

WRITERS MATTER

SUPPLEMENTAL BOOK

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THIS RESOURCE IS A SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE IN ADDITION TO THE ELEMENTARY, UPPER
ELEMENTARY, AND MIDDLE SCHOOL BOOKS.

* USE WHAT WORKS. ADJUST LESSONS. STEAL IDEAS.

WRITERS MATTER @ LA SALLE UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

Dear Teachers,

Thank you for taking the Writers Matter journey with us. For many of you, you have been a part of the program for many years and others might be brand new to the program. Regardless of the category you fall under, we are excited to have you and look forward to working together to help our students find their voice. In doing so, I think, we too, will find and refine our own teaching voice as well.

The book in your hands right now is meant to be a supplemental book, so if you are a new teacher to the program, this is not where you want to start. You might not even use this book this year as it may be overwhelming just getting the program started in your class. Depending on the students you are working with, you should have either the orange cover book if you are an elementary teacher, the blue cover book if you are early middle school, or the green book if you are upper elementary. Those are the books everyone should begin with. This book is an additional resource to those books.

How to use this book:

Each chapter in the book coincides with the same chapter in the other books you are using, even if the chapter titles are slightly different. So if you are working on Chapter Two in the blue cover book, *You think you know, but do you really know me?*, you would turn to chapter two in this book, *Challenges*, for more ideas or suggestions to help you with that theme.

You are not expected to do everything in this book! If you attempted to, you would never get close to getting through all the themes. This book was developed out of the suggestions from some of our veteran teachers who were looking for new ideas and for those who were teaching the same students year after year in the program. If you just use the other books, that is fine. Feel free to pick and choose from the suggestions in this book. You may also want to use some of the writing samples to share with your students. There are some ideas in this book intended for elementary students that can certainly be adapted for use with the middle school students and there are middle school lessons that can be adapted for elementary students. Please don't look at anything in this book as dogma. These are ideas and suggestions and we hope you use them as a seed and plant them anyway you see fit. You are the expert, you know your students, use this the best way you see fit.

We are excited for those of you who are returning to our program for another year and want to welcome those who are new. You are not just starting a journey for your students but one for yourself as well. Don't be afraid to be courageous, bold, and take risks; your students deserve nothing less.

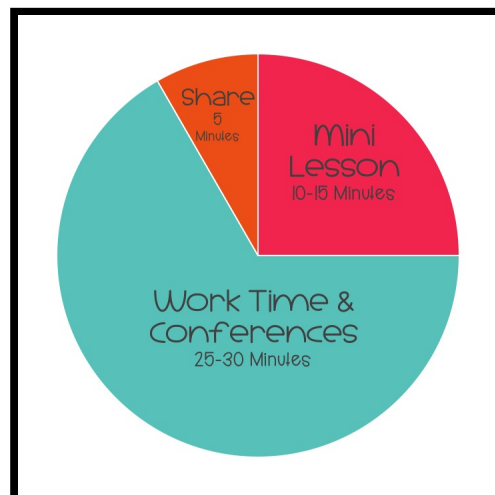
Writers Matter in a Writing Workshop

We have discovered that using writers workshops as an integral part of the Writers Matters approach leads many students to develop confidence in their writing ability and therefore develop the self-belief that they can write more effectively with hard work. Enhanced motivation to write leads to greater persistence in developing these essential skills. Writers Matters teachers also find that employing writers workshops, enables students to develop confidence as writers, which leads to greater writing skill development. (Yost, Vogel, Lewinski, 2014 p.)

What are Writers Workshops?

Although the descriptions of writers workshops vary to some degree from one researcher to another, all share the same premise of what writers workshops are: an “environment where the child can acquire and grow in his or her skills of writing, along with developing the fluency, confidence, ability to make and record observations, and the desire to see him or herself as a writer” (Peterson, 2006, p. 75). Writers Workshop is a **framework** for writing instruction and practice in the classroom. Instruction is designed to help students grow from their individual starting points, which means that every writers workshop is different in some regard. What writing workshop looks like in your classroom will depend upon you, the teacher, and your students. Hence, every writing workshop takes on its own identity. However, there are some fundamental elements that make up a writing workshop.

The writing workshop follows a predictable pattern where most sessions should include a mini-lesson, time to write, conferencing, and time to share. Below is a diagram of what this might look like in your class period. Timing will vary due to the amount of writing time you have built into your day but that ratio of how time is spent should remain the same. The only way we learn *how* to write is by *writing*, so that needs to be where the majority of your time is spent.



The Mini-lesson

A mini-lesson is explicit instruction in a specific writing technique taught in a short 5-10 minute period at the start of the workshop. Your mini-lesson should be dependent on a combination of the needs of your students and your curriculum. These lessons can take on a variety of purposes from helping students come up with an idea to write about, to making revisions to their drafts to make the writing more interesting, to reviewing grammar rules for when they are editing and learning how to publish.



There are 4 types of writing mini-lessons:

- Procedures and Organization - routines
- Strategies and Processes
- Skills
- Craft and Techniques

Time to Write

As stated above, the only way for a student to improve their writing skills is to write. The more one writes, the quicker they will improve as a writer. Therefore it is important for students to write daily or at least 3 to 4 times a week. Research suggests that if you only write one day a week, you are actually teaching kids to dislike writing. It needs to be a part of their routine and who they are.



Students will write what they know best. This is what the foundation of Writers Matter is based. Our research has shown that students like to write about their lives and the important people and events in them. This is why it is critical that the students help to determine the topics they will write about. The Writers Matter program teaches you many ways to help students find these topics. Therefore, the teacher's role is facilitator. After teaching a mini-lesson, the teacher should be circulating the room, monitoring, encouraging, conferencing, and providing help as needed, remembering that students are at different stages of development and writing, therefore individual needs will vary. This leads to the next critical part of the writing workshop, the conference.

Conferences

The conference is where the real teaching takes place. The conference is a time for the teacher to take the role of the student; our job is to observe and learn what the student needs.



Then you provide individual instruction or guidance to help move the writer along. Conferencing occurs during the independent writing time of the workshop. At times, students can seek responses from other students by having peer conferences and/or the teacher conferences with individual students.

Time to Share

Sharing time is an integral part to the writers' workshop and Writers Matter. Most often, this is left out when timing becomes an issue but it is during share time that students really begin to develop as writers. As with every other part of the writing workshop, the share time will look the way that is most appropriate for you and your students. Many teachers have even created something called the "Author's Chair" as a designated place for the writers to share their writing.



During sharing time, students are given opportunities to share their writing piece. This time allows writers to learn from each other and to see/hear good examples of writing. Sometimes this can be one student sharing their entire piece or everyone in the class sharing a sentence. Sharing can take place at the beginning of a draft to get suggestions on where to go, in the middle of a draft to get revision suggestions, or when a draft is published to celebrate their success.

