



Pen to Paper with Alexander: The Writing Process for No Good, Very Bad Days

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Introduction

“Writing isn't one skill but a bundle of skills: sequencing, spelling, elaborating, and transitioning from paragraph to another, just to name a few. A writing teacher needs a bundle of skills to nourish young writers. Some of those are social: knowing when to praise, nudge, or look the other way. Some rely on an understanding of writing itself. Still others depend on your evolving understanding of the individual students in your class.”¹

- Ralph Fletcher

Writing has always been one of the most expressive forms of communication for me. It is an avenue to convey my feelings, emotions, or ideas. In times where orally expressing myself has failed me, putting words down on paper has always been my preference as it is the most comfortable for me. Writing in every form, whether it be carving your initials with your loved one into the side of a tree, typing out your mom’s famous recipe, making the very important to-do list, researching and writing out the itinerary for that vacation you’ve been planning for months, typing up that angry work email that you eventually have to edit to make it more professional, or just leaving a simple message on a sticky note for the babysitter: are all essential parts of our daily lives. In today’s society, having things in writing is also a form of security, like having written permission or proof of agreements, from legally binding documents to the extremely fine print that’s often ignored. Because writing is such an important life skill, it is crucial to teach children at an early age the basics to build a strong foundation that will be beneficial to them all of their lives.

It is my greatest hope that as an educator I can help my students develop a love for writing at an early age. I want them to feel comfortable and confident in using it as a tool to go about their everyday lives so that one day they may grow up to be the screenwriters, editors, authors, or songwriters of their generation. I have the honor of serving the community and children at Elizabeth D. Redd Elementary in Richmond, Virginia. Redd is an inner-city, Title I school with grades K-5. We have approximately 500 students, and the majority of them come from low-income households. Our students are predominantly African-American and Hispanic. Many are new to the country from Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador and speak English as a second language.

My unit, *“Pen to Paper with Alexander: The Writing Process for No Good, Very Bad Days”*, will bring one of the picture books I loved as a child into the writing process for my students. The unit will be based upon Judith Viorst’s *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day*. It tells the story of a boy who, from the time he wakes up with gum in his hair, has a day so bad it makes him want to move away to Australia. Published in June of 1972, the book is an ALA Notable Children's Book. It has also won a George G. Stone Center Recognition of Merit, a Georgia Children's Book Award, and is a Reading Rainbow book. I would love for my third graders to hear Alexander’s story and use it to gather their thoughts and write about a bad day of their own.

Background

Literature is one of my favorite things to teach! My main priority is to create a love for literacy in my third graders, and ultimately for them to become lifelong readers and writers. Making connections between reading and writing is essential in elementary aged students as it builds a strong literary foundation for the rest of their lives. In my classroom, writing is a part of our everyday routine. We have a major focus on reading to learn in third grade, while in grades K-2 the focus is on learning to read. Every reading act is always followed by a writing act; whether it be journaling or summarizing. “Writing should be one the foundational beams of your classroom. Not a decorative beam, but a weight bearing wall.”²

In my eleven years of experience, with so much to pack into a school day with very little time and short pacing schedules that tell you how many days to teach each standard, I am sad to say that teaching writing skills is one of the things that usually gets overlooked. Basic writing skills are taught, but writing as a whole is never fully taught in depth or detail as it should be. Reading comprehension and math skills take precedence over everything else because of the pressures of meeting the goals of state testing. I have always believed that teaching reading and writing go together. It is in the primary grades that students learn essential reading and writing skills that shape their foundation.

Sometimes, as teachers of elementary school students, we put so much pressure on them to spell words correctly that it discourages them from the whole idea, as they fear disappointing you or they are just totally turned off because they feel defeated before they even attempt to begin. For example, if they’re so worried about spelling the word “friend” wrong, they will never get excited to write a story about their friend. We should foster their expressive and oral language skills so that they feel empowered. Just getting them to put pen to paper is the first step. Teaching them the writing process and developing confidence along the way, they will grow to love writing while making great strides with things like spelling and sentence structure.

