The Arc of Story
Writing Realistic Fiction
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In the first bend—section—one of this unit you will let students know that writers see ideas for fiction stories everywhere. Children then begin to collect story ideas in their writer's notebook, fleshing them out to include elements of an effective story. Then students will storytell their ideas to a partner, making sure to use a storyteller's voice and include literary language. Once children have chosen a story idea, you'll teach them ways writers develop their main characters: by thinking not only about a character's external traits but also his or her internal life and surroundings. After this writers may dramatize a scene or small moment. Finally, writers think about a character's needs, letting a storyline emerge in which the character meets obstacles.

In the second bend you'll focus on the classic "story arc," showing students how stories with two or three strong scenes can successfully show the development of a character, a plot, and even a setting over the course of the story. The arc a writer creates in the planning stages becomes a touchstone for drafting. Each scene or event in the story arc is assigned its own page in a booklet, and this, plus an emphasis on skills developed in earlier years, helps fiction sound and feel storylike.

In the third bend you will help children prepare their story for audiences through focused drafting, deep revision, and editing. When your students were younger, they were taught to intersperse dialogue with action as a revision strategy. Now you'll add the need to ground the entire story in a place, a setting. You'll also teach children to rethink the evolution and conclusion of their story. Writers know endings don't come out of nowhere. You'll teach children that in fiction, as in life, solutions are generally hinted at all along: they are solutions we arrive at little by little.

In the final bend you will show students how to take the reins and write fiction independently, teaching them the systems and skills they need to feel confident that they can continue writing fiction throughout their lives.

Welcome to Unit 1

BEND I  •  Creating and Developing Stories and Characters that Feel Real

1. Imagining Stories from Ordinary Moments
   In this session, you'll teach students that fiction writers get ideas for stories from small moments in their lives. You'll help them get started doing that.

2. Imagining Stories We Wish Existed in the World
   In this session, you'll tell students that when they sit down to write fiction, they might get ideas for stories by imagining books they wish existed in the world. You can also teach them that fiction writers get ideas for stories by thinking about issues in their lives.

3. Developing Believable Characters
   In this session, you'll teach students that, like all writers, fiction writers need to choose a seed idea (a story idea) and then begin to develop characters by creating their external and internal traits.

4. Giving Characters Struggles and Motivations
   In this session, you'll teach children that writers can develop characters by telling about their characters' motivations and struggles and also by creating scenes that show these things.

5. Plotting with a Story Arc
   In this session, you'll teach children that writers sketch out possible plotlines for stories, often in story arcs that represent traditional story structure.
BEND II  Drafting and Revising with an Eye Toward Believability

6. Show, Don’t Tell: Planning and Writing Scenes
   In this session, you’ll help children realize that writing scenes is, in a sense, the same as writing Small Moment stories. Writers often begin by putting the character into action or by laying out the character’s exact words and then unfolding the moment step by step.

7. Feeling and Drafting the Heart of Your Story
   In this session, you’ll teach children that fiction writers create their best drafts when they experience the world through their character’s skin, letting the story unfold as it happens to them.

8. Studying Published Texts to Write Leads
   In this session, you’ll remind writers of various strategies for writing effective leads. You will also remind children that writers reread literature, letting it teach techniques for writing.

9. Orienting Readers with Setting
   In this session, you’ll remind writers that as they write, they need to “stay in scene,” making sure the action and dialogue are grounded in the setting.

10. Writing Powerful Endings
    In this session, you’ll teach children that writers of fiction do their best to craft the endings that their stories deserve. In particular, they make sure their endings mesh with and serve the purposes of their stories.

BEND III  Preparing for Publication with an Audience in Mind

11. Revision: Rereading with a Lens
    In this session, you’ll teach children that when revising, writers don’t simply reread; they reread with a lens. Writers vary their lenses according to what they value for their work.

12. Making a Space for Writing
    In this session, you’ll tell writers about the intimate work space you’ve created for your writing and teach students that they can create their own spaces inside their writing notebooks and their homes.

