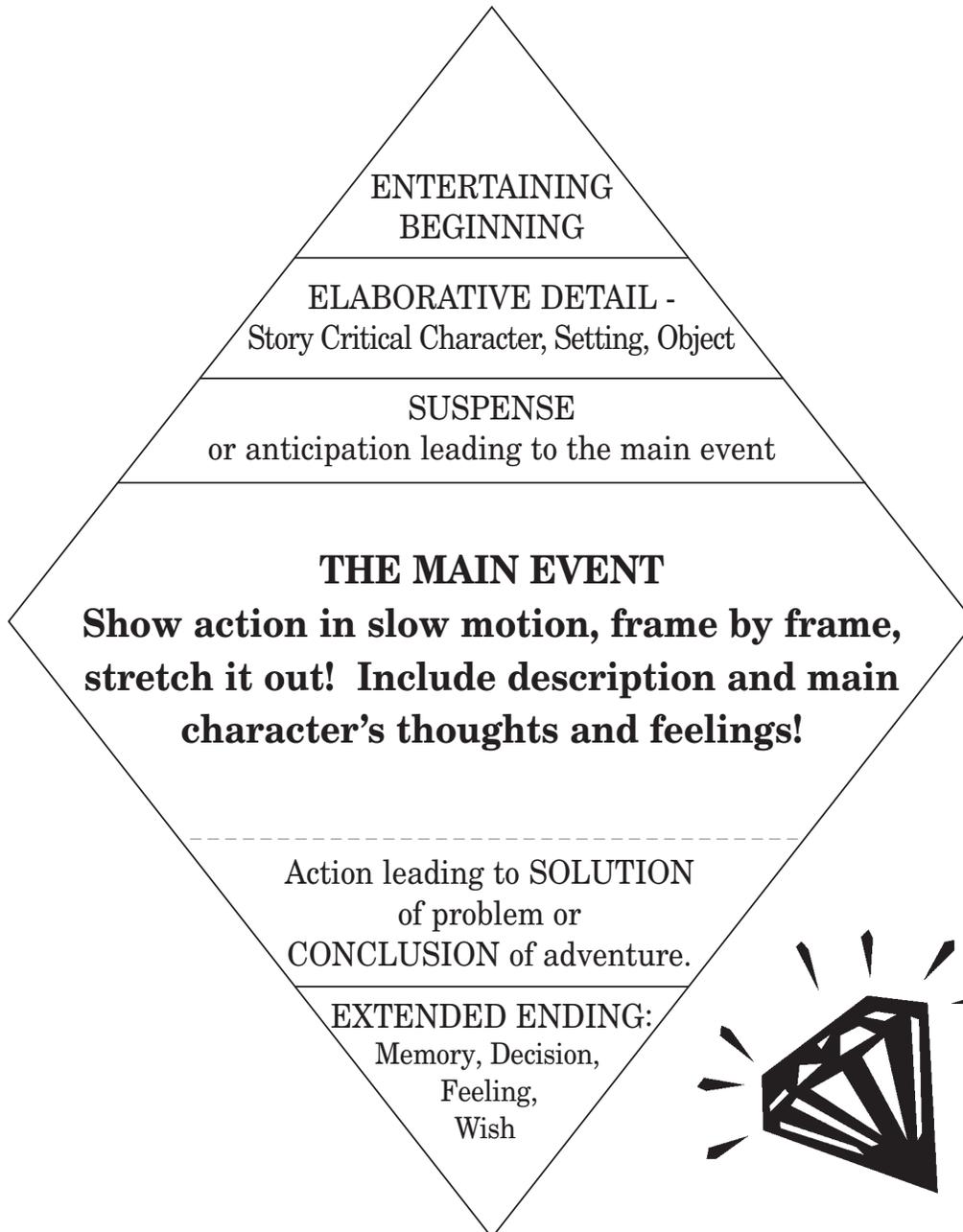


Narrative Writing Diamond



Introduction to Empowering Writers

How is the “Empowering Writers” approach to teaching writing unique? And how will these activities meet student and teacher needs?

To answer that, think about the following observations:

- Teachers interpret “writing as a process” differently, and thus deliver writing instruction in vastly different ways.
- There is often little consistency across or between grade levels in the teaching of writing.
- Frequently we see little consistency in the vocabulary/terminology of writing across and between grade levels, resulting in student (and teacher) confusion.
- Many teachers feel insecure in their own ability as writers. Though they can certainly distinguish good writing from less than satisfactory writing, they have few specific strategies on how to move children forward.
- Most student writing that we see lacks focus, elaborative detail, voice, and a clear “sense of story”.
- Managing a “writing as a process” classroom in which a diverse group of students are working on a number of different projects is difficult. It is extremely challenging to assess and meet individual needs and to provide appropriate instruction designed to move individuals forward. Scheduling individual conferences in a timely way, while keeping the rest of the class on-task, working independently, is difficult.

