

Teaching the Six Traits in Narrative Writing **Ideas K-5**

Introduction

These 3 lessons teach the *Idea* writing trait. They are part of a bundle which includes 18 lesson plans that teach the six traits of writing (ideas, organization, voice, sentence fluency, word choice, and conventions) and is intended for grades K-5 within narrative writing. Some of these lesson plans were developed as a resource to support teachers in teaching the six traits using the mentor texts and lesson ideas expanded upon from the book The Writing Thief, by Ruth Culham, a trait-based strategy to assess and teach writing. All ideas and verbiage from The Writing Thief are clearly cited back to the book itself. You can purchase The Writing Thief [here](#). Check out the entire bundle [here](#).

How to Use These Lessons

Each trait comes with three lesson plans for grades K-1, 2-3, 4-5. The lessons are designed for differentiation so you could use the lessons below, at or above the grade level you teach. You could teach the 'at grade level' lesson to your whole group, enrich or accelerate using the 'above grade level' lessons in small groups and use the 'lower grade level' lessons for your struggling readers and writers in small groups as well. The lessons are designed to be completed during one writer's workshop period, which is typically 45-60 minutes. Approximately 15-20 minutes of the workshop time should be devoted to a quick, teacher led mini lesson, the teaching point, "I do", while the remaining time of the workshop time should be devoted to students for active engagement and student interaction, "You do", and writing independently. In some cases, the active engagement piece may take a few writer's workshop sessions for students to complete. It is during that time that writing time that the most important instruction takes place: conferring with students or small groups with the same need for instruction.

Teaching the Six Traits in Narrative Writing Grades K-1: Ideas Trait- Choosing a Topic

Connection:

Coming up with what to write about is a challenge for many young writers, like yourselves. Sometimes we get stuck. Today I will teach you to look closely at the world around you for inspiration for choosing a topic to write a story about.

Teaching Point: – “*I do*”

Read aloud, **Rocket Writes a Story** by Tad Hills, as story about a dog who loves books and wants to write one of his own, but can't think of what to write about. While reading aloud, pause to discuss Rocket's journey and all he discovers from the smallest details and all the things he hadn't noticed before. Have students recall what Rocket notices, like the baby owl who becomes his friend, plus an idea for a story. “Did you see how Rocket found an idea for a story just by looking closely at the world around him? Thumbs up if you think you could try using this idea to choose a topic. Let's take a walk outside and look very closely at the world around us and when we return to our classroom, we'll share one thing we noticed or discovered which will spark ideas for topics to write about.”

Active Engagement: – “*You do*”

“Now it's your turn. You are going to choose 1 writing idea on our list and write a story about it. Hold the idea in your head and give me a thumbs up when you have your idea (a leaf, a bird, a rock, a cloud...any idea from the list) Okay, Partner 1 turn to your partner and tell your partner which idea you chose to write about today. Partner 2 you do the same after Partner 1.”

Link to Other Writing:

Today and every day, when you are getting ready to write, think about the world around you and take notice to what you see and discover. There's a world with so many beautiful things for us to write about.

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:

Remember writers, when you get stuck and don't know what to write about look closely at the world around you. One of the ideas will spark a topic for you to write about. Writers always have something to write and there are many options. Try to choose a different topic each day this week.

Teaching Share:

I am so excited about all of the different writing I see in our classroom. I see lots of stories about the many beautiful things you notice and have discovered in our world. Wow! I see a classroom of writers and storytellers. Thanks for a great job with staying focused on choosing a topic to write about. Great work writers!

Teaching the Six Traits in Narrative Writing Grades 2-3: Ideas Trait- Getting Focused

Connection:

Many writers have difficulty staying focused on the topic. Some ideas are just so big that it becomes too big of an idea to topic to manage. This shuts down even the best of writers. Today I will teach you how a writer narrows their idea to create a piece that's "clear, tight and manageable" (Culham, 2014).

Teaching Point: – “I do”

Read aloud **Jangles: A Big Fish Story** by David Shannon, a book about one fish, Jangles, and his story, with beautiful oil painted illustrations. With this text help students to realize that *this is one story, one specific and focused story, not everything in the world about the fish* (Culham, 2014). Compare this text to a “seed” story. Then have them think about a big, watermelon topic, like sports, and do the same thing, working from the big topic to one “seed” story about sports. For example, writing a story about when they hit their first homerun, a time when they helped the team win the game, or a time when they struck out and caused the team to lose, etc. The idea is to keep the writing as focused as possible and to write a one time “seed” story. “Give me a thumbs up if you have an idea for a “seed” story.”

Active Engagement: – “You do”

“Now it’s your turn. Brainstorm a list of big, watermelon topics that you can write a story about like sports, a vacation, Christmas, etc. Work with your trio (group of 3 students) to come up with a list of five smaller (seed), more focused topics that could be used to write a one time, small, seed story. (Ex. The one time you missed your plane to Disney or the one time you opened the best present on Christmas morning.) Record any seed topics in your writer’s notebook which you will refer to when you need to zoom in on a focused topic to write about.”

Link to Other Writing:

Today and every day, when you are getting ready to write think about narrowing big, watermelon topics to smaller, seed topics. This way your writing will be more focused and manageable to write about.

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:

Remember writers, when you get stuck on a big topic, think smaller. Seed stories are more manageable to write about. Be sure to stay away from watermelon topics.

Teaching Share:

I am eager to hear all of your seed stories. Let’s do a quick whip around our circle and name the seed topic you’ll be writing about. Good job today writers thinking smaller to focus your topic.

Teaching the Six Traits in Narrative Writing Grades 4-5: Ideas Trait- Choosing a Topic

Connection:

When writing in narrative form, writers offer a clear theme or memorable storyline. Today I will show you how to use ideas from events or people from your past to write and artistically express in the form of a memoir, a story about a particular memory.

Teaching Point: – “I do”

Read aloud Grandpa Green by Lane Smith, a sweet story about how a grandfather's garden topiaries tell the story of his life, with each topiary depicting and commemorating a significant moment. The words are beautiful and the illustrations artful, working flawlessly together to communicate love of life and love of family. “*The way that Grandpa Green taps into the past by using topiary shapes is bound to give students ideas of events or people from their past*” (Culham, 2014). As you read focus on the way Grandpa Green tells the story of his life through words and pictures.

Active Engagement: – “You do”

Now it's your turn. *Through writing and drawing, you are going to focus on important topics to create a memoir that reflects your life journey so far. Write down some events or people from your past. Think of some artistic ways you might represent them in a different way than Lane Smith does with sculpture, collage, paint, crayons/markers, etc.* (Culham, 2014).

Link to Other Writing:

Today and every day, when you are getting ready to write, think about people or events in your past to create memoir writing.

Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:

Remember writers, you could also draw or think of an artistic way to represent your writing.

Teaching Share:

I am so excited to get to know all of you better, not only as writers, but as individuals. We will share our memoirs through both written and artistic expression.