## Writing Personal Recounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Anchor Lesson</th>
<th>Skill Focus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Zooming In on a Personal Moment</td>
<td>Zooming in on a moment; telling the inside and outside stories; using dialogue to add impact; telling details only the writer knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding Recount with Smooth Transitions</td>
<td>Using transitional words appropriately</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Friday Journal: A Personal Account with Details</td>
<td>Zooming in on a moment; telling the inside and outside stories; using dialogue to add impact; telling details only the writer knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collections: Adding Detail from Personal Experience</td>
<td>Zooming in on a moment; telling the inside and outside stories; using dialogue to add impact; telling details only the writer knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Show, Don’t Tell: My Teacher</td>
<td>Removing adjectives and demonstrating by examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Places</td>
<td>Zooming in on a moment; telling the inside and outside stories; using dialogue to add impact; telling details only the writer knows</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Find a Hook</td>
<td>Starting with a great lead</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recounting or Retelling a Story</td>
<td>Synthesizing and summarizing information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gift of Words</td>
<td>Developing vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connecting</td>
<td>Connecting literature to personal experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting and Evaluating</td>
<td>Expressing personal opinions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Personal writing is the form that teachers and students are most familiar with, in some cases, all too familiar as students are asked to write “journals” for years with little or no instruction. It has been our experience that the teacher’s role in journal writing is to comment on the bottom of the page and return it to the student. At its best, the journal provides a window into the child’s life and creates an opportunity for the teacher and the student to engage in a personal conversation when there is little time for this in the press of classroom life. Most often, however, the student is locked into the journal form and, day after day, year after year, dutifully makes entries that are as prosaic and boring for the student to write as they are for the teacher to read. Without instruction in personal writing, journal writing, in this mode, does not move students forward in their ability to write expressively.

With anchor lessons teachers can extend “journals” and provide opportunities for students to write personal accounts with strength and voice.

If we look to the Writing Profile for Personal Recounts on page 30 for direction, we see that fully developed personal writing needs to show a strong point of view. It needs to express an opinion. Ideas and events are to be developed with supporting details and personal responses. From this we understand that a listing of events is insufficient. Unless the writing contains elements of personal reaction supported by details, examples and explanations, it is not a strong example of personal writing. As teachers of writing in this genre, it is up to us to make the elements of the genre explicit for our students. Let’s look at two examples for clarity:

On June 11 we are having a field trip. We are going to the beach! We are not just going to play at the beach, but we are doing research there. I wonder if I’m going to find a starfish or a crab and if the water will be cold. I’ve been to the beach before so I know if there is sun it could be hot. I don’t think I’m going to swim in the water but maybe . . . I can’t wait!

By Kim

I get up in the morning and eat my breakfast. I brush my teeth and go to school. When I come into the classroom I hang my backpack on the hook and come to sit at the carpet. The teacher asks us if we have news. We can say yes or pass. Then we go to our chair and start our work.

By Winson

Kim gives us the pleasure of hearing her voice when she writes. We can delight in her excitement in anticipation of her trip. Kim’s writing expresses a strong point of view and reaction. She is clearly engaged with her topic. Her
writing expresses her individuality — it is vivid and she has chosen her language with care. Winson’s work, on the other hand, has correct conventions, but it is a lacklustre list. There is little analysis and no personal reaction to the events of his day. We don’t know Winson when we read his work.

Towards Powerful Personal Writing

Students will submit personal writing like Winson’s and the teacher, wanting something more, may prompt them by asking for “more.” They then add details such as going out for recess, doing math and eating lunch. This is probably not the “more” the teacher is looking for.

In this chapter of Writing Anchors, we offer models of explicit instruction that unpack the dimensions of powerful personal writing. Our first lesson is designed to put an end to listing as Winson does above and invite students to supply supporting details with techniques such as “Zoom in.” With explicit instruction, teachers show how to tell the inside and outside stories, demonstrating for students how characters respond to their situations. In later lessons, we provide opportunities for students to add details known only to the writer, to refine their personal accounts by using “Show, Don’t Tell” and to revisit work to write leads that will hook the reader. These anchor lessons demonstrate for students how to engage with their topic, express an individual perspective, and choose their words with care.

Not only will students learn how to make their personal writing richer, but they will also learn how to generate and shape their ideas. For example, in these lessons we use cartooning and webbing.

Both teachers and students will enjoy the processes and the products of the personal writing anchor lessons.
## Writing Profile for Personal Recounts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimensions of Writing</th>
<th>Undeveloped</th>
<th>2–3–4</th>
<th>Fully Developed</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>At a Glance:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Writing is brief,</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Writing is focused,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>hard to understand</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>expressive,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>and generic in tone.</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>easy to read and shows originality.</strong></td>
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### Engagement with the Topic
- **Meaning**
- **Ideas**
- **Details**

**Undeveloped**
- Topic may be unclear or illogical; lacks a main idea.
- Writing is brief, with little development of ideas and few details or explanations.

**Fully Developed**
- Topic is focused and easy to read; the meaning is clear.
- Ideas are developed with relevant details, examples and explanations. The writer expresses a strong point of view.
- Writing may include personal feelings and opinions.

### Vividness and Language Use
- **Energy**
- **Passion**
- **Voice**
- **Word Choice**
- **Variety**
- **Expressiveness**
- **Originality**
- **Creativity**

**Undeveloped**
- Writing provides stereotypical response to the topic and may contain clichés.
- The writer lacks energy and personal engagement.
- The voice of the writer is unclear — generic.
- Writing has no audience appeal in its current form.
- Language is simple.
- Writing lacks originality.