I selected the book *Alexander* because I remember how much I loved it as a kid. It is a funny story and I feel it will keep the students engaged as they will be able to relate to Alexander and his very emotional day. In addition to using *Alexander* as our main text for lessons on the writing process, we will have several mini-lessons using various mentor texts to introduce students to concepts such as how to find a topic and stretch their ideas, word choice, voice, how to write descriptive sentences in personal narratives, and dialogue etc. We will also use 3rd grade nonfiction reading passages. These will all allow us to focus on and highlight key points in identifying the author’s craft; which is the style in which the author decides to put the piece together. In the book *Alexander*, we will identify how Viorst sequences the events of Alexander’s bad day, being sure to focus on the details of each event. Some styles we will explore are descriptive, persuasive, and narrative. This

will give students the confidence and background knowledge they need to create a personal narrative about a terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day of their own.

Unit Content

“Writing well has everything to do with being able to read one’s own work with an eye toward the unmet possibilities that are there.”³

- Lucy Calkins

What are Personal Narratives?

Have you ever said in conversation “I could write a book” when referring to all the stories you could tell about your everyday life as a teacher? I have, and I am sure it could be a number one best-seller! It would be full of hilarious **anecdotes** or vivid **vignettes** that share the very essence of the days in the life of the multiple hat-wearing educator. In literature, a *vignette* is a short descriptive scene that captures a single moment or a defining detail about a character, idea, or other element of the story. They are small parts of a larger work, and can only exist as pieces of a whole story, pieces of narratives. So what are narratives? “Narrative genres tell a story, using vivid details about people, events, and conflicts or crises. They also reflect on the meaning of the stories, offering the reader an interpretation or explanation of what occurred. Common narrative genres include the memoir, personal essay, and literacy narrative.”⁴ In my unit I will focus on personal narratives with my third grade students. I will teach them how using anecdotes and vignettes make up a personal narrative.

During the 2019 Yale National Initiative seminar *Reading for Writing: Modeling the Modern Essay* under the leadership and guidance of Yale University’s Professor of English Jessica Brantley, we explored several different genres of non-fiction including personal essays, profiles, cultural criticism, and political argument. Some of the writers include: Joan Didion, Frederick Douglass, Zora Neale Hurston, Tom Wolfe, Scott Russell Sanders, Maya Angelou, and Nancy Mairs. In doing this I discovered how meticulous and deliberate writers are when sharing their stories. We unpacked each essay and analyzed the writer’s craft while exploring how they shaped their personal experiences to create a **public point**. A *public point* is the overall message the writer is trying to show the reader. Through identifying each writer’s public point, we were able to discover their **tone, audience, and rhythm**, all of which are key components of good writing. I gained a newfound appreciation for the art of writing and the very essence of *putting pen to paper* that I have never really had before. In the seminar, we also explored the value of writing workshop, where we went through the process of drafting out our own personal essays, then reading and discussing our writing with each other, learning to teach each other to become better writers, as well as better teachers of writers.

So what exactly are personal essays? “Personal essays focus on a significant personal experience in the writer’s past and draw out the meaning as the writer tells the story and reflects on the experience. Its key features include a dramatic event or episode; vivid details and narration; and an interweaving of narration with reflection on the interpretation of the essayist’s experience.”⁵

As a writer you want to stay in control of your reader’s energy and where it is going. You want your writing to

be good. So how do we decide what is good writing? There are a few things that will help you determine this. It can be considered good writing if it speaks to you, moves you, and you can remember it years later because there was something so special about it that it stuck with you. In the seminar we talked a lot about writing that stands the test of time. Some of the essays we explored were decades old. But what made them worth reading and enjoyable after all the time that has passed, was the fact that they touched the reader in one way or another, whether it was talking about something that is still relevant today, or moved the reader by doing an excellent job with the components mentioned above: making a **public point**, speaking in a relatable **tone**, hooking the reader with a pulsing **rhythm** or **form**, or speaking clearly to the intended **audience** with the perfect word choice.