When students share their writing with one another, they get new ideas for writing and hear other styles and risks that their classmates are making in their writing, which helps them all grow as writers. We have found in Writers Matter that the sharing session has become the heart of the program. Students tend to care more about their writing when they know they are going to share it and it is going to be valued in the classroom.

Given the nature of what many of the students write about in the Writers Matter program, the share session is where the trust is created and the belief in themselves as writers begins. Teachers sharing their writing during this time also helps to break down the barriers between the teacher and student; in turn, more honest writing emerges. This time also allows for students to get to know each other better and learn that they are not alone in what they are going through. Often students begin to find similarities with students they once thought were very different from

them. The bond the students form leads to an environment that is necessary for good writing to emerge; one that is open to taking risks, free of judgement and supportive.

There are many different ways that students can share:

- Whole class sharing
- Small group sharing
- Partner sharing
- Audience sharing (bringing in outside people)
- Publishing (sharing online and in print)

Begin With an End In Mind

As we get ready to begin the journey of a new school year, I ask you to begin with an end in mind. I want you to think about this in two ways-- for your students and yourself.

Your Students:

I want you to think about where you want your students to be at the end of the school year. What goals do you have for your students? What do you want your students to learn from implementing the Writers Matter program? What do you want your students to be able to do that is different from what they already can do? How will your students show evidence of growth throughout the year?

You:

I want you to think about where you want to be as a teacher at the end of the school year. What goals do you have for yourself as a teacher? Why are you even considering implementing the Writers Matter Program? What do you want to be able to do that is different from what you are already doing? What evidence will you have from the changes you implement? In an article for teachers "who are at different points on a continuum of thoughtful change," Dorothy Strickland (1994/1995, p. 301) offered some advice.

- Don't try to change everything at once.
- Know your belief system; it is the rock on which you build your instructional program-but be open to new ideas.
- It's okay to question new ideas, but do so sincerely.
- Learn to live with ambiguity; there are always more questions than answers.
- Collaborate with staff members to set goals and take steps to accomplish them.

As we prepare to implement change, we should ask ourselves: What are my philosophical beliefs as a teacher? Does the way I teach match these beliefs? Why do you do what you do in the classroom? Does it have the best interest of students in mind? Should I continue to do what I've always done? Or should I consider a new approach that promises great reward? To help set a goal for yourself, here are some questions to consider to help you see where your beliefs lie.

	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree
Students should be allowed to talk purposefully during workshop time.			
Students should be able to choose the topics they want to write about.			
The teacher should share control with the students.			
The teacher should adjust instruction as children progress through a natural developmental continuum.			
Writing can enhance any subject area.			
Students learn to write by writing.			
Students learn best when the curriculum is integrated and connected to their lives.			
The child should be the center of the learning process.			
Students need time to read and write.			
Changing teaching methods can be difficult and frustrating.			
Making research-based changes in instructional procedures can be rewarding.			
It's acceptable for students to progress at different rates.			
Students should know that school is a safe place to write about tough topics, especially ones that might be controversial or go against the "norm".			

Adapted from *Constructing a Foundation*

I ask you to take a few minutes at the start of each year to set a goal for yourself as a teacher and for your students. You will write this goal down and you will start to think of a plan to help you achieve these goals so that you can hold yourself accountable. Share your goals and plan with your colleagues, the directors of Writers Matter, the teacher leader at your school, maybe even your principal, and see how they can help you achieve your goals. Don't be afraid to let the students know what your goals are for them and for yourself as they are a great source of accountability. Best of all, have your students set goals for themselves and hold them accountable for achieving them.

My Goal for My Students

This year, I would like my students to

Teaching of Writing Goal

What are some things I do well as a teacher of writing?

-
-
-
-
-

What are some things I am not very good at as a teacher of writing or something I don't know much about but would like to know more?

-
-
-
-
-

What is the one thing I would like to focus on/implement this year?

-

What steps will I take to implement this goal- be specific?

-
-
-
-

What evidence will I use to show the work I've done to achieve my goal?

Writing Goal

What are 5 things I do well as a writer?

-
-
-
-
-

What are five things I have a hard time with/I recently learned about/I don't understand about my writing?

-
-
-
-
-

Pick one of those things you would like to work on?

-

What do you plan to do to improve that aspect of your writing?

-
-
-

What evidence will you use to show that you have been working toward your goal?

CHAPTER 1: WHO AM I?

{ELEMENTARY SUGGESTIONS}

In this unit, students are opening up about who they are and where they come from. Here are some additional resources you can use for this unit. Feel free to adjust any of these to suit the needs of your students.

****VARIATIONS ON “I AM FROM” POEM**** *{Informative/Narrative}*

Objective: Students will be able to write an “I Am From” poem in order to show their knowledge of a historical perspective.

Now that you have some experience working with your students as they create their “I Am From” poems, you can extend the concept.

{Standard Connection}

CC.1.2.5.F Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in grade-level text, including interpretation of figurative language.

CC.8.6.6-8.B.* Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes

Activity 1

Start by doing a read aloud of the book Show Way by Jacqueline Woodson. The book traces a family history from the time of slavery through the present. It shows how a family changes, grows, and adjusts throughout major African American historical events. Discuss with the class how the different events of history made an impact on the family. Discuss how every family has been influenced by their history. Each student will be able to complete a graphic organizer in order to write his or her “I Am From” History poem. (see below) The students might want to work on this at home and include input from their family members. Once they have their completed graphic organizer, they are ready to write their poems. This is the same idea as from the original “I Am From” poems. Have them include some figurative language (similes, metaphors, sensory images, etc.) in their poems too.

Graphic Organizer

History and Historical Events	Family History
Historical People	My Future

Student Samples

Connections to the Past

By: a 6th grader at E. M. Stanton

I am from a rough past.

A past where blacks were slaves,
and slaves were sold.

I am from marching for freedom.

Speeches for equality.

I am from from Martin Luther King
who taught me to treat others how I want to be treated.

I am from Medgar Evers who joined the army.

I am from a grandfather who risked his life in the army.

I am from Madame C.J. Walker who made hair products.

I am from an aunt who does hair.

I am from wanting to become a model and have a bright future.

I am from wanting to be the greatest person I can be.

I am from accomplishing my goals
and getting out of Philly
and away from the violence.

I Am From Poem
By: a 6th grader at E. M. Stanton

I am from slavery because a lot of special people were involved in slavery back in history.
I am from the Civil Rights Movement because the Civil Rights Movement helped blacks back then.
I am from racism because there was a time where black kids could not go to school with white kids.
I am from Martin Luther King Jr. because he helped blacks all over the world by helping with civil rights.

