The lessons in this unit were created in collaboration with the Georgia Writing Project and Georgia Public Broadcasting (GPB).

Teaching Others What We Know: Informational Writing

This 10-lesson mini unit introduces students to the concept of becoming writers of informational texts. While this unit focuses primarily on writing instruction, the assumption is that students are also engaging in reading workshop lessons centered around nonfiction texts. This overlap in reading and writing instruction allows students to begin producing the same types of texts they are reading independently and invites natural observations of text characteristics used by readers and writers of informational texts. In this unit students will observe the teacher model writing informational booklets while producing multiple booklets themselves over the course of the ten days.

Lesson Six: Being Brave with Our Words

In this lesson, the teacher will encourage students to become “fearless spellers” in order to tackle the spelling of specific vocabulary they will likely encounter as they write about their topics. The purpose of the lesson is to reassure students that the spelling of these often-complicated words does not need to be perfect, but that stretching sounds in order to spell via approximations is the brave thing to do. What we don’t want is students who “play it safe” and avoid words they can’t spell, thereby writing bland, unspecific texts. This lesson is adapted from the work of Katie Wood Ray and Lisa Cleaveland (2018).

NOTE: This learning plan uses specific texts (e.g., written, performed, illustrated) as concrete examples of standards-based learning activities. These texts are not endorsements. The selection of classroom texts is completely a local decision and subject to local approval processes.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning Targets</th>
<th>Lesson “Small Make(s)”</th>
<th>Unit “Big Make”</th>
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<td>I can do my best to spell harder words.</td>
<td>Students will either start a new booklet or continue working on an ongoing booklet and will spell unknown and untaught words phonetically.</td>
<td>Students will individually publish an informational booklet that teaches others by choosing one of the booklets they created during the unit, revising and editing to the best extent possible, then sharing with an authentic audience, such as a Buddy Kindergarten class or another first-grade class.</td>
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*adapted from Cris Tovani’s Why Do I Have to Read This? Literacy Strategies to Engage our Most Reluctant Readers (2021)

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**Standard Alignment**

**ELAGSE1W2:** Write informative/ explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.

**ELAGSE1L2:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

  e. Spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.

**WIDA English Language Development Standards for English learners (ELs):**

Teachers of ELs are encouraged to use the resources in the [WIDA English Language Development Standards Framework, 2020 Edition](https://www wida.org/resources/wida-language-development-standards-framework-2020-edition), to design language expectations (p.28) specific to the GSE. Examples of the English language needed to support informational writing can be found on p. 69.
**Instructional Design**

*For more information regarding daily routine practices and/or additional information on the unit framework (including materials), please see the Unit Plan Overview.*

Various evidence-based practices (EBPs) are identified throughout the lesson below; however, we believe good teaching can be eclectic, “...thoughtfully, intentionally taking some of the best of different teaching methodologies, while always holding onto some research-based, core beliefs, we can help our students flourish in ways that teaching only one way will not” (Roberts, 2018, p. 6). Always feel free to adapt the lesson to meet your professional needs with your specific student population. Ideas for student supports and enrichments can be found in the “Student Learning Supports” section.

This mini unit is written for synchronous distance learning or face-to-face learning that utilizes various technology resources. Everything listed as synchronous can be utilized with little to no change in a face-to-face (f2f) environment. However, guidance is provided for modifications, including ideas for supporting students who are learning asynchronously and those with little or no access to technology (unplugged / offline).

**Materials**

**Teacher**—virtual whiteboard (shared document), document camera, “I'm Not Afraid of My Words” chart for underneath document camera, student sample book All About Eagles [student sample booklet] OR a sample of one of your student’s writings with a phonetically spelled word, teacher’s ongoing informational booklet

**Students**—blank paper, previously written booklets, unplugged handout version [link to lesson 6 handout unplugged]
Engage

Opening:

Synchronous

- Compliment the students on the work they’ve done so far on their informational books and all the facts they’ve shared with their readers. Explain that since we are teaching others, we need our readers to be able to read our writing. Sometimes we will need to spell harder words that we don’t already know, and we need to be brave when we spell those words, and not just give up or use an easier word. [EBP: Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing [Moderate evidence] (Graham et al., 2016).

- Show students the student sample you’ve chosen to use for this lesson (either “All About Eagles” or one of your students’ writings) and point out a word that is not spelled conventionally but is phonetically accurate. For instance, in the Eagles book, you might choose to highlight *eegals* or *hed* or *wotr*.

