

Writing Roundup

Lesson Plans



for FCAT Writes Preparation

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August 22-26, 2011

Descriptive Writing: Bring a collection of interesting objects from home: a kite, a box of chocolates, a toolbox full of tools, an antique telephone, cooking utensils, a live turtle in a turtle farm, comical hats, costume jewelry, a puppy, a pair of snow skates, a jar of marbles, a box of buttons, a fresh tomato, a pomegranate, etc. Let kids choose different objects, examine them, and think of all the possible ways to describe them. Ask students to describe some of the objects verbally to a partner. Spend two or three days doing the same activity, but add new items to the collection each day, generating enthusiasm and anticipation for this verbal “writing.” Now model how to write a single descriptive sentence that creates a picturesque image in the mind of the reader. Show several examples. Here are some examples of the types of sentences that make good impressions:

On the outside, the pomegranate is a mysterious red color with smooth skin, but on the inside, there is a surprise waiting: deep red pods that burst when you squish them.

The silver necklace sparkles like brilliant fireworks bursting across the night sky.

Scampy, the soft, velvety puppy, cuddled on my lap and licked my fingers with his pink tongue.

Now ask your student to write the best possible descriptive sentences about one of the objects. Take turns reading these aloud to the class. Talk about what makes good writing. Point out how each kid brings his own particular voice to the writing process. You are setting the stage to make writing fun and entertaining. Practice over and over writing single, well-written, descriptive sentences. Invite students to choose items from the classroom and from around the campus to describe. You are helping your students develop a descriptive eye that will enable them to get the highest scores. Encourage students to read their descriptions to each other and offer praise and suggestions for improvement.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read “The Mountain Lions,” pp. 12-23, from *Writing Camp*, by Melissa Forney. This first play is a little lengthy and might require reading it over several days but it will make a great first week activity to help get kids turned on to writing. Encourage students to practice their parts ahead of time and assign new parts if you read the play a second time.

August 30-September 2, 2011

Earning Points: Kids love competition, games, and gaining points for their efforts. Introduce the concept of earning points for everything students do to learn how to become spectacular writers. They are also listed in the Writing Roundup Saddle Bag (www.melissaforney.com), but here are the accomplishments that will help kids earn the following points:

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|--------------------------------------|----|--|----|
| Coming to writing class | 10 | Writing an expository piece | 15 |
| Being prepared with pencil and paper | 10 | Revising your work | 15 |
| Answering questions in writing class | 15 | Editing your work | 25 |
| Brainstorming to a practice prompt | 10 | Reading your writing aloud to someone | 15 |
| Working as a team | 10 | Having a positive attitude in class | 10 |
| Working on your own | 10 | Using a writing creativity skill in your writing | 20 |
| Helping another writer | 15 | Singing “The 12 Steps, Cowboy Style” Song | 20 |
| Practicing writing at home | 15 | Scoring a 3 on a writing piece | 30 |
| Drawing for prewriting | 25 | Scoring a 4 on a writing piece | 40 |
| Gathering vocabulary | 25 | Scoring a 5 on a writing piece | 50 |
| Writing a narrative piece | 20 | Scoring a 6 on a writing piece | 60 |

Briefly introduce The 12 Steps of the Writing Process and teach the song, "The 12 Steps Cowboy Style". Use the brightly colored poster, *The 12 Steps of the Writing Process* to teach and display in your classroom. If you don't own this poster, you can purchase it for \$7.95 at www.melissaforney.com. 3

Practice writing descriptive sentences again. This week ask the students to expand their descriptions to two or three wonderfully written sentences on the same topic. Provide visually stimulating items that help kids tap into their imaginative vocabularies: a beautiful flower arrangement, a soccer uniform, a horse saddle, Mr. Potato Head, a Transformer model, a pair of ballet toe shoes, an aquarium, etc.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Make the brown paper bag Saddle Bags either WITH or FOR your students. Make only the shell of the saddle bag plus the table of contents and pages 1-6. Throughout the rest of the weeks, keep adding new pages to the Saddle Bags as you need to, one or two at a time.

September 6-9, 2011

Narrative Beginnings: Teach narrative beginnings, page 7 of the Saddle Bag. Help your class practice writing beginnings for the following topics:

Our class took a walk around the school and saw something interesting.
We played a really cool game during P.E.
My teacher took us outside for ice cream cones.
Our class tried to fly a kite.
Something funny happened in class today.

Give your students a short narrative writing that includes a middle and an ending. Where there would have been a beginning, provide two blank lines. As a class, read the middle and ending aloud. Ask your students to write a terrific beginning on the lines that are provided. Do this with several examples.