I am from Malcolm X because he was an inspiration to black people all over the world.
I am from the Little Rock Nine who were brave kids who wanted to learn and were brave enough to go to an all white school.

I am from my mother because she gave birth to me and raised me.
I am from my grandmother because she was there for me since the day I was born.
I am from my dad because he was there for me most of the time and he taught me life lessons that I still know today.

I am from today where blacks need to stop the crime.
I am from the future where my hopes are for the government to improve the schools.
Finally, I am from our community where the community needs to start acting more appropriate and the people in it need to become better citizens.

"Why I Live Well Today"

By: a 6th grader at E. M. Stanton

I am from
The events of the past when slaves were worked to death
I am from
The darkest of all days beginning with slavery ending with Donald Trump
I am from
The "I Have a Dream" speech when crowds gathered together and rejoiced
I am from
1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give her seat to a white man which started the Montgomery Bus Boycott
I am from
The Harlem Renaissance, blacks and whites united in the hands of jazz.
I am from Black kids being sold at the age of seven, torn from their parents like small, little puppies.
I am from
A time when the world was against blacks, and they had barely anywhere to run
I am from
Wondering if the slaves were simply just a reflection of us today

I am from
Waking up everyday to a certain society and wonder if when I grow up, I will be a
slave too
A slave of the law...

I am from
A sad history when you couldn't tell your teacher your innermost dreams without a
response telling you, you will never be anything

I am from
A world where phrases can hurt people, people say
"You will never be anything"
"You can't do it"
"It's impossible, what makes you think you can do it?"
They still ring in all parts of the world, they're loud insults to those who felt the pain
from the past

I am from
The present, today, 2017
And I am thinking of the tragic past

I am from
Feeling as lucky as ever that I have food to eat, food I don't have to work for, shelter I
don't have to work in the hot sun for
I am blessed with food and shelter that I don't have to try for, I'm blessed knowing
that I won't be torn away from my family because they treat me right. But the
people of the past weren't so blessed.

I am from
Aunty giving me a pencil and paper on those long weekends, her telling me to write,
her passing down her passion to write to me

I am from
Langston Hughes mixing the beauty of poetry to the greatness of jazz

I am from
The beauty and ugliness of the past

I am from
Not trying to be amazing, a star, or perfect, I am me and they were they, and they
tried to make a difference while I was waiting for it to happen, then I would be born

I am from
These gentle men and women who had great determination and made quotes that
inspire me today and inspire people all over the world.
"We are not makers of history, we are made by history"- Martin Luther King

Show Way Poem

By: a 6th grader at E. M. Stanton

Throughout the years, many important movements happened.
Marches for unity to support equality and unity.
Women trying to get equal with men,
People wanting to end segregation.
Writers inspiring others to make a change.
Maya Angelou inspired me to write.
Rosa Parks inspired me to stand up for my rights.

I am from my mother's bravery of traveling here from her home.
Trying to fit in, she might've felt alone.
My dad, singing and recording, all day and night.
When he met my mom, love was in sight.
In that red dress she wore, they became friends, and much more.

Then I was born, their first.
They didn't know what to do, so nervous they would burst.
Their second, my sister, bouncing off the walls,
but was as fragile as a glass doll.
Joyful, hyper friends everywhere.
Sang all day long without a care.

In my not-so-distant future, I dream of going to college.
I wish for an education of the arts and artists.
I wish for new laws for safety and equality.
So many people have fought for unity.
The authorities keeping others safe.
Keeping people alive is the most important thing.
I am from the changes of the past and for the future.
Changing lives and bringing people together.

Activity 2

Students can write an "I Am From" riddle poem using the **Writers Matter** approach. Start by introducing your class to *The Undeclared 44*. This is an amazing website complete with short biographies and creative portraits of the most influential African Americans in history past and present. Pick a few to showcase to ignite their interest. Then let them explore the website. Tell them to pick one person that they would like to write their poem about. Students research facts about where their subject was born, what their childhood was like, family background, and lastly, what events led up to how they got to be such an integral part of history.

Using their notes the students write their poems from their subject's point of view. Here's the thing, they don't reveal themselves. The reader has to guess who the poem is about based on the "I Am From" clues.

4th Grade Student Samples from E. M. Stanton

"I Am From" written from Michael Jackson's point of view

I am from my family and the Motown sound
Did you ever hear of the Jackson 5?
Yea I am from that
He was born August 29th 1958 in Gary, Indiana
I am him and he is me
I am from an amazing solo career
They called me the King of Pop
I'm from multiple number 1 hits
I'm Bad
I'm Off The Wall
I'm a Thriller
I am from haunting dreams
Carry on Bruno Mars, The Weekend, and Justin Timberlake
Cause I'll be asleep forever.

"I Am From" written from Henrietta Lack's point of view

I am from being born in 1920
Back then it was okay to marry your cousin so that's what I did
I adore my five children
I was diagnosed with cervical cancer
I had to travel all they way to Baltimore for my treatments
People cutting up pieces of me then covering up their tracks
I am from people stealing my tissue to use my cells without even telling me
My family questions why they started receiving so many telephone calls

My cells help push away polio and HIV
In 2013 researchers published DNA sequences of my HELA cells
Yet I lie here in an unmarked grave.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.5

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6

Activity 3

Using the same template of the "I Am From" poem, students can demonstrate knowledge of fictional characters by writing an "I Am From" from a character's point of view. For example, if the class is reading *The Outsiders*, students could write a poem from Ponyboy's point of view. Also, students can demonstrate knowledge of history or people by writing an "I Am From" poem from a historical point of view. For example, if you are reading *The Diary of Anne Frank*, students can write a poem from Anne's point of view.

Below you will find poems from J. Hampton Moore's third graders after a unit on Malala Yousafzai. It's just another way to use "I Am From" poems.

I Am From

From the perspective of Malala Yousafzai

I am from the clear blue water to the sparkling snow-capped mountains of my home, Swat Valley

I am from a mother who is always there for me when I need a hug to a father who has treated me like his princess since I was born

I am from a classroom of many to a classroom of few

I am from never really knowing the true meaning of terror until I heard the word, "Taliban"

I am from the darkness of negativity to the dawn of determination

I am from never giving up on myself, my female friends, or my country

I am from standing up to men three times my age for my freedom

I am from the sweet sounds of doctors telling me I could finally go home

I am from one pen, one student, and one teacher can change the world

I Am From

From the perspective of Malala Yousafzai

I am from the voice of the Taliban to a loving father

I am from the words of the Taliban to the words of my heart

I am from the Taliban who doesn't want girls to be educated to my father who wants girls to be educated

I am from a past of violence to a future of peace

I am from the words of the Taliban to the words of my dreams

I am from cold tears to a big bright smile

I am from a warrior with words

I am from being a normal girl to a famous woman

"I Am From"

We are all unique beings with our own background story. When we think about who we are, we must think about "where" we're from. "Where" doesn't just mean a place...it means all sorts of things: culture, religion, neighborhood, sayings, family, traditions, celebrations, tragedies, sports, etc. These are the colors of our lives and every person has a special picture to paint.

