

Teacher Notes

This six week unit was designed to meet all of the Common Core informational writing standards. By the end of this unit, all students should take at least one piece of writing through the entire writing process and formally publish that piece of writing. I've added a variety of writing craft and organization lessons within this unit. There are many other important writing craft lessons that will be introduced in my other writing units. You certainly do not have to follow these lessons in the exact order that they are written and may want to spend multiple days on one lesson or rearrange some of the mini lessons. No one knows your students' instructional needs better than you! However, the early lessons were designed to help build students' writing stamina by having extended mini lessons and shorter independent writing time.

The mini lessons were designed to be an approximately 10-15 minute lesson that intentionally teaches a particular writing craft or skill. I've included a script of what I might say to my students when I was teaching the mini lesson, as well as additional teaching notes. I often use a picture book as a mentor text within the mini lesson.

You can follow each mini lesson with additional guided practice, but that is completely optional. I personally like to give my students that additional assistance before having them try those strategies independently. The guided practice can also be complete in guided writing groups for students who need the extra practice. In a few of the lessons, I have included multiple forms of the guided practice, so you can choose the form that best fits the needs of your students.

Independent writing time should take up the majority of time in the writing workshop. I allow my students to move around in the writing process as needed, rather than trying to require them to follow the writing process in a linear manner. After students have three completed first drafts, I have students select one of the information papers to take through the entire writing process to be published and shared at an author's tea.

***I've found that it's much easier to start slowly with informational writing. I try to keep my students together for the first couple of weeks. Once my students understand the process, I then let them work at their own pace.

Almost all research on writing workshop strongly recommends that students should select their own topics and be allowed to work at their own pace. I completely agree with that philosophy, and the majority of the time I do have my students choose their own topics and work through the writing process at their own pace. However, this unit is many of my students' first experience with informational writing, so I do approach informational writing a little different than I approach narrative writing. I limit my students' topics to items that students can write about with limited research. I don't feel that my students are ready to take on an entire research project at this point in the year. Instead, I have them choose a topic they may already know a little about. For instance, if we've already studied habitats in science, I'll have my students choose an animal that we've already learned about. I also help my students select topics that aren't too broad or too narrow to write about. I also do a lot of extra modeling for my students, because I feel they need this extra scaffolding.

There is also a grammar tie-in for each lesson. I like to focus on one grammar skill each week, and spend a few minutes each day focusing on that skill. I prefer to set aside a few minutes before and after our traditional writing workshop time to focus on these grammar skills. Beginning on week two, these grammar skills are partially taught through mentor sentences that can be displayed for students to identify what is right or wrong about the sentence. These are not "fix all" sentences with a variety of errors. Instead, each sentence will reflect the grammar concept of the week. A collection of mentor sentences are included on pages 67-91 and are labeled to correlate with each lesson. Have students analyze these sentences and discuss what is right or wrong with the sentences and why. Be sure to use the formal language of the standards and relay that you expect to see these rules applied in student writing.

At the end of the unit, I've included a rubric to formally assess student writing. I do not give a grade using the rubric until the end of the unit, because I want to be sure I have taught each element the student will be graded on before I formally assess. However, it is very important to informally assess student writing throughout the unit.

The last day of the unit is an author's celebration. This celebration will be a chance for students to showcase their work to others. Students will create invitations to send home to their parents or other family members, other teachers or administrators. This will be your students' opportunity to show off all of their hard work. I've included this celebration on the last day (day 30) of the unit, but the timing of this celebration will depend on your classroom needs.

Suggested Mentor Texts

Informational Writing

Titles Suggested in Mini Lessons

- A Drop of Water by Walker Wick
- Animal Dads by Sneed B. Collard
- Chameleons are Cool by Martin Jenkins
- Caribou Journey by Debbie S. Miller
- Dakota Dugout by Ann Turner
- Desert Animal Adaptations by Julie Ann Murphy
- Honeybees by Deborah Heiligman
- In the Deep-Sea Floor by Sneed Collard
- Marshes and Swamps by Gail Gibbons
- Owls by Gail Gibbons
- Sharks by Gary Lopez
- Take a Backyard Walk by Jane Kirkland
- Take a Beach Walk by Jane Kirkland
- The Great Fire by Jim Murphy
- The Great Kapok Tree by Lynne Cherry
- The Man Who Walked Between the Towers by Mordicai Gerstein

Unit at a Glance

Week 1	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
	What is informational writing?	Writing an Expert List	Selecting a Topic	Writing Subtopics	First Steps of Research
Week 2	6	7	8	9	10
	Writing Notes	Types of Text Structures	Introducing Graphic Organizers	Graphic Organizers Part 2	Writing a Lead
Week 3	11	12	13	14	15
	Writing a Topic Sentence	Structure of a Paragraph	Practicing Paragraphs	Supporting Details	Writing Descriptions
Week 4	16	17	18	19	20
	Facts—What to include?	Writing Conclusions	Strong Verbs	Developing Voice	Transition Words
Week 5	21	22	23	24	25
	Sentence Variety	Quotes and Dialogue	Revision Checklist	Editing Checklist	Creating a Title & Cover Page
Week 6	26	27	28	29	30
	Detailed Drawings	Writing Captions	Diagrams, Graphs, & Charts	Creating a Glossary	Author's Tea

Day 1: What is Informational Writing

Standard:

Text Types and Purposes 2

Production and Distribution of Writing 4

Materials:

- Writing T-Chart
- Owls by Gail Gibbons
- Owl Moon by Jane Yolen

Mini Lesson: Since many of my students do not have experience with informational writing, I typically keep my independent writing time minimal during the first two writing lessons within this unit. The mini lessons are considerably longer than those in a traditional mini lessons.

