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 Five: Getting Our Reader’s Attention

In this lesson, students will work on the leads of their booklets with a focus on creating a lead that lets the reader know the topic in an attention-grabbing way. It is important to note that this lesson is pushing students beyond the basic requirements of the W2 standard, which simply states that students should be able to “name the topic.” The “Evidence of Success” section of this lesson provides guidance on ways to assess student writing as a result of this lesson.

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 | Lesson “Small Make(s)” | Unit “Big Make”
--- | --- | ---
I can **name** my topic at the beginning of my writing.  
I can **interest** my reader at the beginning. | Students will either begin a new booklet and work on creating a lead that names the topic and possibly grabs the reader's attention, or students can go back to a previously written booklet to revise their lead. If students don’t have room in their old booklet to squeeze in a lead, they can write the lead on a sticky note or a taped paper flap on the first page. | 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/resource/wida-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, a new blank booklet, student sample book All About Eagles [link to student sample booklet]

Students—blank paper, unplugged handout version [link to lesson 5 handout unplugged]
**Engage**

**Opening:**

**Synchronous**

- Explain to students that now that they’ve started to get comfortable teaching others by writing booklets, we are going to begin to think about how to make our writing even stronger and more interesting for the reader. [EBP: Create an engaged community of writers [Minimal evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)].

- Show students the student sample booklet All About Eagles. Read aloud the first page and ask them what they notice about how the writer started the booklet. Lead students to observe the question lead, and discuss how much more interested we are as readers than if they’d left out that question and simply started with the next sentence, “Eagles are birds.”

- Tell students, Writers make sure to name their topic in the first sentence, so the reader knows exactly what the book will be about. Writers also work hard to make the beginning of their book interesting, so readers will want to continue reading.

**Asynchronous**

Post on your learning management platform a brief video of yourself a) explaining what leads are and why they’re important, b) pointing out the question lead in All About Eagles, and c) modeling thinking aloud about a few possible leads for your new booklet.

**Unplugged/Offline**

Have students work through part 1 of Lesson 5 Handout – unplugged.

**Explore**

**Synchronous**

- Model beginning a new booklet about a new topic. Think aloud about how you might begin with a question. Model asking a different question than *Did you know…* since that was modeled in the Eagles book. For instance, you might start your question with *Have you ever…* or *Do you know about…*

- Have students make suggestions about other ways you might begin your booklet to get the reader’s attention. Students might suggest other questions, or they might even suggest new ways to grab the reader’s attention (e.g., a very interesting fact or telling the reader what they’ll learn: *This book will tell you all about bats.*) [EBP: Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes. [Strong evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)].
Asynchronous

Have students record a brief Flipgrid or Seesaw video telling you 1-2 different leads they could add to their booklets, just like you thought about several possible leads for your modeled piece.

Unplugged/Offline

Have students work through part 2 of Lesson 5 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. [EBP: Provide daily time for students to write [Minimal evidence] (Graham et al., 2016).

Tell students they need to work on their leads during the first part of this independent writing time. [EBP: Teach students to use the writing process for a variety of purposes. [Strong evidence] (Graham et al., 2016)] They can either begin a new booklet, or they can go back to the beginning of the booklet they’re in the middle of and squeeze in a lead. They may need to use a sticky note for adding their lead if there’s not enough room on the first page. Alternatively, they can tape a small flap of paper over the first sentence to add a lead.

As you confer with students, look for students’ ability to name the topic and get the reader’s attention.

Reflect

Synchronous

Students can share their writing in groups of 2-3 via breakout rooms. Ask students to begin by sharing the lead for their booklet. Once the group has returned to a whole-group format, the teacher might ask 1-2 students to share their leads with the group.

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

As noted earlier, first grade writers are merely expected to name their topic in order to meet the expectations of the standard. Including a creative lead such as the ones mentioned in this lesson would qualify as exceeding the standard. Therefore, when evaluating the success of this lesson keep the following examples in mind:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exceeds Standard</th>
<th>Meets Standard</th>
<th>Not Yet</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have you ever wondered where whales live?</td>
<td>Whales live in the ocean.</td>
<td>They live in the ocean.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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)].
o **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.

o **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.

o **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:**

Using a question lead is generally the easiest type of lead for students. But some students have difficulty formulating questions and would benefit from a chart listing question words, such as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Do</th>
<th><strong>Do bats eat meat? Read this book to find out.</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have</td>
<td><strong>Have you ever seen a bat at night?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did</td>
<td><strong>Did you know that bats do not have feathers?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What</td>
<td><strong>What do bats eat?</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**English learners in need of additional language support may benefit from the above resource coupled with visuals.**

**Supports for English learners:**

- Suggestions for this lesson include but are not limited to: providing students with bilingual books or exemplar leads in their home language to generate ideas for leads, supplying students with sentence frames to create leads, using a chart to generate questions (see example above), 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:**

**Standard:**

**ELAGSE1W2:** Write informative/explanatory texts in which they name a topic, supply some facts about the topic, and provide some sense of closure.
Acceleration/Extension Activity:
Students who would benefit from acceleration might be willing to try more sophisticated leads, such as beginning with a fascinating fact or with a riddle (What has fur and can fly in the night? Bats! Read this book to find out more about interesting bats.)

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

- Families might enjoy looking through the informational books in their home and online to explore the different ways writers begin their books. Together they can decide whether the lead was effective enough to grab their attention.
- Families might play the “lead game” by having one person name a topic while the other orally creates an interesting lead.
- Engage families of English learners in addition to the ideas mentioned above 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


Kendore Learning/Syllables Learning Center. (2020, April 1). **Make a document camera using your phone:** Easy DIY Zoom instructions [Video]. Youtube. [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Il008KwcUE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Il008KwcUE)


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