Requirements:

- Utilize the writing process: draft, revise, edit, publish.
- Free verse poetic form (no intentional rhymes, indent carry-over lines, etc.)
- 4 stanzas of 5 lines each or 5 stanzas of 4 lines each (at least 20 lines)
- Use of descriptive language and precise verbs
- Correct conventions
- Final copy must be typed in 12 point Times New Roman Font with name, section, school, and date on the top of the page.
- GRADING: 50 points for written piece, 50 points for class presentation

(After everyone completes their individual poems, we will each pick our favorite line that most represents us and put it together in one class poem.)

Try this:

I am from (place, city, culture, street, parents) _____
I am from (food, favorite vacation place) _____
I am from (favorite quote, happy place) _____
I am from (pain in your life, sorrow, sad time) _____
I am from (best relationship, worst relationship) _____
I am from (happiest time in life) _____
I am from (positive/negative things people have said) _____
I am from (favorite holiday) _____
I am from (favorite song, music) _____
I am from (childhood memory) _____

Each line can be expanded by adding details to each line. The above ten lines can now turn into 20 or 30 lines with more details for each "I Am From" line.

Middle School "I Am From" poems by Eighth Graders from McDaniel Elementary

I am from Norristown, where I am used to my friends being right down the street.
I am from lots of corner stores with bags of chips for 50 cents.
I am from 20 minutes of school bus rides, where everyone gets lit.
My neighborhood consisted of all different races from Chinese to Black.
I am from the park where the boys would play basketball and the girls would watch.
I am from very quiet schools with strict rules.
I come from a Jamaican grandma, and a grandfather from New Orleans.
I am from a family business where I clean fish and always ate seafood.
I am from a traveling family where we'd be in a new state every summer.
I grew up with both of my parents in two different households.
I grew up an only child, but that didn't last very long.
I am from very immature friends who never get in trouble.
I am from a musical family who loves to sing and rap.
I grew up very curious and was very fast for my age, where I'd annoy lots of people with "too many questions."
I am from play fighting and a playful mom that would have the whole block laughing.
I am from playing with my two cousins in the backyard who always ended up getting hurt.
I grew up looking like my Aunt Dia, we look so much alike people would mistake her for my mom.
I grew up listening to Michael Jackson and watching The Little Einsteins.
I grew up in and out of Florida, I'm always somehow moving back and forth.
Where I'm from makes me the unique, amazing person I've come to be!

**The next poem is by Ashley, another eighth grader who chose not to punctuate at the end of her lines, and I feel it adds more drama to her poem.*

I AM FROM...

I am from a city that's known for hatred
Philly, the city they call Brotherly Love
Where history was made and where I grew up
I am from a place where violence occurs everyday over money, drugs and anything
I am from Philly where "The good die young," and it seems to never end
Where you learn hatred and LOVE rarely wins
A city where mistakes happen and we forgive and forget
Philly, where you should chase your dreams and never give them up
The city where families fall but still seem to find love
Philadelphia, the city of Brotherly Love is what they call it
A place where girls are getting pregnant and have already gave birth by the age of 17
Where almost every corner is filled with drug dealers who make money off the streets
I am from the hard streets of Philly
Where Hip Hop and R&B music take place
I am from a place where you get bullied if you don't have name brand clothes and Jordans
on your feet
This place, where family and friends meet and strangers and neighbors greet
And at night you hear gunshots firing through the air
In this small city where every store is near
The city of the 33rd largest state
I come from a place called Philly where young kids get hurt but also have fun
Block parties, cookouts, water balloon fights playing manhunt in the streets late at night
Where most kids are close and stand up for each other and act as a sister or brother
Philadelphia might be bad but also misunderstood
Some people think we are all rude, dumb and low life just because we are from the hood
Where we learn from experiencing things that happened, bad or good
I am from Philly a city that I LOVE and is very misunderstood

I AM FROM SOUTH PHILLY...

I am from a beautiful mother and handsome father.

I am from where I hear R&B and hip hop everyday.

I am from where mothers cry over their sons, over situations that are deep.

I am from a loving family.

I am from a city called Brotherly Love.

I am from a household that keeps food in the refrigerator.

I am from where young men rape little girls.

I am from where gunshots go off at night.

I am from a family that encourages me to have dreams.

I am from where it is not safe to walk to places at night.

I am from where young men are selling drugs to get money.

I am from a household of 5.

I am from where kids disrespect their parents.

I am from where it is easy to get a gun.

I am from a well-educated school.

I am from where young men are getting killed over money and drugs.

I am from a very clean home.

I am from a city where kids can't go outside and play.

I am from where bullying isn't cool.

I am from a place where people sell their food stamps to get drugs.

I am from where young kids want to be more like rappers.

I am from where kids are going to basketball courts to play basketball.

I am from where kids wear anything because their parents don't have the money.

I am from where kids can't get their hair cut and done when they want.

I am from where the stars light up at night.

I am from where 14 and 15 year old kids are getting drugs.

I am from where kids stay out late.

I am from where it is not safe to go to the park.

I am from a mother that went to Overbrook High School.

I am from South Philly, and this is how I feel.

**** “We Are From” Poetry ****

Sometimes knowing where we come from can be ignited by the people around us. Who else to best help students identify where they come from than their classmates? When it comes to students' backgrounds, there are things they tend to forget, oversee, or even think is not important. Sometimes, what is important to someone may not seem important to others and peers can help them understand or even evaluate the importance of certain life experiences. Say a student is new to your school and they don't know anyone there, the "We Are From" poem can help the new student work collaboratively in getting to know the old students surrounding them. Working in groups sparks a fire in students that should not be denied or overlooked. Allow for laughter and talk time, but monitor students to make sure they are on target. Get to know what they are discussing and positively encourage them to keep working. Saying things like: "I like this," "This is good stuff," "May I read?" "How does this make you feel?" is helpful to students. Asking them questions, being involved and interested helps students feel less anxious and more relaxed. Once the students begin working, you want to make sure you target the groups who are not doing anything and the groups who started but are just stuck. With that being said, let's get started.