13. Using Mentor Texts to Flesh Out Characters
    In this session, you’ll remind students that writers study mentor authors to notice what other writers do that really works. One thing writers do is use actions and revealing details to show rather than tell about or explain the character.

14. Editing with Various Lenses
    In this session, you’ll explain that just as fiction writers revise with “lenses,” they edit with them as well, rereading their writing several times for several reasons, making edits as they go.

15. Publishing Anthologies: A Celebration
    In this session, you’ll give writers an opportunity to see their work “published” in book form and to experience the thrill of receiving “reviews” on their contribution to the class short story anthology.

BEND IV  Embarking on Independent Fiction Projects

16. Launching Independent Fiction Projects
    In this session, you could teach students that writers take all they’ve learned about writing fiction stories to new projects.

17. Planning and Drafting Stories with Agency
    In this session, you’ll show students how to quickly apply their planning and drafting skills from realistic fiction to their independent projects.

18. Mining the Connections between Reading and Writing Fiction
    In this session, you’ll guide writers to study the work they do as readers of fiction and graft those skills into their revisions.

19. Focusing the Reader’s Gaze
    In this session, you’ll show students how writers can learn from visual artists and help readers visualize from different angles to make a variety of points.

20. Choosing Punctuation for Effect
    In this session, you’ll remind students that punctuation can be used to make sentences easier to understand, as well as to have an effect on how the reader engages with the text.

    In this session, you could teach students that writers reflect on the work they have done, celebrating their accomplishments and making new goals for future projects.
Welcome to Unit 2

BEND I  ✦ Writing to Learn

1. Essay Structure Boot Camp
   In this session, you will teach children that writers use an essay frame to help structure their writing. You will give writers a vision for what they are working to create by the end of the unit.

2. Collecting Ideas as Essayists
   In this session, you will teach children that writers use several strategies for growing insightful ideas including using important people, places, and objects as inspiration.

3. Writing to Learn
   In this session, you will orient children to the genre of writing to learn, helping them see how writers freewrite to grow new ideas.

4. Using Elaboration Prompts to Grow Ideas
   In this session, you’ll teach children that writers linger with their ideas, extending their initial thinking by having conversations with themselves as they write and using elaboration prompts to grow their ideas.

5. Mining Our Writing
   In this session, you’ll teach children that writers mine their entries and their lives for insights, developing these into more fully formed ideas and opinion statements.

6. Boxes and Bullets: Framing Essays
   In this session, you will teach children that writers support their thesis by developing different types of reasons.
For additional information and sample sessions, visit www.UnitsofStudy.com
Welcome to Unit 3

BEND I  ♦  Informational Books: Making a Conglomerate of Forms

1. Getting the Sense of Informational Books

   In this session, you'll teach students that writers imagine the text they are going to make. They think about the parts and the whole and then come up with a plan for their writing project.

2. Planning the Structure of Writing

   In this session, you'll teach students that writers of information texts make a plan for the structure of their writing and then use this structure to organize research and note-taking.

3. Planning and Writing with Greater Independence

   In this session, you'll remind students that writers take strategies they've learned in the past and apply them to new situations, working with more independence and skill each time.

4. Teaching as a Way to Rehearse for Information Writing

   In this session, you'll teach students that because writers are writing to teach, it helps to do some actual teaching about their topic.

5. Elaboration: The Details that Let People Picture What Happened Long Ago and Far Away

   In this session, you'll teach students that writers improve their writing by adding details. Historical writers often try to include details that help readers picture what happened long ago.


   In this session, you'll teach students that writers who are writing a story about a time in history think about the three most important elements in any story: character, setting, and conflict.

7. Essays within Information Texts

   In this session, you'll teach students that when writers are writing essays about historical topics, they think about all they know about essay writing: the structure, the thesis, and the supports. They also need to do research to find facts to develop and support their idea.
8. Taking Stock and Setting Goals: A Letter to Teachers

In this session, you could teach students that writers step back from their writing to reflect on how they are doing, asking themselves, “What have I accomplished as a writer and what do I still need to work on?”

BEND II  Working with Greater Independence

9. Writers Plan for Their Research

In this session, you’ll remind students that when tackling a new piece of informational writing, nonfiction writers think about possible chapters, and come up with a research plan.

