

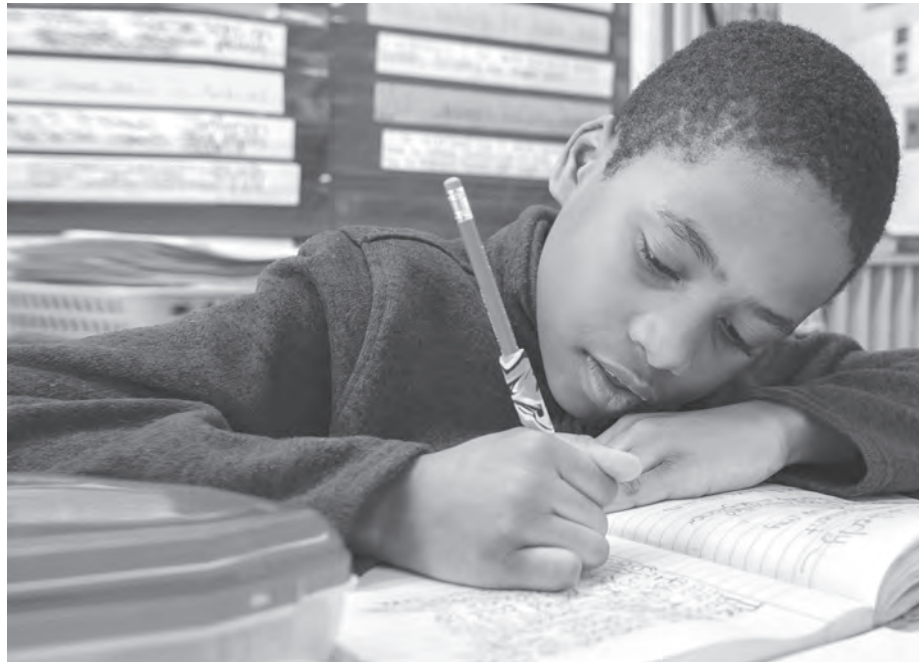
# Up the Ladder: Accessing Grades 3–6 Narrative Units of Study

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# Writing and Revising True Trouble Stories

BEND |



## A PREFACE TO

# *Writing and Revising True Trouble Stories*

Inexperienced writers benefit from opportunities to engage in repeated successful practice. This unit has been designed for young people who may not yet have had many opportunities to participate in a rigorous writing curriculum. The purpose of this first portion of the unit—the first bend—is to induct them into the structures and expectations of a writing workshop and to provide an opportunity for accelerated progress in narrative writing. In Bend I, students who do not have deep experience with a writing workshop will become accustomed to how minilessons go, and to the fact that each day during writing time they'll open up their writing folder and decide what text they need to work on and settle into productive writing. They'll also become accustomed to finding direction in anchor charts, a partner, conferences, and small groups.

During the first and second bends of the unit, your students will have the opportunity to write and revise several booklets containing stories, and in the first bend, those will be true stories. Some students may write a few lines on a page that contains a big space for illustrations, and others may write on notebook paper (perhaps with a nametag sticker in the top right corner for an illustration). In either case, your students will write stories in booklets that you will have made by stapling together four or five pages of specially designed paper. By Session 3, you'll label the parts of the booklet: *The Trouble Starts*, *The Trouble Gets Worse*, and *Change/Solution*.

In the online resources, you'll see templates for a variety of paper choices. Channel students to different bins of blank booklets. As you progress from one week to the next (and from one bend of this unit to

the next), be sure to move students toward paper choices that support longer, more elaborated-upon pages. We don't, however, encourage you to push students to write stories that go on and on and on, page after page after page, since that sort of elaboration will usually lead them to lose any sense of story structure.

Students will revise the books they write, especially if you make sure they write on one side of the paper only. The fact that they write in booklets will make their revision work more appealing and accessible. Revision will be very hands-on, with kids learning that they can elaborate beyond their initial draft by rewriting important pages, by adding a twin sentence that says more, by anticipating and answering readers' questions through the use of revision strips, giant Post-its, and flaps stuck off the edges of a page.