1. Teachers should have already given a mini-lesson on **figurative language** and its usage. Some students may want to stay in a comfort zone by just using similes and possibly metaphors, some students may use those and hyperboles, personification, imagery, idioms, and so on. The usage of figurative language brings light and vision to students' writing. This is a youtube video you can watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVV4DtZGxjqQ>. There are many other videos available, but it is good to provide young students with a visual interpretation of the usage of figurative language. After each type of figurative language, I would have students practice the usage. This lesson could take several days, depending on the age level and what your students needs to learn according to the common core. *Be sure to correspond lesson with common core in the curriculum engine on the School District website.
2. Have students listen to one of the songs mentioned below. Be sure to listen to the songs before you play any of them, there could be content you may be uncomfortable with. There are many other songs about where people are from that you can research. Be sure to find the clean version of any song. See if students can relate to any of the lyrics in the song you chose and have them talk amongst each other about where this person has been and what they have been through.
 - Lauryn Hill: "Every Ghetto, Every City"
 - Kanye West: "Touch The Sky"
 - Kanye West: "Through the Wire"
 - 2pac - "Hold On Be Strong"

-
3. Youtube videos that have students saying their poems can be found here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ztZUSON3jwk>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERzb8jCDn8Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HkOHvtn0-FY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yxLlu-scR9Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8oxXMELGark>

Or you can just do a search of "We Are From" Poems or "I Am From" poems.

Remember...listen and view all content before having your students view or listen to it.

4. Once you are ready to begin your "We Are From" lesson, you want to have the students come up with a class web where they list any and everything that could be in the poem and any and everything they may have in common with other classmates. Accept all answers, as long as they make sense. Possible additions to the web could be: neighborhood, schools, siblings, parents, church, camps, vacations, importance of family, etc. This web should stay up during the writing process.

5. Students should work in groups of 2 or 3. 4 students may begin to get complicated, but can work.

6. Have students think about things they have in common where they can create their own web. You should provide a web for them to make the process easier.

You can include the following topics: pets, parents, places lived, homes, schools, church, activities, family, siblings, vacations, holidays, traditions/celebrations, chores/jobs, fears, subjects, hobbies, friends, books, food, objects, punishments

7. Students should now begin the writing process of writing their poems. Students should be given about 2 days to complete the web and the poem. First draft should be completed by day one. By day two, review the rubric with students and have them reconvene to continue the writing process.

- Review what they have written
- Reread the rubric as a group
- Add lines of explanation using examples of figurative language
- Use computers to check for spelling errors
- Check for grammatical errors, be sure that any slang used is intentional and purposeful (If the students decide to use slang in their semantic, phonological, or stylistic patterns, be sure they can defend why they have decided to use it. Students may want to present their poetry from a "real" or authentic perspective and they should be

allowed to do so. Explain the difference between formal and informal English.)

- Check for correct punctuation
- Rewrite as a final draft
- Begin to type poetry as the teacher does a final check for errors

8. On day 3, students should be given time to read through what they have written. They should begin to practice lines. They should make sure each group member has a voice. Allow them to present this the way they would like. Different styles include: a two voice poem, chunking, or all read together. Some students may present artwork to follow. If they would like art, make sure you allow time for the work to be completed.
9. If you decide to hang the wonderful work your students have done, you might want to include all pieces. The web, first draft, second draft, and final typed copy along with the grading rubric.

Grading Rubric (Can be modified to fit your class)

Work Together as a Group for Final Product	15 points	
Creative Lines Using F.L. (at least 2)	15 points	
Conventions (spelling and grammar)	15 points	
Completed Web	15 points	
Completed Rough Draft	15 points	
Presentation		
Loudness	15 points	
Understandable	10 points	
TOTAL	100 POINTS	

Example: Students can view this example to show the use of figurative language .

I am from shattered glass that continues to shatter

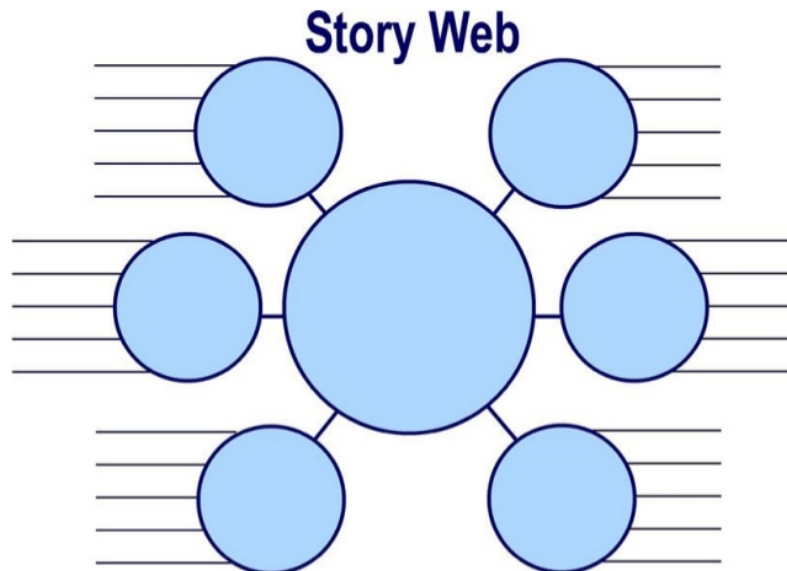
I am from broken promises, where sometimes I felt there was no hope

I am from days and nights wondering if I will see the light of the sun again. The sun that may shine on someone else, but feels like it will never shine on me.

I am from wanting to do things, but not having the courage to get it done. Not knowing if I was good enough to lead my own dreams, so sometimes I follow the dreams of others.

**The poems on the following pages were written by students from Wagner Middle School.

Story Web: This is from the Internet, but any web can be used.



We Are From



We are from beautiful,
From the stars in our eyes.
We are from being scared
When we see imaginary things in the dark.
We are from staying up late,
Watching tv and hearing teenagers walk
the streets.
We are from doing chores,
From sweeping outside and cleaning our
rooms.
We are from taking care of our pets
By walking, feeding, and washing them.
We are from playing outside with our
siblings,
From climbing mountains and being
stranded in a desert.
We are from having quality time with our
families
By taking trips and playing board games.
We are from watching our friends play
basketball at the park.
We are from being girls.
From dresses, nail polish, and perfume.

WE ARE FROM

We are from a world of imagination to a
world of Disney.
We feel like we are a part of the magic.
We are from reading the book to
watching the movie.
Where you enjoy it with your family.
We are from being bored in the house to
going to a water park
We are having a lot of fun.
We are from loving mothers to
abandoned fathers.
In our hearts, it fills up with hatred.
We are from doing challenges to eating a
lot of Hot Cheetos,
The best kind of chips in the world.
We are from loving Christmas to getting
presents.
This holiday is a time to enjoy your family.
We are from far away homes to seeing
each other at school,
Which is so fun to enjoy.
We are from having a funny, silly, cool,
family to having a sad family.
We are from being bad to having good
grades.
We are from being besties to getting into
a fight with them or argument with them.
We are from getting good grades to
getting bad grades.
We are from loving school and hating it.
We are from watching theme park videos,
to going to them.
We are from not knowing how to dance,
to performing on stages.

