Unit 2: Information Writing: The Art of Information Writing

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **English Language Arts**
Time Period: **Marking Period 2**
Length: **8 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

This unit channels the third graders to work towards creating lively, voice-filled information books. Students will examine their personal areas of expertise; topics they feel passionate about, have a strong interest in, and feel knowledgeable about. Then, as writers, they will develop this topic in such a way as to engage their readers with their level of expertise. In order to accomplish this task the children will conduct research thereby bringing even more facts, details, and interesting information to their topic. The unit aims to build upon the work students have completed in the second grade "All-About" unit. Students are now asked to demonstrate that they can introduce a topic clearly, separate it into subtopics, and organize their writing in such a way that appropriate information is grouped together inside of these subtopics. Writers will explore many nonfiction texts with an eye to how authors create headings and subheadings, as well as glossaries, text boxes, sidebars, diagrams, charts, graphs, and other visuals. They will examine text structure and voice and ultimately produce a finished piece of informational writing that demonstrates all they have learned. Students will draft both handwritten pieces as well as pieces using appropriate technology.

Standards

LA.W.3.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
LA.W.3.2.A	Introduce a topic and group related information together; include text features (e.g., illustrations, diagrams, captions) when useful to support comprehension.
LA.W.3.2.B	Develop the topic with facts, definitions, and details.
LA.W.3.2.C	Use linking words and phrases (e.g., also, another, and, more, but) to connect ideas within categories of information.
LA.W.3.2.D	Provide a conclusion.
LA.W.3.4	With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
LA.W.3.5	With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.
LA.W.3.6	With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others.
LA.W.3.7	Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.
LA.W.3.8	Recall information from experiences or gather information from print and digital sources; take brief notes on sources and sort evidence into provided categories.
LA.W.3.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, metacognition/self-correction and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

LA.L.3.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LA.L.3.1.B	Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns.
LA.L.3.1.D	Form and use regular and irregular verbs.
LA.L.3.1.I	Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.
LA.L.3.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LA.L.3.2.A	Capitalize appropriate words in titles.
LA.L.3.2.C	Use commas and quotation marks in dialogue.
LA.L.3.2.D	Form and use possessives.
LA.L.3.2.E	Use conventional spelling for high-frequency and other studied words and for adding suffixes to base words (e.g., sitting, smiled, cries, happiness).
LA.L.3.2.F	Use spelling patterns and generalizations (e.g., word families, position-based spellings, syllable patterns, ending rules, meaningful word parts) in writing words.
LA.L.3.2.G	Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings.
LA.L.3.3	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
LA.L.3.3.A	Choose words and phrases for effect.
LA.L.3.3.B	Recognize and observe differences between the conventions of spoken and written standard English.
LA.L.3.4.D	Use glossaries or beginning dictionaries, both print and digital, to determine or clarify the precise meaning of key words and phrases.

Essential Questions

How do writers become invested in the Writing Workshop?

How do good habits, routines, and procedures, within the workshop model enable writers to grow?

How do writers write with volume, stamina, and speed?

How can writing partners, mentor texts, and writing strategies, help a writer?

How can writers monitor their growth as writers?

How can research extend a writer's knowledge of a topic?

Application of Knowledge: Students will know that...

- authors choose how they present their information for a reason.
- informational writing can be organized in many different ways.
- writers can add to their knowledge of a topic through research.
- writers can teach others what they know.

- writers have many ways to develop and revise their writing.
- writers have routines and procedures to follow in a workshop setting.
- writers learn craft moves from a mentor text for example by noticing new ways to structure text.
- writers need to revise and edit their written pieces for example by checking their facts over again.
- writers use notebooks to log their ideas.
- writing partners support each others' efforts during the writing process.

Application of Skills: Students will be able to...

- choose a structure and organize their information so it is clear.
- choose and write an interesting beginning and conclusion.
- generate informational text from their own knowledge of a topic.
- include headings, sub-headings, charts, text boxes, graphs, charts, glossaries, pictures with captions and other visuals in their finished book.
- insert new information on their topic into their writing.
- produce a finished product.
- research a topic using books, the internet, and reference materials.
- write this information in a predetermined format.