**Fully Developed**
- Writing is highly individual and expressive of the writer.
- The writer expresses energy for the topic.
- Rich and vivid language conveys details in the writer’s own voice.
- The text has audience appeal — it would do well read aloud.
- Words are chosen for effect.
- The writer may experiment with poetic devices such as metaphor or simile.
- Sensory language is included.
- The writer takes risks to use language and expression in original ways.

### Organization and Structure
- **Sequence**
- **Clarity**
- **Focus**
- **Cohesion**

**Undeveloped**
- Writing has little or no introduction.
- Writing loses focus; it is difficult to follow.
- There is a simple, repetitive sentence pattern.
- Ending may be abrupt.

**Fully Developed**
- Writing begins with an arresting lead.
- Ideas are easy to follow and cohesive; transition words are used effectively.
- Writing flows smoothly; it is clear and sequential.
- Sentence length and pattern are varied.
- Writing has a satisfying conclusion.

### Conventions
- **Spelling**
- **Punctuation**
- **Grammar**

**Undeveloped**
- Frequent errors in sentence structure, spelling, punctuation or grammar make the writing difficult to understand.
- Presentation is lacking care.

**Fully Developed**
- Basic sentence structure, grammar, spelling and punctuation are correct.
- There may be some errors on complex structures.
- Presentation shows care.
Why teach this anchor lesson?

- To show students how to engage with the topic and create vivid language by zooming in on one moment in time, telling the inside and outside stories, using dialogue to add impact, and telling details only the writer knows

How to do it

1. Inform students that they are going to use cartooning to zoom in on a personal experience in their life. They may choose an everyday moment, such as thinking as they lie in bed, losing keys, or discovering something, or a dramatic moment with lots of emotional impact, such as fighting with a sibling or going on a midway ride.

2. Model by recounting a personal experience or reading aloud from a piece of literature or one of the student samples included here. Explain what was happening — that’s the outside story — and what the subject was thinking and feeling — or the inside story.

3. Ask students to practise using the technique of zooming in to tell the inside and outside stories of just one event in their life. Explain that the reader will want to experience the event the way they did and to read details only they know. They will need to magnify the moment to include the details.

4. Provide cartoon paper — sheets of paper folded in quarters — for each student. Ask students to sketch their ideas using thinking and speech bubbles that feature limited dialogue to make the moment come to life in the reader’s mind.

5. Circulate, pausing to probe student thinking for details.

Remember the writing anchor: Zoom in!

Student Reflection

- What does a powerful piece of personal writing need?
- What did you learn from this lesson that you can use in Writing Workshop?

Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
- zoom in on one moment in time?
- tell the inside and outside stories?
- use dialogue to add impact?
- tells details only the writer knows?
Wasn't That Fun?

I couldn’t believe it! I was actually going to do it! I was lining up for the Cork Screw. I was wide eyed staring at the gigantic ride. High above me was endless hoops, turns, jerks, hills, loops, and twirls. My heart, I could feel pounding. “I chose to go on this, but why?” I asked myself. So I could get out of this terrible situation, I closed my eyes.

In my head I could imagine myself taking steps toward home. Suddenly, Alex yelled, “Good luck!” I was two people away from my worst night mare. Two passengers then I could be on board. I’d been chattering my teeth now for the past 20 minutes. They hurt, so did my knees. They had been knocking together since the last time I checked my watch.

Someone pushed my back. I looked back but no one was there. “Oh well” I thought aloud. While I was thinking about who pushed me someone latched me up! I looked around. I was trapped in the bars! I tried to escape the huge ride by closing my eyes. I was bumping up and down very slowly. We were going up the hill bump. Bump. Bump. I looked up for a moment at the sky to wish that I would have a safe journey. I said to myself “It can’t be that badddd HELP ME!!!!” I was taking the long journey down. Then we started the endless curves and bumps. We went straight. Then to the left! Then to the right! Then up. Then down. And to the right. Then left!

Oh no! We were coming up to the . . . Upside down, screaming, yelling, gasping for air loop da loop. Upside down! Twice! Straight, straight, straight, loop, loop around and around again. My head was spinning – and fast. Again up we went suddenly! I held onto my head thinking it might come off. I couldn’t take it any more! Then we slowly went down the hill. Straight. Straight.

I could see people waiting in line. It slides. Then halts. It’s over. I quietly sigh with relief. Terror loosened its grip from my shoulders from everyone begging me to go on. I had done it. I was a survivor. I got off the ride still scared, but proud. Then Alex, Jenny, and Zarhra came up and to me and hollered, “Wasn’t that fun?”

By Tracy

In her account of her dad’s search for the lost keys, Emma includes her own thoughts and feelings to expand the moment and take us with her into the story.

Lost and Found Keys

My dad lost his keys.

He cannot find them anywhere.

Are they under my bed,

In the toaster,

Or even in the oven?

Dad needs those keys to get to work.

He has to drive there FAST!

Without them he can’t start the car.

Or get into his building!

He has to be there at 9:00 sharp.

And it’s already 8:00!

Dad has to leave in 15 minutes,

Or else he’ll be late!

If he is late you don’t want to know.

What will happen?

Are the keys in the attic,

In a box?

I feel desperate.

My throat is dry.

I know I used those keys.

But I can’t remember where!

Dad thinks I lost his keys.

Now he’s yelling at me!

He needs those keys.

What will he do?

He looks in his coat pocket

Even in his shoe!

He finally gives up

He can’t find his keys.

He looks down to tie his shoe

And finds the keys on a cord

Around his neck.
In this piece, Jessicce (Grade 3) layers the details that only she can know to create the setting for her bedtime thoughts.

