INTEGRATING LANGUAGE ARTS THROUGH LITERATURE AND THEMATIC UNITS

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sample chapter

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Chapter 9

Types of Writing
LEARNER OBJECTIVES

At the conclusion of this chapter

YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO

1. Discuss the types of writing that students need to learn to use.
2. Implement some techniques that are of value in writing instruction.
3. Identify the following terms that are defined or explained in this chapter:

   - audience 359
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NCTE/IRA Standards addressed in this chapter

STANDARD 4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

STANDARD 5. Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

STANDARD 6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

STANDARD 7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
RS. VANDEVER wants to teach her sixth-grade students about letter writing. She decides that friendly letters are easier to write than business letters, so she starts with a lesson about friendly letters. She makes charts containing examples of several friendly letters that she might have written to others or that she might have received. One is from a friend, telling about her excitement over buying a new car. One is from her sister, telling about the illness of her niece. Another is to her niece, urging her to get well and come to visit. Each letter is written in correct form, but not all of the greetings and closings are the same.

First, the class discusses many different reasons for writing friendly letters and many different people to whom they might wish to write friendly letters. They are given opportunities to tell about people who sometimes send letters to them and to whom they sometimes write letters. They are encouraged to discuss their pleasure when they receive mail and to mention people who would be pleased to hear from them. They talk about different content in the letters they have received from different people. Then Mrs. Vandever leads the students to discover that each sample letter has the same parts. Referring to the sample letters, she writes the names of these parts on the board: Heading, Greeting, Body, Closing, and Signature. She discusses with the class what each part is designed to accomplish.

Mrs. Vandever emphasizes the way that people make friendly letters personal. The class discusses the different greetings and closings on Mrs. Vandever’s letters and

**STANDARD 11.** Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

**STANDARD 12.** Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).
on letters that they have received in the past. Then she says, “Now I want each one of you to think of someone to whom you would like to write a friendly letter. It could be a relative or a friend who lives in another town. It could be someone who is sick at home or in the hospital. Remember that Joey (a classmate) is still recovering from his automobile accident. You could write to him about the unit we are working on in class or about a book that you have read recently and enjoyed. What else could you write about that has happened either at home or at school?”

The students make several suggestions. Mrs. Vandever writes each suggestion on the board. Finally, she says, “Write someone a friendly letter, using the parts that we have just discussed. Be sure to include things that person would like to know. We will also learn how to address an envelope, so that you can send your letters.”

Bob raises his hand. “How long should it be?” he asks.

“Write enough to tell the person what you want them to know,” replies Mrs. Vandever. “Some letters will be longer than others because you will have more things to say. Joey has missed a lot of special activities. If you write to him, you can have a long letter, if you want to tell him several things. You may choose to focus on only one activity, though. It’s your decision.”

What’s happening here?

Mrs. Vandever recognizes a real need that her students have. She plans instruction to meet the need. She stresses the practicality of the skill by showing examples to which her students can relate. She also links the lesson to their personal needs and prior experiences. The motivation for completing the assignment is the idea of communicating with someone to whom the students want to send information or ideas. The children actually send the letters to people who might respond and who certainly will appreciate hearing from them. Therefore, the task is one for which a purpose is evident. Mrs. Vandever’s students’ letters have authentic audiences.
In many classrooms, very little writing is done. Duplicated sheets that require a letter or a single-word response are frequently used, whereas constructed written responses to questions or problem situations and written reports and themes are not often found.

In real life, people write in many different forms. Sometimes when teachers think of writing instruction, they think primarily of writing stories, but students need to learn in the classroom how to write all kinds of discourse that they will need to function in society. This chapter addresses many types of writing that are needed in the language arts curriculum.

There are many types of writing that need to receive instructional attention. They include writing stories; creating photo essays; writing poetry; writing in diaries, personal journals, or dialogue journals; labeling, listing, filling out forms; keeping records and logs; writing letters; making written reports; writing explanations; and using various other forms of writing to learn in class.

TO WRITE good stories, children need to know how good stories are constructed. A good story has a plot, or plan of action. The plot consists of a beginning that sets the stage, a middle that develops a conflict, a climax, and a fitting ending (Norton, 2003). Discussing these characteristics of stories that the children have read or listened to makes the children more aware of the need to develop a plot for the stories that they write. Children are surprisingly analytical when discussing books that they have read. “It just stopped,” one sixth-grader complained of a passage that he had been asked to read. “The ending was not satisfying.”

Good stories have true-to-life characters. Children need to see how authors of good literature develop characterization through description of the characters’ appearances, their actions, their words, and their thoughts, as well as of the reactions of other characters to them. Stereotyped characters are less interesting than characters who project individual personalities. Children can recognize stereotypes after they have been introduced to the concept, and practice in identifying stereotypes in literature helps eliminate them in the children’s own writing.

Some children do not understand that, when they write fiction, the stories are not all “fake,” but are based on things that people experience. You may want to encourage them to make their stories reality-based, or grounded in their own experiences. Because fiction needs to be believable, you may want to encourage them to do research to make their fiction pieces sound realistic.

A process writing approach results in a higher level of composition than does merely providing motivation and asking children to write independently. Using a process approach takes more time than simply providing a stimulus for writing, but it is worthwhile.

Consider letting children coauthor stories, if the children show an interest in doing so, after seeing that many of their favorite books have more than one author. Collabo-
ration results in pooling of knowledge about the subject and about writing forms and conventions and therefore helps children learn more at times than they would learn by working independently.

Creating Photo Essays

PHOTO ESSAYS are a special type of writing. They may tell stories, but they may not. They can be about anything, including content area studies.

Photo essays are a set of related photographs with an accompanying written account. This writing form requires choosing a topic, planning pictures, picture taking, and writing the account. You can ask students to choose topics of interest, decide on scenes that express ideas about the topics, and photograph each scene. Illustrating the scenes with pencil and paper often helps students. They may need help in staging the scenes and taking the photographs. After the pictures are taken and processed, the children must write titles, captions for each of the pictures, and narratives to connect the photographs. The availability of digital photography can make creating photo essays easier.