Teaching Points and Suggested Activities

Preparation before beginning the unit:

- ***Mentor texts, such as the ones listed in "Resources", will be shared in whole or in part throughout the unit. The books may at times be read aloud outside of the Workshop but then referred to during the Workshop. Excerpts can be reproduced for close inspection or projected with the use of a document camera.
- Gather a stack of information books and texts to assist in the unit's focus. Some sample book series that work well are *National Geographic for Kids*, *Sports Illustrated for Kids*, and the *DK Readers* (especially the early chapter book varieties). More suggested titles are listed below in **Resources**. From this stack, choose your "touchstone" text, the text you and your class will return to again and again. The book, Dangerous Animals by Melissa Stewart is referred to as the "touchstone" text throughout the Units of Study.
- It is also recommended to choose a topic yourself to explore and write about. This can then be used as your demonstration text. A sample demonstration text about cockroaches is included in the Units of Study but this sample can easily be replaced by the topic and writings of your choice.
- Help your students settle on a topic (an area) in which he or she has special expertise. It should be a topic that they could teach someone else about. It can be a broad topic, later in the unit they will bring it more into focus and "mine" for those important details. For now, however, you want them to understand that they possess content and can teach about it.
- Plan a "class book" or practice text, perhaps about the school. A table of contents and a few sample chapters can be pre-written on chart paper so they can be used for practice during minilessons.

The following teaching points and activities are adapted from *The Art of Information Writing (Grade 3)* unit of the *Units of Study for Teaching Writing (Calkins et al., 2013)* and serve as a loose framework for teachers, who will add to and or emphasize based on their student's needs.

Teaching Points

- Coach students to make lists of topics on which they are experts, using strategies like making an "Every's" List (Every day I, Every year I...) to help them come up with ideas.
- Help children think of information writers as teachers. Teach them that information writers organize information as they write, like organizing for teaching a course.
- Teach children that writers often brainstorm several different ways to organize their information writing. Suggest different ways writers structure subtopics and explain that doing this is an important part of planning.
- Teach students that by considering different organizational structures, writers can allow themselves to think about a topic in new ways. Guide them through a process of trying to structure their writing in various ways instead of settling immediately on one way. (This is an extra structure lesson that may seem redundant but actually asks students to really study their topic from many different angles.)
- Teach students that drafting an information text is like laying bricks, or pieces of information, one after another, to form a chapter.
- Teach students that the organizational skills writers use for their tables of contents can help them plan their chapters as well.
- Teach students various strategies to develop their informational books. You'll suggest using mentor texts as a way to learn more about elaboration and help them apply these ideas to their own writing.
- Teach students to vary the length and types of sentences in their writing to increase interest; for example by turning simple sentences into complex sentences.
- Teach children how to connect the information in their chapters using different transitional strategies and phrases. Suggest they look to a mentor text for ideas about how best to transition in their own informational books.
- Teach children the art of balancing interesting facts with engaging style. You'll highlight revision strategies that encompass both structure and word choice that will enhance their voices in their drafts.
- Teach students that one way writers improve their stories is by choosing precise words to clarify meaning.
- Teach children that information writers are actually researchers, and suggest resources for finding more information to enhance their informational books.
- Teach children that when they learn something new about information writing they may decide to use the new idea in their book. Instead of small fix-ups like adding Post-its, a real revision might mean starting a chapter over again or rewriting the first half or the second half.
- Guide students through an inquiry process that asks them to consider introduction strategies of mentor texts.
- Teach students how to review their information writing using a checklist and then how to make a plan for revision.
- (Third graders have a difficult time recognizing that what is in their heads does not always show up on paper.) Teach children additional revision strategies for clearing up confusion in their work, including imagining a different perspective and role-playing with a partner.
- Remind students that during the editing process writers check that their stories contain correct capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.
- (This is a good time to bring in technology and perhaps make a plan for publishing with the use of technology.) Teach children the ways text features can enhance their information writing. Guide them to choose the most appropriate features for their books.
- Teach children that it is important for information writers to check their facts for accuracy before publishing. One way they can do this is by checking their facts against another source or two and revising if necessary.
- Teach students that there are many ways to locate facts and information and a note card or Post-it is a good place to store this new information.
- (This is the last lesson for this piece so you may need to take a few days for everyone to finish their revisions and editing.) Teach children that when information writers are editing, they keep a close eye on the way they use paragraphs.
- (This bend could take place in the Social Studies class.) Teach children how to transfer the skills they've learned in this unit to plan and draft for a content-specific information text.
- Teach children that writers need to compare their plans for their drafts, reminding them of different strategies to revise either the original plan or the writing.
- (This session is optional. Evaluate your time and level of student stamina) Continue to teach children that the skills they used to write their information books can be transferred to other sorts of information writing and can be used quickly, on the run. Give students the opportunity to re-imagine the text they have already written as a speech, a brochure or an article.
- Guide students to understand that all information writing will be the best it can be when we draw on everything we know.
- Demonstrate to children that the successful end of a unit of study is cause for a celebration.

