Big Idea/Topic

**Teaching Others What We Know: Informational Writing**

This 10-lesson mini unit supports students in writing longer, more in-depth informational texts as second-graders. 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 One: Getting Started Writing Informational Booklets**

Students will learn that informational texts are written to teach others about a topic. They will view a sample student-written text and discuss its characteristics before seeing the teacher’s “expert list” of possible writing topics and listening as the teacher models beginning to write in her booklet. Students will then compose their own “expert lists” and begin a booklet to teach others about one of those topics.

**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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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I can describe the purpose of informational texts.</td>
<td>• Create an “expert list” of familiar topics you understand and can teach to others. These should be topics that don’t require research and about which students can write multiple facts. • Begin to create a booklet of informational writing about a single topic.</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/1st grade class or another second-grade class.</td>
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<td>I can use mentor texts to inspire my writing.</td>
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<td>I can brainstorm possible informational writing topics.</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)
**Standard Alignment**

**ELAGSE2W2:** Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section

**ELAGSE2W5:** With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing. a. May include prewriting.

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**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, collection of 3-5 informational texts, sample student mentor text “Sharks” [link this to sample student booklet], blank booklet for your writing (you may use blank paper, simple lined paper [link to simple writing paper], or nonfiction writing paper [link to nonfiction writing paper]).

*Students*—blank paper, *unplugged handout version*
**Engage**

**Opening: Whole group discussion**

**Synchronous**

- Explain to students that we are beginning a unit on informational writing. These texts can be defined as texts that teach others about a topic. Under the document camera, quickly share the covers of several nonfiction texts with clear topics (e.g., horses, Florida, rocks). Try to avoid making all the texts about different kinds of animals – an overfocus on animals in this unit could give students the mistaken impression that informational texts are always books about animals. Have students briefly discuss the topics these books are teaching the reader.

- Read aloud the **sample student text “Sharks”** using the document camera. Ask students to share characteristics that make it an informational, or “teaching” text (e.g., it contains true facts, the pictures match the words, it is not a story about a time something happened). [EBP: Teach students to identify and use the text’s organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content [Moderate evidence] (Shanahan et al., 2010).

- Tell students – this writer taught us about sharks, and we can make similar books to teach others about the topics we know.

**Asynchronous**

Post on your learning management platform a definition of informational texts as teaching texts as well as links to covers of nonfiction texts and the student writing sample. Have students create a Flipgrid or Seesaw video or a discussion board explaining the purpose of informational texts and what they notice about the **student writing sample**.

**Unplugged/Offline**

Have students work through part 1 of **Lesson 1 Handout – unplugged**. (Note: you will need to alter the expert list to match your own before printing for students.) Also, print out and give students a copy of the **student writing sample “Sharks”** to serve as a mentor text for your students.
Explore

Synchronous

- Share your personal “expert list” of a list of topics you know enough about to teach others. You might also mention sample topics that you don’t feel comfortable adding to the list and why (e.g., “I can’t add knitting to this list because all I know is you use yarn and needles to knit. I don’t know enough to make an informational book about this topic.”).

- Model choosing a topic from your list and begin to write in your booklet underneath the document camera. Write a title and your name on the cover, then think aloud and write 2-3 sentences on the first page. Make this quick, with the emphasis on your brainstorming facts about the topic. Do not belabor conventions at this point (how to stretch out words, spacing, capitalization, etc.) in order to keep the focus on “teaching” others the facts you know. [EBP: Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes. [Strong evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)].

- Invite students to begin to create expert lists of their own. Before releasing them to work, ask several students to share aloud possible topics for their lists.

- Before releasing students to work on their expert lists, demonstrate under the document camera how to fold a single sheet of paper to make a simple booklet or share where students should go to get pre-made informational booklets (after several lessons, you can allow students to create their own booklets using supplies at a writing center). After students have added at least 4 topics to their expert lists, encourage them to begin to write in their booklets.