Sinatra and colleagues (1990) have used photo essays and semantic maps to build background knowledge of culturally diverse students and help them organize writing. Students worked in pairs to brainstorm possible topics, take photos, arrange the photos on storyboards, and write compositions on the topics represented. The technique was effective.

Figure 9.1 is a photo essay written by an English language learner (ELL) being tutored by Lance Jasitt.

Writing Poetry

CHILDREN ARE not likely to be excited about writing poetry just because you come in one day and say, “Today I want each of you to write a poem about winter.” Many students have a certain amount of animosity toward poetry. Most children, however, enjoy poetry if it is presented to them properly. The prewriting phase of poetry writing is often neglected, but it is vitally important. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of the presentation of poetry to children and children’s reactions to poetry.

Entice students into the world of poetry and poetry writing by giving them the opportunity to hear appropriate poems by good poets read by a person who genuinely loves poetry and who reads it well. An oral introduction is important because poetry is often written more for the ear than for the eye, although there are a few primarily visual poetry forms. Then give students the opportunity to read poetry for themselves. Prominently display books containing good poetry for children. Such selections as *Where the Sidewalk Ends* and *The Light in the Attic* by Shel Silverstein and *A
Figure 9.1 Photo Essay by an English Language Learner

**Photo Essay by Anareli Cruz**

1. Estos materiales se necesitan para hacer artesanía mexicana. Con estos trabajamos la joyería.
   These materials are needed to make Mexican crafts. With these we work on jewelry.

   Here we are working with beads. The work is a little tiring.

3. Estoy terminando el final de este collar. Se necesita tener paciencia.
   I am finishing the end of this necklace. You need to have patience.

4. Así se está ensartan las shakiras. Aquí estoy haciendo la figura.
   This is how beads are connected. Here I am making a pattern.

5. Aquí están las pulseras y collares terminadas.
   Here are the finished bracelets and necklaces.

6. Mi hermana ganó una cinta azul por una pulsera en la feria.
   My sister won a blue ribbon for a bracelet at the fair.

7. Estos son todos los collares que hicimos. Ya están listo para vender.
   These are all of the necklaces that we made. They are ready to sell.

Source: Anareli Cruz, Jere Whitson Elementary School, Cookeville, TN. Used with permission.

*Pizza the Size of the Sun* by Jack Prelutsky are good sources of poems that children readily read. Also encourage students when they show an interest in producing poetry.

Like other forms of writing, poetry writing should be preceded by experiences on which the writing will be based. You can provide direct experiences or vicarious ones like those mentioned in the section in Chapter 8 on providing stimuli for writing. Encourage your students to talk about their experiences, listen to others talk, and
Figure 9.2 Origins Poem Used for a Model

Origins

I am from houses that didn’t have to be locked.  
from hot summer nights, sitting outside in the warm breeze  
with lightning bugs dotting the darkness  
and crickets calling to each other.  
I am from the limbs of the black cherry tree---  
from forbidden heights that were irresistible.  
I am from long walks carrying laundry to the laundromat  
and carrying it back wet to hang on a line in the backyard.  
I am from waxing floors on my hands and knees and polishing them  
with cloths on my feet as I skated across the floor,  
with the clean, fresh smell of the wax and the warm feeling  
of my mother working beside me, singing.  
I am from long walks with my grandmother across town  
to visit friends.  
I am from Saturday at the movies with a newsreel, a cartoon,  
a serial, a double feature, and previews of coming attractions,  
munching on buttered popcorn and drinking a fountain Coke,  
both purchased for a dime.  
I am from cornbread, white beans, baked potatoes,  
and fried apricot pies.  
I am from sitting in the heat hall at Granny’s house,  
smelling the yeast rolls rise.  
I am from curling up in an overstuffed chair and reading a book,  
ignoring the world.  
I am from swinging across the creek on a fraying rope,  
fearful of falling in and being discovered by my mother  
doing something I had been forbidden to do.  
I am from singing along as my mother played the piano by ear  
and playing duets with her, always getting the easy part.  
I am from vacations in Florida,  
started in the middle of the night,  
with no stops along the way without protest.  
I am from sitting up all night on Christmas Eve,  
after opening presents at three different houses  
and returning home to find that Santa had already come.  
I am from bottle rockets and Roman candles and sparklers  
that lit up the sky, but never lasted long enough.  
I am from lying on my stomach,  
staring into the fire in the fireplace,  
while the grownups talked companionably behind me.  
I am from warmth, and security, and love.  

Betty D. Roe

experiment with ways of expressing their ideas. Marshall and Newman (1997, p. 15) point out “that poetry is as much a way of seeing as writing, and that the poet’s vision comes from seeing what is essential in the world around them.” They encourage teachers to help students to look at things as artists do and really see them.

Roberts (2002) suggests infusing technology into the prewriting stage of poetry writing. She states, “Technological applications that use brainstorming software, databases and spreadsheet applications, presentation software, CD-ROM software, and the Internet show the variety of technological paths one may wander in the prewriting process” (pp. 678-679).

Roberts (2002) also suggests the use of a CD called In My Own Voice, which contains contemporary poetry by people of color and interviews with the poets. This CD helps the students to realize that poetry is often about everyday things.

Take a look at New Kids on the Net (Burgstahler & Utterback, 2000) for Internet sites and activities to use with your poetry instruction. A favorite site of ours is http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/poetry/index.htm.