Me and my thoughts by Jessie Alexander

It was Tuesday night and I lay in bed of course I wasn’t tired so I lay there, my electric blanket on, warm by my pyjamas, comforted by Bear, night light on, door closed, regular light off, and I began to think. What if a friendly robot woke me up that morning and acted like a real child? What if a triceratops brushed my hair for me? What if we went outside and a flying horse took me to school? What if I met the Spice girls at school? What if the triceratops and flying horse gave the whole school rides? Tuesday’s thoughts have been nice and tomorrow will be different.
Scaffolding Recount with Smooth Transitions

**Why teach this anchor lesson?**

- To show students how to organize and structure their work using vocabulary related to time transitions: e.g., *first, next, then.*

**How to do it**

1. Engage students in a conversation about an experience they have in common, perhaps a field trip or a special event in the class. Ask students to list the events in order. Explain that they will learn to do a recount of events in order. For example:

   - We got on the bus
   - We went into the arena
   - We drove to Trout Lake Arena for skating
   - We sat down and put on our skates

   etc.

2. Introduce the chart of transition words, as shown below. Explain to students that fully developed writing has transitions that are easy for the reader to follow. Events flow in a logical sequence from one to the next often using words such as those on the chart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>to begin with</th>
<th>first</th>
<th>in the meantime</th>
<th>at the same time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>concurrently</td>
<td>simultaneously</td>
<td>at this point</td>
<td>meanwhile</td>
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<tr>
<td>afterwards</td>
<td>later</td>
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<td>third</td>
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<td>subsequently</td>
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3. In the case of a recount, the opening sentences not only have to draw the reader in, they also orient the reader to the topic. They explain who, what, where, when and why the event occurs. Engage students in developing appropriate opening sentences. For example: We’re off! On Tuesday, Feb. 10, students at Maquinna Annex School raced for the bus and skating at Trout Lake Arena.

4. Ask students to consider the list of events they have developed and to select two or three transition words that they can use to relate some of the events in sequence. Students talk to a partner about events in order, using the words and phrases for transitions. Select some students to share their examples.

5. Explain to students that, as it stands, they have a list or an outline, not a fully developed personal account. With students “flesh out” one of the events into a paragraph using techniques they have learned, for example, zooming in. Explain to students that they need to add the details so the reader can visualize the experience.

Special instructions: Select words from the chart given under #2 and record on the chalkboard or on a chart for student reference. The words should be appropriate to the students’ grade level.

It may be too much for younger students to learn transitions and the opening sentence in one lesson. Teachers may decide to revisit the writing to add information about opening sentences.
6. Demonstrate how the transition words are to be incorporated into what they know about powerful writing to create a sense of flow in the recount. (Older students may understand that each transition could begin a new paragraph.)

7. Students finish writing their recount of the event, adding details and using transition words appropriately.

Remember the writing anchor: Make smooth transitions.

**Student Reflection**

- Where were you able to use transition words without creating a list? Read your favorite section to a partner.
- What will you remember about transition words in your own writing?
- What will you remember about writing a recount of events?

**Evaluation**

To what extent was the student able to
- open with interesting information that orients the reader to the topic?
- develop the topic with details that help the reader to visualize the experience?
- use a variety of transition words to sequence events?
Why teach this anchor lesson?

- To show students how to engage with the topic and create vivid language by zooming in on a moment, telling the inside and outside stories, using dialogue to add impact, and telling details only the writer knows.

How to do it

1. Explain to students that each Friday they will be writing a letter to their parents in a book called The Friday Journal. They will take it home on Friday to show their parents and return it to school on Monday. Parents are requested to write to their children and tell about something that happened in their week or in their life at school.
2. Brainstorm things that have happened in school this week.
3. Review the criteria for powerful personal writing:
   - Zoom in on a moment.
   - Tell the inside and outside stories.
   - Use dialogue to add impact.
   - Tell details only the writer knows.
   - Use transition words appropriately.

You might work with the class with an example, such as this used with young students: “This week I played in the snow with my friends. We also made a snow poem. We are studying about space.” Discuss the writing in relation to the criteria. Once the class decides that this writing does not meet the criteria, work together to make improvements, for example:

This week I played in the snow with my friends. We worked together to make a huge snowman. We used stones for the face. Tracey let us use her scarf and we put it around the snowman’s neck. When we were finished, our snowman looked very funny and we felt proud.

Now the students can see how to make their writing more powerful.
4. Remind students not to write a list of all the events of the week, but rather to pick a focus and meet the criteria for powerful personal writing.

Remember the writing anchors: Zoom in! Tell the inside and outside stories.

Student Reflection

- What did you enjoy most this week?
- What parts of your work meet the criteria for personal writing? Share them with a partner.
Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
– zoom in on a moment?
– tell the inside and outside stories?
– use dialogue to add impact?
– tell details only the writer knows?
– use transitions appropriately?

Letter to Parents About the Friday Journal

(Date)

Dear Parents,

This book is called the “Friday Journal.” In it, your son or daughter will write a letter to you each week describing one or two of the things we did in class during the week. I will be correcting the Friday Journal minimally so that you will have an opportunity to see your child’s unedited writing development. I know you will be pleased to see the growth over the year.

In addition to the letter in the Friday Journal, there will frequently be a math activity for your student to do with the family. These math activities will reflect the current topics of study in the math class. Please participate with your child in these activities.

Finally, I want the children to enjoy writing the Friday Journal and sharing it with their parents. You know how discouraging it is to write to a friend who never writes back. You can help me at home by writing a note to your child each week in response to the Journal. You may write in English or a language of your choice. Please, take a few moments to write a message of encouragement in the Friday Journal.

Sincerely,
Sophie's letter shows her creativity and an original response to the Friday Journal assignment. Her detailed drawings describe her work in school that week and provide a starting point for a conversation with her dad.
Collections: Adding Detail from Personal Experience

This anchor lesson provides rich and authentic opportunities for students to write. If you include the recommended “Collections Day,” it could easily take a week. The original idea for the lesson comes from teacher Carolyne Sinclaire.