Remind students that narrative beginnings tell the reader, "Have I got a story for you!" without giving away the "punchline" or the secret.

Creativity Skills: Review onomatopoeia. Give students a chance to practice writing sound effects words and compare their words to those of other students. Give a short skills test the next day to discover which students have mastered onomatopoeia and which ones need to be remediated.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read, "Writing in the Dark," pp. 25-26, from *Writing Camp*. Let them reread the play several times, practicing and changing parts.

September 12-16, 2011

Narrative Middles: Teach narrative middles, page 8 of the Saddle Bag. Remind students that writing a narrative middle is like telling a story. They should picture their audiences and write for them, just like when we go to the store to pick out a lovely present for someone we love. The middle of a narrative should be told in sequence, include picturesque details, and should include a mountain-top experience the reader will enjoy.

Ask your students to practice writing narrative middles about several of the following topics. They don't have to be true, but **they must sound like they are true.**

I went shopping for something I've been wanting for a long, long time.
 Someone at my house broke something of mine.
 Something embarrassing happened to me.
 I learned how to do something totally new!
 A trip to the doctor turned out to be painful.
 I finally got the pet I've always wanted.
 My parents surprised me with something so cool!

Creativity Skills: Review similes. Give students a chance to practice similes and compare their answers. Give a short skills test the next day to discover which students have mastered similes and which ones need to be remediated.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Where Did All This Trash Come From?" pp. 28-34, from *Writing Camp*. This is another great, fun play kids will love and want to read several times.

September 19-23, 2011

Narrative Endings: Teach narrative endings, page 9 of the Saddle Bag. Remind students that narrative endings tell the reader what you learned, how your life changed, or what you will always remember. Practice writing narrative endings. Provide short writing pieces that have a beginning and a middle but are missing the ending. Type or draw two lines at the end of the piece. Ask students to write their very best ending for each piece. Compare these student-written endings, and talk about what makes some better than others. Work on these until most kids understand exactly how to write endings for a story.

Review narrative beginnings and middles. Discuss what kinds of details go into narrative middles to make them terrific for the reader. Model how narrative beginnings, middles, and endings fit together to make a complete piece of writing. Show students that they now know how to write beginning, middle, and ending.

Ask your class to read several narratives. There are examples of narratives in *Razzle Dazzle Writing* and *Writing Superstars* (by Melissa Forney) as well as magazines and other books. Help them identify the beginning, middle, and ending in each of the narratives. Talk about descriptive writing and how each author makes his or her story come alive for the reader.

Creativity Skills: Review grabbers, page 10 of the Saddle Bag. Talk about the fact that grabbers hook the reader and make a great first impression. Remind your students that grabbers are placed **before** the beginning on the page, but they can be written first or even after everything else has been written. Give a short skills test at the end of the week to discover which students have mastered grabbers and which ones need to be remediated.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read, "A Worried Kid," page 38, from *Writing Camp*. This is a very short play, so allow your students to reread the play several times, practicing and changing parts.

September 26-30, 2011

Narrative Writing: Ask your students to write a narrative based on something funny that has happened to them. It could be an embarrassing incident, a practical joke, or something crazy they have done. Their job is to write a short beginning that tells the reader, "Have I got a story for you!" Guide them through each step of the middle, which should be filled with vivid, picturesque details, and ask them to write a short ending that tells the reader what they learned, how their life changed, or what they will always remember from this event. Remind them that their audience is their classmates, and they should tell details and put in events that will be enjoyable for their readers. This writing might take two days, so don't rush them. The goal is to produce SPECTACULAR writing, not to finish in 45 minutes. Encourage them to do their very best.

Divide your students into small groups, and let them take turns reading their funny narratives loud. 5
Read some to the class, so everyone can enjoy them.

Creativity Skills: Review zingers, page 10 of the Saddle Bag. Teach your students that zingers are a little something extra for the reader to enjoy at the end of the writing piece. A zinger is used to make the reader smile (or laugh!), think, or feel. Show examples of zingers. Give a short skills test at the end of the week to discover which students have mastered zingers and which ones need to be remediated.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read, "Trouble on the River," pp. 40-51, from *Writing Camp*. This is a longer play and may take several days to read, but kids love this play! Discuss how the characters in the story could write narratives about their trouble on the river. What details could they tell? How could they make their writing picturesque for the reader?