WE ARE FROM FROM 161

Katie: I am from a small household with three (3) siblings,
I am the youngest.

NANA: **I am from a single mother and three siblings.**

BOTH: *We are from being goofy and having fun. We like to dance, we do it in front of everyone.*

Nana: *She's scared of bugs and I'm lazy.*

Katie: *You might think we're weird, but we're really crazy.*

Both: **We like to have fun but some people have their bad days, you might think we're mean, but everyone has their ways.**

NANA: we always keep our circles small because some people act weird and our bond seems to fall.

Katie: She's my BEST FRIEND, that's never going to change. we R. O.D. that's always going to stay the same.

BOTH: **WE CAN TALK TO EACH OTHER BECAUSE WE'RE ALMOST ALIKE, WE DON'T WANT TO END OUR FRIENDSHIP, WE CHOSE NOT TO FIGHT.**

We Are From...

We are from Philly,
Where most of us voted for Hillary,
We are from the time where some fun activities turned into crimes.
We are from Adidas, to Puma sweatsuits.
We are from,
We are from,
We are from.
Can't forget about school, or the books of Little Bill,
Do you remember that old show "The Hill"?
We are from when Full House was out and that's the show so watch out.
We are from,
We are from,
We are from.
Now we can't forget the dances that we have now-a-days,
Like the Figure 8 and don't forget the Harlem Shake.
Where social media is a trend,
We are from hearing of slavery in history class.
We are from,
We are from,
We are from.

We Are From Poem

We are from nappy hair that combs
couldn't get through.

We are from discipline and our moms
would punish most of us.

We are from mothers that raised us right
even when our dads weren't there .

We are from loud streets and mean
people that would fight outside.

We are from hard work and high fives
from our coach.

We are from games and staying home
for fun.

We Are From Philly

We are from watching the players catch
the ball and run many yards.

We are from where people shoot guns
and people sell drugs on these Philly
streets, North Philly, or Northeast.

We are from people fighting over money.

We are from schools that have bad kids.

We are from eating five dollars pizzas.

We are from dads leaving their kids with
their mom and mom having to work hard
to take care of all her kids.

We are from eating from the corner store
almost everyday.

We are from people wanting to kill cops.

We are from where most people get
arrested on our block

We are from living with our grandmas.

We are from a place where we should not
be.

We are from where there's no peace in
the streets.

We are from a place where people smoke
weed.

We are from where kids do not have
anywhere to live.

We are from where people rob our corner
stores.

We are from where people do anything
for money.

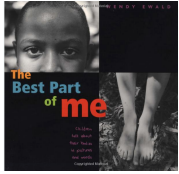
We are from when people have kids at a
very young age.

We are from where people jump kids for
no reason.

The Best Part of Me {Narrative}

Objective- Students will identify their favorite physical feature (hands, feet, smile, etc.) of themselves in order to write a descriptive essay or poem about it.

*It becomes even more powerful when you pair a photo of the feature with the poem/essay and display it.



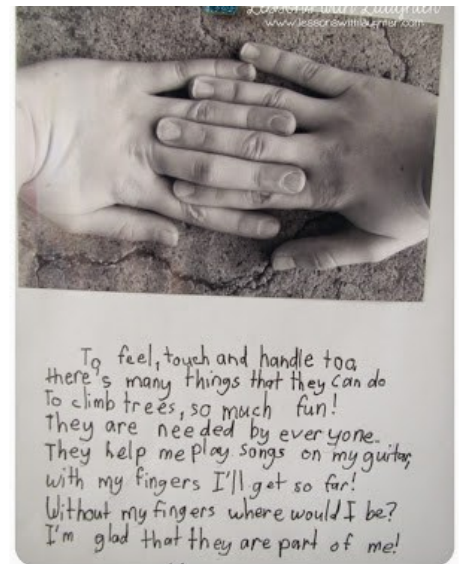
To begin this activity, many teachers read the book The Best Part of Me by Wendy Ewald. This is a book of poems that were developed when a famous photographer asked children, "What is the best part of you?"

>HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES OF HOW YOU COULD DISPLAY IT:



The Best Part of Me

I think the best part of me is my hair because of many different reasons. One is because my hair is as wavy as the ocean on a nice breezy day. It could be long or short it could be brown or blonde, but my hair is long and blonde. I love my hair because it's as white as snow and because I can wear hats on my head to cover my hair. Finally, I love to watch and feel my hair as it dances in the wind. That's why my hair is the best part of me.



[HINT- you can find so many different visual displays on the internet of this project. Some will really blow your mind. The only work on your part would be printing the photos for the project.]

ANOTHER WAY TO INTRODUCE THIS ACTIVITY IS TO PLAY THE SONG, "BEAUTIFUL" by Christina Aguilera.

CHAPTER 2: CHALLENGES

{ELEMENTARY SUGGESTIONS}

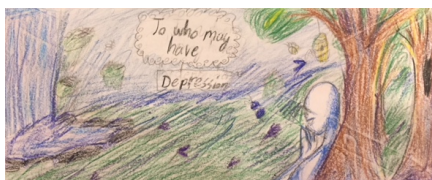
In this unit, students are writing about tough issues either at home or at school. In the Elementary version, the overarching project is an advice letter about a challenge a student has experienced and feels confident in sharing how to get through it.

Advice Letter Exchange { Expository }

In all honesty, the Advice Letter Project is one of my favorite writing assignments of the year. It's raw, sweet, funny, serious, but most of all heartfelt. Because of the amazing writing students were doing, I wanted these letters to be shared throughout the school. So, our Writers Matter team decided we'd do a letter exchange. It's pretty darn easy and has lasting positive effects. So please try it, you'll love it!

HERE'S A FEW QUICK STEPS TO MAKE THE EXCHANGE SMOOTH:

1. Have your students put their letter into an envelope, decorate it, and label it. The label should read something like this: HOW TO DEAL WITH... (DEPRESSION, ANNOYING BROTHERS, GOING TO THE DENTIST, ETC.)



2. Create a rotation schedule of when each class should pass their letters to another classroom. Set a time limit. For example: Each class gets 2 days or 5 days to read the letters (whatever makes sense for your school).
3. Bag your class's letters in a gallon size ziploc bag along with Shout-Out cards for students to write comments to the writers of the letters that moved them the most. Here is an example of the Shout-Out cards we used. →
4. Once the rotation schedule begins, have students choose the letters they'd like to read based on the label on the envelope that they're most drawn to. If a student wants to write a Shout Out, have them slip the card into the letter's envelope.
5. Once the rotation schedule is done and each class gets their original letters back, allow each writer to read their shout outs and discuss how other students' remarks made them feel.