- Add the student’s name to the “I’m Not Afraid of My Words” chart, along with their spelling approximation. Then show students the conventional spelling of the word. Talk through how close this student was to the conventional spelling, and how brave they were for trying it. Help students see how they stretched out the sounds to write everything they heard. For instance, after filling out the chart you might say, “Look at how Sarah, the author of the book about eagles, worked to spell the word *head*. She only missed one letter! She stretched out all the sounds she heard, and she got three of the letters correct. She was brave with her spelling!”

- Note: Instead of “conventional spelling”, you might choose to label that column “book spelling”

Asynchronous

Post on your learning management platform a brief video of yourself a) complimenting students on the work they’ve done so far and explaining the need to be brave with our spelling; b) showing students an example of a student who was brave with their spelling and add them to the “I’m Not Afraid of My Words” chart; and c) talk through the next blank page in your booklet and the hard word you want to spell. Add yourself to the “I’m Not Afraid of My Words” chart.

Unplugged/Offline

Have students work through part 1 of Lesson 6 Handout – unplugged.
Explore

Synchronous

- Tell students you would like them to help you be brave with a word in your writing. Show them the next blank page in your booklet and tell them the sentence you’d like to write. Be sure to include a word in your sentence that students will need to stretch to spell. For instance, you could say, “In my book about doctors, I want to say Doctors use a stethoscope to listen to your heart. But I don’t know how to spell stethoscope. Can you help me stretch it out?” [EBP: Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing [Moderate evidence] (Graham et al., 2016).

- Have students stretch the sounds as you write in your booklet. It is okay to spell it wrong using the letters the students provide – the standard for untaught words states that students should spell these words phonetically, so accept logical suggestions from students. [EBP: Develop awareness of the segments of sounds in speech and how they link to letters. [Strong evidence] (Foorman et al., 2016).

- Next, add your name to the “I’m Not Afraid of My Words” chart, along with your phonetically spelled attempt. Then add the conventional spelling for the word and talk about the parts that were accurate or close to being accurate. The goal here is to encourage risk-taking by the students when spelling new words. [EBPs: Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing [Moderate evidence] (Graham et al., 2016); Teach students to decode words, analyze word parts, and write and recognize words. [Strong evidence] (Foorman et al., 2016).

- Tell students you will be watching for other students who are brave with their words so you can add them to the chart too.

Asynchronous

Have students record a brief Flipgrid or Seesaw video telling you (or showing you on a whiteboard or paper) how they would spell your hard word by stretching out the sounds.

Unplugged/Offline

Have students work through part 2 of Lesson 6 Handout – unplugged.
Apply

Synchronous

Students will work independently on their booklet, either continuing a booklet they've already started or beginning a new one. They do not need to go back and “fix” any previously written words, but simply continue with their writing, striving to be brave with their spelling as they write. [EBP: Teach students to become fluent with handwriting, spelling, sentence construction, typing, and word processing [Moderate evidence] (Graham et al., 2016).]

As you confer with students, look for students’ ability to phonetically stretch out untaught words. Make a mental note of students who are “being brave” so you can highlight them in the closing of the lesson. Lend encouragement to any students who are “playing it safe” by avoiding harder words.

Asynchronous/Unplugged/Offline

Students will work independently on their booklet, either continuing a booklet they've already started or beginning a new one. They do not need to go back and “fix” any previously written words, but simply continue on with their writing, striving to be brave with their spelling as they write.

Reflect

Synchronous

Bring students back as a whole group and highlight 1-2 students who were brave with their spelling. [EBP: Create an engaged community of writers [Minimal evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)]. Add them and their words to the chart, showing how close they were to the conventional spelling. If time, allow students to pair up and share one place in their writing where they were brave with their spelling.

Asynchronous/Unplugged/Offline

Students will continue working on their booklets. These can be shared with teachers via a scheduled online conference, regular phone conference during which the student reads aloud their writing, or photos can be emailed to the teacher of the student’s work.
Evidence of Student Success

Students will be considered successful in this lesson if they are able to phonetically spell new or untaught words in their booklets as they write. Students should attempt harder words rather than sticking to words they know and “playing it safe.” Spelling accurately is a developmental skill that progresses along a predictable continuum from including only beginning and ending consonants, to medial vowel sounds, to multisyllabic words and sophisticated endings. For more on spelling development, read the work of Bear, Invernizzi, Templeton, & Johnston (2016) (see references below).