Does this sound familiar? Our objective was to design lessons that would instruct *both teachers and students in specific skills* that all good writers possess. This approach is quite different from the free write/conference/mini-lesson sequence so often practiced in the traditional writer’ workshop. Our approach provides students with a solid foundation for process writing by teaching basic skills before they begin to write. Skill lessons build upon one another in a *logical sequence* with clear-cut lessons for teachers to follow. The rationale for this came from the experience of growing up in a family of artists and musicians - an artist learns and practices composition, form, and perspective before setting the brush to the canvas. A pianist learns scales and arpeggios before tackling a sonata. As writers, we know that students could benefit by learning about focus, elaboration, great beginnings, suspense, main events, plot, and endings in much the same way. They could set about writing with these skills up their sleeves, thus eliminating a good amount of the frustrating revision work that results from a conference and mini-lesson *after* the first draft.



Introduction to Empowering Writers (cont.)

The framework that we developed for use with this program is unique. It provides a much more solid foundation on which students build their narratives upon than more traditional story maps, summary planners, and webs. The framework we developed is called “The Writing Diamond”. We have a chart of the writing diamond displayed in our classrooms at all times for student reference. It can be introduced as you move through the series of activities, skills, techniques presented in the “Empowering Writers” materials, and referred to during assessment, discussion, and process writing. The diamond (pictured, next page) provides a common frame of reference and vocabulary which moves writing into a more objective realm for teachers and students.



entertaining
beginning - action

The Best Project Yet Genre: Personal Experience

description
of
character,
setting

(My grandfather looks up from his workbench and smiles at me.) "Come on in, Katie," he exclaims. He looks down at the wood in his old gnarled hands, but I can see he's still smiling. The workbench has been all set up for me - a pile of small boards on one side, glue and paint on the other. Grandpa pats the seat beside him and I hop into the chair.

"A birdhouse," he says. "We'll each make one." He hands me a piece of smooth wood, carefully cut. I take it in my hands and run my fingers over it. I can see how he's spent a lot of time sanding it. My heart pounds a little as I imagine it hanging in the tree outside my window. This will be the best project yet, I think!

He speaks softly to me, explaining how to attach the sides, then the small pointy roof. The perch is the hardest part, and he steadies my small hands with his. He never takes the tools from my hands or tries to rush me. We work, side by side, and he lets me do the work.

I choose carefully from his whole shelf full of paints, and he puts the old tin can of bristly brushes of every shape and size on the worktable. Pale yellow for the walls, and dark green for the trim, that's what I choose. We're both quiet, Grandpa and me, both of us absorbed in our work, and feeling comfy and cozy together. We both stick our tongues out a little on the hard parts, and squint our eyes at the places where two colors meet - like two peas in a pod is what Grandma always says.

Finally we both sit back and admire our work. Funny thing - his birdhouse was painted gray and white - just like my house. Mine is yellow and green, just like his house. We smile at each other and he ruffles my hair with his hand. We both understand what we've done. We've each made a reminder of one another to keep in our own backyards. So at least when we're far apart, we're reminded of where the other of us is!

Grandpa gets the nutty smelling linseed oil and some small rags and we clean up. We don't rush, and we don't hurry, because right down to the last second, every project with my Grandpa feels like the best project yet!

description is underlined

conclusion

slow motion
action

ending



Name _____

Starting Off on the Right Foot!



One way to make your writing more interesting and entertaining is by starting off with a great, attention grabbing beginning! Here are some techniques authors use to begin their stories:

1.) AN ACTION - *Put your main character in your setting doing something interesting and relevant to the story.*

Ask: What would you do?

ex. Joey ran full steam ahead across the corral and jumped on the back of the wild stallion!

2.) DIALOGUE - *Have your main character say something.*

Ask: What might you say or exclaim?

ex. "I can't wait to see the Grand Canyon!" I shouted.

3.) A THOUGHT OR QUESTION - *Show the main character's thoughts, or raise a story question.*

Ask: What would you wonder or worry?

ex. I wondered if we'd make it out alive.

4.) A SOUND - *Grab the reader's attention through the use of a sound.*

Ask: What might you hear?

ex. BOOM! Jack flinched as the thunder and lightning rolled in over the hills.