Byrd Baylor’s story Everybody Needs a Rock is an excellent complement to this lesson.

Why teach this anchor lesson?

- To show students how to engage with the topic and create vivid language by using dialogue to add impact and telling details only the writer knows
- To tell the reader how to follow a procedure to reach a goal

How to do it

1. Bring in a collection to share with the class. Show your collection and tell the students how you select items, where the items have been found or acquired, how you arrange or keep the collection, what it means to you, how you got started, and what special features your collection has.
2. Discuss any collections the students might have. Collections include such items as coins, toys, erasers, ornaments, tickets, mugs, and key chains. Anything goes! You’ll be surprised what students collect.
3. Organize “Collections Day.” Invite the students to bring their collections to school. They set up their collections on their desks. Divide the class into two groups. Half stay at their stations and talk about their collections while the others visit and ask questions. Then they reverse roles. If there is anyone without a collection, partner him or her with a friend. Take photographs of the students with their collections before the students carefully put them away.
4. Explain to students that they are going to write “Ten Rules for Collecting.” Remind students that personal writing needs to show strong connections to the writer’s own experience.
5. Model for students what is meant by adding more detail. For example, a student writes, “You need a shelf to put your stuffed animals on.” Write this on the blackboard or chart paper, and prompt the class much like this: “Tell me more about the size of the shelf. Is it large or small? Where is it? Why do you need a shelf rather than a box or a basket? What else might be important about this shelf?” As the students make suggestions, add them to the blackboard or chart. Here’s what the revised version might look like:

You need a shelf to display your animals. Not too high or it won’t be seen. Not too low because your little brother or sister might be able to get them. Eye level is just right. The shelf should be wide enough so they are not too crowded so each one can have some space to breathe. Your stuffed animals will thank you for giving them a space of their own.

6. Students set to work listing their 10 rules for collecting and then supplying more detail and tips for the collector to get it just right.
7. Share in partners. Make adding more detail a focus for conferences.
8. Students edit for spelling and make good copies to display on a bulletin board next to the photos taken.
Student Reflection

• How did your writing change from your first list of rules to your final copy?
• Which rule do you think demonstrates the criteria for this activity best?
• What did you learn in this lesson that you can apply to Writing Workshop?

Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
– use details from personal experience to create an impact on the reader?
– tell the reader how to follow a procedure to reach a goal?
– use the technique of speaking directly to the reader?

Collection of Marbles

1. It has to have a shiny sparkle in the sunlight.
2. It can’t have a chip in it or it won’t look good and it won’t roll very well.
3. You have to look at it like a dragon with glowing red eyes and blowing fire.
4. You must ask yourself — do I like it? and does it suit me?
5. It has to be as smooth as a crystal star in a foggy night.
6. You have to collect many different colours and sizes.
7. If you play against someone use the one marble that is not most special.
8. Try and collect as many marbles as you can.
9. End the game as good friends.

By Jacob

My Collection of Poetry

1. The first rule is you have to go to the back of your mind where all your different thoughts are.
2. Don’t write a poem because you want to pass time. Write it because you need a new way of expressing yourself.
3. You have to write according to your feelings. If you’re mad, write a poem that shows it. If you’re sad write a poem about it. You can do the same with all your feelings.
4. Don’t write for other people. If they want to write they should know what to write about.
5. It’s important you can see what you’re going to write. Not like you can see the blackboard or your deskmate, but see it in your mind’s eye.
6. To have a good poetry collection, you need to think about what you write. That way you always know if you really want to write this poem.
7. To have a good collection you have to have variety. There are many different kinds of poems: Haiku, limericks, diamante and many more.
8. You really should write more than one version of a poem. For example, if you write about a family trip, write a limerick and a diamante poem. That way you have more than one poem about it.
9. A good place to keep a poem is in your head. You can also print it on the computer. Then make up a book of it. That way it’s easier to transport.
10. The final and most important rule is you must be able to feel a poem not with your hands but with your heart.

By Sarah

Show, Don’t Tell: My Teacher

Why teach this anchor lesson?

• To show students how to engage with the topic, create vividness by conveying emotion “between the lines” in the details and make effective word choice, in other words, to introduce the Show, Don’t Tell technique

How to do it

1. Ask the class to suggest the name of someone they all know to write about.
2. The following is an example of how the writing teacher would lead the class to understanding how to apply the Show, Don’t Tell technique.

TEACHER: Let’s start with Ms Sleep. We all know her well. Tell me about Ms Sleep.
STUDENTS: She’s fun.
TEACHER: I agree. Ms Sleep is fun. I want to show you how to take out the word “fun” and still let the reader know that she is fun. Let’s try this together. What does Ms Sleep do that is fun?

The teacher begins a web on the board. She titles the web “Ms Sleep” and puts “FUN” in the centre of the web. As the students brainstorm examples of Ms Sleep’s fun-loving spirit, the teacher writes them on the spokes of the web. Using the examples from the web they craft the following together:

When we came inside from a snowy recess Ms Sleep had hot cocoa with marshmallow on top waiting for us. She helped us out of our soggy clothes and told us to warm our red hands around the sides of the cup until it was cool enough to drink. At Christmas time Ms Sleep brought us each a Christmas tree cookie and green icing and Smarties to decorate it. She just laughed and her blue eyes sparkled when we were greedy and piled the icing on thick to hold too many candies. Last month we had Aerobathon. Ms Sleep came with her skinny legs sticking out of her wide shorts and gave us a challenge. She called out to the whole school, “Anyone who can run as many laps as I can will come to the park with me for a lemonade lunch!” . . . the race was on!

TEACHER: Do you see how our story is more powerful than saying, “Ms Sleep is fun”? That is what I mean by show, don’t tell. We can show by examples what someone or something is like.

