Unit 1 Narrative Writing: Turning Life into Literature

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 1**
Length: **4-6 Weeks**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

This unit, Grade 5 Unit 1: Turning Life into Literature, is a writing workshop curriculum map designed to guide students from September to mid-November. It is structured into three distinct bends to facilitate the writing process for personal narratives. Before beginning the unit, teachers are advised to prepare a writer's notebook for themselves and students, organize folders or binders for student toolkits, and establish writing workshop routines.
The unit progresses through three bends:

Bend 1: Personal Narratives - Starting a Fifth-Grade Notebook

◦ This initial phase focuses on generating strong story ideas from life experiences, recognizing that sharing true stories helps people connect.
◦ Students learn to draft quickly and then develop their narratives by exploring internal thoughts and feelings of characters, adding dialogue, and addressing tricky words.
◦ They practice using writing checklists to assess their work and learn to explore the narrator's point of view to deepen their stories.

Bend 2: Growing Independence in the Writing Process

◦ This bend emphasizes rehearsing stories in various ways to build content and structure.
◦ Students move from rehearsing to flash-drafting a full narrative, focusing on developing the "heart of the story" by elaborating on significant moments and characters' internal journeys.
◦ They explore using flashback and flash-forward to enhance their narratives and improve sentence structure by focusing on commas and combining sentences.
◦ The bend also guides students in crafting powerful endings that leave a lasting impression.

Bend 3: Learning Narrative Craft from Mentor Texts

◦ This final bend encourages students to learn from professional authors by using mentor texts to elevate their own narrative craft.
◦ Students warm up by writing new stories and then rehearse and flash-draft new pieces, learning to balance summarizing with detailed drafting.
◦ They analyze how mentor texts create tension and resolution, revise their own stories to deepen internal thoughts, and use vivid details and figurative language.
◦ The unit also addresses grammatical precision, particularly fixing inconsistent verb tense, and encourages students to take their writing to the "workbench" for detailed revision.

The unit concludes with a celebration where students share their finished and revised pieces with an audience, reflecting on their growth as writers. Assessments throughout the unit include pre and post-benchmarks, informational writing checklists, and anecdotal notes.

This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. During this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers.

Revisionj: June 2026

Pacing Guide

Please refer to the Language Arts Writing Workshop pacing guide for grade 3 in the curriculum folder. Sentence Study is paced and aligned within the Syntax, Style, Grammar and Conventions section. Please refer to this folder for the scope and sequence for Sentence Study.

A sample K-5 Literacy Schedule Across a Week is accessible in instructional materials section of the Grades K-5 folder.

Standards

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship.

These mandates may be hit through the selection of choice literature:

Amistad Commission

This unit also reflects the goals of the Department of Education and the Amistad Commission including the infusion of the history of Africans and African-Americans into the curriculum in order to provide an accurate, complete, and inclusive history regarding the importance of African-Americans to the growth and development of American society in a global context.

Asian American and Pacific Islander History Law

This unit includes instructional materials that highlight the history and contributions of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in accordance with the New Jersey Student Learning Standards in Social Studies.

New Jersey Diversity and Inclusion Law

In accordance with New Jersey's Chapter 32 Diversity and Inclusion Law, this unit includes instructional mater

economic diversity, equity, inclusion, tolerance, and belonging in connection with gender and sexual orientatior

The standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed below.

L.WF.5.2	Demonstrate command of the conventions of writing, including those listed under grade four foundational skills.
L.KL.5.1	Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
L.VI.5.3	Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
RL.IT.5.3	Analyze the impact of two or more individuals and events throughout the course of a text, comparing and contrasting two or more characters, settings, or events in a story or drama, drawing on specific textual evidence (e.g., how characters interact).
RI.IT.5.3	Analyze the impact of two or more individuals and events throughout the course of a text, explaining the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific evidence in the text.
W.NW.5.3	Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.
W.WP.5.4	With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
W.SE.5.6	Gather relevant information from multiple valid and reliable print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, making note of any similarities and differences among ideas presented; and provide a list of sources.
W.RW.5.7	Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.
SL.PE.5.1	Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 5 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
SL.II.5.2	Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, and orally).