When writing a personal essay, one should always have a **public point**. It gives the reader something to take away from the essay, instead of just being solely about something that has happened to the writer. Having a public point, makes the piece more interesting for the reader. In Maya Angelou's 1969 essay "*Graduation*", she tells about growing up in a small town where the middle and high school graduation is THE event of the town. It reminded me of small town Friday night football, where everything shuts down for the big game each week. She takes you on this journey of her day, where everyone is pulling out all of their best of everything, because it is such a special occasion. To show how important this event is, she tells us how her mother makes Sunday breakfast on a Friday, how she wears a beautiful yellow dress, and how she gets a brand new Mickey Mouse watch as a present. But a key part of the essay is when she tells the reader "Oh, it was important, all right. White folks would attend the ceremony, and two or three would speak of God and home, and the Southern way of life..."⁶ This is a key part because it is when the speaker enters the graduation, a white man, that the whole tone and mood of the essay changes. Angelou paints this picture of a wonderful day filled with a great sense of pride and excitement, for in her very small town graduating from 8th grade was a great accomplishment. Most of the teachers there had only completed an 8th grade education.

The day takes a turn, and this high that everyone has been feeling all day is spoiled as the white speaker of the graduation, Mr. Donleavy, makes some very discouraging remarks in his speech. After mentioning that he pointed out to someone that his favorite football player attended the school, he continued saying that "one of the best basketball players at Fisk sank his first ball right here at Lafayette County Training School."⁷ Angelou then says "The white kids were going to be Galileos and Madame Curies and Edisons and Gauguins, and our boys (the girls were not even in on it) would try to be Jesse Owens and Joe Louises."⁸ His words cut the people of the audience, especially the graduates, like a blade freshly sharpened. They killed all hope in the moment and made them feel as their huge accomplishment that they were all so proud of, actually was all for nothing. Angelou says "The man's dead words fell like bricks around the auditorium and too many settled on my belly...Graduation, was finished for me before my name was even called. The accomplishment was nothing...Donleavy had exposed us. We were maids and farmers, handymen and washerwomen, and anything higher that we aspired to was farcical and presumptuous".⁹ Angelou then lets the reader in on her thoughts of how it made her feel that it was awful to be a negro, how she wanted to be dead.

But it was at the end of the graduation, when Henry Reed, another student in her graduating class turned to them and began singing the Negro national anthem with his head held high that their spirits were lifted. Angelou says she had learned the song as a child and had sung it many times before, but it wasn't until this moment that she really heard it for the first time. Its lyrics spoke to her dampened spirit and gave her a sense of empowerment which seemed to be true for the rest of the people in attendance as well. "We have come over a way that with tears has been watered, We have come, treading our path through the blood of the slaughtered." The words of the song held such a deep meaning. She goes on to say "While echoes of the song

shivered in the air, Henry Reed bowed his head, said “Thank You”, and returned to his place in the line. The tears that slipped down many faces were not wiped away in shame. We were on top again. As always, again. We survived. The depths had been icy and dark, but now a bright sun spoke to our souls. I was no longer simply a member of the graduating class of 1940; I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful Negro race.”¹⁰ Angelou’s public point was to persevere and take pride in one’s accomplishments to overcome adversity. From the lyrics of the song, she is reminded of how the history of her people, the Negro race, has been able to rise above things that were meant to tear them down. From that she was reminded to hold her head high and be proud of who she was, and hopeful to be whatever she wanted to be in the future. You could feel the confidence and emotions through her words on the page. It was very moving for me as a reader.

In Scott Russell Sanders’ essay “*Under the Influence*” which was originally published in *Harper’s Magazine* in 1989, he does a wonderful job of setting an appropriate **tone** to match his topic. In literature, the **tone** of the piece expresses the writer’s attitude toward or feelings about the subject matter and audience. When we speak, our tone of voice conveys our mood—frustrated, cheerful, critical, gloomy, or angry. When we write, our images and descriptive phrases get our feelings across. Sanders’ essay is about growing up with his father who was an alcoholic. He sets the tone in the very beginning in the first few sentences when he writes: “My Father drank. He drank as a gut-punched boxer gasps for breath, as a starving dog gobbles food-compulsively, secretly, in pain and trembling.”¹¹