Literature is one of the best ways to introduce poetry writing. Betty Roe attended a workshop by George Ella Lyons, who read a poem from Jo Carson’s Stories I Ain’t Told Nobody Yet about when you are considered to be from a place. After reading Carson's poem, Lyons asked the workshop attendees to write poems about where they were from, somewhat modeled on Carson’s poem. Betty ended up writing an origins poem in a style similar to that of Carson’s poem. Her poem is found in Figure 9.2. Betty went back and used the technique with a group of graduate students who were in-service teachers. These students were surprised and pleased by the products that they produced in class, but they were delighted when they tried the technique with their own elementary school students and got wonderful results. The lack of required rhyme or meter and the emphasis on images seemed to free the students to write. This technique is particularly effective for older students.

When Dillon Young was a fifth-grader, he was asked by his teacher to write a poem that could be classified as an identity poem. He was given beginning prompts for each line (first two words) and completed the poem about himself that is found in Figure 9.3.

Different styles of poetry may be introduced separately. For each style, you may first read examples. Then you may discuss the characteristics of the particular type, using a poem that has been read for an example. Next it may be helpful to have the children write one or more group poems of that type. After the children see how good the class products are, encourage individual productions. It is most effective if you write while the children write and share what you have written before inviting the children to share. The children should not be forced to share, but if the atmosphere of the classroom is one of trust, many of them will
Some may ask for reactions from the group in order to revise the drafts of their poems that they have just finished. Such sharing may be conducted like peer conferences. Positive comments should always precede suggestions for improvement, and questions that show interest and indicate points of uncertainty are also preferable to negative statements. Poems that the children feel are polished can be shared orally, displayed on a bulletin board, published in a personal book, or published in a class book.

### Cinquain

A good poetry form for early writing instruction is the cinquain. Cinquains are unrhymed five-line poems that are very easy to write. Children pick up the form quickly. The requirements for a cinquain are as follows:

- Line 1: One word (the title)
- Line 2: Two words (describing the title)
- Line 3: Three words (expressing action)
- Line 4: Four words (expressing a feeling)
- Line 5: One word (referring to or repeating the title)

A good source for cinquains to read to children prior to their writing these poems is Lee Bennett Hopkins’s *City Talk*. The following are examples of cinquains written by elementary school students.

**Camping**

Neat tents
Hiking, eating, playing
It was good fun.

**Trip**

Source: Toby Ray Gaddis, Second Grade, Farrar Elementary School, Tullahoma, TN. Used with permission.

**Swimming**

Muscle exercise
Diving, lapping, competing
It's fun and dangerous.

**Meets**

Source: Kristy Allison Gaddis, Sixth Grade, West Middle School, Tullahoma, TN. Used with permission.

### Haiku

Haiku is another popular poetry form. It is a highly structured unrhymed form of Japanese poetry. It consists of three lines containing a total of seventeen syllables. The arrangement of syllables is as follows.

- Line 1: Five syllables
- Line 2: Seven syllables
- Line 3: Five syllables
Haiku usually contains a reference to nature in addition to mention of the time of day, season, or setting. The following is an example of haiku.

The hummingbird swarms
around the azalea bush
gath’ring food and drink.

Source: Jennifer Oglesby, Eighth Grade, Martin Junior High School, Crossville, TN. Used with permission.

Free Verse

Free verse is a form of unrhymed poetry that has no set number of lines and no set rhythmical pattern. Free verse emphasizes the expression of the thought without having to adjust it to meet artificial restrictions. The following are examples of free verse.

Snowy white trees  The morning mist
Tall and towering  Bright shining dew
Watching over us  The clear new world
With a great deal of pride.  Innocent and free.

Source: Lee Ann Hamby, Seventh Grade, South Cumberland Elementary School, Crossville, TN. Used with permission.

Couplets, Triplets, and Quatrains

The simplest form of rhymed verse is the couplet. A couplet consists of two rhymed lines. Young children can be introduced to writing couplets by trying to supply last lines to go with first lines that you supply. Later the children can supply both lines themselves. A triplet consists of three rhyming lines. A quatrain is a four-line rhymed poem. It may have various rhyme schemes, such as abab, aabb, and abcb. An example of a poem written in multiple couplets follows.

A Bottle on the Shore

One night a bottle came ashore.
I lifted it and began to pour.

Then its contents made me feel grand.
For its contents was golden sand.

The sand made me very rich.
So I threw the bottle in a ditch.

The next day a gift came for me.
In my yard was a bottle tree.

In the bottles were a great treasure.
That gave me lots and lots of pleasure.
Inside the bottle was a mold,
Which makes me look beautiful till I’m old.

Soon people gave lots of money.
Then my future looked real sunny.

But don’t believe the story I told.
For there’s no such thing as a beauty mold.

Source: Jessamyn Bradley, Fifth Grade, Pleasant Hill School, Pleasant Hill, TN. Used with permission.

An example of a rhymed poem that was written in response to a traumatic event in our country follows.

9-11-01

You can knock down our Towers,
And kill three thousand people in just one hour.

You can make us scream,
At your little scheme.

You can make us give blood,
And make us clean up the mud.

You can make a firefighter a hero,
And make the towers go to Ground Zero.

You can make people die,
But the flag will still fly!

We have tons of people on our side,
Bin Laden you can run but you can’t hide!

O, please I pardon,
But we will catch you Osama bin Laden!

Source: Kelsey Brooke Atkinson, Fifth Grade, Glenn Martin Elementary School, Crossville, TN. Used with permission.

Shaped Poems

Sometimes the shape of the poem is a part of the poem’s message. Figure 9.4 is an example of two shaped poems.

Limericks

Limericks have five lines. The first, second, and fifth lines rhyme, and the third and fourth lines rhyme, producing a rhyme scheme of aabba. Limericks are generally humorous, and children enjoy them immensely. The following is an example of a limerick.
There once was an athlete named Jerry.
He was so good it was scary,
When he got the ball,
His opponent would fall,
Because his legs were so hairy.

Source: Sean Stephens, Seventh Grade, South Cumberland Elementary School, Crossville, TN. Used with permission.