You'll notice that we suggest you channel your students to write "trouble stories"—that is, we point out that in most good stories, characters tackle trouble. We suggest kids write true stories about times things were hard for them. We encourage them to select important struggles and channel them to topics such as a time they were bullied, a time they lost a grandparent, a time they let down someone they loved. The decision to highlight trouble stories comes in part because students will soon be writing realistic fiction, and this sets up that work perfectly. Also, because we are designing this unit for older writers, and because we imagine some of those writers may be resistant to writing, we have made many decisions with an eye to increasing students' engagement in the work.

We also emphasize that writers write structured stories that have a beginning, a middle, and an end. We stress that many stories are made of several small moments, set alongside each other. It is not until the third bend of the unit that we prioritize that sort of focus. Meanwhile, encouraging students to write trouble stories that span several small moments is a way of helping them produce stories that are built around a story arc.

For this first bend to work well, it is important that you structure your writing workshop in ways that help you establish that “hum” of engaged effort. *The Guide to the Writing Workshop*, available separately from Heinemann, contains chapters on classroom management and on the handful of methods that you will use every day as you teach writing.

You can learn from that source about ways to keep kids on task, about the use of partnerships, the materials that you’ll want, the ways to lead fast-paced small groups . . . the works! For any teacher who is new to the writing workshop, the guide will be an invaluable support.

This first bend of the unit aims to help you build students’ identities as authors. You will want to emphasize that your students will be writing like the pros do, and you will want to treat them as fellow professionals, engaged in writing work that is similar to that done by Donald Crews, Peter H. Reynolds, Tomie dePaola, and Eloise Greenfield. The Conferring and Small-Group Work sessions offer you many ways to build your students’ self-confidence, rallying them to know that if they work hard and use their strategies, they will be able to wow others with their writing.





## Session 1

# Think, Plan, and Write

### IN THIS SESSION

TODAY YOU'LL teach students that after thinking of a true story, authors rehearse for writing by touching the pages of a booklet and telling the story, bit by bit, and by sketching what happens on each page. Then they write across the pages of a book.

TODAY STUDENTS will write their first personal narrative book. Expect to see them write across multiple pages.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ Outside the writing workshop, read aloud a few published trouble stories that you can reference later in this unit. Donald Crews's picture book, *Shortcut*, is one good choice. Others are *Those Shoes* by Maribeth Boelts, *Oliver Button Is a Sissy* by Tomie de Paula, and *Ish* by Peter H. Reynolds.
- ✓ Create a writing center containing booklets, single pages, and other tools writers might use (Post-its, revision flaps, scissors, tape). Consider providing pens and a date stamp.
- ✓ Before today's session, stage an event to serve as the basis for a whole-class story threading through this bend. Ask a colleague to storm into your room during reading time, when your kids are working quietly, and tell the class to be quiet. (You may use "Trouble in Room 206" as a model for your class story.) If you choose an alternate event, be sure it involves a problem and that the whole class witnesses the event (see Teaching and Active Engagement).
- ✓ Prepare to display the chart, "How to Write a True Story" (see Teaching, Active Engagement, and Link).
- ✓ Create an oversized chart paper booklet resembling the booklets in which the students will write. This will be for the class story (see Active Engagement).
- ✓ Prepare story booklets with four to five pages stapled together for each booklet, and a space for a drawing. Make booklets using the variety of paper templates from the online resources, and guide each writer toward the paper that is appropriate for him or her. Stress that kids can only write on one side (see Link).
- ✓ Display the "A Story Includes" one-day chart (see Conferring and Small-Group Work).
- ✓ Prepare a writing folder for each student, with a red dot on one pocket and a green dot on the other (see Share).
- ✓ Plan ahead now for Bend III by buying composition notebooks for your students. This unit begins with students writing in story booklets, but in Bend III, they will be using writing notebooks.
- ✓ Scan the QR code to view the brief video to get a vision for how the work in this minilesson might sound. There is a video available for every minilesson.
- ✓ Review tips for additional support when working with English as a New Language (ENL) students at the end of this and every session.



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## MINILESSON

# Think, Plan, and Write

## CONNECTION

**Rally writers to the start of a new unit—a unit that will channel students to write books like the pros.**

“Writers, I’ve gathered you here in our classroom library where we are surrounded by books, because this year, you’ll be writing books that will go on these bookshelves. A month from now, this shelf will display books by Seth and Cleo and Shariff and *all* of you. And I’m going to teach you how authors like Andrew Clements and Donald Crews and Kate DiCamillo go about writing books so that you can make books just like the pros do.”