3. Ask the students to think of a person they know and a word to describe them. Examples: Dad—joker; Mom — thoughtful.

Our colleague, Brenda Boylan, does a daily activity with Show, Don’t Tell. She writes a “telling” sentence on the board and engages the class in rewriting it to “show.” For example:

Telling: Moatia was sad when she walked to school,
Showing: Moatia’s shoulders drooped, her backpack hung loosely from one arm, the bottom dragging on the road. Moatia walked slowly to school, kicking at a pebble in her path.
The student writes, “My dad plays stuff with me.” The teacher pauses to ask, “What’s stuff? Tell us exactly what your dad plays with you. Everybody’s dad plays “stuff” — that’s a generic term. Tell the story so it can only be your dad.” The student writes: “Whenever we go to the adventure playground my dad plays Pirates and the Treasure with me. We pretend that the culvert is a pirate hideout and we have to tiptoe past to get the gold.” The teacher responds, “Yes, now I see. Your dad has a great imagination! That’s specific and it could only be your dad.”

4. Engage students in a discussion about people they know and their qualities. Ask students to turn and share their thoughts with partners in response to the following prompts:
   • Who is the person you are thinking of?
   • Which one quality will you choose to describe?
   • What are some of the things the person does to show that quality?

5. Students write using Show, Don’t Tell. They can begin by putting the name of the person at the top of a web. In the centre of the web they put the quality they want to write about. Around the spokes of the web, they list examples.

6. Circulate and prompt students to think of specific, not generic examples.

7. Students meet to share their drafts informally.

Remember the writing anchor: Show, don’t tell.

Student Reflection

• What is your favorite Show, Don’t Tell example? Read it out loud for your partner.
• What did you learn in the lesson today that you can use in Writing Workshop?

Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
– convey meaning through specific examples?

My Dad

My Dad helps me with math whenever I have homework. He takes me to Toys R Us and gives me ideas for games to get. He makes pizza and birdhouses for me. He even does my hair for special occasions and helps me make birthday cards for my friends.

By Kim

Daddy

Daddy, thank you for staying up with me last night when I was sick. Thank you for taking us out for dinner when Mom’s away. Sometimes in the spring you take us biking. Brave Dad, you had to take us out swimming by 4:00 and we got out of school at 3:05. You are so brave! I love you.

By Delaney
Why teach this anchor lesson?

- To demonstrate the power of rehearsing with a sketch or a map to help students visualize the story
- To consolidate lessons in personal writing taught so far, including zooming in on a moment, telling the inside and outside stories, using dialogue to add impact, telling details only the writer knows, creating impact on the reader with details from personal experience, and using the Show, Don’t Tell technique

How to do it

1. Tell a story about a special place that means a lot to you. It could be a memory from childhood about a special place where you played with a friend or sibling, a place you visited with your parents, a memory of a vacation or just a memory of a place that you remember fondly. Keep it short, but make the point that the place was somewhere where you were happy. You know things about this place that no one else will know. It means something special to you.

2. Instruct students to close their eyes and imagine a place that is very special for them. Guide their thinking. Talk about where this place might be (at home, at Grandma’s house, at the beach, in the park, at a favorite vacation spot). When they have chosen the place, ask them to open their eyes and draw a map or picture of the place. Have them work in silence.
   - Continue to prompt their thinking: “Are you alone? Who is in the place with you? What can you hear? What can you see?” Emphasize that this is a sketch, not a complete picture. Give no more than 10 minutes to the drawing.

3. Students share their sketch with a partner and tell their story about their special place.

4. Students begin to draft their work. Circulate, pausing to offer help, probe students’ thinking and highlight powerful examples.

5. Students meet informally to share their writing.

Remember the writing anchors: Zoom in! Make it your own! Tell details only the writer knows.

Student Reflection

- What did you enjoy about this writing time today?
- Choose the passages from your work that best exemplify the criteria we are working on in personal writing.
- What will you use from this lesson in Writing Workshop?
Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
– write with a sense of personal voice in the piece?
– reflect their own experience?
– use detail to make an impact on the reader?

By Clarissa

The Old Closet

The old closet floor is bumpy with jagged, sticking up nails. It feels rough on my hands. It smells musty and old but somehow it has a strong homey feeling like it’s putting its arms around me in a big hug. The old closet is relaxing. The walls are white washed and the rods and shelves neatly stuffed with clothes and games. The only sounds you can hear when the closet door is shut are the bumps and clangs of pots while dinner is being made. I go there to think my own thoughts in privacy. I’m going there now.

By Alison

Alison writes about a special place where she goes to hide “to think my own thoughts in privacy.” Notice how she includes sensory details: the bumpy floor, rough on her hands; the smell, musty but also homey like a “big hug”; the sounds from the kitchen of pots and pans as dinner is made. The Grade 5 student takes us in our imaginations to the old closet through her use of detail.

Clarissa’s sketch shows details that later the Grade 4 student will include in her writing.
Allison's special place is about playing a game with her cousins. The Grade 3 student describes how to play the game with the balloons. The fun she is having is shared with the reader in the invitation, "Would you like to come to my special place? I have a balloon waiting for you."
Find a Hook

**Why teach this anchor lesson?**

- To strengthen student writing on the dimension of Engagement with the Topic by creating a strong opening
- To show students that good writers often revisit their work to polish it

**How to do it**

1. Ask students to look through the books in their independent reading collection for opening sentences that draw them in and make them want to keep reading. Provide sticky notes or markers so students can bring their examples to the lesson. (Tip: Magazine articles often have great openings.)

2. Ask students to share examples from their search. As they do so, ask students to suggest what makes the opening powerful. They will discover that effective leads may give a hint of a mystery or intrigue, ask a question, spring from the middle of the action, include a quotation, include a sound effect, start with an amazing fact or set a mood. They hook the reader.

