Unit 1--Narrative Writing

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s): **English Language Arts**
Time Period: **Marking Period 1**
Length: **6 to 8 weeks**
Status: **Published**

Unit Overview

In conjunction with Reading lessons on fictional and nonfictional narratives, students will compose their own narratives as they have done in previous grades. Based on individual students' readiness, the teacher will work with students to move beyond basic personal and fictional narratives into the realm of fantasy. All of the essential techniques, conventions, and strategies apply to students' stories: character development, dialogue, setting, conflict, and resolution, to name a few. Additionally, students--particularly those in the GATE class--will draw inspiration from exemplars that use advanced, abstract literary devices such as irony, foreshadowing, foils, symbolism, allusion, and metaphor.

The unit establishes the teaching and learning environment through writing tasks, mentor-text reading tasks, and decision-making, as students generate and nurture their writing. These tasks and decisions establish norms, writing habits, and ways of living together in a classroom, in which all students develop confidence and competence. The framework of the unit supports students in the following goals:

- Imagine an identity as a writer
- Read in order to appreciate, study, emulate, and experiment with the decisions of other writers
- Develop a voice that expresses both emotions and ideas through a variety of genres
- Engage in a safe community of writers that encourages risk-taking and growth.

Standards

LA.W.6.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
LA.W.6.3.A	Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
LA.W.6.3.B	Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
LA.W.6.3.C	Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.
LA.W.6.3.D	Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.
LA.W.6.3.E	Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.
LA.W.6.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, voice and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
LA.W.6.5	With some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

LA.W.6.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.
LA.W.6.10	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.SL.6.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 6 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
LA.SL.6.1.B	Follow rules for collegial discussions, set specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
LA.SL.6.1.D	Review the key ideas expressed and demonstrate understanding of multiple perspectives through reflection and paraphrasing.
LA.L.6.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LA.L.6.1.A	Ensure that pronouns are in the proper case (subjective, objective, possessive).
LA.L.6.1.B	Use intensive pronouns (e.g., myself, ourselves).
LA.L.6.1.C	Recognize and correct inappropriate shifts in pronoun number and person.
LA.L.6.1.D	Recognize and correct vague pronouns (i.e., ones with unclear or ambiguous antecedents).
LA.L.6.1.E	Recognize variations from standard English in their own and others' writing and speaking, and identify and use strategies to improve expression in conventional language.
LA.L.6.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LA.L.6.2.A	Use punctuation (commas, parentheses, dashes) to set off nonrestrictive/parenthetical elements.
LA.L.6.2.B	Spell correctly.
LA.L.6.6	Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression.

Essential Questions

1. Evaluating my previous experiences in writing narratives, what goals should I set for myself in terms of genre, technique, and creativity?
2. How do I develop a theme in my narrative that applies to the world at large and the experiences of my audience?
3. What elements contribute to a compelling story, and how do they do so?
4. What should inspire me and influence me as I write?
5. How and why should I make use of my skills, resources, peers, and teacher as my work takes shape?

How can we learn to tell our own stories by researching defining moments in our lives and learning the narrative craft that lets us tell these stories with grace and power?

- **Bend I:** *How can I draft and craft personal narrative entries, coming with ideas by studying other's writing, thinking about moments and places that matter deeply and then re-imagining the moment and writing from inside the story?*

- **Bend II**: *How can I draft and revise personal narrative, deliberately using craft moves so as to convey*

the larger meaning of my story?

- **Bend III**: *How can I take charge of my writing process through meaningful revision, particularly by stretching my problem, ending in meaningful ways and editing for rhythm and meaning?*

Application of Knowledge: Students will know that...

- A story's resolution (even if it is ironic or a surprise) must reflect in a clear and significant manner the theme of the story and its narrative arc.
- Basic skills such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation apply to all writing.
- Clear and coherent writing illustrates development, organization, and style that are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Commas, dashes, and ellipses can enhance and manipulate the rhythm of dialogue.
- Conferences are two-way discussions whose frank interchange of ideas facilitates good writing.
- Conflict drives the plot of a narrative.
- Effective description, details, logical and natural sequencing, and character development require significant time and thought in order to take shape.
- Narratives have a beginning, a middle, and an end.
- Narratives take on added dimensions of meaning with appropriate use of vocabulary and description.
- Personal pronouns have antecedents, case, and number.
- Writing is a process that unfolds over time, beginning with ideas, taking refinement over several drafts, and improving with inspiration from outside texts as well as with consultations with peers and teachers.

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

- Apply constructive criticism received from their peers and from the teacher with regard to basic skills, pacing, dialogue, sequencing, character development, theme, and literary devices.
- Apply the basic skills of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation properly to their writing.
- Apply the correct case and number to personal pronouns in relation to their antecedents.
- Assist and receive assistance from peers in developing ideas, writing, revising, and editing.
- Complete at least the final phase of their work using digital and cloud capabilities and produce final products in digital form.
- Compose a resolution consistent with the theme and narrative thrust of the story.
- Compose narratives with a clear and logical narrative arc from beginning to end.
- Develop a clear narrative voice as well as distinct, developed, and evolving characters.
- Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence, signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another, and show the relationships among experiences and events.
- Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, and reflection, to develop experiences,

events, and/or characters.

- Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.
- Use vocabulary appropriate to the content, tone, and theme of their narratives.
- Write every day toward the completion of their narratives.

Teaching Points and Suggested Activities

The following teaching points and activities are adapted from *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grades 6-8* (Calkins et al., 2014) and serve as a loose framework for teachers, who will add and or emphasize based on their students' needs.

Teaching Points

Bend I: Launching Independent Writing Lives and Generating Personal Narratives

Setting Up to Write

- Writers can study finished work, imagining the strategies that other writers probably used, and then try these strategies with their own work.

Calling On All Strategies to Write Up a Storm

- Writers call on a toolkit of strategies for finding ideas for their stories, and that they can use those ideas to launch into fast and furious writing. You'll also teach students that narrative writers sometimes generate story ideas by thinking of places and the meaningful episodes that occurred in them.

Writing from Moments that Really Matter

- When writers come up with ideas for personal narratives, it can help to think of small moments that matter deeply. Writers often do this by turning to moments when they realized or learned something significant.

Telling the Story from the Narrator's Point of View

- Writers re-imagine the episode as they put it on paper, so that readers will be able to experience it, too.

Reading Closely to Learn from Other Authors

- One way writers raise the level of their own writing is by imitating the personal narrative writing that inspires and moves them.

Taking Stock: Pausing to Assess and Set Goals

- Writers sometimes pause to consider their progress, using a checklist to assess their own growth and set new goals.

Bend II: Moving through the Writing Process and toward Our Goals

Rehearsing: Experimenting with Beginnings

- Writers generate multiple leads as a way to rehearse a story.

Flash-Drafting: Get the Whole Story on the Page

- Writers take their seed ideas to flash-draft a first-draft version of their stories.

Using Writer's Notebooks for Mindful, Goal-Driven Work

- Writers use their writer's notebooks as a place to try new things, to practice their skills, and to work hard at the writing goals they've set for themselves.

Re-Angling and Rewriting to Convey What a Story Is Really About

- Writers kick off their substantial revision process by re-angling their storytelling to hint at the larger meaning, early on in the story, and then to develop that deeper meaning throughout the story.

Elaborating on Important Scenes and Adding New Ones from the Past

- Writers use everything they know about writing powerful scenes to further develop the most important parts of their stories and to incorporate new moments from the past that connect with their stories' meaning.

Using All Available Resources to Aid with Final Touches

- Writers draw on the many writing tools available to them, including classroom charts and checklists, to aid with final revisions and with editing

Bend III: Writing a Second Personal Narrative with New Independence

Taking Charge of the Writing Process: Deciding Where to Begin and How to Revise from the Get-Go

- Writers take charge of their writing process and their plan as they embark on a second personal narrative. They draw on everything they know how to do, keep an eye on their goals, and make use of their many writing tools.

Slowing Down and Stretching Out the Story's Problem

- When writers draft, they think carefully about how to slow down the problem in their story and build tension.

Ending Stories in Meaningful Ways

- Writers don't just end stories; they create resolutions that connect to the big meaning of their story. 1

Editing Sentences for Rhythm and Meaning

- Writers listen to the rhythm of their writing and make final revisions to convey the intended mood and

feelings of their writing.

Publishing and Celebrating as a Community of Writers

- Writers share their pieces with their writing colleagues and their families.

"Personal Narrative: Creating Powerful Life Stories." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

The following additional teaching points address standards in the Common Core not specifically approached by the Calkins resource:

- Aligning the conflicts and resolving them clearly
- Consistency between events and themes
- Connecting with audience: connecting concepts and themes to everyone's experience
- Dialogue: formatting, pacing, and giving characters a personality
- Foreshadowing and symbolism: easy enhancements
- Irony: the surprise ending
- Personal pronouns and their antecedents
- Digital and cloud resources for composing, revising, editing, and publishing

Typical Daily Activities

- Mini-lesson (connection, teaching point/modeling, active engagement, independent practice, sharing)
- Daily writing
- Conferences (between peers, small groups, and with the teacher) and sharing

Critical Phases of Student Activity

- Developing topics
- Research
- Drafting
- Revising
- Editing
- Publishing

Assessments

Assessment in this unit takes three forms: diagnostic, formative, and summative. Assessment rubrics are available in Lucy Calkins's 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.

Additionally, 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.

Also, whenever possible, teacher assessment should take place in the context of a conference, or at least be followed up by a conference. This reinforces expectations, advice, assistance, and ultimately, growth.