❁ **Name the teaching point.**

“Today I want to teach you that when real authors go to write a book, they don’t start by writing. No way! They start by storytelling. They often touch the pages of a blank book and tell how the story might go, telling it bit by bit, page by page. They tell it a bunch of times, and when the story sounds pretty good, they sketch it out across the pages, and *then* they write.”

## TEACHING

**Show students the steps they can take to write their own books: think, touch and tell, sketch, and write.**

“Today, I thought we could start writing a book together—it can be a class book—and then you can begin to get ready to write your own book. You’ll write a whole book today! To write our class book, we’ll go through a few steps—then later you can go through the same steps, only thinking about your own story.

“Let’s start by thinking of a time when we, in this class, faced trouble, a time we had a problem. Hmm, . . . We could write about that time when we had a power outage in the classroom and all the lights went out . . . but that was a while ago, and I’m not sure we remember the details.”

## ◆ COACHING

*You’ll want to gather your students close to you, showing them even by your posture that your minilesson is a time for intense, energetic, intimate teaching. Usually teachers sit on the edges of their seats, lean toward the kids, and use eye contact to pull their youngsters in. We encourage you to hold the Unit of Study book as you teach these minilessons so that you can glance down at it from time to time, but instead of using a read-aloud voice, talk as if you are the captain of a football team that has huddled together.*

*Teachers, the term trouble stories actually refers to more than just times when a person got into trouble. Trouble stories also include times when something bad happened to a person, or times when the person worried that a bad thing might happen—after all, all good stories follow a predictable arc, and trouble lies at the heart of that arc. A character has wants and desires, encounters a problem, and works to resolve the problem.*

**Recall a bit of trouble the class experienced (perhaps an event you staged), then guide the class to coauthor a shared story, using “think, touch and tell, sketch, and write.” Expect to pause them.**

“I have an idea. Remember what happened yesterday when Mrs. Kennedy shushed us for being loud? We could write about that time, couldn’t we?”

“Let’s remember how to write like the pros.” Referencing the chart, I said, “First we *think* of something we did, something that happened to us, perhaps a time we faced trouble. Well, we already thought of that time when Mrs. Kennedy shushed us yesterday afternoon. For a sec, let’s really remember what happened yesterday, thinking back over all the details.” I gestured for silence.

“Okay, next we need to tell what happened, *touching* the pages of a blank book and *telling* the story bit by bit, page by page. Let’s work on that together. Pretend you have a blank booklet in your lap.” I mimed opening my booklet and scanned the class as if to say, “Are you opening the pages of your imaginary booklet?” Touching the first page, I dictated the words that could go on that page:

*Yesterday, we were all reading quietly. It was so quiet you could hear pages turn.*

I whispered, “Turn the page,” and did so, getting many of the kids to pantomime with me. Then I whispered to Miles, sitting to my left, “Your turn.” Miles touched the next page and said,

*Then Mrs. Kennedy told us we were too loud.*

## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Pause in the midst of dictating a whole-class story. Pass the baton to kids, asking them to each touch the pages of an imaginary book while storytelling their recollection of the event to a partner.**

“Whoa, Miles, you went through that whole story awfully fast! Let’s take some more time to show what we were doing at the start and to show just the start of the trouble. Will you remember what happened *exactly* when we were working? Tell the story in teeny tiny steps to the person beside you, turning the pages as you do. Start with our page 1.”

*Yesterday we were all reading quietly. It was so quiet you could hear pages turn.*

**In voiceovers, prompt the kids to story-tell the event bit by bit, page by page, turning pages as they progress. Then a half-minute later, coach them to tell it again, adding details, feelings, thoughts.**

I moved among the kids, gesturing for them to story-tell and to turn the imaginary pages. “Now tell the story again, this time adding teeny details. Don’t forget about the knock on the door. What were you thinking when she shushed you? Tell it again to make the story even better.”