From the very start I knew that the *tone* of his essay would be dark and emotional. He goes on later to say that as he became an adult, that he then knew that his father was an alcoholic. Throughout the essay he gives accounts of encounters with his father after he had been drinking and how it made him and his siblings feel. “...and behind the closed doors they slam in fury or disgrace, countless other children tremble. I comfort myself with such knowledge, holding it against the throb of memory like an ice pack against a bruise.”¹² These lines show that Russell tried to find comfort in the fact that he was not the only child living in a house with an alcoholic father. That there were other children who shared the same trauma, humiliation, and fear that he did. “When drunk, our father was clearly in his wrong mind. He became a stranger, as fearful to us as any graveyard lunatic, not quite frothing at the mouth but fierce enough, quick-tempered, explosive; or else he grew maudlin and weepy, which frightened us nearly as much.”¹³ In his use of descriptive word choice (quick-tempered, maudlin, and weepy), the tone of his words painted a picture of a painful upbringing of watching his father suffer this illness, he pulled the reader into his story.

Then, there is **rhythm**. It is the sense of movement in speech, marked by the stress, timing, and quantity of syllables. In William Zinsser’s classic guide to writing non-fiction titled *On Writing Well*, he says when you’re choosing words and stringing them together, you need to always bear in mind how they sound. I like to think of it as a catchy song you hear on the radio that you can’t help but sing along to because the rhythm flows so well. It draws you in. Zinsser says that while “..readers read with their eyes. But in fact they hear what they are reading far more than you realize. Therefore such matters as rhythm and alliteration are vital to every sentence.”¹⁴ He gives an example with two words “serene” and “tranquil”—one so soft, the other strangely disturbing because of the unusual n and q. Such considerations of sound and rhythm should go into everything you write.¹⁵

In Joan Didion’s 1968 essay *On Keeping a Notebook*, she writes “Why did I write it down? In order to remember, of course, but exactly what was it I wanted to remember? How much of it actually happened? Did any of it? Why do I keep a notebook at all? The impulse to write things down is a peculiarly compulsive one, secondarily, in the way that any compulsion tries to justify itself.” I think she does a wonderful job in stringing

those questions together to create a nice rhythm that draws the reader in. Some of the sentences being shorter than others helped the flow as well. Zinsser says “An occasional short sentence can carry a tremendous punch. It stays in the reader’s ear.”¹⁶

Lastly, there is **audience**. Before you begin writing, a question you should ask yourself is “Who am I writing for?”. Zinsser says “It’s a fundamental question, and it has a fundamental answer: You are writing for yourself...You are writing primarily to please yourself, and if you go about it with enjoyment you will also entertain the readers who are worth writing for.”¹⁷ In Nancy Mairs’ essay *On Being a Cripple*, she tells her story of being diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (also known as MS). MS is a chronic degenerative disease of the central nervous system, in which she explains that during its course, which is unpredictable and uncontrollable, one may lose vision, hearing, speech, the ability to walk, control of the bladder and/or bowels, and coordination of movements.

In this essay, Mairs does a phenomenal job at reaching her audience, which seems to be multiple audiences; people with MS, family members or friends of people with MS, or people who have been diagnosed with other life changing diseases and are learning to cope with them. It is such a powerful essay where she embraces her diagnosis and takes the reader on a journey with her on how her life changes in dealing with her relationships with family and friends and maintaining a job. Living each day trying to make the best of it, not knowing what’s in store. She sprinkles little bits of humor throughout the essay which makes this very heavy topic enjoyable to read. It keeps the reader hopeful and engaged.

Mairs says in the essay “First, the matter of semantics. I am a cripple. I choose this word to name me. I choose from among several possibilities, the most common of which are “handicapped” and “disabled.” I made the choice a number of years ago, without thinking, unaware of my motives for doing so. Even now, I’m not sure what those motives are, but I recognize that they are complex and not entirely flattering. People—crippled or not—wince at the word “cripple,” as they do not at “handicapped” or “disabled.” Perhaps I want them to wince. I want them to see me as a tough customer, one to whom the fates /gods /viruses have not been kind, but who can face the brutal truth of her existence squarely. As a cripple, I swagger.” This line is very powerful as it gives you a sense of direction of where the essay is going. First she calls herself a cripple, and then says she swaggers. Showing that she has embraced her situation and would try to make the best of it and with great confidence using a word like “swagger”. She takes the reader on the up and downs that is her life with MS, and leaves them feeling inspired.