3. Revisit a piece of writing the class has done together in a previous lesson with a view to rewriting the opening to make it stronger. In the following example, we have used the piece about Ms Sleep in Show, Don’t Tell: My Teacher.

   When we came inside from a snowy recess Ms Sleep had hot cocoa with marshmallow on top waiting for us. She helped us out of our soggy clothes and told us to warm our red hands around the sides of the cup until it was cool enough to drink. At Christmas time Ms Sleep brought us each a Christmas tree cookie and icing and smarties to decorate it. She just laughed and her blue eyes sparkled when we were greedy and piled the icing on thick to hold way too many candies. Last month we had Aerobathon. Ms Sleep came in her wide shorts with her skinny legs sticking out and she gave us a challenge. She called out to the whole school, “Anyone who can do as many laps and I can will come to the park with me for a lemonade lunch!” . . . the race was on!

4. Engage students in experimenting with new openings. While you write, think aloud and experiment with each type of opening sentence.

Depending on the age of the students, you may want to spread this lesson out over several days. Perhaps your group could have a series of mini-lessons in Writing Workshop and apply each type of opening to a new piece or revisit a finished piece.
What Does an Effective Opening Do?

- Gives a hint of a mystery that makes the reader want more information—*As I entered the classroom, a sweet smell greeted me.*
- Asks a question—*Is your teacher full of fun? You should meet Ms Sleep.*
- Springs from the middle of the action—*The bell rang just as we finished the snowman.*
- Includes a quotation—*“Who wants hot cocoa?” Ms Sleep called.*
- Includes a sound effect—*“Buzz!” Recess is over. Good thing cause I’m freezing.*
- Starts with an amazing fact—*Hot cocoa and snow go well together.*
- Sets the mood—*With teeth chattering from the cold, sodden snowpants weighing us down we slopped in from recess.*

5. Ask students to select a piece of writing that they have already finished to revise the opening in one of the ways learned.

Remember the writing anchor: Find a hook.

**Student Reflection**

- Share your revised opening(s) with your partner and explain which type of hook you used.
- What did you learn today that you can use in Writing Workshop?

**Evaluation**

To what extent was the student able to
- create a strong opening?
- identify different ways to hook the reader?

**Anchor Lessons Based on Response to Literature**

One aspect of personal writing that many teachers use in the language arts program is response to literature. Typically, students read books independently and then respond in their journals in open-ended ways, commenting on what they liked, how they made connections with the text, and what they felt about the story. These journals may be used in literature circles, where small groups of students meet to share ideas about books.

There are many different ways to engage students in responding to literature, but as with all classroom assignments, their writing can be improved with teacher demonstration, guided practice and feedback, and ways of scaffolding the response. The open-ended instruction to write about what the book made you feel often results in the generic “I liked it. It was good.” In the anchor lessons in this next section, we make some suggestions for ways to include response to literature in Writing Workshop.

All these ideas depend on the organization of students into book clubs or literature circles, composed of members who have read the same text. The discussion that takes place in these groups is part of the process. Students may write *before* the discussion, *after* the discussion, or both, moving back and forth between talk and writing. We suggest here that part of Writing Workshop should be anchor lessons on what makes an effective, well-crafted and powerful response. A colleague, Lisa House, helped us develop a rubric to assess student response to literature and tried it with her students in Grades 8 and 9. We include it as Blackline Master 2.2. It provides the basis for criteria setting and evaluation.
Recounting or Retelling a Story

Why teach this anchor lesson?

- To scaffold reader response by starting with the most literal
- To increase student awareness of the structure of stories and so help their own story writing
- To develop students’ ability to synthesize information

How to do it

1. Students read a story or a chapter from a novel. They meet in groups and in discussion summarize what they have read. They may summarize the beginning, the middle and the ending sections using the language of transitions: first, then, and finally. Alternatively, they may summarize a special section of the text, perhaps the scariest, the funniest or the saddest.
2. After the discussion, the teacher calls the whole class together, and using an overhead transparency, creates a communal synopsis of the shared text, focusing on main ideas and important supporting details, and eliminating the least important information. The summary will convey information about the most important themes in the story. If appropriate, it will show awareness of character motivation.
3. Students then practise this skill as they read and retell another short story or chapter from their novel. They share their writing in a literature circle, each taking a turn to read their synopsis.

Remember the writing anchor: Find the keys.

Student Reflection

- How did you decide what to include and what to leave out of your summary?
- How did recounting the story help you to understand it better?
- Did the themes and characters in the story become clearer?

Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
- show awareness of major themes or character motivation?
- to synthesize the main ideas and eliminate extraneous detail?

Gabriele identifies with a mother owl.

I am a Great Grey Owl

I am a Great Grey Owl. I am a proud nocturnal creature who sleeps in the day and hunts at night. I find my food. Wait! I hear something in the grass! It's a mouse quivering with fright. I am a mighty owl. I see the mouse and that will be my rodent meal. I glide and go down. I swoop and get the mouse. I strike! My talons grab the mouse and I eat. I spit the pellet out. Now I give food to my babies when they are hungry. Time to sleep till nightfall returns and it's time to prey.

By Gabrielle
"Oh, I'm so hungry" wolf groaned. Wolf groaned as he walked around town with an empty stomach. "I know, I'll visit the farm!" he said. As the Wolf walked to the farm, he was shocked to see farm animals reading. "Oh, my imagination's playing tricks on me again" he said. But, it wasn't his imagination. Wolf jumped over the fence and howled. "What's that noise? Can't they be quiet here?" Duck asked. The wolf was shocked to know that farm animals like us aren't scared of him. "What? Why aren't you scared of me?" he asked. "Can't you see? We're reading here." I replied. "Can you please go now? We're reading here." Pig said as he gave wolf a little push outside. "What's wrong, why aren't they scared of me?" Wolf asked himself on his way out. "Oh, I know! I'll go to school!" he suggested. The teacher and the kids were frightened to see a wolf in their classroom. After a lot of work, Wolf finally learned how to read and write.

