
<td>if I had three wishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boyfriends/girlfriends</td>
<td>my teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things that make me happy or sad</td>
<td>TV shows I watch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>music</td>
<td>my favorite holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>an imaginary planet</td>
<td>if I were stranded on an island</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cars</td>
<td>what I want to be when I grow up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magazines I like to read</td>
<td>private thoughts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>what if snow were hot</td>
<td>how to be a superhero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cartoons</td>
<td>dinosaurs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>places I’ve been</td>
<td>my mom/my dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>favorite movies</td>
<td>my friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if I were a movie/rock star</td>
<td>my next vacation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>poems</td>
<td>if I were an animal or something else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pets</td>
<td>books I’ve read</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>football</td>
<td>favorite things to do</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>astronauts</td>
<td>my hobbies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the president</td>
<td>if I were a skydiver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jokes</td>
<td>when I get a car</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motorcycles</td>
<td>if I had a lot of money</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things that happen in my school</td>
<td>if I were rich</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current events</td>
<td>wrestling and other sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>things I do on weekends</td>
<td>favorite colors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or ANYTHING else I want to write about</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When students share personal information with teachers through their journals, a second issue arises: Sometimes teachers learn details about students’ problems and family life that they don’t know how to deal with. Entries about child abuse, suicide, or drug use may be a student’s way of asking for help. Although teachers are not counselors, they have a legal obligation to protect their students and to report possible problems to appropriate school personnel. Occasionally a student invents a personal problem as an attention-getting tactic; however, asking about the journal entry or having a school counselor do so will help to ensure that the student’s safety is fully considered.

### Dialogue Journals

Students converse in writing with the teacher or with a classmate through dialogue journals. These journals are interactive and conversational in tone. Most important, dialogue journals are an authentic writing activity and provide the opportunity for real communication between students or between a student and the teacher. Students write informally about something of interest, a concern, a book they are reading, or what they are learning in a thematic unit. They choose their own topics and usually control the direction the writing takes.

When teachers or classmates respond to students’ entries, they answer as they would in an oral conversation. They react to their comments, ask questions, and offer suggestions. Teachers acknowledge students’ ideas and encourage them to continue to write about their interests. They also provide new information about topics, so that students will want to read their responses. Teachers try to avoid unspecific comments, such as “good idea” or “very interesting.” Their responses don’t need to be lengthy; a sentence or two is often enough. Even so, it’s time-consuming to respond to 25, 30, or more journal entries every day. To solve this problem, many teachers read and respond to students’ journal entries on a rotating basis; they might respond to one group one week and another group the next week.

In this fifth grader’s dialogue journal, Daniel shares the events and problems in his life with his teacher, and she responds sympathetically. Daniel writes:

Over spring break I went down to my grandma’s house and played basketball in their backyard and while we were there we went to see some of my uncles who are all Indians. Out of my whole family down there they are all Indians except Grandpa Russell.

And Daniel’s teacher responds:

What a fun spring break! That is so interesting to have Indians in your family. I think I might have some Indian ancestors too. Do you still plan to go to Padre Island for the summer?

The next day Daniel writes:

My family and I plan to go to Padre Island in June and I imagine we will stay there for quite a while. I think the funnest part will probably be swimming or camping or something like that. When we get there my mom says we will probably stay in a nice motel.

And Daniel’s teacher responds:

That really sounds like a fun vacation. I think swimming is the most fun, too. Who will go with you?
Daniel continues to talk about his family, now focusing on the problems he and his family are facing:

Well, my mom and dad are divorced so that is why I am going to court to testify on Tuesday but my mom, me, and my sister and brother are all going and that kind of makes me sad because a couple of years ago when my mom and dad were together we used to go a lot of places like camping and hiking but now after what happened we hardly go anywhere.

His teacher responds:

I am so sorry your family is having problems. It sounds as if your mom and dad are having problems with each other, but they both love you and want to be with you. Be sure to keep talking to them about how you feel.

Daniel replies:

I wish my mom and dad did not have problems because I would have a lot more fun and get to go and do a lot more things together, but since my mom and dad are divorced I have to take turns spending time with both of them.

This journal is not a series of teacher questions and student answers; instead, the student and teacher are having a conversation, and the interchange is built on mutual trust and respect.

Dialogue journals are especially effective in promoting the writing development of children who are English learners. Researchers have found that these students are more successful writers when they choose their own topics for writing and when their teachers contribute to the dialogue with requests for a reply, statements, and other comments (Reyes, 1991). Not surprisingly, researchers found that students wrote more when teachers requested a reply than when teachers made comments that did not require a response. Also, when a student was particularly interested in a topic, it was less important what the teacher did, and when the teacher and the student were both interested in a topic, the topic seemed to take over as they shared and built on each other’s writing. Reyes also found that English learners were much more successful in writing dialogue journal entries than in writing in response to books they had read.

Students use dialogue journals to write to classmates or the teacher about books they are reading (Nash, 1995). In these journal entries, students write about the books they are reading, compare the books to others by the same author or books by other authors they have read, and offer opinions about the book and whether a classmate or the teacher might enjoy reading it. They also write about their book-selection strategies and their reading behavior. This approach is especially effective in reading workshop classrooms when students are reading different books. They’re often paired and write back and forth to their reading buddies. This activity provides the socialization that independent reading does not. Depending on whether students are reading relatively short picture books or longer chapter books, they can write dialogue journal entries every other day or once a week, and then classmates write back.

**Reading Logs**

Students write in reading logs about the stories and other books they are reading or listening to the teacher read aloud during literature focus units, literature circles, and reading workshop. Rather than simply summarize their reading, students delve into important ideas and relate their reading to their own lives or to other literature they
have read. They may also list interesting or unfamiliar words, jot down memorable quotes, and take notes about characters, plot, or other story elements; but the primary purpose is for them to think about the book and develop their own interpretations, as Ms. Meinke’s students did in the vignette at the beginning of the chapter.

