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 Seven: Illustrating with Intention

In this lesson students will learn that the illustrations in an informational text teach just as much as the words. As informational authors, we need to make sure to carefully add details to the illustrations in our booklets and to think about the book from the audience’s point of view.

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.
## Learning Targets

| I can **create** illustrations that teach the reader. | Students will add to existing booklet illustrations or create new illustrations that carefully match the words they write on the page. At times, the illustrations may contain more details than the writing. | 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. |

*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.

**ELAGSE1W5**: With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed. a. May include oral or written prewriting (graphic organizers)

**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.us/standards), 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, student sample book All About Eagles [link to student sample booklet], teacher’s ongoing booklet with a simple drawing on the target page, first grade level text with clear illustrations

Students—blank paper, unplugged handout version [link to lesson 7 handout unplugged]
Engage
Opening:
Synchronous
- Share with students a few pages from a first-grade level text with clear illustrations, such as “My First Book of Planets” or “Amazing Sharks.” Avoid books with extremely busy page layouts or books that look like webpages.
- Think out loud about what you can learn from the illustration alone, before even reading the text on the page. Point out any information that can be learned solely from the illustration that’s not mentioned in the text. For instance, in the planet book linked above, on page 1 the reader can learn from the picture that planets are different colors and some even look like they have stripes. [EBP: Teach students to identify and use the text’s organizational structure to comprehend, learn, and remember content [Moderate evidence] (Shanahan et al., 2010)].
- Show students the sample student text “All About Eagles” and think aloud about how the illustrations teach us information about eagles. For example, on p. 3 we learn that eagles hunt during the day because the illustration shows that the sun is out. And on p. 4 we learn that eagles build their nests in trees.

Asynchronous
Post on your learning management platform a brief video of yourself, a) sharing the illustrations from a published book and thinking aloud about what you can learn from them; b) showing students how you can learn from the illustrations in the sample student text “All About Eagles,” and; c) showing students the simple drawing from your own booklet.

Unplugged/Offline
Have students work through part 1 of Lesson 7 Handout – unplugged.
**Explore**

**Synchronous**
- Show students the booklet you’ve been working on and the simple picture you’ve already drawn. Read the text you’ve written and then ask students to talk to a partner about how you could add details to your illustration to teach the reader. [EBP: Create an engaged community of writers [Minimal evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)].
- Have students share their suggestions with the group while you add to your illustration based on their ideas.

**Asynchronous**
Have students record a brief Flipgrid or Seesaw video telling what details you should add to your simple drawing.

**Unplugged/Offline**
Have students work through part 2 of Lesson 7 Handout – unplugged.

**Apply**

**Synchronous/Asynchronous/Unplugged/Offline**
Students will work independently on their booklet, either continuing a booklet they’ve already started or beginning a new one. Today they will pay extra attention to their illustrations, making sure to go back to previously written pages to add more details. This action of going back to revise illustrations will set up your class to be ready to go back to revise text in a later lesson. [EBP: Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes. [Strong evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)].

**Reflect**

**Synchronous**
Students should pair up and share with their partner an illustration they are proud of. [EBP: Create an engaged community of writers [Minimal evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)]. They should also read the text that goes with that illustration so the partner can make sure they match. Have 2-3 students share their illustrations with the class, talking through the details they added and why.
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 include detailed illustrations that match the text. In some cases, it may be difficult for the teacher to interpret the students’ drawings, but difficulty with drawing ability or small motor control should not count against the writer. Instead, ask the student to tell you about their drawing and if it appears there is intentionality behind the marks, count that as progress. For instance, a student may tell you, “These are his sharp teeth and here are the sharp claws,” which demonstrates an understanding of factual details about the topic even though it may not be immediately recognizable to you.

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)
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 struggle with representational drawing, and for these students it can be well worth the time to help them learn to draw. You might pull a small group of students and model how to draw a person by looking at either a drawing or one of your actual students. Walk through the shapes you see and the details: *I see that her face is like a circle, so I’ll draw that here. In the middle of her face is her nose, and it looks almost like a triangle...* Help students slow down and see the two-dimensional shapes and details on three-dimensional objects around them. For more support with this, check out *Talking, Drawing, Writing* by Horn and Giacobbe (2007).
Supports for English learners:

- Suggestions for this lesson include but are not limited to: providing students with word banks to assist in labeling pictures, allowing students to use their first language to create a draft, providing students with exemplars of labeled illustrations in first language, 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 for teaching EL students and to utilize relevant evidence-based strategies such as those found in Project EXCELL’s downloadable GO TO Strategies (Levine et al., 2013).

Acceleration/Extension

Standards:

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

ELAGSE1W5: With guidance and support from adults, focus on a topic, respond to questions and suggestions from peers, and add details to strengthen writing as needed. a. May include oral or written prewriting (graphic organizers)

Acceleration/Extension Activity:

Students who easily include detailed drawings in their booklets should be encouraged to elaborate on the text in their booklets so that the pictures and text more closely matches. These writers will be able to write more details based on their pictures alone. For instance, a student who carefully adds color illustrations to their book about soccer might then write that soccer balls are black and white, which makes them easier to see on the green field.
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<th><strong>Engaging Families</strong></th>
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<td>Aligning with your district’s family engagement plan to facilitate the most meaningful way to work with your families.</td>
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<td>• As family members read informational books with their children, pay special attention to the illustrations and the information that can be gleaned from them. Make a game out of matching the facts in the text with the details in the illustrations.</td>
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<td>• To help students practice illustrating, try having them make their own illustrations for nonfiction texts that are different than what the author/illustrator included.</td>
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<td>• <strong>Engage families of English learners</strong> by encouraging reading of bilingual books on students’ chosen topics to identify/support the English language needed for the unit (sample online resources for free bilingual books: <a href="#">Unite for Literacy</a>, <a href="#">Global Storybooks</a>). Parents can also work with students to label pictures using websites like <a href="#">Markup Hero</a> and <a href="#">Szoter</a>.</td>
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References