The following day, Wolf walked in the farm and tried to amuse us by reading his book. Wolf read sentence to sentence. "I think you can do better then that" Duck interrupted. Wolf was confused, how can he read better than that? Soon enough, Wolf decided to practice reading in the Library. He read every book and couldn't take his eyes off them. "After a lot of reading, I think I'm ready now" he said.


As soon as Wolf reached the farm, he rang the doorbell and walked in. Wolf read his very own book, until duck, Pig and I were amused by his reading. Wolf read lots and lots of stories until, "do you want to join us in our picnic later?" I asked. "Sure, why not!" he replied.

Later on, everyone ate and read their books. "You know, we can be professional story readers" I suggested. "And travel around the world!" Pig continued. "We can start tomorrow!" Duck replied. Soon enough, all four of us became professional story readers.
The Gift of Words

Why teach this anchor lesson?
• To increase students’ awareness of literary language
• To develop a greater sensitivity towards vocabulary and the meaning of words

How to do it
1. Share a story with the class. Model what is meant by a Gift of Words. Show how the author has made deliberate word choices. Explain that these are a gift from the writer to the reader.
2. Talk about the Gifts of Words you have chosen and why you chose them.
3. On large chart paper using felt markers, the students work cooperatively in pairs to retell the story. Partner talk aids the retelling. Students must incorporate the Gifts of Words that you have provided on the strips of paper by pasting them into the text they are creating. To help younger students, or those who need more help, photocopy three or four key images to help them structure their retelling.

Remember the writing anchor: Play with words!

Student Reflection
• Which was your favorite Gift of Words and why?
• How did having the Gifts of Words help you to write your version of the story?

Evaluation
To what extent was the student able to
– incorporate the Gifts of Words into the reading in a meaningful way?

Three Extensions
1. Students may collect Gifts of Words as they read and record them in their reading journals. They could respond to the passages, describing the thoughts, images or feelings that they evoke, and then share these in their literature circles. Below is a Grade 6 student example.

From “Fox”:
“Fox with his haunted eyes and rich red coat. He flickers through the trees like a tongue of fire and Magpie trembles.”
I liked this piece of language more than the others because of the image it creates in my mind. A flash of red here, a dash of it there, it reminds me of the book, “Chasing Redbird.” All you see is that flicker of red, just like fire, and the eyes! Sorrow; loneliness and envy is what one would see when looking into those
magnificent eyes. The rage of living a lifetime of lonesomeness, waiting, feeling, and breathing as a mere dart of red... beautiful and respected red, not the sort to befriend.

By Chloe

2. Ask students to select words and phrases from a piece of literature that engages them. They then arrange the words and elaborate with their own ideas to create a found poem. Below is a student sample inspired by Thomas Locker’s *Water Dance*.

![My Dance

My Dance

Ever since the world began
I have been moving in an endless circle.
Spiraling, plunging, tumbling, cascading

Some people say I am one thing,
Others say I am many,
I am more precious than the rarest jewel and yet,
I am the most abundant substance on earth.

Sometimes I fall from the sky
other times I merely float and drift,
but throughout my journey
I am always dancing... dancing on forever.

I have seen many places
and caused many things,
but have remained the same
for as long as the world has spun.
Destined to forever dance...
I am the water.

Four sketches and the selection of key words helped plan the next piece of writing. Note how this young Grade 3 writer conveys an understanding of the character’s feelings.
Dear Yohi,

I remember when you found me, on the ground, how you helped me. When I fell in love with you, gentle kind heart, we were happy together. When we got married, but why then, you only cared about money? Money, money, money. Who can't you be so kind and loving? I fell in love with you, why are you so curious? I woke up though the doors were open, and I saw my second wife. I knew you weren't very, very, very time. Why did you go? Your money is your only thinking, your money, all your money. Did you even care about me? If you did, you wouldn't call me. I don't think you really care about me. I don't think you have another wife. Don't treat her as you did to me or else she will leave you. Don't just think about money. Think about caring about people I just hope that you have learned a lesson.

From: Your Wife

---

Dear Crane Wife,

I remember when you gave me hope. I hope you forgive me for being so rude. I hope I will stay in your heart. I will always remember you in my heart. I remember how kind and gentle you were. I will also remember how exquisite dining sitting, jelly, and shining your patterns were. I will never forget to see you do all of that. For me, just to me. I hope you will write me back. Please come and visit me again. You were a very, very, very nice woman. I realized when I was ill the bond but I will still love you. Always and you will still remain in my heart. I will always think about you and how generous you were to me. I was a good knowing you crane wife. Please remember me where you are. And you gold exquisite patterns were very very pretty and lovely and useful.

The Crane Wife
Connecting

**Why teach this anchor lesson?**

- To increase students’ ability to connect literature to their own experience, thus deepening their understanding of the text

**How to do it**

1. Model the process of making connections to a story by commenting on your own personal connections as you read aloud. You can make connections to things that have happened to you, to things you know about but have not actually experienced, or to other books and stories. Films and videos and music may also form part of the landscape of personal connection.
2. Give the students a story to read, or assign a chapter from their novel. Explain that they are to stop and notice whenever the story reminds them of something they have experienced. They can record these connections on sticky notes and place them on the page.
3. In the literature circle, ask students to share their connections.
4. Finally, assign a writing activity in which the students explore the story they have read through the lens of their personal connections. Sentence starters can be especially helpful for this. Some suggestions follow:
   - This makes me think of (a story like this one) because . . .
   - This makes me think of (a time when something like this happened to me)
   - This makes me think of (something I know about the world)

Remember the writing anchors: Make it your own! Tell details only the writer knows. Tell the inside and outside stories.