10. The Intense Mind-Work of Note-Taking

In this session, you’ll teach students that note-taking is not the easy part of research writing. When writers take notes, they need to understand what they are reading in a way that they are able to explain their notes to someone else.

11. Drafting Is Like Tobogganing: First the Preparation, the Positioning ... Then the Whooosh!

In this session, you could remind students that writers draw on all they know as information writers to draft new information books.

12. Developing a Logical Structure Using Introductions and Transitions

In this session, you’ll remind students that when writing an informational text, writers need to organize information. In an introduction, writers let readers in on their organizational plan.

13. Text Features: Popping Out the Important Information

In this session, you’ll teach students that writers think about the most important information and ideas that they’re trying to convey in a chapter or a section, and they use text features to highlight that information.

14. Quotations Accentuate Importance: Voices Chime In to Make a Point

In this session, you’ll teach students that history writers add quotations to their writing to accentuate a central idea.

15. Using All We Know to Craft Essay and Narrative Sections

In this session, you could teach students that information writers often draw on what they know about other genres, including narrative, essay, and how-to writing, to craft chapters for their information books in the style and form of those genres.

16. The Other Side of the Story: Uncovering Hidden Perspectives in Narratives

In this session, you’ll teach students that historical writers need to remember that there is always more than one side to a story.

17. Self-Assessment and Goal Setting: Taking on New Challenges

In this session, you could remind students that writers reflect on how much they have grown as writers, especially when they are about to take on new and challenging work, so that they can set new goals for this upcoming work.

BEND III  Building Ideas in Information Writing

18. Information Writing Gives Way to Idea Writing

In this session, you’ll teach students that history writers write and develop their own ideas about the information that they find as they research.

19. Digging Deeper: Interpreting the Life Lessons that History Teaches

In this session, you’ll teach students that historical writing is not just made from facts but also from ideas. Historical writers convey larger ideas about a people, a nation, and a time. As they write they ask themselves, “What life lessons might this be teaching?”

20. Using Confusions to Guide Research

In this session, you’ll teach students that nonfiction writers don’t always start out as experts on the topic they’re writing about, but instead work to become short-term experts on their topic. They start with their musings, then turn these into research questions, and then see what they can learn.

21. Questions Without a Ready Answer

In this session, you’ll teach students that historians don’t always find answers to every question they have. But they can use all of their research and knowledge to create possible answers to questions for which people can’t find ready-made answers.

22. Editing

In this session, you could remind students that writers edit their writing to make sure it is ready for readers.

23. A Final Celebration: An Expert Fair

In this session, you could teach students that information writers share their writing with an audience, teaching their audience all they have learned about their topic.
To write well about reading, students need to learn more not only about writing but also about reading. Throughout this unit you will teach students ways writers read complex texts closely and then write about the literature they are reading. You will first teach students to notice authors’ choices about the setting, objects, words, metaphors, and characters they use in their texts. This work, so central to the Common Core State Standards, is especially powerful for students who are analyzing texts for ideas and interpretations. Students learn that there are certain aspects of a text that tend to be more important, and they learn to pay attention to those aspects, noticing what the author has done and fashioning evidence-based theories about the text.

From the get-go, you will teach students to write structured, compelling essays in which they make and support claims and analyze, unpack, and incorporate evidence. Students focus on arguing for their ideas about characters while carrying forward what they have been taught about planning and drafting essays, writing introductions and conclusions, and marshalling evidence in support of reasons. This allows the main focus of teaching to be devoted to the special challenges of writing essays about texts.

After drafting and revising an essay about a familiar short text in Bend I and receiving feedback, students are asked to repeat that cycle in Bend II, this time applying all they have learned and also working to write more interpretively and analytically. On the first day of this second bend you will begin teaching youngsters the power of higher-level interpretive reading. Writing about favorite texts—read-alouds, short stories, novels—students learn to value complexity examine all sides of an issue with the most open mind possible. In doing so they will also learn new, more complex ways of structuring an essay and more nuanced ways to mine a text for the evidence they need.