Activities to Support Teaching Points

- create and refer to anchor charts
- study pages from exemplar writer's notebooks
- provide and present mentor texts as models
- teach children to read like writers using mentor texts
- create an on-going class book for modeling and trying out new skills
- use writer's notebook for daily writing
- tap, sketch, or jot across the pages as a way of planning stories
- explore and try a variety of leads and endings
- practice creating mental movies and acting out a story in order to make writing come alive
- use figurative language and sparkle words to improve descriptions of character and setting
- add dialogue to writing to bring characters alive
- set mini-writing goals as you move through the writing process
- provide checklists to assess and develop on-going writing goals
- write long and strong to build stamina
- teach that sentences are used to group one idea and paragraphs are used to group similar ideas
- plan to celebrate the conclusion of classroom writing projects
- use technology to research information about a specific topic
- use technology to publish a piece of writing

Assessments

Assessment in this unit takes three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Assessment rubrics are available in Lucy Calkins' Reading and Writing Project resource kits, but teachers may also develop their own rubrics in order to include more specific elements of knowledge and skills listed in this unit summary.

Student self-assessment and peer assessment should take place whenever possible--again, in all three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Removing the traditional emphasis on teacher assessment enables students to take more initiative and become self-directed.

On-going teacher assessment will take place in the context of a conference. Conferences, both small group and one-to-one conferring, are used to reinforce expectations, provide advice and/or assistance, and ultimately, to support growth.

Diagnostic Assessments

On-Demand Performance Assessment Prompt: Information Writing (E.g. "Think of a topic that you've studied or that you know a lot about. Tomorrow, you will have forty-five minutes to write an informational (or all-about) text that teaches others interesting and important information and ideas about that topic. If you want to find and use information from a book or another outside source to help you with this writing, you may bring that with you tomorrow. Please keep in mind that you'll have only forty-five minutes to complete this. You will only have this one period, so you'll need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting. Write in a way that

shows all that you know about information writing. In your writing, make sure you:

- Write an introduction.
- Elaborate with a variety of information.
- Organize your writing.
- Use transition words.
- Write a conclusion." - Taken from *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, K-5*)

Formative Assessments (Informal)

Daily observation of students' participation during the active engagement segment of each mini-lesson.

Students' conversation with partners during Turn and Talk segment of mini-lessons.

Comments, corrections, and records from peer conferences between students.

Observation of daily writing progress in writing notebooks and/or folders.

Formative Assessments (Formal)

Teacher-student conferences

Summative Assessment

Summative writing will take the form of both handwritten pieces and pieces generated using appropriate technology.

Published Information books

Completed unit writing projects

On-Demand Performance Assessment Prompt (Same prompt as the diagnostic on-demand)

Activities to Differentiate Instruction

The design of Writer's Workshop allows for individualized instruction and independent growth for every child. At the heart of differentiation in Writer's Workshop is data and the analysis of data. Through the usage of monitoring student progress during independent writing, analysis of student writing using the learning progressions and writing checklists, teachers should be able to delineate which students are in need of additional supports, in what areas those supports should be targeted at, and which students are ready to be pushed further in their writing work.