Even kindergartners write in reading logs. They use a combination of drawing and writing, as the two samples in Figure 6–3 show. A kindergartner wrote the entry on the left after listening to his teacher read *The Three Billy Goats Gruff* (Finch, 2001). As he shared his entry with classmates, he read the text this way: “You are a mean, bad troll.” Another child wrote the entry on the right after listening to her teacher read *The Jolly Postman, or Other People's Letters* (Ahlberg & Ahlberg, 2006). This child drew a picture of the three bears receiving a letter from Goldilocks. She labeled the mom, dad, and baby bear in the picture and wrote, “I [am] sorry I ate your porridge.”

Hancock (2007) examined students’ responses and noticed patterns in their reading log entries; she identified nine categories which are listed in the LA Essentials box on page 000. The first four are immersion responses in which students make inferences about characters, offer predictions, ask questions, or discuss confusions. The next three categories focus on students’ involvement with the story. The last two are literary connections, in which students make connections and evaluate the book they’re reading.

These categories can extend the possibilities of response by introducing teachers and students to a wide variety of response options. Teachers can assess the kinds of responses students are currently making by reading their reading logs, categorizing

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**FIGURE 6–3**

Two Kindergartners’ Reading Log Entries

[Diagram of Reading Log Entries]
### RESPONSE PATTERNs

#### Immersion Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Students write about their understanding of characters and plot. Their responses include personal interpretation as well as summarizing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Introspection</td>
<td>Students share their insights into the feelings and motives of a character. They often begin their comments with “I think.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Predicting</td>
<td>Students speculate about what will happen later in the story and confirm predictions they made previously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questioning</td>
<td>Students ask “I wonder why” questions and write about confusions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Involvement Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Character Identification</td>
<td>Students show personal identification with a character, sometimes writing “If I were ________, I would . . . ” They express empathy, share related experiences from their own lives, and sometimes give advice to the character.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Character Assessment</td>
<td>Students judge a character’s actions and often use evaluative terms such as nice or dumb.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story Involvement</td>
<td>Students reveal their involvement as they express satisfaction with how the story is developing. They may comment on their desire to continue reading or use terms such as disgusting, weird, or awesome to react to sensory aspects of the story.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Literary Connections

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Students make text-to-self, text-to-world, text-to-text, and text-to-media (television shows and movies) connections.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literary Evaluation</td>
<td>Students evaluate part or all of the book. They may offer “I liked/I didn’t like” opinions and praise or condemn an author’s style.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Hancock, 2007.

the entries, and tallying the categories. Often students use only a few types of responses, not the wide range that’s available. In this event, teachers can teach minilessons and model types of responses that students aren’t using, and they can ask questions when they read journals to prompt students to think in new ways about the story they’re reading.
Seventh graders’ reading log entries about *The Giver* (Lowry, 2006) are shown in Figure 6–4. In these entries, students react to the book, make predictions, deepen their understanding of the story, ask questions, assume the role of the main character, and value the story. Each entry is categorized according to Hancock’s patterns of response. As you read the students’ excerpts, you might notice other patterns, too.

**Double-Entry Journals**

Students divide each entry into two columns when they write double-entry journals (Berthoff, 1981). In the left column, they usually write quotes from the story or other book they are reading, and in the right column, they relate each quote to their own life, the world around, and other literature they have read. Through this type of journal, students become more engaged in what they are reading, note sentences that have personal connections, and become more sensitive to the author’s language.

Students in a fifth-grade class wrote double-entry journals as they read C. S. Lewis’s classic *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005). After they read each chapter, students reviewed the chapter and selected one or two brief quotes. They wrote these excerpts in the left column of their journals, and they wrote reactions beside each quote in the right column. Excerpts from a fifth grader’s journal are presented in Figure 6–5. This student’s responses indicate that she is engaged in the story and is connecting the story to her own life.

Double-entry journals can be used in several other ways. Instead of recording quotes from the book, students can write “Reading Notes” in the left column and then add “Reactions” in the right column. In the left column, they write about the events they read about in the chapter. Then in the right column, they make personal connections to the events.

As an alternative, students can use the heading “Reading Notes” for one column and “Discussion Notes” for the other column. They write reading notes as they read or immediately after reading. Later, after discussing the story, or chapter of a longer book, students add discussion notes. As with other types of double-entry journals, it is in the second column that students make more interpretive comments.

Young children can use the double-entry format for a prediction journal (Macon, Bewell, & Vogt, 1991), labeling the left column “Predictions” and the right column “What Happened.” In the left column, they write or draw a picture of what they predict will happen in the story or chapter before reading it. Then, after reading, they draw or write what actually happened in the right column.