Figure 9.4 Shaped Poems

Keeping Diaries or Personal Journals

DIARIES OR personal journals are records of events, feelings, or ideas that the writer has each day. They serve as memory devices, ways of letting off steam, or ways of
relieving tension. They may be kept in bound journals or blank books, spiral-bound notebooks, or loose-leaf binders. They are never intended to be graded. You should not read them at all unless the children invite you to do so. If they are done in loose-leaf binders, children can take out pages to share with you without exposing the entire journals to scrutiny. Each page should have the date at the top and the student’s name, if he or she wants you to read it. That way pages can be slipped into a folder for you to read and respond to and then be replaced in their chronological order when they are returned. Do not respond directly on the journal pages unless the child indicates such a preference. Put your response on a separate sheet of paper. The responses are not for the purpose of correcting the writing but for reacting to the content. If a child tells of the death of his grandfather, you might respond, “I know you are sad about this, but I can tell that you have many good memories of your grandfather. My grandfather died many years ago. It made me sad too, but I still remember the good times we had together.” Although you never mention errors in the way the child expressed himself, your response should model good sentence structure, correct spelling, and accurate punctuation. If the child misspelled _grandfather_, he now sees the correct spelling and has a chance to study it in order to spell the word correctly next time. Children learn most of their speech indirectly in this same way at home with their parents. Journal responses teach without appearing to do so. You have shown through the sympathetic response in the journal that you understood what the child had to say, that it was perceived as important, and that you are a person with similar feelings. This makes the child more likely to want to share more writing with you in the future.

The children practice writing skills and can also experiment with writing without any pressure of evaluation. The writing is important to them, and, therefore, they expend effort to make it serve their purposes.

As an introduction to personal journal or diary writing, the class can do a group classroom diary by group dictation of each day’s events. These diaries can then be used as the basis for a weekly or monthly letter to parents about what has been going on in class. The children will see that recording the events in the diary acts as a memory helper.

Time must be provided for journal writing. During this time you should write also, at times sharing your writing with the class and at times keeping it private, just as the students do. You may wish to model different types of journal entries during the sharing times—sometimes relating happenings, sometimes expressing feelings, and sometimes including fanciful material.

Jennifer Magnusson, a fifth-grade teacher, has her students write daily in personal journals. They may write about topics of their own choice, but she also provides some prompts for students who cannot think of their own topics. Figure 9.5 is an example from Stacie Moerdyk’s personal journal, when responding to a teacher’s prompt.
Communicating with Dialogue Journals

**DIALOGUE JOURNALS**, in which the student writes entries and you respond in writing in the same journal, are meant to be two-way communication between you and the student, rather than being personal and private. Students can share incidents, problems, and successes with the help of these journals. Dialogue journals are particularly good for use with ELLs and struggling learners because they provide a risk-free environment. You, as the teacher, never correct their spelling, punctuation, or usage, but you respond to their meaning and model correct usage in your response. This nonjudgmental modeling takes place in an authentic communication event, providing students with motivation to write clearly and with self-esteem because their writing is taken seriously and given thoughtful responses.

*Source: Stacie Moerdyk, Fifth Grade, Pleasant Hill School, Pleasant Hill, TN. Used with permission.*
express concerns, ask questions, and generally talk to you on paper. Once again, these are not to be graded for mechanical accuracy, but responded to in terms of content. Notebooks that have a vertical line dividing the pages are good to use for these journals. The child can write on the left side of the paper and you can respond on the right side, by making comments and asking questions. You may entice a student to write more by asking for elaboration or by expressing interest in something the child has written. You provide a writing model with your responses in the journal.

**Labeling**

FROM THE earliest elementary grades, children encounter the need for labeling. They may need to label their boxes of supplies, their desks, their lockers, and other personal possessions. If they are making displays of various materials, labels may be necessary. Art may be labeled as to subject matter and child artist. Posters of different types may also require labels.

To facilitate early labeling, such as that of their personal possessions, you may write the names needed on a sheet of paper or on the board and let the children copy the words. Later the children should be encouraged to use such reference materials as picture dictionaries to make needed labels.

**Listing**

LISTING IS a **functional writing** skill that children see adults using frequently. They see their parents making grocery lists and lists of chores. They see their teachers making lists of assignments or groups. You may want to encourage children to list things that they plan to do that they do not want to forget, supplies that they need to bring to school for particular projects, people that they would like to work with at centers, and many other things. The children practice writing skills while making the lists and also practice reading skills when they refer to the lists later.
Filling Out Forms

OUR SOCIETY is richly endowed with forms that need to be completed. Children must complete many forms as part of their school lives and others as a part of activities at home. Application blanks, registration slips, subscription blanks, order blanks, headings on standardized tests, and library cards call for form-completion skills.

Generally, forms specify that they should be filled out in manuscript writing or typed. If the forms are not filled out both accurately and neatly, the children may not accomplish their purposes. This can serve as a strong motivational force to practice their best thinking and writing skills. Emphasize the importance of filling out forms correctly and provide correct models for forms that the children must complete at the times when such forms are needed. Sample forms can be completed by the class as a practice activity before the real form is used. This gives the children a chance to correct mistakes before using forms that are sometimes hard to change once they have been filled out. It gives you a chance to explain the meanings of certain entries that children are confused about, such as the heading “Class,” which could mean the subject of the class or the grade level of the class.

Keeping Records and Logs

CHILDREN HAVE many in-class opportunities to keep records. They may keep a class log in which they, individually or as a group (through use of a secretary), keep a daily record of progress through a unit of work. They may keep running accounts of experiments in progress or of daily changes in the weather. Individual students may record their daily or weekly progress in one or more subject areas, such as arithmetic.

Franks (2001) had her middle school language arts students observe the weather each day and sketch cloud formations. After that, they wrote about the experience in response to their choice of five writing prompts she provided. These prompts addressed their observations, questions that they had, reflections and personal memories, associations that they made, or forecasts. This process improved their retention of science facts.