Teaching Strategies

“Here’s a little secret that may surprise you: It’s not so much that you will teach your kids to write. They will teach themselves by writing every day, and by living in a community of writers.”¹⁸

- Ralph Fletcher

From my research and the Reading for Writing: Modeling the Modern Essay seminar, I learned that writing must be a predictable daily routine. Students need to see themselves as writers, each with a unique identity.

Therefore, students should be writing every single day. This unit will be taught during my two-hour language arts block. Benchmark Literacy Curriculum is what we use in my district for Language Arts instruction. Each writing unit is taught over a six week period. My unit activities will be using the writing process to conduct writer's workshop which will include the following steps: pre-writing, drafting, re-reading, revising, editing, and publishing. Weeks 1-3 will include activities 1-6, and weeks 4-6 will include activities 7-12. Below are the strategies that I will be using in order to successfully teach the activities.

Model Writing

What it is: The teacher will model each step of the writing process before students engage in the process.

Why do it: This will set expectations for students as well as give them an opportunity to see the teacher as a writer too.

How it is done: One day read aloud and discuss the mentor text. The next day, model for students what their writing should look like, "Yesterday I read Alexander...if I write about a bad day it would look like this".

Mini-Lessons

What it is: A mini-lesson is where a teacher explicitly teaches a specific skill for about 10-15 minutes.

Why do it: Focusing on a specific skill in a short simple lesson creates a greater chance of students comprehending the skill.

How it is done: The teacher will be following the mini-lesson's components. This includes connection, which helps students make the connection from what they were learning previously to that day's learning objective. The second component is explicit modeling and explaining what writing skill or strategy they can try for that day's independent writing time. The last component is linking what they learned that day to what they can do during their independent writing time. I will be using some of the following **mentor texts** to teach various skills.

Writers Workshop: to create Personal Narratives

What it is: The teacher will confer with individual students. It is a conversation that teaches students to be better writers during the writing process which includes the following prewriting/brainstorming, drafting, re-reading, revising, editing, and publishing.

Why do it: This helps to differentiate, strengthen, and target students' area of weakness which is easier when you are meeting one on one with each student, versus the whole class. Conferences also help the teacher develop a relationship with students. They help students make good choices in their writing and learn to give and receive feedback.

How it is done: Writing Conferences- A writing conference is essentially a conversation between student and teacher. You talk with a student, get a dialogue going, give compliments, make a suggestion, and exit. "Listen, Be Present as a Reader, Don't Get into a Power Struggle-the student decides if or when to use the ideas you put forth in conferences. The challenge is to create the kind of classroom atmosphere where you suggest lots of rich ideas, and students are willing to try them out".¹⁹

The teacher will first give compliments such as "this was funny!" or "I liked the way you described this." Then

the teacher will ask questions such as, “What do you think is the best part of this piece?” “If you were to work on it to make it even better, what could you do?” The teacher will look at the students’ work and identify where they need more support. Then give feedback and teach a specific strategy by defining it, explaining why it is important, and making sure the student understands how to use the strategy. Lastly, the teacher will connect the discussions during the conference back to the students’ writing.

“Invite students to have a real give and take with you, sit with students at their eye level, use “active listening” strategies- allow wait time after asking questions, ask students to “say more” about what they tell you, and repeat what they say to check that you’re hearing them correctly.”²⁰

What you learn about students’ needs in conferences also helps you make decisions about which students to place in small group lessons. Small groups are more effective when students have similar needs. There should also be some peer editing/revising-towards the end of the unit, before the conference with the teacher. During writer’s workshop, you don’t want all students on the same step at the same time, them being staggered is best because you cannot meet with everyone at the same time.

Free write

What it is: this is timed writing with no focus on punctuation. Students are just continuously writing until the designated time is up.

Why do it: Focusing on a specific skill in a short simple lesson serves a greater chance of students comprehending the skill.

How it is done: The teacher will set a timer and allow students to write anywhere in the classroom.

Journaling

What it is: The students write in their designated writing notebooks/journals.

Why do it: This gives the students a chance to practice writing skills and develop a joy for writing.

How it is done: The teacher gives students specific topics or prompts to write about. Journaling can also be used as a time for students to write about whatever they want.