October 3-7, 2011

Narrative Writing: Review narrative writing, grabbers, and zingers. Ask your students to think about a time they got into trouble. This could be trouble at home or trouble at school. Ask them to share these stories with a partner, telling what they did to get into trouble, who got upset, how they felt, and how they were reprimanded. Urge them to share details! Partners should listen with careful attention and ask questions, if necessary, to find out all details.

Now ask students to write narratives about the time they got into trouble. Encourage them to start with a grabber, if they can think of one. Remind them to use a beginning that tells the reader, "Have I got a story for you!" The most important part of all, of course, is the middle, so ask them not to skimp on the details. Guide them through short endings and zingers. Praise all efforts! Stay positive and available to help them as needed.

Ask students to read their narratives aloud to different partners. Read some aloud to the class. Validate the writers who followed directions and included vivid details. Encourage and praise all writers! Discuss what makes each writing special and interesting. Make suggestions for how writers could improve.

Creativity Skill: Review strong verbs. You can use *Razzle Dazzle Writing* if you need models. Let kids practice changing weak verbs (verbs you cannot picture) into strong verbs (verbs you can picture and verbs that add new meaning to the sentence).

The dog went home. = bounced, raced, skipped, dashed, tiptoed, limped, etc.

The sun was overhead. = blazed, beamed, shone, beat down, radiated, etc.

I went to bed. = collapsed into, jumped in, snuggled into, flew into, etc.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "The Leap of Faith," pp. 53-59, from *Writing Camp*. This is a very exciting reader's theater play involving the same endearing characters your students have come to know.

October 10-14, 2011

Expository Beginnings: Teach expository beginnings. Remind students that expository beginnings should introduce the topic in clear, easy to understand language. Help them practice writing expository beginnings on the following topics:

Healthy Snacks
An Aquarium
Bedtime

My Favorite Animal
Doing Your Chores
The Best Sport

Homework
Super Heroes
School Bullies

Expository Middles: Teach expository middles. Remind students that every BIG IDEA wants its own paragraph. Big ideas are like flashlights that shine down on vivid details, interesting facts, riveting statistics, quotes from experts, convincing reasons, picturesque descriptions, and so forth. Lead students through writing an expository beginning and middle for the following prompt: 6

Our school is a terrific place to learn.

Start with a beginning that introduces the topic. Next, help students brainstorm different features of your school: the music room, the science lab, the computer lab, the playground, the cafeteria, the teachers, the principal and assistant principal, our classroom, field trips, etc. Help students write one paragraph at a time, filling it with juicy details. Take your time with this middle, even if it means spreading the writing out over several days. Choose several features to write about and develop those paragraphs. There is no set number that is right. The middle could have two paragraphs, or it could have three, four, or five. It is critically important for students to experience what it is like to write a thorough paper.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read “The Bragging Stick,” pp. 64-71, from *Writing Camp*. This reader’s theater play will help your students learn to analyze their own writing.

October 17-21, 2011

Expository Endings: Teach expository endings, which tell the reader the MOST IMPORTANT thing about the topic. Endings can be as short as one sentence, maybe two. Using the expository beginnings and middles your students wrote last week, help them write expository endings. If you need more time to complete the pieces you worked on, do that first.

Ask students to read their expository pieces to a partner or in small groups. Read some of these aloud. Consider copying two or three of the better pieces for each student. Read these together and discuss the beginning, middle, and ending. Discuss what makes these pieces a pleasure to read. Review expository beginnings, middles, and endings.

Help students write another expository piece on the following topic:

I do many things to get ready for school each morning.

First, give them a copy of your own answer to this writing prompt. In your piece, explain some of the things you do to get ready in the morning. Ask them to help identify the big ideas you have included in the middle. Give them permission to use your paper as a model for their own.

Encourage students to brainstorm suggestions for big ideas of things they do to get ready for school each morning. Put these ideas on the board. Talk kids through beginning, middle, and ending. Remind them to take their time and add several big ideas and lots of juicy details to their middles. Offer help as needed. Validate all efforts. Cheer them on.

Creativity Skill: Review grabbers and zingers, page 10 of the Saddle Bag. Help students add zingers after the endings of the expository pieces they wrote this week.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read “Your Turn: Analyze Writing,” pp. 72-73, from *Writing Camp*.

October 24-28, 2011

Focus, Organization, Support, Conventions: Discuss these four important points to remember. Teach your students the meaning of each one from page 12 in the Saddle Bag. Explain that you will be keeping these in mind for the next six months, at least, and that they will have more meaning as students practice writing.