Some methods to use to support struggling writers as well as advanced writers:

- Encourage student choice in topics to ensure that they are writing on topics that are meaningful for them
- Provide support as needed through conferencing
- Provide support as needed through strategy groups
- Provide modified and/or alternate grade level checklists and rubrics to scaffold or stretch learning

- Scaffold or stretch learning through the use of various strategies
- Provide appropriate writing partners
- Utilize charts to provide a visual reminder for students throughout the mini-lesson.
    - Add drawings and visuals to charts
    - Provide individualized copies of teaching charts
    - Depending on the concept, the chart may be most effective to visually break the concept into parts and touch each part during a demonstration
- For students needing more support at the end of the mini-lesson, keep them at the rug for an extra minute after dispersing the rest of the class and clarify the main topic of the mini-lesson or work one-on-one with them to start their writing
- Set writing goals for students and follow-up with the writing goals after an appropriate amount of time.
- Create group and one-on-one conferring calendars to ensure that students are being met with on a regular basis and working toward individualized goals
- As the unit progresses, the teacher, in coordination with the students, will develop a word wall that will highlight vocabulary specific to the topic chosen
- Assign roles to partners (Partner 1/Partner 2) to help scaffold which student should speak first and avoid one partner dominating the conversation and the other partner becoming a passive listener
    - For ELL students, creating a triad instead of partnership may be beneficial
- Demonstrate for students how to use writing checklists to set goals for their writing and also self-assess

Supports for ELL students:

- Provide consistent teaching structures
- Use consistent teaching language
- Offer plentiful opportunities for reading practice
- Provide access to a broad variety of texts
- Use assessment to provide extra support
- Support students in the preproduction and early production stages of learning English
- Use visual examples in your teaching
- Modify our mini-lessons to be as concise as possible
- Provide extra ?active engagement? time in mini-lessons for extra practice
- Provide readers with topic-based text sets
- Provide opportunities for listening and learning the social language of the reading workshop
- Provide opportunities to read in both their home language and in English
- Plan instruction with the ELL teacher
- Extend the language ELLs are producing through questioning
- Provide explicit instruction in tenses, pronoun references, and connectives
- Support students in building vocabulary using their own reading as the context
- As the unit progresses, the teacher, in coordination with the students, will develop a word wall that will highlight vocabulary specific to the topic chosen

In order to support this differentiation work, teachers may want to consult the following materials:

- Units of Study books at lower or higher levels for teaching strategies that are appropriate to the support needed.
- *The Writing Strategies* Book by Jennifer Serravallo
- If. . . Then. .. Curriculum book for alternate units or teaching points to support the individual reading levels.
- *A Guide to the Writing* Workshop (Primary Grades) chapter 14 for more in-depth information on differentiation

Challenge gifted students to incorporate more complex writing techniques in each writing piece based on the 4th grade Writing Learning Progressions:

- teach different things about a subject and include facts, details, quotes, and ideas into each part
- group information into sections and use paragraphs and sometimes chapters to separate the sections
- include different kinds of facts and details such as numbers, names, and examples
- use interesting comparisons and figurative language to clarify points
- write in a teaching tone using phrases such as *that means*..., *what that really means is*..., and *let me explain*...

Integrated/Cross-Disciplinary Instruction

Reading Workshop

- apply language and ideas from read alouds and independent reading
- utilize read alouds and independent reading as mentor texts
- apply spelling strategies
- identify areas of spelling needs
- apply grammar skills
- identify areas in need of addressing (spelling, grammar, mechanics)
- expand written vocabulary from read alouds and independent reading
- model sentence and paragraph structure after mentor texts

Houghton Mifflin Social Studies

- *w*rite information books about life in Green Brook
- write information books and posters about following rules
- write informational journal entries about life in and around the US
- write about life in early communities compared to today
- write about the life of Native Americans and/or colonists
- write instructions for being good citizens

Macmillan/McGraw-Hill Health and Wellness

- use a notebook to log experiences
- write information texts concerning family relationships
- write information posters dealing with getting along with others
- write letters to friends and family about topics you care about
- write journal entries about health goals and practices
- write information posters involving consequences to poor health and safety practices

Science, Engineering, and Math

- write journal entries related to scientific observation
- use a notebook to log activities
- write information books about space and the solar system
- write information books about math topics
- write math problems tied to personal experiences

Study Skills

- use graphic organizers to plan writing
- use checklists and rubrics to monitor progress
- use post-its and note cards to gather information about topics
- use Venn diagrams and t-charts to gather, compare, and contrast events

- use highlighters, note cards, post-its, and other tools during revision and editing process