Shared Stories

What it is: The teacher will start a topic sentence and go around the room and each student will add a sentence to the previous one to complete a story focusing on the skill taught in each mini lesson.

Why do it: This gives the students a chance to practice the skill taught in the mini-lesson.

How it is done:

Illustrations

What it is: drawing pictures first, then writing words.

Why do it: The idea that pictures have meaning is critical as students learn to compose with illustrations as well as words.²¹

How it is done: This is great for reluctant writers, allowing them to draw out the picture in their mind first, will make putting their ideas on paper easier. It is a form of brainstorming that can be very effective.

Peer Interviews

What it is: students partner up and ask each other a series of questions.

Why do it: This gives the students a chance to practice using quotation marks and dialogue.

How it is done: The students will formulate a number of questions to ask a partner. They will record their partners answers on paper, using quotation marks.

Oral Story Telling

What it is: The students tell a partner their story orally, then they go and write it.

Why do it: This gives reluctant writers a chance to get their ideas out, which will help them get their words down on paper.

How it is done: The teacher will pair up students and give them a set amount of time to tell their stories to each other, before returning to their seats to put it down on paper. Another option would be to orally tell the teacher their story while she writes it out for them. Afterwards, cut it apart into strips and have them put it back in sequential order. Finally, they can copy it themselves and feel a great sense of accomplishment.

Author's Chair

What it is: a designated place in the classroom where the writer sits when sharing with the class.

Why do it: Sharing from the author's chair signifies a particular form of response (help for work in progress, celebratory comments for finished work).

How it is done: The teacher will decorate a chair in the center of the room with the word "Author" on it. This will make it special for students when they are sharing.

Another strategy to incorporate some technology would be "Talk to text" using iPads. This would be a great activity for ESL (English as a Second Language) students. Students can speak into the iPad, telling the story they would like, while the iPad types out their words into a document. They can later copy those sentences into their notebooks. They can also record themselves reading to take notes for writing later.

Classroom Activities

To begin the unit, I will introduce students to the steps of the writing process with writer's workshop. I will model the steps using my own personal narrative, using the title "The Blizzard Known as Jonas". It will tell about the day everything seemed to go wrong for me when we had the snow storm *Jonas* a few years ago. Then, we will read the text *Alexander* and use brainstorming activities and graphic organizers so that students can begin the prewriting step of the process. We will go through the book and highlight different events and

Alexander's emotions and feelings, students will turn and talk with a partner and then share again their findings with the class. I will also allow them to draw out any scenes they want to emphasize; they love drawing! We will focus on making connections (text to world), comparing and contrasting what distinguishes the book from their own personal story using graphic organizers like Venn Diagrams. Additional activities that could be included in this unit are artistic efforts through creating storyboards. When launching the workshop, starting out with the mini lessons "You might start by sharing two or three personal stories from your own life. Keep your stories short. Usually one of your examples will spark ideas for your students to write about. Choose stories with emotional content-strange, sad, funny."²²

Writer's Workshop should have the following three components:

1. Mini Lesson (10-15 minutes): a whole class lesson about a writing strategy, craft, technique, or language convention. In many classrooms, the teacher has students gathered in the meeting area.
2. Independent Writing (25-30 minutes): students work on their writing back at their seats. The teacher walks around the room and also has several writing conferences with students, which usually last 4-7 minutes each.
3. Share Session (5-10 minutes): The class reconvenes to discuss how writing went that day, either to highlight student work or to give feedback to a few students about their draft-in process.²³

The Writing Process

- Pre-writing: students plan for their writing through reading sources, brainstorming, talking, or sketching.
- Drafting: Students write independently on a topic of their choice on an assigned piece.
- Revising: Students reread what they have already written and make appropriate changes to the content.
- Editing: Students go back through their writing to fix and circle their use of proper conventions, mechanics, and spelling.
- Publishing: Students formally present chosen pieces of writing in a finished format.²⁴

In each lesson after the read aloud, it is important to tell students to practice that skill in their writing for the day. For example, if the lesson is on using dialogue they should practice using dialogue in their independent writing time. For example:

Day 1- *Owen* mini lesson (which is about using dialogue in writing), Students will go practice dialogue in their journals writing an entry that includes characters speaking, using quotation marks.