Read and discuss "Reading a Writing Prompt," page 13 of the Saddle Bag. Ask your students to read the following writing prompts, and discuss what they are being asked to write. 7

Narrative Prompt #1:

Pretend your class has gone on an amazing field trip to a spectacular place. Write the story of your remarkable field trip. In the middle, be sure to sequence the day and give lots of details. Build to the "mountain top" experience the reader will enjoy. Your story should be realistic but enjoyable for the reader. If you know how to do it, include a grabber and a zinger.

Expository Prompt #1:

Imagine you are along with Christopher Columbus on his journey to the new world in the year 1492. You are part of the crew, and you have many duties. Write a letter to your parents explaining what your responsibilities and chores are on the ship. Remember to write a beginning, a middle with several BIG IDEAS, and juicy supporting details, so your parents can picture what a typical day is like for you. Be sure to writing a short ending that tells your parents the most important point you want to make about working on the ship. If you are an extra snazzy writer, include a grabber and a zinger, as well.

Narrative Prompt #2:

Think about a time when you did something wonderful. If you can remember a time, that's great. If not, make one up, but be sure to make it seem real. Tell the circumstances of what happened, and build to the "mountain top" experience. Take us, your readers, on the journey through your wonderful experience. We weren't there to see it, so paint vivid pictures, so we can imagine it as we read your narrative. Remember that your ending should tell the reader what you learned, how your life changed, or what you will always remember.

Expository Prompt#2

Having a healthy body is one of the important steps to a happy life. Think of some ways to have a healthy body. Now explain some of those ways in the middle of your piece. Be sure to make it awesome for your reader.

Now ask your students to write a narrative to Narrative Prompt#1. They should plan what they will write with a planning sheet. I like them to do this by drawing icons that represent BIG POINTS OF THE STORY. Coach them and offer advice and help as they write. Encourage them to write the best narrative piece they can possibly write.

Take the papers home to read. Give written feedback on sticky notes you will stick on each paper. Work on these over the weekend, so you'll have them ready for next week to give back.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Writing to Kara," pp. 74-76, from *Writing Camp*. Discuss. Read "Your Turn: Expository Planning", and ask your students to fill in the blanks with information about a person who is special to them.

October 31-November 4, 2011

Appositives: Teach appositives, page 18 of the Saddle Bag. Ask students to practice writing terrific appositives, which are one of our creativity skills. Practice these daily, all during this week. Remind students that appositives are a great skill to use in our writing because they clarify things for the reader.

Review onomatopoeia (sound effects words). Review strong verbs.

Teach students how to score the easy way, page 34 of the Saddle Bag. Give back their papers from Narrative Writing Prompt #1. Read several papers aloud for the class to enjoy. Ask students to score their own papers as you teach them how to score. Discuss what they can do to score higher next time or to keep the high score they earned on this piece.

Ask kids to write an expository piece about the person they chose who is special to them. Coach them through every step. Let them brainstorm ideas you will put on the board for everyone to use as a resource. Talk them through each paragraph. This might take several days of writing. Remember: you are programming into them what good writing looks like. Take your time teaching and urge them to write juicy, vivid, picturesque details. Remind them that you will read some of these aloud, and it should provide a great experience for the listeners. 8

Take the expository papers home to read. Give written feedback on sticky notes. Score the papers, and put the score at the top of each paper. Work on these over the weekend, so they'll be ready to read and discuss next week.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "P-A-Y-B-A-C-K," pp. 80-86, from *Writing Camp*. Your students will love this funny practical joke story written in reader's theater form.

November 7-11, 2011

Scoring: Review "Scoring the Easy Way", page 35 of the Saddle Bag, or review scoring the way the state teaches it. Give back the Expository Prompt #1 papers students wrote last week. Encourage students to read your comments on the sticky notes. Lead them through the scoring process as it relates to their papers, so they understand the score they got. The more children understand the scoring process, THE EASIER IT IS FOR THEM TO ACHIEVE HIGH SCORES. Read several of the papers aloud. Lead a discussion about what makes each writing sample enjoyable. Ask, "What did this author do to entertain us? What could this author do to get a higher score?" Praise all efforts. Encourage students to read their papers to two or three other students. Make copies of two or three good papers, and give them to students to keep in their notebooks as examples.

Review descriptive writing.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Faceoff for the Treasure," pp. 90-96, from *Writing Camp*. Your students will enjoy watching the campers compete for the most descriptive sentences. The prize? Treasure!

November 14-18, 2011

Dialogue: Teach dialogue from Saddle Bag page 18. Encourage students to learn to write dialogue, and instruct them to use one line of dialogue in their narratives and expository writings (no more than two!). Practice writing dialogue.