Performing Arts Standards

1.4.5.Cr1: (a). Create roles, imagined worlds, and improvised stories in a drama/theatre work articulating the physical qualities of characters, visual details of imagined worlds, and given circumstances of improvised stories in a drama/theatre work. (b). Imagine, articulate, and design ideas for costumes, props, and sets that support the story, given circumstances, and characters in a drama/theatre work. (c). Imagine how a character's

inner thoughts impact their actions and collaborate to determine how characters might move and speak to support the story and given circumstances in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Cr3: (a). Collaborate with peers to revise, refine, adapt, and improve ideas to fit the given parameters of an improvised or scripted drama/theatre work through self and collaborative review. (b). Use and adapt sounds and

movements in a guided drama experience. (c). Refine technical choices by creating innovative solutions to design and technical problems that arise in rehearsal for a drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Pr5: (a). Describe and apply dramatic elements of dialogue, action, character emotion, and theme in the

performance and/or creation of a drama/theatre work. (b). Physically and intellectually investigate how movement and vocal choices are incorporated and make meaning in drama/theatre work.

1.4.5.Pr6: (a). Practice drama/theatre work and share reflections individually and in small groups, and informally with an audience.

1.4.5.Re9: (a). Compare and contrast multiple personal experiences when participating in or observing a drama/theatre work. and justify responses to drama/theatre work based on personal experience. (b). Explain responses to characters based on cultural perspectives when participating in or observing drama/theatre work. (c). Identify and discuss physiological changes connected to emotions on posture, gesture, breathing, and vocal intonation in drama/theatre work.

Essential Questions

- Bend I: How can you generate ideas for true stories and write entries that are full stories?
- Bend II: How can you take a piece of writing through the writing process with greater independence?
- Bend III: How can you use mentor texts to revise a piece of writing and use some of the same narrative techniques?

Students Will Know/ Students Will Be Skilled At

By the end of this unit, students will:

- Generate multiple personal narrative entries
- Reflect on their own writing using checklists and setting specific goals
- Select a meaningful "seed idea" and take it through the full writing process
- Revise purposefully
- Demonstrate independence in the writing process
- Analyze and emulate techniques from mentor texts
- Edit their writing with a focus on clarity
- Celebrate and share their published narratives

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration or absence of skill.

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

Formative:

- Answer essential questions
- Teacher observations/conferring notes
- Turn and talks
- Partnerships rehearsing their writing
- Peer Conferences/Partnership Discussion and Rehearsing
- Writer's Notebook (quick writes/drafts/prewrites)
- Teacher checklists using mini-lessons for measurable skills

- Writing Conferences: Individual and small group
- Writing Partnership work and discussions
- Writing folders with student work
- Writing pieces to note the growth need of the writer
- Observations
- Listening in on partnership discussion of writing piece
- Drafts online (Google Docs)
- Writing Club work and discussions

Summative:

- Students should have 2-3 final pieces to score not including the post assessment.
- Published pieces
- Score grammar and spelling in final drafts only
- Student portfolios
- During publishing students read their piece to assess oral speaking and reading skills
- Rubrics: created for the standards-based report card as well as teacher-created.
- Standards should be addressed as reported on the Standards-Based Report Card and should reflect this work

Benchmark:

- Benchmark writing assessments: opinion, narrative, and informational, scored using rubrics, district-created and provided.
- Located in the shared Grades K-8 Language Arts folder on the Google Drive, reported three times per year

Learning Plan

Our upper elementary writing instruction follows a balanced literacy approach including a number of strategies and techniques in Writing Workshop. These include mini-lessons, shared writing, independent writing, small group strategy instruction, one-to-one conferencing, partnerships and/or writing clubs. Writing Workshop emphasizes immersion, independence, and choice. Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer. Each unit ends with a celebration of learning where children share their writing with others in the school community.

To assist students in reaching the goals for this unit, teachers will guide them through the following steps:

- Immersing students to study the purpose, structure, and characteristics of writing while generating possible writing ideas

- Choosing topics by considering focused areas of expertise
- Organizing information and writing pieces
- Elaborating to increase writing volume and to add a variety of detail
- Revising and editing to prepare for publishing

Through mentor text, students will be immersed in text type in order to recognize text features and structures of the particular type of writing. It is suggested that students form writing partnerships with the goal of collaborating and supporting each other throughout the writing process. Grammar and conventions mini lessons will be taught throughout this unit during Sentence Study.

Lessons should follow the mini-lesson format:

- Teaching point(s) for each lesson
- Connection: Connects new learning to previous learning/lessons
- Teach/Modeling: Uses 'think alouds' when modeling what you expect students to do
- Guided Practice/Active Engagement: Guides students through practice of the teaching point
- Link to Independent Practice: Helps writers understand the purpose for the writing they are about to do and the skills/craft they will be practicing/applying independently as good writers
- Independent Writing/Student Conferences: Provides time for students to do independent writing while teacher confers with individual students, works with small groups, or writing clubs.
- Closure/Sharing: Pull students back together and recognize the work they have done relating to the teaching point.