Diagnostic Assessments

Review of student's portfolio from the previous school year, particularly narrative projects

On-demand narrative (E.g. "Please write, the best personal narrative, the best true story, that you can write. Make this be the story of one time in your life. You might focus on just a scene or two. You'll have only forty-five minutes to write this true story, so you'll need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting. Write in a way that allows you to show off all you know about narrative writing. In your writing, make sure you: Write a beginning for your story, use transition words to tell what happened in order, elaborate to help readers picture your story, show what your story is really about, and write an ending for your story." - Taken from *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, 6-8*)

Formative Assessments (Informal)

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

Students' questions, comments, suggestions to teacher

Comments, corrections, and records from peer conferences between students

Formative Assessments (Formal)

Teacher-student conferences

Summative Assessment

Published narratives

On-demand narrative (Same prompt as the diagnostic on-demand)

Activities to Differentiate Instruction

The Writing Workshop framework enables students to generate story ideas based on their own interests and experiences. The inherently self-directed nature of developing initial concepts requires continual reinforcement, however, at all phases of instruction during the unit.

This particular unit on narrative writing also enables students--based on interest and ability--to choose in consultation with their teachers from a range of narrative genres. Struggling students may choose more basic narrative structures, applying them to real-life personal narratives. Teachers will encourage other students to take on the challenge of writing fantasy stories, Highly imaginative students, however, will require advice and guidance as the depth of their work transcends genre. They will explore literary tropes and elements on a highly abstract level and with highly nuanced applications.

The active participation component of mini-lessons enables a teacher to move around and observe students at work on concepts and strategies that were presented in a whole-class format. The teacher can intervene at his or her discretion.

Likewise, a sharing component of many lessons will allow for a sampling of work from multiple students. A greater flow of ideas and products brings about a more thorough appeal to the individual dispositions and learning styles of students listening. Also, this unit will culminate in a publishing/celebrating day on which students put their individual skills and products on display.

Supplementing this, multiple exemplar texts in varying styles will broaden the appeal and accessibility of the knowledge and skills students are developing.

Due to those varying dispositions and learning styles, teachers promote various strategies during all phases of the writing process. Students will have opportunities to work alone, in pairs, and in groups. They will choose either to compose in a traditional pen-on-paper mode or to compose, revise, edit, and publish digitally.

Conferences also provide a critical opportunity for students to receive individual attention and instruction. Small-group conferences with a teacher will allow for a diverse mix of ideas and advice that students can apply to their work whether it was specifically given to them or not, and the discussion is often easier to follow and takes place in closer proximity to individual students than whole-class instruction. Of course, at several stages in the writing process, the teacher will hold conferences with individual students for formative and summative purposes.

In compliance with 504 plans and IEP's, teachers will review applicable documents, consult appropriate personnel connected with special-needs students' cases, work closely with inclusion teachers and classroom aides, and communicate with parents in an effort to see to the specific needs of all students.

In some cases, most often in GATE classes, teachers may elect to have students compile their narratives into a true publication. This will require many individual students to work in specialized capacities such as copy editors, section editors, editors-in-chief, and layout and design specialists. Over several instructional units, additional students will serve as archivists.

Integrated/Cross-Disciplinary Instruction

Consistent with the concept of differentiated instruction, students should learn the knowledge and skills of this unit in conjunction with concepts from various content areas. The diverse genres of narrative writing make this highly feasible, and mini-lessons can apply to concepts from multiple subjects. Here are some of the obvious correlations:

- historical fiction: social studies
- science fiction: science and mathematics
- fantasy: mythology and folklore
- fan fiction: literature

While some teachers will provide instruction that includes specific concepts from various content areas, all should direct students to specific text and on-line resources pertinent to various content areas. Also, teachers will consult grade-level content area teachers on concepts covered in their classes, allowing subjects, lessons, and experiences to reinforce each other.

Suggested Mentor Texts and Other Resources

Mentor Texts:

Anthology*: When I Was Your Age: Volumes I and II: Original Stories About Growing Up*

- Suggested selection: “Everything Will Be Okay” by James Howe

Short Stories:

"Talk to Me" by Avi

"Eleven" by Sandra Cisneros

"Stray" by Cynthia Rylant (or other selections from *Every Living Thing*)

Excerpts from memoirs:

Boy: Tales of Childhood by Roald Dahl

Knots In My Yo-Yo String by Jerry Spinelli

Also, as suggested by the Writing Project in the attached Personal Narrative resource unit, the student exemplar notebook pages can be useful to examine.

Resources:

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

- "Personal Narrative: Creating Powerful Life Stories." *Units of Study in Argument, Information and Narrative Writing, Grade 6.* Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *A Guide to the Common Core Writing Workshop, Intermediate Grades*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Writing Pathways, Grades K-8, Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions*. Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *If...Then... Curriculum*, Grade 6 (Assessment-Based Instruction). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP
- *Resources for Teaching Writing* (DVD). Lucy Calkins, TCRWP

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.