Ask students to write to Narrative Prompt #2, about a time they did something wonderful. These stories can be true--based on real life--or students can make them up as long as they sound believable. Lead them through writing beginnings, middles, and endings. This might take several days.

Ask students to read their papers aloud to themselves and look for ways they can improve their stories. Ask them to underline any creativity skills they have used. Take these narratives home over the weekend to read and score.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Hitting the Horse Trail," from *Writing Camp*, pp. 98-104. Discuss sizzling vocabulary.

November 21-23, 2011 SHORT THANKSGIVING WEEK

Scoring: Return the students' narrative papers back to them and discuss the improvements and accomplishments you've seen in their writing. Ask them to read their paper to a partner. Read a few papers aloud.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Ask students to do page 97 from *Writing Camp*. Make this fun! Celebrate progress.

Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How: Divide students into partners. You can do this activity with another class. Let students spend time formulating questions to find out as much as they can about their partners. Their questions should elicit interesting information. Here are some examples:

- What is one food that makes you say, "Yuck!" ?
- What does your family do for fun?
- What job do you think would be the most interesting when you grow up?
- How do you make the world a better place?
- What is something exciting that has happened to you?

Allow partners to take turns interviewing each other. Encourage kids to practice what they will say to the group to introduce their partner. Remind students that they want to share only the interesting parts with the audience. Take turns verbally introducing each other to the class, giving each student two minutes.

Review grabbers, beginnings, middles, endings, and zingers for both narrative and expository writing.

Ask students to do page 105, "Your Turn: Sizzling Vocabulary" from *Writing Camp*.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "A Special Gift," from *Writing Camp*, page 106. Discuss sizzling vocabulary.

December 5-9, 2011

Writing With Passion: Discuss writing from the heart, what it means to write with passion, and how it gives your writing importance. Ask your students to discuss topics they are passionate about. You will have to be a patient asker of questions for the children who don't know whether they are passionate about something. Here are some samples of questions that can open the door for them:

- Do you feel like we should protect and take care of animals?
- How strongly do you feel that family members should be loving and caring?
- What changes would make school better for kids?
- How important is it to take care of the environment and each person do what he can do to accomplish that?
- What if children were able to work at paying jobs?

Ask them to talk in small groups and discuss things they are passionate about. Show samples of writing where the author demonstrated passion. You can find these in magazines for kids, books, and Teddy Bodain's letters in *The Astonishing Journey of Teddy Bodain* (by Melissa Forney).

Ask students to write expository papers based on Expository Prompt #1 (included in these lesson plans). This is a creative prompt where students will get to tap into their own imaginations and invent life aboard the ship with Christopher Columbus. You might need to review the facts about Columbus and the period of time in which he lived. The prompt asks students to write a letter to their parents explaining their responsibilities on a voyage to the new world with Columbus. Encourage them to be inventive and to explain their chores, the ship's rigging and sails, the foods they have to eat, and how they entertain themselves with the other few children on the ship each day. Remind students to write the very best explanations they can write, and offer help as they write their beginning, middle, and ending.

Take these home to read and score. Confer with students afterwards to offer praise and validation. Read several papers aloud to the class. If there are some good ones, ask if you might make copies of these for every student to have and refer to.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Who Is Your Audience?" pp. 108-115 in *Writing Camp*. This play is a little longer and might need to be read over several days.

This is the last week before the holiday for most schools, so let's do something memorable and fun for your class. Ask students to think of two or three writing skills they have mastered that have helped their writing. Invite another class to join your class for this activity. Place chairs in two circles, one inside the other. The inner circle should face out, and the outer circle will should face in. Ask students to sit facing each other across from a partner in the two concentric circles.

Ask students sitting on the outer circle to explain to their partner one of the writing skills they have mastered and how it has helped their writing. Give them one minute to do this, then ring a bell. Now ask students sitting on the inner circle to do the same thing. After one minute, announce, "Inner circle move two seats to the right." Help them do this without too much confusion. Then proceed as before, asking students to explain one of the writing skills that has helped them the most. This is a creative way to get kids to think creatively and to concentrate on writing skills they use to improve their writing.

Review onomatopoeia, strong verbs, similes, descriptive writing, and so forth. Encourage students to reread writing pieces they have done throughout the year so far and notice their improvement.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Make lettergrams, page 117 in *Writing Camp*. Ask children to write a friendly letter to someone they think would enjoy receiving one. These can either be posted or given to the recipient by hand.