**Student Reflection**

- How did thinking about your own experiences help you to understand the characters in the story?
- What did you learn about the story by making your own connections to it?

**Evaluation**

To what extent was the student able to
- make insightful connections to personal ideas, opinions, experiences and feelings that help develop conclusions about the text?
- draw upon a repertoire of reading, viewing and listening to make connections?
In this response to the story of White Lily by Ting-Xing Ye, the student relates the story to her own feelings and thinks about how her family would behave if she was in pain.
Reflecting and Evaluating

Why teach this anchor lesson?

- To assist students in forming opinions and expressing their original ideas
- To help them think ahead, or predict the outcome of a story

How to do it

1. Provide sentence starters for the response writing that focus on evaluating the meaning of the story. Here are some suggestions:
   - This story makes me feel __________ because . . .
   - I used to think ______________ but now I __________________
   - I wonder . . .
   - In my opinion . . .
   - I understand why ____________________, but I think ____________________
   - The message I think the author wanted us to understand is . . .
   - Questions I have for the author (or character) are . . .
   - I understand the story to mean . . .
   - This story will change the way I ______________ because ____________________

2. The students write a response either after the story is complete, or during the story, allowing for predictions to be made based on unfolding evidence from the text. Encourage them to use quotations and reference the text accurately. These responses are used in the literature circle to clarify understandings and develop further inferences about the meaning.

Remember the writing anchor: Make it your own!

Student Reflection

- How did writing about your opinions help you understand the author’s point of view?
- Did you have questions for the author? If so, did they help you clarify your understanding?

Evaluation

To what extent was the student able to
- show through writing an awareness of the big ideas in the story (theme, character, ambiguities)?
- make predictions consistent with the text?

Below is a Grade 5 student’s passionate response to a text read.

Feb. 13, ’03. Reading Response

I don’t understand why those people have to kill the baby gibbons’ mothers because everyone needs a mom. Those people should have realized that without their parents they wouldn’t even be there! How would they have felt if their mothers were killed? To do something like that, they must be really cruel. They shouldn’t kill the animals’ moms just for zoo. Zoos aren’t as important as parents. Killing animals is like acting as a murderer.
# Transition Words

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words that show sequence:</th>
<th>first</th>
<th>next</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
<td>following that</td>
<td>now</td>
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<td>as time passed</td>
<td>fourth</td>
<td>presently</td>
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<td>at the same time</td>
<td>immediately</td>
<td>previously</td>
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<td>in the meantime</td>
<td>second</td>
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<td>soon</td>
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<td>eventually</td>
<td>meanwhile</td>
<td>then</td>
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<td>finally</td>
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<th>Words that signal the end:</th>
<th>in essence</th>
<th>in addition to</th>
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<td>in the same way</td>
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<td>briefly</td>
<td>in summary</td>
<td>likewise</td>
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<td>in brief</td>
<td></td>
<td>moreover</td>
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<tr>
<td>in conclusion</td>
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<th>Unifying expressions:</th>
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<td>all together</td>
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<td>in essence</td>
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<td>also</td>
<td>to conclude</td>
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<td>but</td>
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<tr>
<td>furthermore</td>
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<th>Words used in comparing and contrasting:</th>
<th>in addition to</th>
<th>in the other hand</th>
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<td>but</td>
<td>in the other hand</td>
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<td>by comparison</td>
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<td>except</td>
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<tr>
<td>in contrast</td>
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<th>Words that emphasize:</th>
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<th>in any event</th>
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<td>never</td>
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<td>certainly</td>
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<td>surely</td>
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<td>definitely</td>
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<td>unquestionably</td>
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<td>emphatically</td>
<td>in any event</td>
<td>without a doubt</td>
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<tr>
<td>eternally</td>
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<td>without question</td>
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<tr>
<th>Words for examples:</th>
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<tr>
<td>for example</td>
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<td>for instance</td>
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<tr>
<td>in another case</td>
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<tr>
<td>in this case</td>
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# Rubric for the Assessment of Response to Literature

Name: __________________________  Date: __________________

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Level One</th>
<th>Level Two</th>
<th>Level Three</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Retell</strong></td>
<td>In an age-appropriate way:</td>
<td>In an age-appropriate way:</td>
<td>In an age-appropriate way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>response shows little or no awareness of major themes or insight into character motivation</td>
<td>response shows some awareness of major themes and insight into character motivation</td>
<td>response shows strong awareness of major themes and insight into character motivation</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>demonstrates little or no understanding of the author’s message</td>
<td>demonstrates some understanding of the author’s message</td>
<td>demonstrates a clear and insightful understanding of the author’s message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Connect</strong></td>
<td>response makes simple connections to personal experience, but does not develop interpretations or draw conclusions</td>
<td>response makes some connections between own ideas, experiences and opinions that help develop conclusions about the text</td>
<td>response makes insightful connections to own ideas, opinions, personal experiences and feelings that help develop conclusions about the text</td>
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<td></td>
<td>makes connections to other writing, art, or videos</td>
<td>makes connections to other writing, art, or videos</td>
<td>makes connections to other writing, art, or videos</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Reflect</strong></td>
<td>response poses simple questions about the story elements that need little or no inference</td>
<td>response poses questions about the big ideas (theme, character, and ambiguities)</td>
<td>response poses insightful questions that help deepen understanding of the text and develop inferences</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>predictions are not based on textual clues or context; they are more of a guess</td>
<td>questions may help to clarify some points of difficulty in the text</td>
<td>questions help clarify points of difficulty in the text</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>predictions are consistent with the text</td>
<td>predictions are consistent with the text</td>
<td>predictions are consistent with the text and supported by quotations</td>
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Retelling a Story in Parts

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