The architecture of a writing conference includes:

- Research
- Decide
- Teach and Coach with guided practice
- Link

A writing club is like a book club. It is a group of students that meet to discuss one student in the group's piece at a time. The students listen to the piece read aloud. If on Google Docs, it can be shared with the group and they can follow along. (This takes a lot coaching in the beginning.) Students provide feedback to the writer, first what they did really well, and provide evidence from the piece that supports it. Then they provide something that they can use to enhance their piece and evidence as to why it can be changed. The writer that shared can use the advice. Developing trust in the group and valuable advice takes time. Over time groups can run on their own.

To plan for this unit, you will want to:

- Pre-assess having the students write a personal narrative to determine prior knowledge.
- Follow Cranford Scope and Sequence for Word Work.
- Using the grammar standards listed above, teachers will utilize mentor sentences from read alouds and picture books from this unit for grammar instruction. For example from The Tiger Rising : "He specifically did not think about Norton and Billy Threemonger waiting for him like chained and starved dogs, eager to attack." On day one, ask the students what do you notice about this sentence? You might see exciting words, figurative language, type of sentence, or even special parts of speech. Write down what you notice. On day two, rewrite the mentor sentence exactly as it is written, but skip lines in between. Label all of the parts of speech that you know in this sentence. On day three, revise the mentor sentence by making it more descriptive or exciting. Try adding or changing adjectives,

verbs, or specific nouns. Remember to keep the meaning of the sentence the same. On day four, imitate the mentor sentence by keeping the style and structure the same, but making it your own. You should create a brand new sentence. On day five assess the students on the skills.

Teachers may personalize instruction during this unit and address the distinct learning needs, interests, aspirations, or cultural backgrounds of individual students.

Before Beginning this Unit

- Prepare a “Writer's Notebook” for yourself (marble notebook). Your students should also each have their own.
- Prepare folders or notebooks/binders for student toolkits
- Establish writing workshop routines

Detailed Curriculum Map

Teaching Points and lessons are located in the K-5 folder under Grade 5 Curriculum for Language Arts. These curriculum unit guides include not only aligned teaching points to standards, but also specific lessons and appropriate resources. Guidelines for preparing to teach the unit as well as goals for the end of the unit are outlined. Academic vocabulary and prerequisite skills are identified. Essential questions and possible assessments are detailed as well.

Materials

The materials used in this course allow for integration of a variety of instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

Instructional Materials

The core materials for this unit include the Units of Study in Writing for grade 5, The Reading and Writing Project at Mossflower, 2026.

The instructional materials which correspond with this unit are linked in the detailed curriculum map under resources and housed in the Grades K-5 folder under grade 5. Here is a direct link to the instructional materials that accompany this unit**.**

Please refer to this folder for specific materials for Sentence Study.

Read Alouds

- Childtimes by Eloise Greenfield
- Peter's Chair by Ezra Jack Keats
- Papa Who Wakes Up Tired in the Dark by Sandra Cisneros (House on Mango Street)
- Charlotte's Web by E.B White (ending)
- Eleven by Sandra Ciscernos
- Heat Wave by Eileen Spinelli (leads)
- The Friend by Sarah Stewart (Why Writers Write)

Mentor Texts

- When Lightning Comes in a Jar by Patricia Polacco
- Fireflies by Julie Brinckloe
- The Best Story by Eileen Spinelli
- My Rotten Redheaded Older Brother by Patricia Polacco
- Thank you, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco
- Just Mercy by Brian Stevenson
- Pictures From Our Vacation by Lynne Roe Perkins
- The Orange Shoes by Trinka Hakes Noble
- Bedhead by Margie Palatini
- A Chair for my Mother by Vera B. Williams
- Enemy Pie by Derek Munson
- Those Shoes by Maribeth Boelts

Teacher Resources

- Use resource CD for rubrics, student samples, and charts.
- Patterns of Power: Inviting Young Writers Conventions of Language Grades 1-5 by Jeff Anderson
- Feedback That Moves Writers Forward by Patty McGee
- The Continuum of Literacy Learning by Guy Su Pinnell & Irene C. Fountas
- The Common Core Writing Book by Gretchen Owocki
- Projecting Possibilities for Writers: The How, What & Why of Designing Units of Study by Matt Glover & Mary Alice Berry