January 3-6, 2012

Timed Writing: Explain to your students that they have learned so much as writers that they are ready to begin writing on their own. Tell them they will write narratives to the following prompt:

Narrative Prompt #3

Think of a time when something dangerous happened to you. If nothing dangerous has happen to you, you can "borrow" someone else's story or make up one of your own. Write the story of the time when something dangerous happened to you. Remember: your reader wants to read about your adventure and all of the juicy details, so write with vivid details.

Tell students they will just have today to write this story, but don't announce they have 45 minutes. Ask them to plan for five minutes what they will write. Then, after five minutes, tell them it is time to start writing. Say, "Today, I'm going to ask you to write on your own without my help. I know you can do it. You've learned so much, and you are imaginative, creative writers. I'd like to see how much you can write during this writing workshop." Tell them to get started on their stories, and remind them to include a beginning, a middle, and an ending. Remind them to write with passion and picturesque details.

After 30 minutes, tell students they should write endings if they haven't already started one. Tell them, "You have ten more minutes. If you haven't written your ending, start one now. If you've already finished, read your paper to yourself, and make any improvements that will make your paper the best one you've ever written." At the end of 45 minutes, say, "Time's up." Brag on all efforts, and validate your students. Collect these papers.

The next day, pass out the narrative writing papers. Lead students through "Scoring the Easy Way", page 34 of the Saddle Bag, step by step. Ask them to analyze and score their own papers and put the score they think they should get at the top of the paper. Collect these papers, and take them home to read and score. Put the score you think they should have at the top of the paper next to the child's efforts at scoring. The next day, pass these out again, and be available to discuss and answer questions about the paper. Give encouragement all around to every writer.

Teach hyperbole and strong verbs from page 19 of the Saddle Bag.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "How Does Your Garden Grow?" pp. 119-125 in *Writing Camp*.

Revising: Lead a discussion on revision, which means the BIG changes. Ask your students to tell what kinds of writing boo boos they typically make and how they fix them to make their papers better. Ask for advice on how to revise. Give your students a paragraph that is “okay” but needs revising. Make sure there is plenty of space between lines of the paragraph for them to write in their ideas for revision. Lead a discussion of how they chose to revise, and show some examples on the document camera.

Ask students to write to the following Expository Prompt #3:

We share the world with children in our country and all of the other countries around the world. We have to take care of the world, its plants, and its animals or we won't have a nice place to live with our children one day. Think of some ways to take care of the world. Now, explain several ways to take care of the world. For each BIG IDEA you think of, be sure to put it in its own paragraph, and support it with vivid reasons and interesting details.

Again, as before, tell your class that you know they can use what they have learned to write the best expository papers they've ever written. Remind them to include creativity skills. Remind them to write with passion! Give the same kind of time reminders as before. Encourage students to do their very best. Talk them through the 45 minutes as before.

Collect the papers. Pass them out the next day, and lead students through “Scoring the Easy Way”. Ask them to read their papers aloud and give themselves a score. Ask students to look for CONVENTIONS such as capital letters, end punctuation, spelling, neatness, etc.

Take the papers home to read and score. Put your score at the top next to the student's version of the score and return the papers to the kids. Encourage them to read them to a partner and discuss their accomplishments and successes.

Teach students how to write a one-sentence mini story. Mini stories can be used in expository writing, especially. Most of the time mini stories begin with narrative language:

For instance, one time...

Once, when I was...

When I went canoeing. I saw...

I saw an example of this when...

This very thing happened when...

My family and I had this happen when...

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read “What a Great Point of View,” pp. 127-128 in *Writing Camp*.

January 17-20, 2012

Sentence Variety: Teach the importance of writing short, medium, and longer sentences. Teach how to start sentences in various ways. Copy an interesting, kid-friendly magazine article for your students. Ask them to listen to the article as you read it aloud and pay particular attention to the way the sentences start differently. Ask them to notice that some sentences are shorter, some are longer. Remind them that it is important to do the same thing in their own writing.

Discuss the importance of conventions such as capital letters, end punctuation, neatness, and spelling.

Ask students to write to the following Narrative Prompt #4:

Part of growing up is learning new things. Think of a time when someone taught you something important. Write the story of how this person taught you something new and the steps it took for you to learn it. Be sure to include all the vivid details that will help us picture the entire experience.

Again, as before, offer suggestions of what to do with their time during the 45 minute period. Afterwards, encourage all efforts and validate the entire class. Take these papers home to score. Looking at the strengths and weaknesses of your students, make decisions about which children need remediation.

January 23-27, 2012

Transitional Phrases: Teach transitional phrases, pp. 25-26 in the Saddle Bag. Remind students that transitional phrases should sound natural, like kids normally talk. Avoid using "cookie cutter" transitions that make writing sound corny and boring. Read the list of transitions. Encourage students to look for transitions in writing pieces they have already completed in the past few weeks and to underline them.