*If the child to whom you pass the baton doesn't skip ahead as Miles has done, you'll still want to recruit the whole class to step in and help, as this supports more active engagement. An alternative might be to say, "So class, we've written one way the first two pages could go. Will you try another way?"*

As I listened, I took notes to form a composite drawn from the kids' versions of the story. Convening the class, I said, "What great storytelling! I recorded what I heard." I looked at my notes and started dictating a composite story.

### Trouble in Room 206

Yesterday, we were all reading quietly. It was so quiet you could hear pages turn.

We heard a knock on the door. No one said anything.

Then the door opened and it was Mrs. Kennedy. She told us we were being too loud. She told us her students were trying to concentrate. She looked very, very mad.

Jasmine told Mrs. Kennedy that we had just been quietly reading.

Mrs. Kennedy looked around the room, and then she apologized.

**Model how you might "sketch in the air" for one page of the imaginary booklet, and then rally students to sketch with invisible pens the remaining pages of the shared story.**

"Hmm, . . . now that we have touched and told the story, what do we do next?" I gestured toward the chart, modeling that anchor charts function as reminders. The students called out that next we needed to sketch and then write the story.

Picking up a marker and turning to the box on the top of page one of our oversized booklet, I said, "Let's see, what happened at the beginning? What should we include in our sketch?" The class chimed in that kids were reading.

"Sketching should be super-fast. It helps to think back to the time and to add in really important details. As you sketch, you will remember even more details you will want to add. Sometimes it helps to use labels. Try it. Use an imaginary pen," I held up a finger, "and on the floor in front of you (or on the person's back that is nearest to you), sketch just the first part of the story plan, sketch page 1. Go!"

After half a minute, I said, "If this was writing time, we'd finish sketching pages 2, 3, and 4, and then we'd write the story, starting with, 'Yesterday, we were all reading quietly. It was so quiet you could hear pages turn.'"

**Debrief, noting the way the class has touched and told, then sketched and written. Rally the children to chant, "Writers touch and tell, sketch, then write."**

"Writers, did you see how we didn't just start writing right away? To get ready to write, we touched each page and told the story, and then we sketched each page. Only after that are we ready to write the words. Say it with me: Writers touch and tell, sketch, then write." I repeated the chant: "Writers touch and tell, sketch, then write!"

*Teachers, this story is not great. There are a score of ways it could be improved. Know that we are fully aware of that and actually revised our first draft to make it worse—and the reason is that we plan to show kids how to reread their initial stories and to revise them to make them better. So it is best if you use this story, unless you read ahead to see the work that is planned during upcoming sessions and then make your alternate story equally sparse. If you choose to write another story, use this one as a model. Another example is included in the online resources.*

*Notice also that this trouble story has a beginning (lines 1 and 2) that shows what the characters are doing/saying at the start and gives a hint of the trouble. The trouble gets worse (lines 3 and 4) and then is resolved (lines 5). All this takes place in a small moment or two. If you can, write your story across the pages of a six-page booklet (see the template in the online resources).*

*Note that in this demonstration, you don't perform for kids who merely observe. Instead, you make this participatory. You recruit the kids to join in, mentally doing the work along with you, although you have every intention of essentially pulling ahead and, in the end, demonstrating for them. You want the class to have imagined how they would do what you have demonstrated so that they take note of ways your demonstration calls them to lift the level of their work.*



## LINK

**Channel writers to think of the story they will write and to prepare to write that story by planning across pages.**

“Writers, in a minute you’re going to write your own true stories. You’ll write a whole story today, and you might even start a second story, too. There are blank booklets on your tables.” Pointing to the first bullet on the chart, I said, “Follow the chart. Let’s start.”

### ANCHOR CHART

#### How to Write a True Story

1. **Think** of something that happened to you.

Hint: In stories, characters encounter trouble. Think of a time you had trouble, a time things were hard.

“Let’s do this part together, while you are here on the rug. You could think about a time when something was hard for you. Maybe you just moved here and didn’t know who to sit with at lunch. Maybe someone teased you. Maybe you were worried about something. Who can think of one time and tell it to us?” I left a moment of silence, nodding to the kids whose hands shot up.

“Or, you could try thinking about a time you were scared something bad *might* happen. Picture where you were, exactly, and what you said and did.” Again hands shot up and I nodded, as if saying, “Yes, yes.” Then I gestured for a youngster or two to tell us their stories, which I knew sparked memories for yet others, and then said, “Turn and tell each other what story you are remembering!”