The Arts

- create skits and plays to teach nonfiction topics
- add illustrations to further convey meaning
- create posters and displays about pictures and photographs
- create comic books or graphic novels

Suggested Mentor Texts and Other Resources

Resources

Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing:

- *The Art of Information Writing* by Lucy Calkins and Colleen Cruz
- *Launching the Writing Workshop*, Grades 3-5; Lucy Calkins and Marjorie Martinelli
- *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop*, Intermediate Grades; Lucy Calkins
- *Writing Pathways, Grades K-5, Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions*; Lucy Calkins
- *If...Then... Curriculum*, Grade 3 (Assessment-Based Instruction); Lucy Calkins; Julia Mooney; and Colleagues From the TCRWP
- *Resources for Teaching Writing* (DVD) Units of Study in Opinion, Information, and Narrative Writing; Lucy Calkins

The Art of Teaching Writing; Lucy Calkins

The Writing Thief; Ruth Culham

Creating Classrooms for Authors; Jerome C Harste, Kathy G Short with Carolyn Burke

Guiding Readers and Writers, Grades 3-6; Irene C Fountas and Gay Su Pinnell

Smarter Charts; Marjorie Martinelli

Launching the Writing Workshop; Denise Leograndis

Some Suggested Mentor and Classroom Texts

National Geographic Readers: Dangerous Animals; Melissa Stewart

Written Anything Good Lately?; Susan Allen and Jane Lindaman

Cactus Hotel; Brenda Z Guiberson (K)

Manfish: A Story of Jacques Cousteau; Jennifer Berne (O)

The Beginner's Guide to Running Away From Home; Jennifer LaRue Huget

On a Beam of Light: A Story of Albert Einstein; Jennifer Berne

Ocean Sunlight: How Tiny Plants Feed the Seas; Molly Bang and Penny Chisholm (N)

M.O.M. (Mom Operating Manual); Doreen Cronin

What Do Authors Do?; Eileen Christelow (O)

Going to a Restaurant; Melinda Beth Radabaugh

Titles Found in Reading Street Anthologies

How to Raise a Raisin; Pam Munoz Ryan (P)

Hottest, Coldest, Highest, Deepest; Steve Jenkins (N)

Supermarket; Kathleen Krull (K)

Penguin Chick; Betty Tatham (L)

Amazing Bird Nests; Ron Fridell

DK Readers (Eyewitness Books)

Plants Bite Back! (Level 3); Richard Platt

Dinosaur Dinners (Level 2); Barbara Taylor and Lee Davis (K)

How Fruits and Vegetables Grow series (titles such as)

Tomatoes Grow on a Vine; Mari Schuh

Apples Grow On a Tree; Mari Schuh

Scholastic News Nonfiction Readers (titles such as)

Let's Talk Tae Kwon Do; Laine Falk

What's In Washington, D.C.?; Laine Falk (J)

The Moon; Melanie Chrismer

National Geographic Kids Readers (titles such as)

Great Migrations: Amazing Animal Journeys; Laura Marsh

Cats vs. Dogs; Elizabeth Carney

Dolphins: Melissa Stewart

21st Century Skills

CRP.K-12.CRP2.1	Career-ready individuals readily access and use the knowledge and skills acquired through experience and education to be more productive. They make connections between abstract concepts with real-world applications, and they make correct insights about when it is appropriate to apply the use of an academic skill in a workplace situation.
CRP.K-12.CRP4.1	Career-ready individuals communicate thoughts, ideas, and action plans with clarity, whether using written, verbal, and/or visual methods. They communicate in the workplace with clarity and purpose to make maximum use of their own and others' time. They are excellent writers; they master conventions, word choice, and organization, and use effective tone and presentation skills to articulate ideas. They are skilled at interacting with others; they are active listeners and speak clearly and with purpose. Career-ready individuals think about the audience for their communication and prepare accordingly to ensure the desired outcome.
CRP.K-12.CRP11.1	Career-ready individuals find and maximize the productive value of existing and new technology to accomplish workplace tasks and solve workplace problems. They are flexible and adaptive in acquiring new technology. They are proficient with ubiquitous technology applications. They understand the inherent risks-personal and organizational-of technology applications, and they take actions to prevent or mitigate these risks.