Beginning tips - Begin your story as close to the main event as possible. For example, if it's a story about being marooned on a tropical island, don't begin the story two weeks before you leave, reading through travel brochures. Begin on or near the island. If you're writing about a day at the beach, don't begin waking up, getting dressed, and having breakfast--begin at the beach! Get right into the action so that you don't lose your reader! Also, since it is very difficult to weave many characters throughout the story, a good strategy is to have your main character start off alone.



Introduction to Elaborative Detail

Name _____

Story Critical Characters, Settings, Objects

In every story there are certain people, places, and things that are especially important. These are called **story critical characters, settings, objects**. Authors highlight these story critical characters, settings, and objects by stopping and taking time to **describe** these. Read each story plan below. Think about the characters, settings, and objects that would be most interesting to the reader.

Underline story critical characters in RED, settings in BLUE, and objects in GREEN. On the lines below each plan, list the character/setting/ and or object that will later be described in an elaborative segment.

- 1.) This story is about exploring a mysterious cave. Inside I discover a talking dragon. The dragon gives me a magical stone to take home with me.
- 2.) A space alien knocked on my door. He captured me and took me in his spacecraft. At a stop on an unusual planet I overpowered him, took over the controls and landed at home.
- 3.) I took a trip to a beautiful rain forest. I met a most unusual creature there. It shared a piece of amazing tropical fruit with me.
- 4.) One autumn day I strolled along a country road collecting colorful fallen leaves.
- 5.) I baked some delicious chocolate chip cookies with my grandmother in her cozy kitchen.

BONUS: Circle the story plans that are realistic personal experience narratives. Box those which seem to be imaginative or fantasy narratives. Put a star beside the character/problem/solution story plans.

Name _____

General or Specific?



Read each pair of descriptions below. Circle the example in each pair that uses effective specific detail, rather than overly **general detail**. Which description tells you more? Which is more entertaining?

- 1.) She wore a really pretty fancy cape.

A cape of purple velvet trimmed in soft white fur covered her shoulders.

- 2.) The dog had a luxurious reddish coat, long silky ears, and alert black eyes.

It was a nice, awesome dog that looked so cute.

- 3.) The field was covered in tall golden grass and dotted with red and blue wildflowers.

The view across the big field was very beautiful and nice.

- 4.) The cake looked really good and delicious to eat.

The double chocolate cake dripped in thick white frosting.

- 5.) A cute little bird perched there on the brown branch of the tree.

A small green bird with bluish wings and a delicate yellow beak perched on the branch.

- 6.) The shutters hung crookedly and the windows were shattered.
Faded paint peeled around the rickety front stairs.

The old house was really a mess and looked like it needed some attention.

- 7.) What an interesting looking old man over there!

The old fellow had a long white beard and bushy silver eyebrows curled in arcs above his golden colored eyes.

BONUS: Go back and read each GENERAL description. Underline the overly general adjective that the author used ineffectively.



Name _____

PIRATE 

REMEMBER: • When you elaborate, you STOP THE ACTION and observe.

- Use the five senses!
- Your description should make the reader feel as though he or she is *right there* with the main character.
- Use specific rather than general details.
- Remember that sentence variety is important!

Write an ELABORATIVE SEGMENT of the **character** below. Tell specifically what she/he looked like (clothing, features, size), and how he/she behaved. Do NOT write a grocery list. Use interesting words and make it entertaining!

The **pirate** stood before me.

Teaching Suggestions -

Pirate Description

Possible Detail Generating Questions:

- What kind/color of hair/eyes/nose/mouth did he/she have?
- What was his/her height/weight? (no number words - compare!)
- What kind of scars or other distinguishing marks did he/she have?
- What was she/he wearing? (clothing/jewelry)
- What was she/he carrying/holding?
- What kind of expression was on his/her face?
- How did he/she move?
- And . . . any others that come to mind!

Sample Sentence Starters:

His/her eyes/hair/mouth/nose was _____.

I couldn't believe the pirate's _____.

The pirate _____.

He/she was the size of _____.

This buccaneer wore _____.

His/her frame was covered in _____.

He/she wore _____.

In his/her hand _____.

At his/her side hung a _____.

I shivered/laughed/gasped at _____.

The pirate/fiend/culprit looked as though _____.

She/he moved like _____.

When he/she walked _____.