**Language Arts Notebooks**

Language arts notebooks are a specialized type of journal in which students record a variety of information about language arts. Often students use these notebooks to take notes about procedures, concepts, strategies, and skills during minilessons. Procedure entries include the steps in giving a book talk, participating in a grand conversation, and proofreading a paper. Concept entries include information on authors and genres, contractions, homophones, parts of speech, plot diagrams, affixes, poetic formulas, and types of sentences. Strategy entries include explanations of visualization or connecting to personal experience, and student reflections about how they use the strategy during language arts activities. Skill entries include charts about forming plurals, using quotations in writing dialogue, alphabetizing a list of words, and skimming a content-area textbook.
### FIGURE 6–4
Entries From Seventh Graders’ Reading Logs About *The Giver*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
<th>Response Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tiffany</td>
<td>I think the book <em>The Giver</em> is very scary because when you do something wrong you get released from the community. I think it would be terrible to be pushed out of your community and leave your family. Your family would be ashamed and embarrassed. It is like you are dead.</td>
<td>Story involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scott</td>
<td>I don’t think I could handle being a friend of Jonas’s. In other words NO I would not like to be a friend of his. There would be too much pain involved and most of the time I wouldn’t see Jonas.</td>
<td>Character identification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>The part that hooked me was when the book said Jonas took his pills and did not have feelings about Fiona.</td>
<td>Monitoring understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jared</td>
<td>As I’m reading I’m wondering if they get married at twelve because they get jobs at twelve.</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>Something that surprised me so far in the story was when Lily said she wanted to be a birthmother Lily’s mom became mad and said three years, three births, and then you’re a laborer. Being a birthmother is not a good job at least after the three years. I hope that doesn’t happen to Lily but I don’t know what other job she should have.</td>
<td>Character assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graciela</td>
<td>So far I think that the story is really sad. The story is sad because everyone has sameness except Jonas and the Giver Jonas and the Giver are the only ones who can see color because of the memories. The story is also sad because no one has feelings.</td>
<td>Story involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>Why didn’t Jonas use the fire in his favorite memory to stay warmer on his long journey through the rain and snow and the terrible coldness? Also, why didn’t the author explain more about the things that are between the lines so the reader could really grasp them?</td>
<td>Literary evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marcos</td>
<td>Well, I can’t really make a prediction of what is going to happen because I already read the book. If I hadn’t read ahead my prediction would be that Jonas would get drowned in the river because he couldn’t handle the pain.</td>
<td>Monitoring understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rob</td>
<td>I think Jonas will confront his father. He won’t ever forget what he saw his father do and it is wrong. Just wrong, wrong, wrong. If my father ever did that to an innocent little baby I would never forgive him. It’s like abortion. I would confront him and tell him that I know. I will always know and so will God.</td>
<td>Predicting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>I don’t exactly understand what happens at the end. It sounds like they froze to death. I think they died but I wish they found freedom and happiness. It is very sad.</td>
<td>Questioning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>The ending is cool. Jonas and Gabe come back to the community but now it is changed. There are colors and the people have feelings. They believe in God and it is Christmas.</td>
<td>Story involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graciela</td>
<td>At first I thought it would be good to have a perfect community. There would be no gangs and no crime and no sickness. But there is a lesson in this story. Now I think you can’t have a perfect community. Even though we have bad things in our community we have love and other emotions and we can make choices.</td>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 6  Personal Writing

FIGURE 6–5

Excerpts From a Fifth Grader’s Double-Entry Journal About The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In the Text</th>
<th>My Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I tell you this is the sort of house where no one is going to mind what we do.</td>
<td>I remember the time that I went to Beaumont, Texas to stay with my aunt. My aunt’s house was very large. She had a piano and she let us play it. She told us that we could do whatever we wanted to.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“How do you know?” he asked, “that your sister’s story is not true?”</td>
<td>It reminds me of when I was little and I had an imaginary place. I would go there in my mind. I made up all kinds of make-believe stories about myself in this imaginary place. One time I told my big brother about my imaginary place. He laughed at me and told me I was silly. But it didn’t bother me because nobody can stop me from thinking what I want.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Still they could see the shape of the great lion lying dead in his bonds.</td>
<td>When Aslan died I thought about when my Uncle Carl died.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They’re nibbling at the cords.</td>
<td>This reminds me of the story where the lion lets the mouse go and the mouse helps the lion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By recording this information in a notebook, students create a permanent reference book to use during language arts activities. Older students often divide their language arts notebooks into several sections, and they add information to sections on authors, words, spelling, parts of speech, sentences, strategies, poetry, stories, and study skills.

Learning Logs

Students write entries in learning logs to record and think about what they are learning in math, science, social studies, or other content areas. As they write in these journals, students reflect on their learning, discover gaps in their knowledge, and explore relationships between what they are learning and their past experiences. For example, in math class, they record explanations and examples of concepts presented in class and react to the mathematical concepts they are learning and any problems they may be having. Figure 6–6 presents an entry from a sixth grader’s learning log in which she describes how to change improper fractions. Notice that after she describes the steps in sequence, she includes a review of the six steps. In addition, some upper-grade teachers allow students the last 5 minutes of math class to summarize the day’s lesson and react to it in their learning logs.

Students can make daily entries in science logs to track the growth of plants or animals. For instance, a second-grade class observed caterpillars as they changed from caterpillars to chrysalides to butterflies over a period of 4 to 6 weeks. They each kept a log with daily entries, in which they noted the changes they observed using words describing shape, color, size, and other properties. Two pages from a second grader’s log documenting the caterpillars’ growth and change are presented in Figure 6–7.
Writing in Journals

FIGURE 6–6
A Sixth Grader’s Math Learning Log Entry

Changing to Improper Fractions

To change a mixed number such as $5\frac{2}{3}$, you must multiply the denominator, which is the bottom number, times the whole number which is 5. So now we have $3 \times 5 = 15$. Next you add the numerator to the problem like this: $15 + 2 = 17$. Put the same denominator, the bottom number, and it should look like this: $\frac{17}{3}$. To check your answer, find out how many times 3, the bottom number, goes into the top number, 17. It goes in 5 times. There are two left over, so the answer is $5\frac{2}{3}$. It is correct.