The room filled with a cacophony of stories. I called out over the hubbub. “This class has a *lot* of being sad stories!” I said. “I better bring some Kleenex® to class.

“As soon as you’ve got a story idea, head to your table, get a booklet, and start doing what the pros do. They touch and tell, and then sketch and write. Off you go!”

Most of the kids were soon on their way to their tables, and a small group remained. “Help each other think of stories you could tell,” I said, pairing the group up. Then as they talked, I headed into the classroom to help everyone get started storytelling.



*Teachers, it is very important that kids write on only one side of the paper so they can scissor the story apart to revise. It is also important to provide booklets with eight, twelve, or fifteen lines on each page. For students who struggle with English or who lack the skills to elaborate and say more about one story, you may prefer to guide them toward paper with eight lines. Encourage those students to write more stories to keep volume high. For other students, paper with fifteen lines will do the trick. To maintain story structure, limit booklets to six pages.*



# Sustain Energy and Productivity

**Keep kids productive by using gestures (thumbs up, big-eyed nods of support) and stage-whispered comments, as well as occasional voiceovers that the whole class can hear.**

You'll want to move quickly from one side of the room to the other, as if you are on roller skates, using gestures and brief prompts to keep kids working productively: pointing to a child's booklet to signal "touch the pages and story-tell," and giving a youngster who seems to be spending five minutes selecting a pen a quizzical "what's up?" look.

Once you've made sure that all your students are storytelling in a bit-by-bit way across the pages of their booklets, and once you have reminded a few (loudly enough for others nearby to receive the message) to try telling the story a few times to make it better, you'll probably need to return to the kids who had trouble choosing a story idea to quickly get them launched. Your mid-workshop teaching point needs to come early on in the session, and if your students are working at very low skill levels or are writing only a line or two on each page of their booklets, you'll need a second mid-workshop to channel students to start writing a second book.

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Shifting from Touching, Telling, and Sketching—to Writing**

"Writers, if you haven't done so already, you'll want to begin writing your story. Remember to write just one part of the story on each page. So if I were going to start writing the story we told together about Mrs. Kennedy, after I wrote 'Yesterday, we were all working quietly. It was so quiet you could hear pages turn,' I'd turn the page before I wrote the next part: 'We heard a knock on the door.'" Remember, too, that you need an ending that solves the problem or shows something change for the good."

### SMALL GROUP

#### Help writers tackle a predictable challenge: **What do I write about?**

If you discover that your students are having difficulty choosing a story idea, you might say, "Writers, if you are having a hard time thinking of ideas to write, it can help if you hear other people's ideas, because that sparks you to think, 'Oh, that reminds me!' So let me tell you about some other kids' story ideas and after each idea, you and your partner can say, 'That reminds me of . . . ' and then tell each other what comes to mind."

Then you might share a few story ideas you've heard, such as "Mia is telling about the time she burned her hand while helping her mom cook" or "Jose is telling the time he first came to this school and he didn't know who to play with at recess." After each idea, prompt kids to say, "That reminds me . . ." and to tell stories that come to mind.

Once you feel that kids in the group have ideas, channel them to get out their booklets and start touching the pages and storytelling to themselves.

As you move about the room conferring with students, you'll want to use encouraging comments to help energize them and keep their productivity high. To do so, you might try some of these prompts:

#### **To support kids doing a volume of writing:**

- "Your hands should be flying down the page! Keep your pens moving!"
- "You should be on page 2 by now. You'll want to get this whole book written today."
- After giving a quick thumbs up to a writer, add, "Keep going!"
- "Whoa! You have written a lot! Good job. If your hand gets tired, shake it out and keep going!"

### To channel kids to write in ways that fit the genre:

- “Oh my goodness. You are putting the whole story on this one page. Let me get you some scissors so you can cut this apart. Put just the first part of this on page 1, the next part on page 2. Will you read this and show me which part tells just the first thing that happened? Okay—so that part goes on page 1. This other part, then, goes on page 2.”
- “Before you sketch, think, ‘What is the one small next-part of the story? That’s the part that goes on *this* page.’ You don’t want to put the whole story all in a bigglom on one page.”