Students in Pennsylvania are taking part in an oral history project. Each student chooses a person as a subject, interviews the person, and researches his or her history and interests. Findings are presented to their classmates on a “triptych”—a three-part presentation board on which the student places a memoir written or told by the person, photos, and artifacts related to the subject. Sometimes news articles about the person and other things that convey the essence of the person to readers are included (Dickson, Heyler, Reilly, Romano, & DiLullo, 2002).

Learning logs, written accounts of thoughts, questions, and information learned in content area classes, are valuable learning devices. Children can use them to summarize what they have learned from a class period or from their reading, to record questions that they have about content, to make connections among ideas that have been
presented, and to speculate about applications of the information. You may specify the
questions to be answered in the logs, such as “What did you learn from Chapter 6?”
and “What questions do you still have about the material that you read?” You should
read these logs, note misconceptions and missing information, write some responses
in the logs, and use the information gained to plan subsequent lessons. Respond to the
logs, but do not grade them, to encourage free responses in the logs.

In keeping records, accuracy is vitally important. Also, generally not all informa-
tion pertaining to a subject can be recorded. Therefore, the students must learn to
choose the most important details and record them briefly but clearly. In making prog-
ress reports, daily entries should be dated.

If there are classroom clubs, some students will need to write minutes of the meet-
ings. These students will be motivated to learn record-keeping skills because they are
interested in club activities and because they hold the prestigious position of secretary
in the clubs. If officers of clubs change frequently and if there are several clubs appro-
priate for students with different interests, many children can learn these important
skills in a highly functional setting.

You should work with students to set standards for record keeping and help them
analyze their records in view of the stated standards. Students must be helped to see
that records are written to be understood by people other than the writers and that clar-
ity of expression is therefore highly important. Children may exchange records for the
purpose of proofreading and detecting omissions of necessary details.

Writing Letters

Perhaps the most common experience with functional writing that children have is
letter writing. Letter writing should be taught to the children when they can see a real
need for the writing. Many such occasions are available. Letter-writing activities are more
positively received if the letters are going to be mailed. Some examples of letters that can
be mailed are ones to sick classmates, invitations to class functions, requests for material
to be used in a class project, requests for help from parents, requests for permission to
go on field trips, and letters ordering magazine subscriptions. Vos (2002/2003) had good
results letting students who had genuine purposes for writing to authors do just that in
writing workshop. They took their letters through the stages of the writing process and
were excited about the prospect of getting replies. To avoid undue disappointment, they
need to understand that not all authors have time to reply and that the letters they get may
be form letters, but the rewards of response are worth the perils of disappointment.

To encourage interest in letter writing, you may make use of Mark Teague’s Dear
Mrs. LaRue, Sesyle Joslin’s Dear Dragon, or Janet and Allan Ahlberg’s The Jolly Post-
man or Other People’s Letters. The humor in these books adds some spice to discus-
sions of proper form.

Friendly Letters

Friendly Letters are characterized by informality; for example, they may use contrac-
tions. They should be newsy, containing information that has been carefully selected
to interest the reader. They should express the writer’s personality. The students should write friendly letters as if they are talking to the intended recipients. It may even help to address the recipients by name at times.

Students need to be aware of the characteristics of a friendly letter (heading, greeting, body, closing, and signature) and the proper punctuation to be used in different parts. You may find it helpful to devise a large poster to illustrate the correct form for a friendly letter. The five main parts could be labeled on the poster. Attention to punctuation could be encouraged by the use of a contrasting color for punctuation marks. You might suggest that each child copy the correct form, so that he could carry it home for use in personal correspondence. An example of one correct form for a friendly letter is in Figure 9.6.

Figure 9.7 shows a sample of a friendly letter written by a girl in first grade and one by the same girl written in fifth grade. Jasmin’s first-grade letter was written to Betty Roe in response to a series of storytelling and language-activity sessions that she conducted in Jasmin’s classroom. The teacher did not dictate anything that the students should write in their letters to Betty. The children wrote from their own feelings and in their own voices. Jasmin’s letter shows her reaction to the entire storytelling program.

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**Figure 9.6  Form for Friendly Letter**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(HEADING)</th>
<th>Your Street Address</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City, State Zip Code</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Date</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dear ________,</th>
<th>(GREETING)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| (BODY) | |
|--------| |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(CLOSING)</th>
<th>Your friend,</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(SIGNATURE)</td>
<td>Your Name</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
FIGURE 9.7  Sample Letters from First and Fifth Grades

Dear Dr. Roe. I thank you for telling us all the stories you have told us.
And the plays you let us do. Thank you very much.

Source: Jasmin Adams, First Grade, Crossville Elementary School, Crossville, TN. Used with permission.

Date: September 21, 1988

Dear Dr. Roe,

I have been thinking about the book you read to us. I love the part where all the kids set fire to a box just to get downtown. On what one of the kids wanted to the bathroom at church, and started smoking, and the people who called the fire department because they thought the church was on fire, but it wasn't, it was her smoking. I'm not going to tell you any more because it will spoil the book for you. Write back when you have read it. If you like read anything good books at me know so I can read them to

Your friend,
Jasmin

Source: Jasmin Adams, Fifth Grade, Crossville Elementary School, Crossville, TN. Used with permission.
It is neat and carefully written, but it lacks standard form, other than the use of “Dear” in the salutation. As a fifth-grader, Jasmin showed much growth in her knowledge of letter-writing form over her first-grade performance. Her fifth-grade letter contains all of the five main parts of a friendly letter.

You may want to pair your class with another class as pen pals to provide authentic letter-writing experiences. Lemkuhl (2002) paired her inner-city second-grade class in Ohio with a class of Arizona first-graders in a bilingual program for this purpose. The letters that were exchanged turned into a cross-curricular learning experience, as the students shared information related to social studies, science, and math classes, while they were applying language, spelling, and writing skills.