6 Steps:
1. $5\frac{2}{3}$
2. $3 \times 5 = 15$
3. $15 + 2 = 17$
4. $17/3$
5. $3 \div \frac{2}{3} = 5\frac{2}{3}$
6. $5\frac{2}{3}$ - Correct

Simulated Journals

Some children’s books, such as Catherine, Called Birdy (Cushman, 1994), the story of a disenchanted English noble woman of the 13th century, are written as journals; authors research the time period, assume the role of a character, and write from the character’s point of view. These books might be considered simulated journals. They are rich with historical details and incorporate both the words and phrasing of the period. At the end of these books, authors often include information about how they researched the period and explanations about the liberties they took with the character, setting, or events that are recorded. Scholastic Books publishes historical journals appropriate for fourth through eighth graders. The books include I Walk in Dread: The Diary of Deliverance Trembley, Witness to the Salem Witch Trials (Fraustino, 2004), which recounts events during the Salem witch hunts of 1692; The Journal of Jesse Smoke: A Cherokee
Two Entries From a Second Grader’s Science Log on Caterpillars

Day 3

The Caterpillars are 3 cm. They are black and brown. They have little spikes on their bodies. They have 9 legs. They have untarnas on their head.

Day 25

They are turning white. They are turning into a Chrysalis and they are hanging from the roof.

Boy (Bruchac, 2001), which records the Cherokee removal on the Trail of Tears in 1838; and Catherine: The Great Journey (Gregory, 2005), which chronicles the 14th year in the life of the German princess who became empress of Russia. Each book provides a glimpse into history from a young girl’s boy’s perspective and is handsomely bound to look like an old journal. The paper is heavy and rough cut around the edges, and a ribbon page marker is bound into the book.

Students also write simulated journals, assuming the role of another person and writing from that person’s viewpoint. For examples, they can assume the role of a historical figure when they read biographies or as part of thematic units. As they read stories, they can assume the role of a character in the story. In this way, students gain insight into other people’s lives and into historical events. A look at a series of diary entries written by a fifth grader who has assumed the role of Betsy Ross shows how she carefully chose the dates for each entry and wove in factual information:

May 15, 1773

Dear Diary,

This morning at 5:00 I had to wake up my husband John to get up for work but he wouldn’t wake up. I immediately called the doc. He came over as fast as he
June 16, 1776

Dear Diary,

Today General Washington visited me about making a flag. I was so surprised. Me making a flag! I have made flags for the navy, but this is too much. But I said yes. He showed me a pattern of the flag he wanted. He also wanted six-pointed stars but I talked him into having five-pointed stars.

July 8, 1776

Dear Diary,

Today in front of Carpenter Hall the Declaration of Independence was read by Tom Jefferson. Well, I will tell you the whole story. I heard some yelling and shouting about liberty and everyone was gathering around Carpenter Hall. So I went to my next door neighbors to ask what was happening but Mistress Peters didn’t know either so we both went down to Carpenter Hall. We saw firecrackers and heard a bell and the Declaration of Independence was being read aloud. When I heard this I knew a new country was born.

June 14, 1777

Dear Diary,

Today was a happy but scary day. Today the flag I made was adopted by Congress. I thought for sure that if England found out that a new flag was taking the
old one’s place something bad would happen. But I’m happy because I am the maker of the first American flag and I’m only 25 years old!

Students can use simulated journals in two ways: as a tool for learning or as a project. When students use simulated journals as a tool for learning, they write the entries as they are reading a book in order to get to know the character better or during a thematic unit as they are learning about the historical period. In these entries, students are exploring concepts and making connections between what they are learning and what they already know. These journal entries are less polished than when students write a simulated journal as a project. Students might choose to write a simulated journal as a culminating project for a literature focus unit or a thematic unit. For a project, students plan out their journals carefully, choose important dates, and use the writing process to draft, revise, edit, and publish their journals.

Teaching Students to Write in Journals

Journals are typically written in notebooks or booklets. Spiral-bound notebooks are useful for long-term personal and dialogue journals and for language arts notebooks, whereas small booklets of paper stapled together are more often used for reading logs, learning logs, and simulated journals that are used for one literature focus unit, literature circle, or thematic unit. Most teachers prefer to keep the journals in the classroom so that they will be available for students to write in each day, but students could write at home, too.

Students usually write at a particular time each day. Many teachers have students make personal or dialogue journal entries while they take attendance or immediately after recess. Language arts notebooks are often used during minilessons to record information about topics being studied. Teachers may assign the same types of journals throughout the school year, or they may alternate them, starting and stopping with particular literature focus units and thematic units.

How Journals Fit Into the Four Patterns of Practice

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Literature Focus Units</th>
<th>Literature Circles</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students usually write in reading logs, but sometimes they keep simulated journals where they write from one character’s viewpoint as they read each chapter. They also write in language arts notebooks about information presented during minilessons.</td>
<td>Students create reading logs for each book they read and discuss in a literature circle. They write notes while they’re reading and take notes as classmates share information during the small-group discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reading and Writing Workshop</th>
<th>Thematic Units</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During reading workshop, students keep reading logs where they list books they’ve read and write responses, and during writing workshop, they write lists of writing topics and first drafts in personal journals.</td>
<td>Students write in learning logs. They can also keep double-entry journals where they write information in one column and their responses in the other, or they write simulated journals from the viewpoint of a historical personality or scientist.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Teachers introduce students to journal writing using minilessons in which they explain the purpose of the journal-writing activity and the procedures for gathering ideas, writing the entry, and sharing it with classmates. Teachers often model the procedure by writing a sample entry on chart paper as students observe. This sample demonstrates that the writing is to be informal, with ideas emphasized over correctness. Then students make their own first entries, and several read their entries aloud. Through this sharing, students who are still unclear about the activity have additional models on which to base their own writing. Similar minilessons are used to introduce each type of journal. Even though most types of journals are similar, the purpose of the journal, the information included in the entries, and the writer’s viewpoint vary according to type.

Students write in journals on a regular schedule, usually daily. After they know how to write the appropriate type of entry, they can write independently, and some students usually read their journal entries aloud afterward. If the sharing becomes too time-consuming, they can share in small groups or with partners. Then, after everyone has had a chance to share, several students can be selected to share with the entire class.