Ask students to write to the following Expository Prompt #4:

Friendships are important to everyone's life. Think of the many ways you can show friendship to someone else. Now write an expository piece explaining how to be a good friend. Use a different big idea for each of the middle paragraphs and support the big ideas with lots of specific reasons and vivid details. As you explain, teach the reader how to be a good friend.

Before kids begin, have a classroom discussion on the topic of being a good friend, so kids have a chance to hear many ideas. I realize they can't do this on the day of FCAT Writes, but for the time being we are still teaching them how writers think. Hearing other students' ideas is a good way to help them inform their own writing. Limit their writing to 45 minutes, and keep them aware of the time and how to budget their time. Again, you won't be able to do this for FCAT Writes, but they will learn how to budget their time better if you give them support at this stage.

Collect the papers to take home, read, and score. Return the papers, and ask students to study their paper and consider the score. Lead a discussion about the experience writing to this expository prompt, the success they had, and how they can improve as individuals. Ask kids to give each other advice. Allow them to read their papers to small groups of other students. Read several papers aloud.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "The Talent Show," pp. 135-139 in *Writing Camp*.

January 30-February 3, 2012

Punctuation: Teach punctuation, p. 28 in the Saddle Bag. This is actually a review, as students have been using these punctuation marks all year. Ask students to go back through several of their older writing pieces and make sure they've used the most important punctuation marks.

Review grabbers, beginning, middle, ending, and zingers. Ask students to read the following prompts and explain to the class exactly what it is that each prompt is asking you to do:

Everyone has been lost some time or another. Think of a time when you got lost. Now write the story of the time you got lost.

Most people have a favorite sandwich. Explain how to make your favorite sandwich.

Think of a favorite present you've received from someone. Now tell the story of how you received this gift, who gave it, and what it means to you.

Write about a time when someone special came to visit you.

Think of a really awesome job you would like to have when you are an adult. Now explain what the job is, what you would do in that job, and why you would like it.

Having a day off from school could be lots of fun. Think of things you could do on a day off that would be fun for you. Now explain how to spend this terrific day off.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Breaking Up is Hard to Do," pp. 140-141 in *Writing Camp*.

Excellent Writing: Teach and discuss what makes excellent writing. Ask students to read aloud the narrative and expository writings on pp. 15-18 in the Saddle Bag. Ask, what makes this writing good? Why did we want to keep reading? What did this author do that we could do in OUR writing? Ask students to tell how their writing compares to the writing they have read aloud.

Make arrangements for your students to have a date to read their writing pieces to a younger audience. Confirm a time and place with another teacher, so it is set up ahead of time. Tell your students they have a chance to teach younger kids how to become good writers and that they will perform their own writing as examples. Encourage them to give the younger writers tips about how to be a great writer.

Divide students into small groups, and ask them to read aloud one page of the "Spelling List" from the Saddle Bag, page 29. All students should follow along, taking mental pictures of just how each word looks and is spelled. Another day this week ask them to do the same thing and read page 30.

Ask students to write (45 minutes) to the following Narrative Prompt #5:

Write about an imaginary time when you played a funny joke on someone. Write all the details, so your audience will feel as though they were actually there when it happened or are watching it on a television show. Make sure the story is funny and not something that would hurt someone's feelings. Be sure to include a beginning, middle, and an ending.

Read, score, and confer with students to let them know their progress. Encourage and cheer them on. Kids are growing weary of writing to prompts by this time, so do everything within your powers to support and validate their efforts. You are the coach of a winning team!

Recreate the same treasure game with your students played by the characters in *Writing Camp*. Instructions are on page 97. You will need a treasure chest filled with small prizes. Perhaps you can have these donated by several local businesses. Play the game the same way it is described in the play. Encourage good sportsmanship by reviewing how the Mountain Lions reacted to each other. Ask the kids to list verbal and physical responses to disappointment that would NOT be appropriate and verbal and physical responses to disappointment that WOULD be appropriate when it comes to winning and losing. Role play how to behave if you are the WINNER. Role play how to behave if you are NOT the winner. Appropriate behavior must be taught ahead of time and programmed into kids because some of them have not been taught etiquette when it comes to sportsmanship. You don't want anything to spoil this game because it is tons of fun.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Read "Keeping in Touch," pp. 142-144 in *Writing Camp*.

February 13-17, 2012

Creativity Skills: Review and practice all creativity skills. You can turn this into an amusing game like Jeopardy or a spelling bee. Keep reminding your students how much they already know. Brag on their efforts and validate what amazing writers they've become.