E-mail Correspondence

Classes can also be paired to correspond through e-mail. In Kentucky, students correspond with students in other schools about books they are reading as a part of the Kentucky Telecommunications Writing Project (Bell, Cambron, Rey-Barreau, & Paeth, 1995; Holland, 1996). Finding out about this project prompted Betty Roe to set up a keypal project between her university methods students and classes of public school students. In it, methods students and their matched partners read the same literature selections and conversed about these selections through e-mail exchanges. The project was a great success in the view of the public school students and their teachers, as well as the university students and their teachers. In a seven-year period, several faculty members participated. Methods of implementation have varied from semester to semester, and different grade levels were involved over the course of the project. Roe and Smith (1997) believe that this model is helpful from the standpoint of motivation for writing, providing an authentic audience for writing, and providing writing models for the public school students. Other educators have reported good results with similar projects (McDermott & Setoguchi, 1999; McKeon, 1999; Niday & Campbell, 2000; Sullivan, 1998). Middle school students with special needs have also been paired with college students for e-mail exchanges (Stivers, 1996).

Business Letters

Business letters are characterized by brevity. Only the essential facts are included in such letters. Business letters have six main parts (heading, inside address, greeting, body, closing, and signature). You could make a large poster similar to the one for friendly letters to illustrate the form and punctuation of a business letter. An example of one correct form for a business letter is in Figure 9.8.
Figure 9.8  Form for Business Letter

(HEADING)  
Your Street Address  
City, State Zip Code  
Date

Recipient’s Name  
Street Address  (INSIDE ADDRESS)  
City, State Zip Code

To Whom It May Concern:  (GREETING)  

__________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________  

(BODY)  

__________________________________________________________  
__________________________________________________________  

(CLOSING)  
(SIGNATURE)  
Sincerely,  
Your Name

Figure 9.9  Form for Envelope

Sender’s Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code

Recipient’s Name  
Street Address  
City, State Zip Code
Other Considerations

In all letters, courtesy is important. Encourage students to proofread their letters in an effort to detect discourteous statements, so that these statements can be eliminated from the final drafts of the letters.

Attention to proper form for addressing envelopes is also important. A poster may be developed to illustrate this form. An example of one correct form for addressing an envelope is in Figure 9.9.

Writing Explanations

CHILDREN OFTEN need to write explanations of how to do certain things, how various things work, or why events occur at particular times. To write such explanations, they must be aware of the need for accuracy of information, clarity of expression, and use of effective language. They need to be able to recognize causes and effects and to see relationships among ideas and facts.

Children at times need to write explanations of events that have occurred in the classroom (for example, experiments, demonstrations, explanations of the ways to solve math problems or difficulties in solving these problems). These explanations may include definitions of terms and details and sequences of events.

Making Written Reports

TEACHERS OFTEN ask students to share their research findings with others through written reports. Writing reports involves many related skills.

Collecting Data

The first step in report writing is collection of data through reading, observing, experimenting, or interviewing. These data need to be recorded in a meaningful fashion, so that students can use them with accuracy in their written reports.

Note taking

Note-taking skills can be taught in a functional setting when students are preparing written reports. Students need to be taught to include key words and phrases in their notes, include enough context to make the notes understandable after a period of time has elapsed, include bibliographical references with each note, copy direct quotations exactly, and indicate carefully which notes are direct quotations and which are reworded.

Notes can be taken in outline form, in sentence or paragraph form, or in graphic form (for example, feature matrixes, webs, or time lines). Outline form can be taught...
in a useful context by asking the students to fill out partial outlines of chapters in their subject-matter textbooks. Gradually, the information that is given can be decreased until the students are making out the entire outline without aid. Feature matrixes, webs, and time lines may also be taught through initial use of partially filled out devices. (Chapter 12 has more information about note taking.)

**Summarizing**

Summarizing skills are needed if notes are taken in paragraph form. Once again, you may use subject-matter textbooks to teach summarizing. You may start by reading a sentence, identifying the key words in the sentence, and explaining why those words were chosen. Then you may ask the students to pick out the key words in other sentences. Next, you may model picking out the key sentence in a paragraph and then ask the children to pick out the key sentences in other paragraphs. Finally, you may model the process of finding the key idea or ideas in an entire selection and then ask the children to try this process. In each case, teacher modeling comes first, followed by student practice under your supervision and then by independent practice by the students. If this practice is done with their textbooks, the children are using meaningful material that they really need to understand.

**Organizing Ideas**

After the data have been collected, the students need to organize the ideas for the reports. Completed feature matrixes, webs, outlines, or time lines can provide the organization for writing. Information from them can then be used to write paragraphs about the material. The teacher should first model the writing of a paragraph from the organizational device to be used. Then the students write paragraphs and share their writing. One branch of a web, one row of a feature matrix, or one section of an outline could serve as the basis for each paragraph.

**Documenting Sources**

The inclusion of a bibliography with the report is helpful, both to the reporter and the reader. The reporter may use the bibliography to point out books that substantiate the statements he has made. The reader may use the bibliography to locate more information on the subject than is included in the report.

For students in the early grades, the bibliography need include only the title of the book and the author. Students in higher grades should include author, title, publisher, place of publication, copyright date, and, where applicable, page numbers. Examples of these two forms are as follows.

1. Lower grades
   *From Slave Ship to Freedom Road* by Julius Lester

2. Upper grades

**Attending to Conventions of Written Language**

In writing the report, attention must be given to writing conventions, or mechanics, since the report is intended to communicate information to others. The student should
proofread the report to detect errors in spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. The final copy should be written legibly and should have a neat appearance. Attention to such details as using proper spacing between words and leaving appropriate margins helps to produce an attractive report that is usable by others. Chapter 10 has suggestions for working on use of writing conventions.