The Reading-Writing Connection. Journal writing can also be introduced with examples from literature. Characters in children’s literature, such as Amelia in Amelia’s Notebook (Moss, 2006) and Birdy in Catherine, Called Birdy (Cushman, 1994), keep journals in which they record events in their lives and their thoughts and dreams. A list of books in which characters and historical personalities keep journals

**BOOKS IN WHICH CHARACTERS AND HISTORICAL PERSONALITIES KEEP JOURNALS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Grade(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cronin, D.</td>
<td><em>Diary of a spider</em></td>
<td>New York: HarperCollins</td>
<td>(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cruise, R.</td>
<td><em>The top-secret journal of Fiona Claire Jardin</em></td>
<td>San Diego: Harcourt Brace</td>
<td>(M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cunningham, L. S.</td>
<td><em>The midnight diary of Zoya Blume</em></td>
<td>New York: HarperCollins</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danticat, E.</td>
<td><em>Anacaona: Golden flower</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garland, S.</td>
<td><em>A line in the sand: The Alamo diary of Lucinda Lawrence</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George, J. C.</td>
<td><em>My side of the mountain</em></td>
<td>New York: Puffin Books</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hesse, K.</td>
<td><em>Stowaway</em></td>
<td>New York: McElderry</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hite, S.</td>
<td><em>Journal of Rufus Rowe, witness to the battle of Fredericksburg</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lewis, C. C.</td>
<td><em>Dilly’s big sister diary</em></td>
<td>New York: Millbrook Press</td>
<td>(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ma, Y.</td>
<td><em>The diary of Ma Yan: The struggles and hopes of a Chinese schoolgirl</em></td>
<td>New York: HarperCollins</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McKissack, P. C.</td>
<td><em>Nzingha: Warrior queen of Matamba</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morpurgo, M.</td>
<td><em>The amazing story of Adolphus Tips</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myers, W. D.</td>
<td><em>The journal of Scott Pendleton Collins: A World War II soldier</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M–U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker, S.</td>
<td><em>It's a frog's life</em></td>
<td>Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest</td>
<td>(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perez, A. I.</td>
<td><em>My diary from here to there/Mi diario de aquí hasta allá</em></td>
<td>San Francisco: Childrens Book Press</td>
<td>(P)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Platt, R.</td>
<td><em>Egyptian diary: The journal of Nakht</em></td>
<td>New York: Candlewick Press</td>
<td>(M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veciana-Suarez, A.</td>
<td><em>Flight to freedom</em></td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(U)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watts, L.</td>
<td><em>Stonecutter</em></td>
<td>San Diego: Harcourt Brace</td>
<td>(U)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

P = primary grades (K–2); M = middle grades (3–5); U = upper grades (6–8)
is presented in the Booklist on page 000. In these books, the characters demonstrate the process of journal writing and illustrate both the pleasures and the difficulties of keeping a journal.

**Minilessons.** Teachers teach minilessons on procedures, concepts, strategies, and skills about writing in journals. A list of minilesson topics and a minilesson about quick-writing are presented in the box on pages 000 and 000. It is especially important to teach a minilesson when students are learning a new type of journal or when they are having difficulty with a particular procedure or strategy, such as changing point of view for simulated journals or writing in two columns in double-entry journals.

**Assessing Students’ Journal Entries**

Students can write in journals independently with little or no sharing with the teacher, or they can make daily entries that the teacher monitors or reads regularly. Typically, students are accustomed to having teachers read all or most of their writing, but the quantity of writing students produce in journals is often too great for teachers to keep up with. Some teachers rarely check students’ journals; others read selected entries and monitor the remaining ones; still others try to read all entries. These three management approaches can be termed *private journals*, *monitored journals*, and *shared journals*. When students write private journals, they write primarily for themselves, and sharing with classmates or the teacher is voluntary; the teacher does not read the journals unless invited to. When students write monitored journals, they write primarily for themselves, but the teacher monitors the writing to ensure that entries are being made regularly. The teacher simply checks that entries have been made and does not read the entries unless they are marked “Read me.” Students write shared journals primarily for the teacher; the teacher regularly reads all entries, except those marked “private,” and offers encouragement and suggestions.

Many teachers have concerns about how to grade journal entries. Because the writing is usually not revised and edited, teachers should not grade the quality of the entries. One option is to give points for each entry made, especially in personal journals. However, some teachers grade the content in learning logs and simulated journals because they can check to see whether the entries include particular pieces of information. For example, if students are writing simulated journals about the Crusades, they may be asked to include five pieces of historically accurate information in their entries. (It is helpful to ask students to identify the five pieces of information by underlining and numbering them.) Rough-draft journal entries should not be graded for mechanical correctness. Students need to complete the writing process and revise and edit their entries if they are to be graded for mechanical correctness.

**LETTER WRITING**

Letters are a way of talking to people who live too far away to visit. Audience and purpose are important considerations, but form is also important in letter writing. Although letters may be personal, they involve a genuine audience of one or more persons. Through letter writing, students have the opportunity not only to sharpen their writing skills, but also to increase their awareness of audience. Because letters are written to communicate with a specific and important audience, students
Meeting the Needs of English Learners

How Can Teacher Use Journals With English Learners?

Writing can be difficult for English learners, and journals are the best way to introduce writing. It’s essential that English learners have daily opportunities to practice writing because they need to develop writing fluency, the ability to get words down on paper. Through sustained writing, their handwriting skills improve, and their ability to spell high-frequency English words increases. In addition, there’s less pressure because when students write in journals, the emphasis is on ideas rather than on correctness and neatness.