Divide students into small groups and ask them to read aloud one page of the "Spelling List" from the Saddle Bag, page 31. Again, all students should pay attention to just how each word looks and is spelled. Do the same thing another day this week, and read page 32.

Ask students to write (45 minutes) to the following Expository Prompt # 5:

Imagine designing the perfect summer camp for kids. Think of all the areas of the camp and the activities you would do there. Now explain to us, your readers, and make your writing so inviting we will all want to go there!

Read and score their expository papers. Give great amounts of encouragement and praise.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Host an "Authors' Ice Cream Social" for all the kids in your grade level. 14
Tell the students that authors like to get together and discuss writing: their strengths, their victories, favorite vocabulary words, creativity skills they have mastered, etc. Encourage them to give each other advice on writing.

February 21-24, 2012

Review of Writing Skills: Review punctuation, beginning, middle, ending, how to read a writing prompt, how to plan for five minutes with iconic drawing, how to support the middle with picturesque details, how to consider your audience, and creativity skills. Review, review, review. Make this fun. Children will pick up on your enthusiasm and see this entire experience as something positive if you lead the way. The key is to brag on their accomplishments and lift them to the heights with words of affirmation and pride.

Divide students into small groups, and ask them to read aloud one page of the "Spelling List" from the Saddle Bag, page 33, looking at each word carefully, taking a mental picture of how it is spelled. If you have the time, they can read over the entire spelling list this week.

Write a personal letter to each of your students, validating and praising each step of this arduous journey. These don't have to be more than four or five sentences, but they should be heartfelt, sincere uplifting, and motivating. Especially let them know that you are proud of them and know they can do their best the day of FCAT Writes but that they are more than just a "score" to you: you value them as a contributing member of your classroom. Put these in envelopes to open on Monday.

EXTRA ACTIVITY: Ask students to write letters of encouragement to each other. Have them draw one name out of a hat and write to that classmate. Remind them to build each other up, talk about their strengths, make writing suggestions, and be upbeat and funny. When they have finished their letters, they should sign their names and seal them in envelopes. If they want to write to more than the one student, that's okay, too. Save these for Monday, February 27.

February 27, 2012 One Day Before FCAT Writes!

Let students open and read their letters. This will be a time of great enjoyment for them. Spend this day reflecting on the journey of this year and look to the future when their skills will help them accomplish great things for the world. This journey is MUCH BIGGER THAN JUST FCAT WRITES!

If your students have "Encouragement Rings", now is a good time for them to read them.

Ask students to write letters to you, their teacher, telling you how they feel, what they have learned from you this year about writing, and how they plan to write for tomorrow's FCAT Writes! Remind them that you need encouragement, too.

Send a letter home to parents reminding them to help their student have a calm, enjoyable evening. Students need a nourishing supper and the loving support of their families. Ask them to lay things out tonight so that tomorrow morning will be the smoothest morning of the entire year: clothes, bookbag, lunch, etc. Ask them to make sure students have a good breakfast with the least amount of stress. Remind them to plan ahead, so there is no rushing or worries about getting to school on time. Ask parents to tell their child how proud they are of all they have learned in writing and that they believe in them no matter what. (You know some kids won't get this, so be ready to stand in the gap for them at school).

Start the day with a positive, calm, supportive attitude. Verbalize, "You are ready. You can do it. I believe in you. Don't worry about your score. Just do like we have practiced over and over and over, and you'll do fine."

Remind students of the following tips:

1. Read the prompt several times, and think about what it is asking them to do.
2. Plan for a few minutes, so they get their thoughts organized.
3. Indent for beginning, middle, and ending plus other paragraphs that contain BIG IDEAS.
4. Write with vivid, picturesque details, interesting facts, and creativity skills.
5. Be passionate about the topic, and let it show in their writing.
6. Make their ending just as wonderful as their beginning: end with a B-A-N-G!

Reassure them that they have been taught well, they are prepared, and they know what to do. Tell them to relax and have fun with their writing because that will show on the paper.

After the test, praise them, reassure them, calm their fears, and validate their efforts. This is the time to help them let off steam and do some laughing!

Teachers, I can't emphasize enough that we are touching the lives of our students and preparing them for future opportunities. This is a noble profession we have chosen. Be proud of your loving, sacrificial, life-changing, mentoring, enabling, empowering efforts to improve the lives of the children in your class. You deserve the highest praise, the biggest salary, the greatest respect, and lifetimes of gratitude.

I am proud to stand with you!

Melissa Forney