Writing Multigenre Research Papers

Traditional research papers are often viewed as formulaic exercises that lack interest and originality. Some teachers have experimented with other approaches to research writing that are more motivational and relevant to students. Some have changed the mode of presentation of information. A promising new approach that Moulton (1999) uses for high school students is the multigenre research paper, developed by Romano (1995). Scaled down slightly, this approach to reports can appeal to middle school students, who frequently are already using a variety of genres that computers have made more accessible because of the font choices and formatting available on word processing programs. Newspaper articles, obituaries, ads, and editorials; birth, marriage, and death certificates; wedding invitations; advertising posters; diaries and journals; plays; different types of poems; letters; receipts; recipes; greeting cards; book covers; letters; and other genres can be formatted to look like the real thing. Pictures can be imported into the material and captioned. Students can use their creativity and take advantage of their own special strengths. Allen (2001) documents the use of such research papers in grades 4 through 6.

With multigenre papers, students research a person, event, or other topic and reveal the information in a number of creative forms, such as the genres mentioned above. There is a bibliography at the end, but the nature of the body of the paper does not allow for internal citations. Moulton (1999) suggests the use of endnotes about each genre in terms of the source of the information and the reason behind the use of that genre.

Grierson, Anson, and Baird (2002, p. 52), spurred by the adoption of a state core curriculum that requires understanding of “functional, informational, and literary texts from different periods, cultures and genres,” as specified by the Utah State Office of Education in 1999, decided to experiment with the use of multigenre papers for this purpose in sixth-grade classes. After modeling by the classroom teachers, the students were asked to produce a multigenre paper about chosen ancestors. For students who could not find out enough about their ancestors to produce papers, the option was to choose from famous historical figures. In the research for family members’ histories, students were encouraged to use such primary sources as genealogy charts, journals, tombstones, and interviews with relatives. They filled out Rationale Cards for recording why they chose each genre and the sources of their information for that genre. Genres used included birth certificates, letters, obituaries, and telegrams.

Moulton (1999) asked high school students to use eight different genres. We suggest that four or five different pieces in three or four different genres may be more appropriate for middle school students. Just as is true with traditional research papers, the students should be expected to use multiple sources and integrate the information from different sources into a paper that conveys the important information about the subject.

Meagan Jasitt has produced a multigenre book report on the book The Midwife’s Apprentice. It is shown in Figure 9.10. Meagan’s endnotes were on a single page at the end of her paper, but they have been integrated into Figure 9.10 for the clarity of this example.
**Figure 9.10** Multigenre Book Report

*The Knight.* My poem is about the dream of a girl in the Middle Ages for her handsome knight.

*Village of Gobnet-Under-Green, England.* This certificate that Jonathan Baker was born to Mr. and Mrs. Christopher Baker at The Inn at Eddironch, England at 4:06 a.m. Thursday, the 25th day of December, A.D. 1991.


Reprinted by permission of Meagan and Lance Jasit.
Coat of Arms: This is my personal coat of arms. One of my favorite activities is gymnastics.

Midwife’s Apprentice Delivers Twins: Adapted from Chapter 8, “The Twins” by Karen Cushman. The Midwife’s Apprentice. New York: Harper Trophy, 1995, pp. 48–53. Alyce’s life as a midwife’s apprentice was so miserable that I decided to give her credit for helping Will Russett deliver twin calves. I just took the facts from Chapter 8 and wrote a modern day newspaper article.

Midwife’s Apprentice Delivers Twins
By Meagan Jasitt
Medieval Press Writer

Alyce, the apprentice for Jane the Midwife, delivered twin calves. It was Tuesday night, June 15, 1250. Alyce was on the way home from collecting apples when she met Will Russett along the Old North Road. Tansy the cow fell into a gravel pit and Will could not get her out. Alyce realized that Tansy was about to have her baby calf and helped Will with the delivery.

To their surprise Tansy had twins. After the calves were carried out of the pit by Alyce and Will, Tansy followed them. Will said, “Tansy couldn’t have done it without Alyce.”

The mother and the baby calves are doing fine. The only problem was that Alyce left her fruit baskets on the road and they were taken during the night. If anyone finds the baskets, please return them to Jane the Midwife in the village of Gobnet-Under-Green.
Types of Writing

writing to learn in Content Areas

Some of the writing forms discussed previously are suitable for learning content material. Learning logs and other types of record keeping, written explanations, written reports, and occasionally business letters all have a place in content area instruction, as does creative writing that involves basing writing on factual material. Minilesson 9.1 illustrates a writing-to-learn project.

Use of semantic webbing (see Chapter 3) before writing about a content topic can be extremely helpful. The words needed to form the web may come from personal experiences, books, videos, or other sources. Each part of the web can be used to form the basis for a paragraph or a section of writing.

Researchers have found that summary writing after reading social studies material enhances comprehension and recall (Doctorow, Wittrock, & Marks, 1978; Taylor & Berkowitz, 1980). Bromley (1985) found that both précis writing and outlining helped fifth-graders learn from content texts. A précis is a paraphrased summary of the material, condensed to about one-third of the original length. The effects of the two techniques studied by Bromley were not significantly different, so either approach

Minilesson 9.1

Writing-to-Learn Project for Social Studies

After study of the Underground Railroad, ask students to plan, research, and write a diary of either an imaginary slave being conducted to freedom or an imaginary conductor. The students must begin the diary entries of the slave from the day before he or she runs away and continue them until he or she reaches safety. The students must begin the diary entries of the conductor on the day before some runaway slaves join him or her and continue them until the conductor passes the slaves on to someone else. The students should tell how the slaves are located, how they are treated, how they travel, and how they are hidden. The feelings of the diary writer should be included, as well as an account of things that are done. If possible, contact with a real person from history should be included.

These diaries may be taken through the process writing procedure so that the final drafts are in a form suitable for sharing with a broad audience.

What are the students learning?

The students are learning to take the point of view of another person to write about events that the other person experienced. They are learning to include vivid details in written accounts of events and to consider feelings of characters as well as their experiences.
appears to be valuable. Minilesson 9.2 shows the use of summary writing after reading science material.