Students usually write about events in their own lives before writing about books they’re reading and the content they’re learning in thematic units. Peregoy and Boyle (2005) recommend that English learners write in buddy journals, which are a lot like dialogue journals: Students write back and forth to other English learners, and in these entries that are like written conversations, they write about topics that interest them, sharing ideas and asking questions. And as they’re developing writing fluency, students are also learning that the purpose of writing is communicating ideas.

Many English learners write brief entries, often using and reusing familiar words and sentence patterns, and their entries are typically sprinkled with grammatical errors and misspelled words. Too often, teachers conclude that their English learners just can’t write, but they can help these students write better journal entries. The first step involves examining students’ entries to determine whether the problems center on undeveloped ideas, limited vocabulary, nonstandard grammar, or spelling errors. Often teachers notice problems in all four areas, but they prioritize the problem areas and then work to resolve them.

Ideas and Vocabulary

Ideas and vocabulary usually go hand in hand. Teachers model how to brainstorm ideas and related words before beginning to write, and they also demonstrate how to write entries with interesting, well-developed ideas. Teachers can also help individual students talk out their ideas and brainstorm a bank of works before they begin writing.

Grammar

To focus on nonstandard grammar, teacher teach minilessons on particular grammar concepts and then have students locate examples of the concept in their journals entries and make any needed corrections.

Spelling

Even though students usually misspell some words in their journals entries, they should be expected to spell most high-frequency words correctly. Teachers explain how useful high-frequency words are to writers, and they demonstrate how to locate high-frequency words on the classroom word wall or on individual word walls that students keep in their journals. English learners can also return to a previously written journal entry and check for misspelled words using the wall as a resource.
take more care to think through what they want to say, to write legibly, and to use spelling, capitalization, and punctuation conventions correctly.

Children’s letters are typically classified as friendly or business letters. Formats for friendly and business letters are shown in the LA Essentials box on page 000. The choice of format depends on the purpose of the letter. Friendly letters might be informal, chatty letters to pen pals or thank-you notes to a television newscaster who has visited the classroom. When students write to the National Park Service requesting information about the Grand Canyon or another park or send letters to the president expressing an opinion about current events, they use the more formal, business-letter style. Before students write both types of letters, they need to learn how to format them.

Friendly Letters

After teachers have introduced the format for friendly letters, students need to choose a “real” someone to write to. Writing authentic letters that will be delivered is much more valuable than writing practice letters to be graded by the teacher. Students write friendly letters to classmates, friends who live out of town, relatives, and pen pals. They may want to keep a list of addresses of people to write friendly letters to on a special page in their journals or in address booklets. In these casual letters, they share news about events in their lives and ask questions to learn more about the person they are writing to and to encourage that person to write back. Receiving mail is the real reward of letter writing!

Robinson, Crawford, and Hall (1991) examined the effects of personal letter writing on young children’s writing development. In the study, a group of 20 kindergartners wrote back and forth to the researchers over a 2-year period. In their early letters, the children told about themselves, promised to be friends with their correspondent, and asked the correspondent questions. Over the 2-year period, they matured as letter writers and continued to be eager correspondents. Their letters became more sophisticated, and they developed letter-writing strategies that took their readers into account. The researchers concluded that authentic, purposeful, and sustained letter-writing experiences are extremely valuable for children.

Pen Pal Letters. Teachers can arrange for their students to exchange letters with students in another class by contacting a teacher in a nearby school or local educational associations, or by answering advertisements online or in educational magazines. Another possible arrangement is to have your class become pen pals with college students in a language arts methods class. Over a semester, the children and the preservice teachers can write back and forth four, five, or six times, and perhaps can even meet at the end of the semester. The children have the opportunity to be pen pals with college students, and the preservice teachers have the opportunity to get to know a student and examine his or her writing development.

Courtesy Letters. Invitations and thank-you notes are two other types of friendly letters that students write. They may write to parents to invite them to an after-school program, to the class across the hall to invite them to visit a classroom exhibit, or to a person in the community to invite him or her to be interviewed as part of a content-area unit. Students also write letters to thank people who have been helpful.
FORMS FOR FRIENDLY AND BUSINESS LETTERS

Friendly letter

Return address

Greeting

Dear __________,

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

Your friend,

Signature

Complimentary closing

Business letter

Return address

Inside address

Person’s Name
Company Name
Street
City, State ZIP

Date

Greeting

Dear __________,

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

__________________________

Sincerely,

Signature

Complimentary closing
E-mail Messages. The Internet has created a completely new way for students to send messages electronically to correspondents anywhere in the world. It’s a fast and simple way to send and reply to mail, and messages can be saved and stored on the computer, too. Students can use e-mail message forms. They type the correspondent’s e-mail address in the top window, specify a subject in the subject window, and then write their message in the large window. They begin by greeting their correspondent, and then they write their message. Students should keep their messages short—no longer than one or two screens—so that they can easily be read on the computer screen. They end their messages with a closing, much as in other types of letters. McKeon (1999) studied the e-mail messages that a class of third graders wrote about the books they were reading and concluded that e-mail is a constructive way to enhance students’ learning as well as an effective strategy for teachers to personalize their interaction with students.

Letters to Authors and Illustrators. Students write letters to favorite authors and illustrators to share their ideas and feelings about the books they have read. They ask questions about how a particular character was developed or why the illustrator used a certain art medium. Students also describe the books they have written. Here’s a letter that a fourth grader wrote to Eve Bunting that was written at the end of an author study, after the class had read and responded to eight of her books.

Dear Eve Bunting,

I have read some of your books. All of them had friendship in them. My favorite book is Smoky Night. I think the theme is get along and respect each other. My family needs to learn to respect each other and to get along because I fight with my brother and he fights with my sister.

How many picture books have you written? I have read eight of them. Have you ever met Chris Van Allsburg because we did an author study on him also. Why do you write your books?

