

# Unit 2: Information Writing: The Art of Information Writing, Grade 3

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

## Unit Overview

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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

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LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4	Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5	Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6	Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7	Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8	Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9	Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
LA.3.CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1.b	Form and use regular and irregular plural nouns.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1.d	Form and use regular and irregular verbs.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.1.i	Produce simple, compound, and complex sentences.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.a	Capitalize appropriate words in titles.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.c	Use commas and quotation marks in dialogue.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.d	Form and use possessives.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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).
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.2.g	Consult reference materials, including beginning dictionaries, as needed to check and correct spellings.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3.a	Choose words and phrases for effect.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.3.3.b	Recognize and observe differences between the conventions of spoken and written standard English.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2	Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2.a	Introduce a topic and group related information together; include illustrations when useful to aiding comprehension.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2.b	Develop the topic with facts, definitions, and details.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2.c	Use linking words and phrases (e.g., also, another, and, more, but) to connect ideas within categories of information.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.2.d	Provide a concluding statement or section.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.4	With guidance and support from adults, produce writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task and purpose.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.5	With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.6	With guidance and support from adults, use technology to produce and publish writing (using keyboarding skills) as well as to interact and collaborate with others.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.7	Conduct short research projects that build knowledge about a topic.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.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.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.3.10	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

## Essential Questions

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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...

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- 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...

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- 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

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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**

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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**

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Note: These strategies can be adapted to scaffold for students needing more support or extending the learning for higher level students.

- provide support as needed during individual teaching sessions
- provide feedback in small group setting
- provide informational texts on a variety of reading levels
- provide personal copies of teaching charts
- provide modified and/or alternate grade level checklists and rubrics
- provide modified writing paper
- provide appropriate writing partners

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**

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*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*

- write 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

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## **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