Asynchronous

Post on your learning management platform a copy of your expert list along with a photo of the first page of your booklet. You might find it helpful to upload a short video of your think-aloud process as you discuss your expert list and write the first page of your booklet.

Unplugged/Offline

Have students work through part 2 of Lesson 1 Handout – unplugged.
**Apply**

*Synchronous/Asynchronous/Unplugged/Offline*

- Students will work independently to create expert lists. Ask students to include at least 4-5 items on their expert lists, more if they can. These should be stored in their pocket folders so they can be added to as students think of more expert topics. Students will use these as inspiration in the future as they complete one booklet and begin another. *[EBP: Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes. [Strong evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)]*

- As students complete their expert lists, they may choose one of their expert topics to begin to write about. At this point, you are simply looking for students to write in informative ways about their topic rather than telling a story. The focus is not yet on interesting leads, organization, or language conventions.

**Reflect**

*Synchronous*

Students can share 2-3 items from their expert list via synchronous discussion, a breakout group, or via Flipgrid or Seesaw. Ask several students to share with the group one page from the booklet they started and ask the others if they agree these students wrote an informational text and what makes that so (i.e., what facts can they pinpoint in the student’s writing?). *[EBP: Create an engaged community of writers [Minimal evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)]*

*Asynchronous/ Unplugged/Offline*

Students will complete their personal expert lists and begin their first booklet. 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 if they are able to effectively participate in the discussion of the topics and characteristics of the sample texts. They should be able to create a list of potential writing topics (their “expert list”) that lends itself towards informational writing (and not narrative or opinion genres). The beginning of their booklets should contain factual information and not narratives or opinions.

### 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 Engagement*]

  “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 are designed to support students who are either struggling to meet this lesson’s learning target 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:

Students may be hesitant to share aloud during whole group discussion about informational book topics and characteristics of the student writing sample. Some students may be more willing to participate if they can write their answer on a dry erase board and hold it up to the computer camera, particularly with short-answer questions such as book topic. For longer answers, students might feel more secure in a small group setting via a breakout room. It will also be helpful for the teacher to chart text characteristics on chart paper or an online document that can be shared in future lessons.

When folding and getting ready to write in their booklets, some students may have difficulty in knowing which page is the front of the book. In those cases, demonstrating with a published book and encouraging students to compare with texts they have in their homes can help. You can also have students draw a triangle at the top of the front page once they’ve determined the cover to help them remember where to start.

Supports/scaffolds for English learners:

- Educators are encouraged to refer to resources such as WIDA’s Essential Actions Handbook or the downloadable GO TO Strategies from CAL to find a variety of scaffolds appropriate for ELs across ELP levels.
- Sample language objectives/targets for this lesson (Please note the following language objectives are examples and should not be used across all ELP levels. Teachers should take students’ ELP levels into account when creating language objectives for their lessons):
  - Orally share about topics using pictures and sentence frames in peer groups.
  - Generate a list of potential topics using pictures and single words with support from picture books and/or visuals.

Acceleration/Extension

Standard: ELAGSE2W5: With guidance and support from adults and peers, focus on a topic and strengthen writing as needed by revising and editing. a. May include prewriting.

Acceleration/Extension Activity:

Students who are comfortable with the informational writing genre may benefit from a pre-writing graphic organizer in which they create a bubble map to brainstorm known facts before beginning their booklets. This graphic organizer can help students begin to organize similar information together and elaborate on particular facts. However, keep in mind that prewriting graphic organizers are optional, and not all students respond
Engaging Families

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

- Parents can work with students to help add to their expert lists. Parents may jog students’ memories of places they’ve visited they could teach others about or activities/games that are known to the family.
- Families can support students as they begin to create informational booklets by serving as genuinely interested readers/listeners as well as by asking questions to stimulate further writing (e.g., How big can whales get?).

References


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development standards. Board of Regents of the University of Wisconsin System.


Tovani, C., & Moje, E.B. (2017). *No more telling as teaching: Less lecture, more engaged learning (not this but that)*. Heinemann.