Sincerely,

Jeffrey

Most authors and illustrators reply to children’s letters when possible, and Eve Bunting answered these fourth graders’ letters. However, they receive thousands of letters from children every year and cannot be pen pals with students. Beverly Cleary’s award-winning book Dear Mr. Henshaw (1983) offers a worthwhile lesson about what students (and their teachers) can realistically expect from authors and illustrators. Here are some guidelines for writing to authors and illustrators:

- Follow the correct letter format with return address, greeting, body, closing, and signature.
- Use the process approach to write, revise, and edit the letter.
- Recopy the letter so that it will be neat and easy to read.
- Write the return address on both envelope and letter.
- Include a stamped, self-addressed envelope for a reply.
- Be polite in the letter.

Students should write genuine letters to share their thoughts and feelings about the author’s writing or the illustrator’s artwork, and they should write only to authors and
illustrators whose work they are familiar with. In their letters, students should avoid asking personal questions, such as how much money the author or illustrator earns. They should not ask for free books, because authors and illustrators usually don’t have copies of their books to give away. Students send their letters to the author or illustrator in care of the publisher (the publisher’s name appears on the book’s title page, and the address usually appears on the copyright page, the page following the title page). If students cannot find the complete mailing address, they can check online.

Business Letters

Students write business letters to seek information, to complain and compliment, and to transact business. They use this more formal letter style and format (as shown in the LA Essentials box on page 000) to communicate with businesses, local newspapers, and government agencies. Students may write to businesses to order products, to ask questions, and to complain about or compliment specific products; they write letters to the editors of local newspapers and magazines to comment on articles and to express their opinions. It is important that students support their comments and opinions with facts if they hope to have their letters published. Students can also write to local, state, and national government officials to express concerns, make suggestions, or seek information.

Simulated Letters

Students can write simulated letters, in which they assume the identity of a historical or literary figure (Roop, 1995). Simulated letters are similar to simulated journals except that they are written as letters. Students can write letters as though they were Davy Crockett or another of the men defending the Alamo, or Thomas Edison, describing his invention of the lightbulb. They can write from one book character to another; for example, after reading Sarah, Plain and Tall (MacLachlan, 2004), students can assume the persona of Sarah and write a letter to her brother William, as a third grader did in this letter:

Dear William,

I’m having fun here. There was a very big storm here. It was so big it looked like the sea. Sometimes I am very lonesome for home but sometimes it is very fun here in Ohio. We swam in the cow pond and I taught Caleb how to swim. They were afraid I would leave. Maggie and Matthew brought some chickens.

Love,

Sarah

Even though these letters are never mailed, they are written to a specific audience. Classmates can assume the role of the person to whom the letter is addressed and respond to the letter from that point of view. Also, these letters show clearly how well students comprehend the story, and teachers can use them to monitor students’ learning.
Teaching Students to Write Letters

Students use the process approach to write letters so that they can make their letters interesting, complete, and readable. The steps are shown in the Step by Step feature on page 000.

The Reading-Writing Connection. A variety of books that include letters have been published for children. Some of these are stories with letters that children can take out of envelopes and read. With Love, Little Red Hen (Ada, 2001) is a collection of letters that tells a story, and Ann Turner’s Nettie’s Trip South (1987) is a book-length letter about the inhumanity of the antebellum South. Other books are epistolary novels in which the story is told through a collection of letters, such as Dear Whiskers (Nagda, 2000), the story of a fourth grader who befriends her second-grade pen pal, a Saudi Arabian girl who has recently come to the United States. The Booklist on page 000 lists books that teachers can share as part of letter-writing activities.

Minilessons. Teachers present minilessons about letters, including how they are formatted and how to craft letters to encourage correspondents to respond. A list of minilesson topics and a sample minilesson on writing letters to favorite authors are presented in the box on pages 000 and 000. These lessons are sometimes presented as part of language arts lessons. Sometimes teachers teach minilessons on letter writing as part of social studies or science lessons because students often write letters as part of thematic units. For example, students write business letters to request information during a science unit on ecology or write simulated letters as part of a history-based thematic unit.

Writing Letters

1. Gather and organize information for the letter. Students participate in prewriting activities, such as brainstorming or clustering, to decide what information to include in their letters. If they are writing friendly letters, particularly to pen pals, they also identify several questions to ask.

2. Review the friendly- or business-letter form. Before writing the rough drafts of their letters, students review the friendly- or business-letter form.

3. Draft the letter. Students write a rough draft, incorporating the information developed during prewriting and following either the friendly- or the business-letter style.

4. Revise and edit the letter. Students meet in a writing group to share their rough drafts and get feedback to use in revising their letters. They also edit their letters with a partner, proofreading to identify errors and correcting as many as possible.

5. Make the final copy of the letter. Students recopy their letters and address envelopes. Teachers often review how to address an envelope during this step, too.

6. Mail the letter. The crucial last step is to mail the letters and wait for a reply.
Traditionally, students wrote letters and turned them in for the teacher to grade. The letters were returned to the students after they were graded, but they were never mailed. Teachers now recognize the importance of having an audience for student writing, and research suggests that students write better when they know that their writing will be read by someone other than the teacher. Although it is often necessary to assess student writing, it would be inappropriate for the teacher to put a grade on the letter if it is going to be mailed to someone. Teachers can instead develop a checklist or rubric for evaluating students' letters without marking on them.

A third-grade teacher developed the checklist in the Weaving Assessment Into Practice feature on page 000; the checklist identifies specific behaviors and measurable products. The teacher shares the checklist with students before they begin to write so that they know what is expected of them and how they will be graded. At an evaluation conference before the letters are mailed, the teacher reviews the checklist with each student. The letters are mailed without evaluative comments or grades written on them, but the completed checklist goes into students’ writing folders. A grading scale can be developed from the checklist; for example, points can be awarded for each checkmark in the Yes column, or five checkmarks can equal a grade of A, four checkmarks a B, and so on.