Teaching Suggestions -

Pirate Description

Sample Modeled Revision:

He was a fierce looking fellow - tall and thin and pointy all over--a pointy chin, pointy nose, pointy ears with golden rings, pointy elbows and knees--even a pointy black beard. His skin was wrinkled and weathered a deep shade of brown. I wondered how he got the long curved scar that ran from his mouth all the way over to his ear lobe. A long black braid hung out from under the bandana beneath his black three cornered hat. He wore a red striped shirt and ragged knickers under a long black velvet waist coat. I fought the urge to hold my nose at the salty stench that surrounded him. I could hardly tear his eyes away from the cutlass and pistols slung under his thick leather belt.

Curriculum Connections:

- Art connection - On extra large construction paper have students draw a picture of their pirate. Have them fill the page with their bigger than life buccaneer. Display with student writing samples stapled to treasure chest cut-outs. Or, have them create life-sized pirate figures out of butcher paper, but cut out the face. Students stand behind and look through the facial cut-out, “becoming” the pirate.
- Literature connections:
 - *Pirates, by Gail Gibbons, *Tough Boris, by Mem Fox
 - *Pirate School, by Colin McNaughton
 - *Pirates Past Noon, by Mary Pope Osborne
 - *The Not So Jolly Roger, Jon Scieszka
- For older students: Literature Connections:
 - *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle - Avi
 - *Treasure Island - Robert Louis Stevenson

* See bibliography page 387 for publisher’s information.



Name _____

SHOWING OR TELLING?



Read each story segment below. If the author SHOWS the character's feelings, write an "S" in the blank. If the author just TELLS the character's feelings, write a "T" in the blank.

- 1.) _____ Joey was really scared.
- 2.) _____ Annabelle felt a smile spread across her face. Her heart seemed to leap in her chest and she clapped her hands together in delight.
- 3.) _____ Laticia slammed her book onto the table and stamped her foot. You could almost see steam coming out of her ears!
- 4.) _____ David was mad at Sam.
- 5.) _____ Paulo dragged his backpack behind him. Sweat trickled down his back. Each step took a huge effort. He wiped his brow and thought about how nice an ice cold lemonade would taste.
- 6.) _____ Nick's stomach seemed to churn. His palms were sweaty and he watched the clock. The time seemed to drag along. He thought again and again about the test. He gulped as the teacher handed out the paper.
- 7.) _____ Sarah was excited about her big day.
- 8.) _____ That was when Janie got furious.
- 9.) _____ Tommy shivered and his teeth chattered.
- 10.) _____ Clara felt a lump in her throat. Her lips began to quiver and her eyes welled with tears.

BONUS: Go back to each "S" example. Write the feeling after the sentence.



Name _____

Comparing Summaries and Fully Elaborated Main Events - 1



Read each version of a main event about how a horse became magical.

- 1.) I watched the horse turn magical.

- 2.) I saw the horse grow wings and then it grew a unicorn's horn. After that it started to fly and then it flew all around sparkling in the sky. And then it started to glow and everyone looked at it.

- 3.) The horse threw its head back and whinnied. It bucked as if it was afraid and I noticed something sparkly suddenly sprouting from its back. How strange, I thought. I looked more closely and gasped. Golden wings were growing from the beast's back and were gently flapping. The animal settled down a little and a cloud of sparkling dust settled around her. "What's happening?" I asked, amazed. My eyes were open wide and my heart raced. The horse began to gallop and slowly, slowly its hooves left the ground. "She's flying!" I shouted, pointing to the magnificent magical creature circling up in the sky. A crowd of people gathered around and peered up into the sky. Murmurs of "Oooh!" and "Ahhh!" could be heard. They pointed and gasped. Suddenly there was a loud thundering noise and the magical horse seemed to nod her head. We watched as a golden horn grew from her head.

I felt myself tingle in excitement. The horse had become a flying unicorn before my very eyes!

THINK ABOUT IT: Which example is a fully elaborated event? Which example is a simple summary of a main event? Which example is a grocery list of actions? Which example is the most entertaining to read? Is this realistic fiction or imaginative fantasy?

Name _____

Analyze this Ending! - 1 

Read this story ending.

- Underline the main character’s memories of the main event in BLUE.
- Underline the main character’s feelings about the main event in RED.
- Underline a decision that the main character made in BLACK.
- Underline the main character’s hope or wish in GREEN.

Tim leaned back against the building and heaved a sigh of relief. It had been close, that’s for sure. When he shut his eyes he could still see the huge, slobbering dog snarling and snapping at him. He knew that if he ever wanted to explore the junkyard again, he’d check first to see if the dog was there. And he’d come armed with some dog biscuits or a very big bone!

THINK ABOUT IT:

What do you think this story was about? Use this ending to summarize what probably took place in the story!