In our previous writing unit, we learned how to write personal narratives.

Let's read Owl Moon and discuss some of the common elements we see in

narratives. Read Owl Moon and create a large anchor chart that replicates the left column of the T-chart and complete the next column together. In that column, have students list common elements of a narrative.

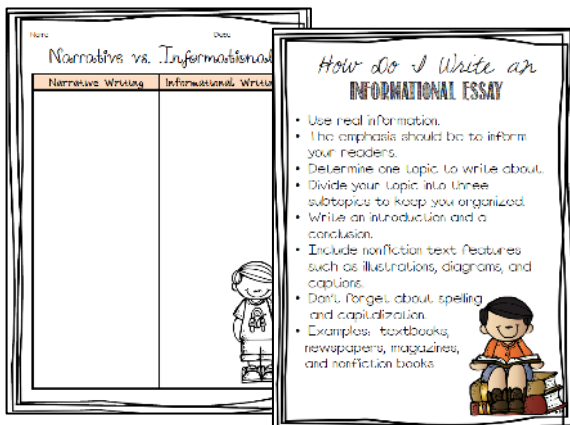
DETAILED LESSON PLANS

As I'm sure many of you already know, there are many different types of writing. During our next writing unit, we will learn how to write informational or expository papers. Spend a few minutes informally assessing students prior knowledge for informational writing. Read Owls and after reading, complete the right column of the T-chart together. In that column, have students list elements of informational text.

Independent Writing: Have students explore the room to find as many different examples of informational writing as they can. Students should record these examples in their writing notebooks. Students will not officially begin writing their informational papers for a few days.

Sharing: Since students have not had the opportunity to spend much time writing, allow two or three students to share their list of examples of informational writing.

Optional Handout/Printable:



Grammar Tie-in: Irregular Plural Nouns

- Mentor Sentence 1

As a whole group, create an anchor chart to explain the rules on how to spell plural nouns. Today, only focus on how to spell plural nouns that end in s, ch, sh, and x.

Name_____

Date_____

Narrative vs. Informational

Narrative Writing

Informational Writing

OPTIONS FOR ACTIVITIES



How do I Write an INFORMATIONAL ESSAY

- Use real information.
- The emphasis should be to inform

your readers.

STUDENT HANDOUTS

- Determine what to write about.
- Divide your topic into three subtopics to keep you organized.
- Write an introduction and a conclusion.
- Include nonfiction text features such as illustrations, diagrams, and captions.
- Don't forget about spelling and capitalization.
- Examples: textbooks, newspapers, magazines, and nonfiction books



Day 2: Creating an Expert List

Standard:

Text Types and Purposes 2

Production and Distribution of Writing
4

Materials:

- I'm an Expert graphic organizer
- Swamps and Marshes by Gail Gibbons

Mini Lesson: *One of the first steps in writing an informational paper is deciding what to write about. Before you begin writing, you have to choose a topic! It's important to put a lot of thought into the topic you choose, because you'll need to be an expert on that topic. I believe that we could all consider ourselves experts on swamps, since we just finished learning about them. Let's read Swamps and Marshes together, so we can hear an example of expert writing.*

I chose the book Swamps and Marshes, because I been in the 5th grade year with habitats and know that all of my students will have a fair amount of prior knowledge on swamps. You'll definitely want to chose a book with a topic your students will be familiar with.

Since all of us are experts we're all experts on different topics, so today I want everyone to create an Expert List during independent writing today.

Independent Writing: Have students complete one of the Expert List graphic organizers. I've included four different versions: a boy and girl version with no labels, and a boy and girl version with labels to help guide students as they brainstorm. Encourage students to place a lot of thought into their lists and to think about things they've learned from home and at school.

Sharing: Allow several students to share expert lists. I try to get really excited about ideas that will lend themselves to great informational writing essays.

Optional Handout/Printable:



Grammar Tie-in: Irregular Plural Nouns

- Mentor Sentence 2

Discuss that some nouns completely change when made into a plural noun. Give students a few examples of these types of nouns. Add the rule to the anchor chart.

Name _____

Date _____

Informational Writing Brainstorm

Write a bulleted list of everything you know about the topic you've chosen for your informational writing.

Topic

EXTENSIVE SCAFFOLDING

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



Narrow or Broaden Your Topic

Change the following broad or narrow topics to a narrow topic your could easily write about.

Broad Topic: Outer Space

Just Right Topic

Broad Topic:: Animals

Just Right Topic

EXTENSIVE SCAFFOLDING

Broad Topic: The Ocean

Just Right Topic

Narrow Topic: The Childhood of George Washington

Just Right Topic

Narrow Topic: The Temperature of the Sun

Just Right Topic

2 Ways to Begin Informational Writing

Type of Beginning	Mentor Text	My Example
Question	<p><u>Honeybees</u> by Deborah Heiligman</p> <p>When you see a bee on a warm summer day, do you think, "OW! That bee is going to sting me?"</p>	
Fact	<p><u>The Man Who Walked Between the Towers</u> by Mordcai Gerstein</p>	
Description	<p><u>Sharks</u> by Gary Lopez</p> <p>The ocean water is clear and blue in the bright sunshine. Under the surface, schools of colorful fish swim through the water.</p>	

REVISION LESSONS

Mentor Sentence 1

The ~~use~~ driver placed
three boxes by my front
door.

MENTOR SENTENCES

Mentor Sentence 2

All of the children were
so excited to be at the
party.

Mentor Sentence 3

I picked a bouquet of
daisies for my mom.