Of course, in content area classrooms, some writing takes place to test learning. Teachers should offer students instruction on how to answer essay questions. Organization of answers should be stressed, and commonly used terms such as compare, contrast, and trace the development of should be thoroughly explained.

Some commercial writing programs help teachers address nonfiction writing instruction. One program, Write Time for Kids (Teacher Created Materials, 2004), is a research-based nonfiction program that has students read nonfiction text as a springboard for writing instruction. Narrative, expository, and persuasive passages, as well as passages that contain visual presentation elements such as maps and charts, are included in separate kits for each grade level, K-8. Articles are drawn from Time for Kids magazine. The program is geared to the Content Standards: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning). It has been correlated to many states’ standards and to the Traits of Good Writing framework, as well as to several reading programs. Student cards are attractive and contain stimuli for reader response and writing activities. There is an extremely informative Teacher Resource Notebook and an extensive Lesson Plan Book for the teacher. A process writing approach and self-evaluation based on six traits of good writing—voice, word choice, organization, conventions, sentence fluency, and ideas—are encouraged. Many assessment rubrics are included in the resource materials. Both teachers in self-contained classrooms and content teachers in departmental settings who are not accustomed to using writing extensively in content areas should be able to implement this program.

### Minilesson 9.2

**Cooperative Writing in Science**

Jennifer Magnusson reads a picture book entitled Trapdoor Spiders to her class, section by section. After she reads a section of the book—for example, one called “Shapes”—she asks the students to summarize on a transparency the information that they acquired from the reading, so that everyone can see what is written and can contribute. One student is the scribe for the class, taking dictation, as the others provide information. After the material is summarized on the transparencies, another student becomes the scribe, and the students cooperatively edit their work. Finally, they all write the edited material in their notebooks for future reference. Figure 9.11 shows their first draft, complete with editing marks (which are in a contrasting marker on the transparencies), and a typed copy of the entire edited piece.

**What are the students learning?**

The students are learning to listen to informational material for important details, cooperatively summarize material learned from informational books, cooperatively edit material, and use class-produced material as supplementary study resources.
Figure 9.11  Cooperative Writing

Trapdoor Spiders are unique arthropods, which means they have skeletons on the outside of their bodies. Like all other spiders, the Trapdoor Spider has two body parts and eight legs.

Trapdoor Spiders build homes under the ground with tightly locked doors. These spiders live in climates that are hot or warm.

There are many different sizes of Trapdoor Spiders. Their bodies can reach up to one and a half inches in length, and their legs are twice as long as their bodies! Trapdoor Spiders have different colors, although their colors are close to being the same. These colors are tan, brown, or red. Some of these spiders, such as the Red African Trapdoor Spider, also have a dark stripe along the bottom of their abdomen.

How do Trapdoor Spiders defend themselves? When enemies are near, this arachnid darts into it's burrow and slams the door! Once inside, it will tightly hold the door.

These examples, along with many others, are the reason Trapdoor Spiders are unique. More information about all arachnids can be found in the library.

Source: Jennifer Magnusson’s Fifth-Grade Class, Pleasant Hill School, Pleasant Hill, TN. Used with permission.
Raphael, Kirschner, and Englert (1988) have developed the Expository Writing Program (EWP) to help students learn about writing expository text. Students are taught different text structures, such as comparison/contrast, problem/solution, and explanation, and they are shown that these different structures answer different types of questions and use particular key words and phrases. The EWP includes a series of “think sheets” designed to stimulate students’ use of planning, information gathering, drafting, editing, and revising strategies. Students initially learn to use expository structures in writing by writing about things based on personal experiences, such as explanations of how to make things. Later they learn to apply such writing strategies to report writing, in which they must gather information from expository texts. Raphael and colleagues (1988, p. 794) believe that “the EWP is effective because students learn the strategies used by authors of informational text, apply the strategies in their own writing, and through participation in the writing process learn to read critically and monitor the clarity of the text they are reading whether or not they themselves are the authors.”

Do you think that it is possible to teach functional writing entirely through activities that have real meaning and purpose for the students? Why, or why not?

Some types of writing, such as diaries or personal journals, may not be assessed for form, but may be self-assessed for clarity. Reading their own written material after a period of time has elapsed should convince students of the need to include sufficient details in their writing. Writing to learn in the content areas may be assessed by considering the effectiveness of the writing in achieving the targeted learning objective.

When a process writing approach is used with the various types of writing, assessment by the student and the teacher is ongoing, as described in Chapter 8, with each step of the process involving at least self-assessment. Rubrics may be developed to assess any form of writing. Students and teachers may cooperatively develop such rubrics. Various assessment techniques, including use of rubrics, are discussed in more detail in Chapter 13.

SUMMARY

Children’s writing often takes the form of stories, photo essays, poems, diaries or personal journals, dialogue journals, labeling, listing, filling out forms, keeping records and logs, writing letters, writing explanations, making written reports, or a variety of types of writing to learn in content areas. Each form needs special instructional attention.
To prepare written reports, students must collect data, summarize, organize ideas, and document sources. They must observe writing conventions so that they will communicate ideas clearly. Multigenre research papers involve writing in a variety of genres. These papers are often seen as more relevant and motivational for the students.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are writing-to-learn activities that you find particularly useful in a content area of your choice?
2. What types of poetry would you introduce to students first? Why?
3. How do the processes of writing stories and writing reports differ?
4. What are some values of diaries or personal journals?

**Suggested Activities**

1. Construct a photo essay that could serve as a model for children to follow.
2. Compile a bibliography of model poems for each type of poetry discussed in this chapter.
3. Participate in a dialogue journal about a piece of literature or a chapter in a content area textbook with your teacher or with a classmate. Write an evaluation of this technique for improving writing instruction.
4. Compile a list of people to whom students could write friendly letters for authentic purposes.
5. Compile a list of people or businesses to whom students could write business letters for authentic purposes.

**References**


Books for Children and Adolescents Cited in This Chapter