**BOOKS THAT INCLUDE LETTERS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Danziger, P., &amp; Martin, A. M. (2000)</td>
<td>Snail mail no more</td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(M)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teague, M. (2002)</td>
<td>Dear Mrs. LaRue: Letters from obedience school</td>
<td>New York: Scholastic</td>
<td>(P)</td>
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### What Students Need to Learn About Personal Writing

**Topics on Journal Writing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Procedures</th>
<th>Concepts</th>
<th>Strategies and Skills</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Journals</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write a journal entry</td>
<td>Personal journals</td>
<td>Choose a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share entries</td>
<td>Dialogue journals</td>
<td>Generate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respond in dialogue journals</td>
<td>Language arts notebooks</td>
<td>Organize</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write in language arts</td>
<td></td>
<td>Predict</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notebooks</td>
<td></td>
<td>Incorporate key vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write reading log entries</td>
<td>Reading logs</td>
<td>Assume another viewpoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write double-entry journals</td>
<td>Double-entry journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use learning logs</td>
<td>Learning logs</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write simulated journals</td>
<td>Simulated journals</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Letter Writing**          |                           |                                     |
| Write pen pal letters       | Friendly-letter format    | Use letter format correctly         |
| Write courtesy letters      | Business-letter format    | Ask questions to elicit information |
| Write e-mail messages       |                           | Respond to correspondent’s questions|
| Write letters to authors    |                           |                                     |
| and illustrators            |                           |                                     |
| Write business letters      |                           |                                     |
| **Write simulated letters** |                           |                                     |

To learn more about personal writing, please visit the Video Classroom section of the Language Arts module on the Teacher Prep website at [www.prenhall.com/teacherprep](http://www.prenhall.com/teacherprep). You can watch fourth graders responding in reading logs to the books their teacher is reading aloud by going to the Writing section and clicking on the Reading Logs link.
Mr. Rinaldi’s Eighth Graders Write Simulated Letters

1 Introduce the topic
Mr. Rinaldi’s eighth graders are studying the American Civil War, and each student has assumed the persona of someone who lived in that period. Many students have become Union or Confederate soldiers and given themselves names and identities. Today, Mr. Rinaldi asks his students to think about the war as their persona would. He explains that they will write simulated letters to Abraham Lincoln or Jefferson Davis, arguing an issue as their persona might. He explains that a simulated letter is a letter that is written as if the writer were someone else.

2 Share examples
Mr. Rinaldi assumed the persona of a Confederate bugle boy when his students assumed personas, and he reads a letter he has written to Abraham Lincoln as that bugle boy, begging Lincoln to end the war. He gives three reasons why the war should end: the South has the right to choose its own destiny; the South is being destroyed by the war; and too many boys are dying. He ends his emotional letter this way: I ‘spect I’ma gonna die, too, Mr. President. What ya’ gonna do when there be no more of us to shoot? No more Johnny Rebs to die. When the South has all died away, will you be a-smilin’ then? The students are stunned by the power of their teacher’s simulated letter.

3 Provide information
Mr. Rinaldi explains that he did three things in his simulated letter to make it powerful: He wrote in persona—the way a scared, uneducated boy might write—he included vocabulary words about the war, and he argued his point of view persuasively. Together they brainstorm a list of arguments or persuasive appeals—for better food and clothing for soldiers and to end the war or to continue the war. He passes out a prewriting form that students use to plan their simulated letters.

4 Supervise practice
The students write their letters using the writing process. The planning sheet serves as prewriting, and students draft, revise, and edit their letters as Mr. Rinaldi conferences with students, encouraging them to develop the voice of their personas. Afterward, students share their letters with the class.

5 Reflect on learning
After the lesson, Mr. Rinaldi talks with his students about their simulated letters. He asks them to reflect on what they have learned, and the students emphasize that what they learned was about the inhumanity of war, even though they thought they were learning about letters.
## A Checklist for Assessing Students’ Pen Pal Letters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Did you complete the cluster?</td>
<td>□□</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Did you include questions in your letter?</td>
<td>□□</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Did you put your letter in the friendly letter form?</td>
<td>□□</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>return address</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>greeting</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 or more paragraphs</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>closing</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>salutation and name</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Did you write a rough draft of your letter?</td>
<td>□□</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Did you revise your letter with suggestions from people in your writing group?</td>
<td>□□</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Did you proofread your letter and correct as many errors as possible?</td>
<td>□□</td>
<td>□□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Review

Two types of personal writing are journals and letters. Journals are an important learning tool that students at all grade levels can use effectively. Students use journal writing to share events in their lives and to record what they are learning in literature focus units, literature circles, and thematic units. Students write three kinds of letters: friendly letters, business letters, and simulated letters. Here are the key concepts presented in this chapter:

- Students write in seven kinds of journals: personal journals, dialogue journals, reading logs, double-entry journals, language arts notebooks, learning logs, and simulated journals.
- Dialogue journals are especially useful for English learners.
- Reading logs, double-entry journals, and simulated journals are often used during literature focus units and literature circles.
- Learning logs and simulated journals are used for thematic units.
- Even young children can draw and write in personal journals and reading logs.
- Teachers teach minilessons about how to write in journals.
- Students often share entries with classmates, although personal journal entries are usually private.
- The friendly and business letters that children write should be mailed to authentic audiences.
• Students write simulated letters in connection with literature focus units, literature circles, and social studies and science units.
• The focus in personal writing is on developing writing fluency and using writing for authentic purposes.

Professional References


Children’s Book References