### To provide compliments that build your writers’ identities as narrative writers:

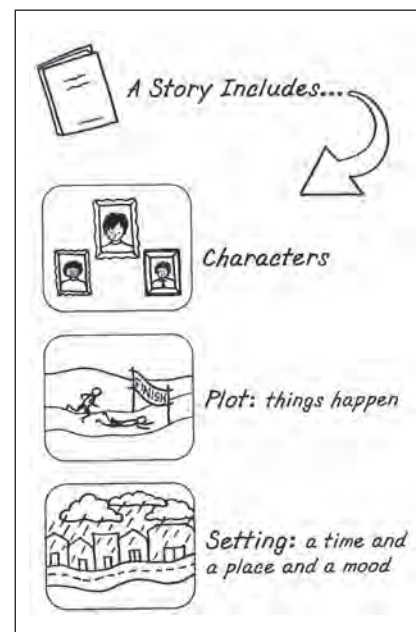
- “You are writers! You are so much like \_\_\_\_\_ (*mentor author*)! I’m leaving one of her books beside you so you can notice what she does and do some of that in your writing too!”
- “You are such a keen observer. The way you notice details and put them in your sketch. That is such a talent. I *love* the details—the sweat coming down her face, the way she is holding that thing—what is it? I can just see kids reading your book, poring over the details.”
- “I was going to teach you that stories need endings, but you beat me to it. What an ending. We should show it to the other kids. Maybe you could lead an Ending Seminar and teach others how to make endings like this.”

### Lifting the Level of Sketching and Writing

To help lift the level of your students’ sketching and writing, you might pull together a small group and say, “Writers, I gathered you here to teach you one more thing that pro writers know. It is an easy tip for me to say, but not so easy for you to do. It will make all your sketching and storywriting better, from this day forward, forever. Are you game? So this is the tip: When writers sketch to get ready for telling or writing

stories, and when they write a page of their stories, it helps to think, ‘Did I put in all the important elements of a story?’”

Then you might remind them about things they’ve learned earlier. You might say, “Let me explain. During reading time, when we talk about stories, about novels, we talk about the *characters* in the stories, right?” You might ask the kids, “What are other elements, other things, that every story contains?” Show them this short list.



Then you might suggest to kids, “So, look at the page of the booklet you were working on, and notice whether every page—whether it is a sketch or words—contains those elements. Is there a character or two? A setting on that page—a sense of the time, the mood? *Is* something happening? Is the page telling part of the story’s plot? When you sketch and when you write, keep the important elements of a story in mind.”



## SHARE

# Sharing Work and Using Writing Folders

**Celebrate the volume of writing by sharing favorite lines and then giving students folders for storing their work.**

While students were still writing at their tables, I said, “Oh my goodness, it’s like a story factory in here. Take a moment to share a favorite line.”

After a minute or two of sharing, I reconvened the class and said, “I’ve made a folder for each of you and I’ve put a red dot on one pocket of your folder, for work that is stopped, and a green dot on the other side of your folder, for work that is still going, stories you aren’t finished with. It is just like how we stop at a red light and keep going at a green light. Right now, find your writing folder in the special bin on your table, date your work with the date stamp, and then slide your work carefully (so it doesn’t bunch up) into the pocket where it belongs: red if you feel as though you’re done with that piece (and you should be done with at least one story!) and green if you’re still working on it.

“Writers, I’ve listed this week’s table monitors up here.” I gestured to a list of one name from each table. “Table monitors, take the bins back to the writing center.”

## WORKING WITH ENLS

This session is already very supportive for ENL students:

- ◆ The process for writing a true story provides clear, actionable, and transferable steps (see “How to Write a True Story” chart).
- ◆ The class story (begun by the teacher and continued by the students) provides support for language, as well as for the writing process students learn in this minilesson.
- ◆ Voiceovers for language support provide examples embedded across the session.

To provide additional support for ENL students, you might:

- ◆ Invite students to act out the story before talking with their partner during the active engagement.
- ◆ Use lots of gestures and an animated voice when sharing student stories during the mid-workshop teaching to help make the concept of “trouble” clearer.



FIG. 1-1 A student’s Day One draft