- Use teacher model of personal writing to show process
- Ruth Culham's The Writing Thief
- Georgia Heard's Finding the Heart of Nonfiction: Teaching 7 Essential Craft Tools with Mentor Texts
- Everyday Editing by Jeff Anderson
- For All Parts of the Writing Process, including tools for intervention and ways to publish, see The Good Writer's Guide by Gretchen Bernabe
- *The Writing Strategies Book*, Jennifer Serravallo
- *Mechanically Inclined*, Jeff Anderson
- *The Story of My Thinking*, Gretchen Bernabei
- Trail of Breadcrumbs Website
- Two Writing Teachers Blog
- *Assessing Writers*, Carl Anderson
- Cranford Public School Grades K-5 Google Folder for instructional materials

Suggested Strategies for Accommodations and Modifications

Content specific accommodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504.

The structure of writing workshop is designed to differentiate and address specific goals and learning for each reader:

- The unit includes presentation of material through multiple modalities such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic to address the unique learning styles of all students.
- The teacher will assign, assess and modify if necessary to address the specific needs of the learner.
- Students have individualized choice of topics within each unit.
- Individual conferences with each student will address specific needs of the writer.

Possible accommodations during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts, word walls.
- Allow students to set individual goals for writing.
- Work in partnerships
- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student
- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Take frequent breaks
- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Mark text with a highlighter or other manipulative such as a post-it
- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Create alternate assignments or homework

- Provide distinct steps in a process; elminate unnecessary steps, as needed.
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines
- Access speech-to-text function on computer

Possible modifications to content during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Refer to the Strategies for Striving Students in the K-5 folder for specific appropriate interventions.
- Adhere to all modifications and accomodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plan

Framework for Alternative Setting (LEAP Program at Lincoln School)

In our K–5 alternative school setting, each class consists of students who require a highly personalized approach to reading instruction. The district's core Writing Units of Study will continue to serve as the primary writing curriculum framework; however, lessons will be further adapted to ensure accessibility and engagement for all learners. Teachers will use a combination of pacing adjustments, flexible timing, and individualized goal setting to meet students at their current skill levels. Instruction will be delivered through a blend of whole-group, small-group, and one-on-one settings, with intentional scaffolds in place to build confidence and reduce frustration.

To adapt any writing unit for an alternative school serving students with school avoidance, anxiety, behavior challenges, and social constraints, teachers should employ flexible, supportive modifications while aligning with grade-level writing standards (focusing on organization, elaboration, and mechanics) and speaking/listening standards (focusing on collaborative discussions).

- Timing Adjustments: Extend the pacing of instructional blocks or bends (e.g., extending a typical 2-week drafting phase to 3 weeks) with shorter daily writing sessions (20–30 minutes). Incorporate calming transitions or choice-based entry activities to ease transition anxiety.
- Activity Modifications: During the initial brainstorming and topic-generation phase, use sensory-friendly methods like drawing, sketching, or voice recording instead of demanding whole-group sharing. During structural planning, provide pre-made graphic organizers tailored to the specific genre's layout (e.g., chronological, narrative plot maps, or thesis-and-reason structures) and allow low-stakes, paired verbal rehearsals to build confidence. For the revision phase, incorporate supportive one-on-one teacher conferring for feedback, replacing peer review sessions with optional self-reflection journals. Simplify checklists and rubrics with visual icons, and offer flexible writing alternatives like dictated drafts or digital speech-to-text tools for students with severe writing aversion.
- Intervention Programs: Integrate comprehension-focused frameworks (such as Visualizing and Verbalizing) to unpack exemplar texts, structured foundations programs (like UFLI) for keyword jotting and sentence-level drafting, and systematic phonics/morphology programs (like Sonday System) during conventions exploration (e.g., mechanics, grammar, and parts of speech).
- NJTSS Framework: Implement Tier 1 universal supports, such as explicit modeling of introductions, transitions, and conclusions with visual aids; Tier 2 targeted small-group interventions for elaboration and planning, tracked via regular anecdotal notes; and Tier 3 intensive individualized sessions for goal-setting and revision, prioritizing emotional safety and student agency.
- Data Analysis: Leverage formative assessments (e.g., conferring notes, on-demand writing samples) and summative pre/post benchmarks to personalize pacing, ensuring students produce structured, cohesive compositions in a nurturing environment that celebrates writing progress through low-pressure, voluntary sharing.