SHOUT OUT to the student who wrote the letter on How to Deal With _____

I really appreciated this part of your letter:

Writing About One's FEARS {Narrative}



FEARS AND PHOBIAS

The feeling of fear is the most natural feeling a human can have, besides love. A fear is a natural reflex that we inherit that helps protect us. Fear gives us the feeling of fight or flight: we will either fight to save our lives or try our best to protect ourselves by getting away as fast as we can. Having fear is not a sign of weakness, it protects us when we are in danger, when we sense danger, or when danger is near or coming.

In our lives, we experience certain fears that we may or may not be able to get through. With help, we may be able to overcome a fear. Overcoming a fear may not be the easiest thing to do, but sometimes speaking on that fear can help us see past it.

Phobias are fears we can get past when we learn to face them. A phobia can be something like being afraid of bugs, bees, water, heights, snakes, etc. If we learn to face that fear, we may certainly be able to move forward, having left that fear behind us.

Foreshadowing is when the author drops clues in the story to help us infer what will happen later on in the story. This can occur in the beginning of a story.

With that being said, let's look at different things that can cause fear and what could cause a phobia.

During this lesson, students will be able to use these 21st Century Skills:

- Collaboration and teamwork
- Creativity and imagination
- Critical thinking
- Problem solving

Step 1: With a classmate, list different examples of fears and phobias. [See chart below]

Step 2: Have the class share out the difference between fears and phobias while you make a class list. Students should be able to explain why it is a fear and why it is a phobia. They should use analysis, questioning, debating, speaking, and listening skills. Encourage students to question your answers and their peer's answers. Be sure to give all students a voice and don't rush their thoughts or answers.

Step 3: After your class has come up with one list of fears and phobias, use some written examples provided (or others) to read, analyze, question, and debate. Reading other students examples are good to provide and inspire ideas. Next, have students begin the writing process where they work individually on a web where they write their own fears.

Step 4: The teacher can take one example of a fear and do a shared writing activity with the class in order to teach how to have a **catchy opening and foreshadowing** in that first sentence. Foreshadowing is when the author drops clues in the story to help us infer what will happen later on in the story. This can occur in the beginning of a story.

This should be a shared writing activity, where students share their voice in what happened in the story. They will be gearing up to write a narrative using their experience of fear in their lives where they will focus on conflict, resolution, character traits, setting, and central idea. Use chart paper or type for all to see on the projector.

Step 5: Give students a template to organize their writing [I included one on p. 37]. They should begin with an introduction and move into the body paragraphs of the essay. Once students have completed their template, encourage them to revisit adding examples of figurative language, their own nuances, and theme. Students should be encouraged to write about their own experiences, but if a student wants invent a story, that should be allowed as well.

Review Standards for writing and what should be included in the essay. Review the rubric.

PA Standards

Narrative Writing- CC.1.4.6.M: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

Focus: CC.1.4.6.N : Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters.

Content: CC.1.4.6.O: Use narrative techniques such as dialogue, description, and pacing to develop experiences, events, and/or characters; use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.

Organization: CC.1.4.6.P: Organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically, using a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another; provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences and events.

Style: CC.1.4.6.Q: Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of writing. Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style. Use precise language. Develop and maintain a consistent voice.

Conventions: CC.1.4.6.R

Demonstrate a grade-appropriate command of the conventions of standard English grammar, usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling.

CCSS Standards**Narrative Writing- W.6.3**

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

Performance Objectives: Rubric

SWBAT compose a narrative that includes a narrator and/or characters **IOT** relay events in a logical sequence.

- **Focus: SWBAT** introduce characters and make decisions regarding how to give context to narrative situations **IOT** tell a real or imagined story around that character or situation. **20**
- **Content: SWBAT** develop characters, situations, and theme through inner thought, description, and dialogue **IOT** describe real or imagined experiences or events. **20**
- **Organization: SWBAT** use a logical sequence, angled storytelling, and creative hooks and endings **IOT** communicate a narrative storyline with purpose in craft. **20**
- **Style: SWBAT** use a variety of expressive words, punctuation, dialogue, and narrative structure **IOT** give voice and style to a narrative piece. **20**
- **Conventions: SWBAT** incorporate grade-level grammar, punctuation, usage, and spelling **IOT** clearly communicate a story. **20**

Have students rewrite from their template, adding details, figurative language, and theme. You decide whether your students should be required to complete a 3 or 5 paragraph essay based on their level.

After the students have completed the writing process, have them share their stories. Students should again use analysis, questioning, debating, speaking, and listening skills to critique one another's work.

Extended activity: The class can choose a few stories to create a readers theater. There can be 4-5 groups working collaboratively to create a play of the essay they chose.

Teachers, if you are going to display students work, be sure to display all parts of the writing process for each student. Do not throw any parts away. Also, consider using each step as part of the final grade.

*****The following poems were written by students from Wagner Middle School.**

My First Car Accident

Have you ever experienced something that you never thought would happen to you? Well here's my story.

My brother, mother, and I all lived in an apartment in Kissimmee, Florida with a lady by the name of Sherly. We wanted to move out of her apartment because it felt like old time slavery. So, my mother decided to buy a minivan and a trailer. My mother brought everything she owned with her out of the apartment. We had gotten a new tire for the minivan before we left.

Sherly got us a used tire. She didn't know the tire had rubber on it though. We ended up loading up the trailer that night. It took so many days and nights, it felt like a million years. After that night, we got on the road and started our journey to Pennsylvania. My mother wanted to move to Pennsylvania because our cousin lives up there. Our cousin wanted us to move up there with him because he said there was a house that we could live in.

We were finally on the highway. At first, I felt the car move up and down like a foot... Then, it stopped. I thought there were just some rocks on the road. But there wasn't. It actually... popped. The car started spinning around, then... BOOM! The minivan hit the brick railing. It felt like my life flashed before my eyes.

After the car had stopped, we all got out the car as fast as possible. Once we got out, the engine started smoking. Everyone got out the car ASAP. Nobody was hurt... but my brother. He had some glass in his head. Someone called the ambulance and they came. They took the glass out and he was okay. Then, we ended up staying with a lady by the name of Karen for three weeks.

After those three weeks, Karen said we should take the safe way to freedom. So we took a plane. We packed our stuff and loaded up. After we got to the airport, we said our last goodbyes for her taking such good care of us. This was a very big move in our life. It was a very emotional moment in our lives, especially for my mother.

Overall, we were very happy and safe and are still living a wonderful, successful life. This was "My First Car Accident". And again, this is my story.

The Scariest Thing I've Been Through

Have you ever been scared to go on stage? Well you haven't been scared like I was.

When I was in fourth grade I was selected to get an award. I was getting ready to get my award, along with the other award winning students of Joseph Pennell. I waited, and waited until it was time for my class to finally get our awards. My fourth grade class was the last class.