Day 2- Students will apply yesterday's lesson to their personal narrative.

Week 1- Duration: 5 days (The teacher will not conduct conferences in week one, but rotate around to check on writers, help with goal setting, making students feel like they can write.)

Strategies for Independent Writing time: Free-write and Journaling

Lessons 1-2: What Should I Write About?: finding a topic and zooming in on that topic.

Lesson 1: *Ralph Tells a Story* by: Abby Hanlon- students will learn about finding writing ideas.

Lesson 2: *Kitchen Dance* by: Maurie J. Manning- students will learn how to zoom in and write about the small moments in their family lives.

The teacher and students will create a class anchor chart on why writers write together to display in class. Students will be able to refer back to it later. The teacher will brainstorm a list of possible writing topics with students to be added to a class-sized heart map. The students will also add the topics to a list in their writing folders or journals.

Week 2- Duration: 5 days *This week the teacher will begin conducting writing conferences*

Strategies for Independent Writing time: Journaling, Pre-writing, Oral Story-Telling

Lessons 3-5: Writing about Yourself: Personal Narratives

Lesson 3: *When the Relatives Came* by: Cynthia Rylant- students will learn to spark memories of family visits and trips which are good inspiration for narrative writing.

Lesson 4: *A Chair for My Mother* by: Vera Williams- students will learn about the details of personal narratives.

The teacher and students will create a class anchor chart on the characteristics of personal narratives that includes:

- a. focuses on a particular incident in the author's' life
- b. has specific details about a time, place, and people involved
- c. includes dialogue
- d. includes the author's thoughts and feelings as well as actual events
- e. may be a few paragraphs or several pages in length

The teacher will use graphic organizers with students to guide them through the text identifying places where the characteristics of personal narratives appear in the texts.

Lesson 5: *Alexander and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day* by: Judith Viorst- students will learn about the details of personal narratives.

The students will begin their pre-writing step of the writing process.

Week 3- Duration: 5 days

Strategies for Independent Writing time: Drafting, Journaling, Shared Stories

Lessons 6-8: Writing about Yourself: Personal Narratives-The BIG IDEA (public point)

Lesson 6: *Punctuation Takes a Vacation* by: Robin Pulver- for learning how important punctuation is to a sentence and a paragraph.

Lesson 7: *Fireflies* by: Julie Brinckloe- students will learn first person narrative, as well as writing descriptive sentences.

Lesson 8: *Owl Moon* by: Jane Yolen- students will learn about personal narrative and descriptive details.

The teacher will explain and model how to find the big idea of the text. The teacher and students will create a class anchor chart on how to identify the big idea of a text as a reader, and how to make the big idea clear as a writer together to display in class. Students will be able to refer back to it later. Then the students will work

with a partner and choose a pre-selected leveled text and practice identifying the big idea. They will record their findings in their writing journal and in a graphic organizer.

Week 4- Duration: 5 days

Strategies for Independent Writing time: Drafting, Re-Reading, Revising, Free-Write

Lessons 9-10: Choosing Just Right Words

Lesson 9: *Rollercoaster* by: Marla Frazee- students will learn about word choice, small moment writing and text/writing features that students love to emulate—using dashes to stretch out words, using CAPITAL letters to place emphasis on words, and using sound words.

Lesson 10: *Thundercake* by: Patricia Pollacco- for modeling interesting openings, setting a scene, strong verbs, punctuation and the style of a recipe at the end of the story.

The teacher will create an anchor chart with the students listing words from the text as well as new words students may formulate. We will also use reference materials such as a dictionary and thesaurus to find more words. Students will then go to their journals and write a paragraph or 5-7 sentences using a few of the words. We will focus on using descriptive words in our sentences highlighting feelings, setting, and mood using descriptive words to say so. For example instead of saying “The boy felt nervous” we could say “His face turned pale and his cheeks were red.”

Week 5- Duration: 5 days

Strategies for Independent Writing time: Revising, Editing, Peer Interviews

Lessons 11-12: Dialogue and Point of View

Lesson 11: *Owen* by: Kevin Henkes- students will learn about dialogue.