The unit ends with a third bend in which students learn to write comparison/contrast essays, noting different texts’ approaches to the same theme or issue. Students will learn to write in ways that take into account not only the subject of a text but also the author’s treatment of that subject. In this way students are taught to write more about point of view, emphasis, and interpretation, and to be aware of the craft moves authors use. Students will also learn ways to structure a comparison/contrast essay and cite evidence from two texts in a seamless, purposeful way.

Welcome to Unit 4

BEND I  •  Writing about Reading: Literary Essays

1. Close Reading To Generate Ideas about a Text
In this session, you’ll teach students that reading with an attentiveness to detail can spark ideas and that writing can be a vehicle for developing those ideas.

2. Gathering Writing by Studying Characters
In this session, you’ll teach children that experts know that certain aspects of their subjects merit special attention. Literary essayists know it pays off, for example, to study characters.

3. Elaborating on Written Ideas Using Prompts
In this session, you’ll teach students one way writers elaborate on their ideas—using simple prompts.

4. Finding and Testing a Thesis
In this session, you’ll teach students that writers select ideas to craft into theses. You’ll show writers ways to question and revise their theses, making sure these are supported by the whole text.

5. Using Stories as Evidence
In this session, you’ll teach children ways that essayists select mini-stories as evidence to support their ideas.

6. Citing Textual Evidence
In this session, you’ll teach children that writers use direct quotes to support their claims about a text. You’ll teach them ways writers are discerning, choosing only the quotes that best support their ideas.

7. Using Lists as Evidence
In this session, you’ll teach students that writers not only uses stories and quotes as evidence, they also use lists to support their claims.
8. Putting It All Together
In this session, you’ll teach children some of the ways that writers create drafts out of collections of evidence. You’ll also teach children ways to study published literary essays to find structures for their own literary essays.

BEND II ✧ Raising the Quality of Literary Essays

9. Writing to Discover What a Story Is Really About
In this session, you’ll teach children that writers seek out patterns in their books or short stories, using those patterns to develop ideas about the story’s theme or message.

10. Adding Complexity to Our Ideas
In this session, you’ll teach children that essayists look at all the sides of a text and form complex ideas, adding depth to their writing.

11. Flash-Drafting Literary Essays
In this session, you’ll teach children that essayists flash-draft essays, getting their thoughts down quickly on paper so they can later revise.

12. Beginnings and Endings
In this session, you’ll teach children that essayists think carefully about their introductions and conclusions, giving readers the larger context for their claim in their introduction and leaving their readers with something to think about in their conclusion.

13. Using Descriptions of an Author’s Craft as Evidence
In this session, you’ll teach children that writers find evidence to support their claims by studying the choices authors make in their texts.

14. Editing
In this session, you could teach students that literary essayists check their writing for many things, including making sure they have written in the present tense and that all their pronoun references are correct.

BEND III ✧ Writing Compare and Contrast Essays

15. Building the Muscles to Compare and Contrast
In this session, you’ll teach students that essayists notice the similarities and differences between texts and categorize their observations into patterns or ideas, in preparation to write a compare and contrast essay.

16. Comparing and Contrasting Familiar Texts
In this session, you’ll teach children that essayists write compare-and-contrast essays by looking at similar themes across texts, or similar characters, and naming how the texts approach the themes differently or how the characters are similar and different.

17. Using Yesterday’s Learning, Today and Always
In this session, you’ll teach children that essayists draw on all they know about essay writing as they tackle new projects. You’ll remind children that compare-and-contrast essays are a kind of literary essay, so they can use prior learning as they continue to draft and revise their essays.

18. Developing Distinct Lines of Thought
In this session, you’ll teach children that writers elaborate on each of their distinct, individual supporting ideas, ensuring they have developed their essay with enough evidence for their claim.

19. Exploring Commas
In this session, you could teach students that writers get their writing ready for readers by editing and polishing up their writing. One thing writers make sure to check is their punctuation, including comma usage.

20. A Celebration
In this celebration, you and your community of writers will celebrate the literary essays that your children have completed.

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