



YALE NATIONAL INITIATIVE

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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2025 Volume II: The Art of Writing and Revision

Help Me Find the Words: Rhetoric, Workshop, and Memoir in Middle School

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“Ms. / Mr. / Mx. / Tr. _____, you’re doing too much.” – My students, and probably your students as well, upon hearing the expectations for a writing assignment.

Teaching writing is an incredible task. Incredible as in truly unbelievable. There are so many moving parts, and it can feel impossible to meaningfully engage students (or convince students to meaningfully engage) with the writing tasks we give. This curriculum unit, designed to be a brief introduction to writing for the beginning of the school year, takes students from the building blocks of what makes a sentence a sentence, to drafting a six-word memoir, all the way to the composition of a roughly 250-word piece of creative nonfiction writing. In this unit, students learn the rhetorical impacts of strong verb choice, sentence length variety, and repetition from mentor texts (both six-word memoirs and excerpts from longer works of creative nonfiction); and they author, workshop, and revise their own versions of these text forms. In short, this unit allows students to choose their own words to convey their own experiences. Ultimately (hopefully) they find their voices!

(Developed for English Language Arts, grade 7; recommended for English Language Arts, grades 6-9)

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