Lesson 12: *Let's Get a Pup! Said Kate* By: Bob Graham- students will learn about dialogue.

The teacher and students will create a class anchor chart on dialogue together to display in class. Students will be able to refer back to it later. Students should understand that dialogue is a conversation that happens between two or more characters, and that all words spoken by a character must be surrounded by quotation marks. The teacher will model a short comic strip panel where she will create dialogue between two or more characters. The students will then create their own comic strip panel, practicing this same skill. Another activity would be for students to find examples of dialogue in a text and highlight them throughout.

Lessons 13-14: Who's Speaking?: Teaching Point of View

Lesson 13: *Memoirs of a Goldfish* by: Devin Scillian- students will learn about identifying point of view.

Lesson 14: *The Day the Crayons Quit* by: Drew Daywalt- students will learn how to compare and contrast point of view in a text.

The teacher and students will create a class anchor chart on point of view together to display in class. Students will be able to refer back to it later. The teacher will use graphic organizers with students to guide them through the text identifying places where first and second person point of view is used. The students will

later use their journals to create a paragraph where they will practice point of view by creating a point of view poem, using the word I.

Week 6- Duration: 5 days

Publishing and Sharing

Students will complete the final step of the writing process which is publishing. They will be able to sign up for a day to read their published personal narratives to the class.

Strategies: Author's Chair

Appendix: Implementing District Standards

English Standards of Learning for Virginia Public Schools - January 2017

The **Standards of Learning (SOL)** for Virginia Public Schools establish minimum expectations for what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or course in English, mathematics, science, history/social science and other subjects. In 2010 and 2011, *The Board of Education* followed the commonwealth's established process for adopting and revising the *Standards of Learning* to ensure that instructional standards in Virginia public schools equal or exceed those for schools in states that have adopted the *Common Core State Standards*.

Writing

3.8 The student will write in a variety of forms to include narrative, descriptive, opinion, and expository.

- a) Engage in writing as a process.
- b) Identify audience and purpose.
- c) Use a variety of prewriting strategies.
- e) Write a clear topic sentence focusing on main idea.
- f) Elaborate writing by including supporting details.
- g) Use transition words to vary sentence structure.
- i) Write a well-developed paragraph focusing on the main idea.
- j) Revise writing for clarity of content using specific vocabulary and information.

This unit is particularly focused on the writing process; indicators 3.8 a-c, e-g, i and j will be assessed throughout the six weeks of the unit as students draft, revise, and edit their essays.

3.9 The student will edit writing for capitalization, punctuation, spelling, and Standard English.

- a) Use complete sentences.
- b) Use the word I in compound subjects.
- c) Use past and present verb tense.
- d) Use adjectives correctly.
- e) Use singular possessives.
- f) Use commas in a simple series.
- h) Use apostrophes in contractions with pronouns and in possessives.
- i) Use the articles a, an, and the correctly.
- j) Use correct spelling including irregular plurals.
- k) Indicate paragraphing by indenting or skipping a line.

Students' published essays will take into account indicators 3.9 a-f, and h-k as they focus on capitalization, punctuation, and spelling; the final step of the writing process is publishing. After this is done, all of these things should be covered.

Common Core English Language Arts Standards 3rd Grade Writing

The Common Core State Standards are a set of academic standards adopted by 43 states . The standards are meant to prepare students for college and careers and to make the US more competitive academically. They're benchmarks for what students should know and be able to do in math and language arts from kindergarten through senior year of high school.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.B Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.4 With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.5 With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.10 Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

This unit is particularly focused on the writing process; the standards above will be assessed throughout the six weeks of the unit as students draft, revise, and edit their essays. Students' published essays will take into account the above standards as they focus on the components of writer's workshop; one of the main areas of focus for this unit.

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2. IBID, 9.
3. Lucy Calkins
4. Melissa A. Goldthwaithe, *The Norton Reader*, xli.
5. IBID, xli.
6. IBID, 5.
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17. IBID, 24.
18. Ralph Fletcher, *The Writing Teacher's Companion: Embracing Choice, Voice, Purpose & Play*, 2.
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20. Carl Anderson, *A Teachers Guide to Writing Conferences*, 4-5.
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