Formative Assessment

“More of What’s Meaningful”: Formative Assessments (Serravallo, 2013)

Formative assessment can occur in two ways:

- Conferring [Guidance: Tips for Conferring to Maximize Student Engage]
  “Supercharge your Conferring: Focus on Goals, Strategies, and Feedback” (Serravallo, 2018)

- Sharing [“How to Create an Inclusive Virtual Classroom” (Kern, 2020)]
  “8 Strategies to Improve Participation in Your Virtual Classroom” (Minero, 2020)

Student Learning Supports

At all levels, the English Language Arts standards encourage students to become critical thinkers and communicators. The following strategies, though not exhaustive, are designed to support students struggling to meet this lesson’s learning target, and/or learning English as an additional language, and/or are exceeding and would benefit from enrichment.

Supports/Scaffolding

- **Conceptual Processing:** Allow additional processing time. Review this content prior to the lesson occurring so that the student will have additional time to formulate responses. Summarize each lesson segment and keep summary accessible for students. Implement scaffolds identified below for various circumstances.

- **Language:** Prior to beginning of the lesson, explicitly teach vocabulary required to engage with the content. [EBP: Teach students academic language skills, including the use of inferential and narrative language, and vocabulary knowledge [Minimal evidence] (Foorman et al., 2016)].
- **Visual-spatial Processing**: Provide opportunities for students to engage with visual representations and/or manipulatives (virtual or concrete) as they explore informational writing and communicate ideas.
- **Organization**: Maintain logical progression of big ideas/lesson segments in the course’s shared virtual space so that students can revisit lesson segments as necessary. Help students bookmark frequently utilized sites (such as Flipgrid) or how to group tabs in Chrome to assist with organization.
- **Memory**: Maintain logical progression of big ideas/lesson segments in the course’s shared virtual space so that students can revisit lesson segments, as necessary.

**Lesson-specific scaffolds:**

Some students may have difficulty independently stretching the sounds of harder words and will need the teacher to stretch out the sounds for them as the student writes the corresponding letters. Gradually release the work of both stretching and writing letters to the student.

Students who still struggle with correctly matching letters and sounds might benefit from an illustrated letter/sound chart on their desk. It is important to have the chart close to the student rather than on a wall across the room, as students can lose valuable time and attention by walking back and forth or straining their eyes to see.

Having a classroom sound wall or word wall and/or or individual sound/word walls, of high frequency words can benefit students by creating automaticity in spelling these common words, thus freeing up students to spend their energy working on the spelling of harder, more difficult words.

**Supports for English learners:**

- Suggestions for this lesson include, but are not limited to: allowing students to use word-to-word dictionaries or picture dictionaries for spelling support, working with groups of students to contextualize the teaching of Tier 2 vocabulary and spelling by using cognates (examples of cognate lists can be found [here](English/Spanish) (Calderón, M., August, D., Durán, D., Madden, N., R. Slavin & M. Gil (2003) cited in Colorín Cobrado, 2019) and [here](English/Haitian Creole) (New York State Education Department, n.d.), role-playing or realia, etc.

- Educators may find it valuable to review WIDA’s Proficiency Level Descriptors (pp. 80-81) when planning for differentiation based on students’ levels of English proficiency.

- Teachers of ELs are encouraged to incorporate [high leverage practices](https://www.projectexcell.org/home/strategies) for teaching EL students and to utilize relevant evidence-based strategies such as those found in Project EXCELL’s downloadable [GO TO Strategies](https://www.projectexcell.org/home/strategies) (Levine et al., 2013).
Acceleration/Extension

Standard:
ELAGSE1L2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
e. Spell untaught words phonetically, drawing on phonemic awareness and spelling conventions.

Acceleration/Extension Activity:
For students who can easily spell high-frequency first grade words and are comfortable approximating the spelling of more difficult vocabulary words, you might encourage the use of resources for comparing their spelling to conventional spelling. For instance, if a student does their best to spell predator when writing about cheetahs, they may later want to check their spelling by looking it up in a book about cheetahs. However, it is important to keep in mind that students should not pause in the midst of their writing to find correct spellings, as that will unnecessarily interrupt the flow of their writing.

Engaging Families

Aligning with your district’s family engagement plan to facilitate the most meaningful way to work with your families.

- Families might choose to create their own “I’m Not Afraid of My Words” chart at home to encourage risk-taking with spelling across the curriculum. The chart can be posted on the refrigerator and approximations can be publicly celebrated by the family.
- Engage families of English learners by encouraging reading of bilingual informational texts on students’ chosen topics to identify/support the English language needed for the unit (sample online resources for free bilingual books: Unite for Literacy, Global Storybooks). Families can also encourage writing at home (Spanish version) with students.
References


New York State Education Department. (n.d.). *Glossary of cognates: English/Haitian Creole*. [https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/atn293/cognates/english_haitian_cognates.pdf](https://research.steinhardt.nyu.edu/scmsAdmin/media/users/atn293/cognates/english_haitian_cognates.pdf)