All my classmates went up. They hadn't called my name yet. I even thought I wasn't getting an award. I was finally called for. I rushed up and got my award. Before I knew it, my name was again and again. I was an award magnet.

When I got on stage, my teacher started reading this really long poem about me. I got a good look at the audience. I got dizzy and started sweating (which means fear). After that, I had problems presenting in class. I was scared to present.

In conclusion, my teacher taught me how to conquer that fear by not thinking about it. I learned to conquer it by practicing being on stage.

THE WEIRD TIME

Hi there! Wait I feel like I'm going to be so sick. I feel like I'm about to drop. Help me. I'm so nervous and scared.

To start off, it was a hot summer day and I was at Dorney Park. My aunt, my brother, and I were on a trip with my Summer Camp. We were at the front of the line and she was paying our fee. When I got in, I was going to go on all the rides except for one. It was so big and it was a long way down. My aunt told me not to be scared.

Next, I went to change and it was very crowded in the changing room. Then I came out of the stall and I was thinking about what ride I should get on first. I went on a lot of rides especially the water ones. Then I sat down and ate my lunch and I tried to eat it all fast because I wanted to go on more rides. What I remember about that ride was I was scared to get on. But, my aunt said that my brother and I could go on the ride.

Finally, when my Brother and I got to the line, it was very long. At last we got to the front of the line and we were very scared because when you get at the end of the ride there is a really big splash. When we got on, we sat back and put on our seat belts; then the man put the other belt on us. When we were going up, it felt like we were about to fall back but we kept on going up. I felt like vomiting and it made me so sick and I knew I was about to be really sick after that ride. We made it to the part when you have to go through the tunnel it was really dark and I was really scared because after that, it's time for the drop. Then it feels like you were about to fall. All of a sudden we just fell... everything was fine!

Lastly, now I know if you don't want to be scared of anything, you have to face your fears. That's what I learned the hard way!!

FEAR/PHOBIA CLASS BRAINSTORMING CHART

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

FEARS	PHOBIAS	NOT SURE

Fear Essay Template

Name _____ Date _____ Class _____

- 5 paragraphs: Catchy Opening, 1st Body paragraph, 2nd Body paragraph, 3rd Body paragraph, Conclusion
- Complete sentences
- 4-5 sentences per paragraph, you need to add details.
- At least 1-2 examples of figurative language

Catchy Opening:

Present the conflict:

Body Paragraph #1: To Start off with or First,

Body Paragraph #2: Next,

Body Paragraph #3: Lastly or Finally

In conclusion or Overall (State the theme in your conclusion)

Third Grade Variation

Objective: This is an adaptation of writing about one's challenges in order to specifically hone in on a student's fears. In the elementary grades, it's often something I do around Halloween time.

~Below is an example of a fear narrative (that's unfortunately very true) that I wrote to use in my third grade classroom. I use this to both introduce the assignment, show that I have fears too, and to model the type of writing I'm looking for. I encourage you to do the same. Fears are tough to write about for everyone. So, it's even more eye-opening for students to be able to journey inside your head and visit one of your deepest fears.

An example of a Fear Narrative essay

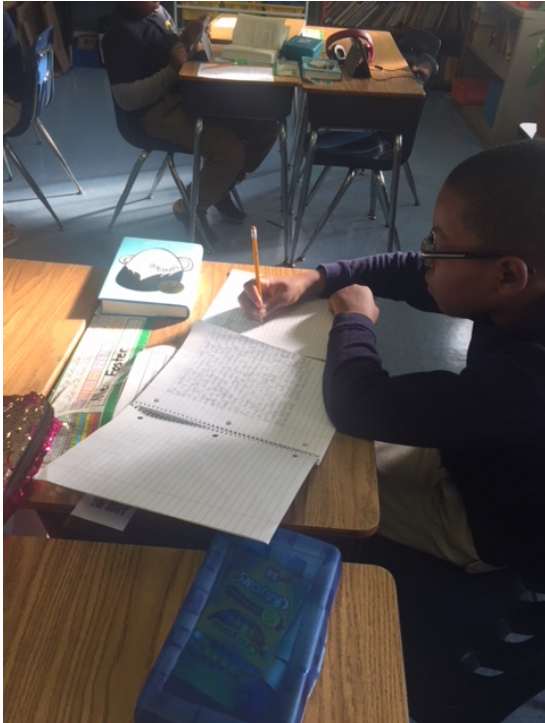
"Mooooom!!! I'm not sleeping in this room with the lamp staring at me!" I'll never forget one of my biggest fears as a little girl--CLOWNS. My fear began after I watched a scary movie called "Poltergeist" with my family. There was one part in the movie where a stuffed animal clown came alive and pulled a little boy under the bed and wrestled him. I almost peed my pants. Fast forward to bedtime... Laying in my comfy bed, being tucked in by my mom and dad, I peered over to my bureau and see a painted ceramic lamp that my mom had made for me. Unfortunately that painted ceramic lamp was of a CLOWN. Ahhhhhhhhhhh I wanted it out of my room, out of my sight! I remember rolling over in my bed and staring at the wall so I didn't have to look at it. Because my brain runs a mile a minute, I thought, Oh no, even though I can't see the clown, the clown is probably looking at me. "MOOOOOOMMM, DAAAAADDI!" I yelled. They came running down the hall. "What's the matter Kel?" I told them the whole story. My dad told me that I would be "just fine". "The clown is just a lamp, Kel. It's not alive!" For days, I could not stop thinking about the movie and the clown lamp in my room. Its smile with its red lips haunted me. My dad got really annoyed and moved it down my basement. I dreaded when my dad asked me to get something down there. I would run as fast as I could to get what I needed and run away from the ceramic clown lamp. My fear was finally resolved when trash day arrived, I saw the lamp sitting on the curb waiting to be thrown in the trash truck. My mom and dad were sick of hearing me complain about the lamp, they finally decided to get rid of it. I beamed when I left for school that day. I couldn't wait to never see that clown lamp again.

Wonder Connection to Advice Letter Assignment

In this chapter, students explore the challenges in their lives then give advice to other students their age on how to heal and deal. What a perfect segway to the book Wonder by R.J. Palacio.

Engage your class in a novel study using the book Wonder. Students read about the challenges of being a kid with facial deformities and draw strength from the main character's determination.

* See other connections to Wonder on p. 45.



Resources: Wonder by R.J. Palacio Unit Plan (Book Bites)

This Unit plan covers 4 weeks. It can be used from grades 3-7. It comes with a suggested pacing guide but it's easily adaptable so that you can create a unit plan that works for your students and your schedule. You can find lessons covering key knowledge and skills such as character analysis, inferencing, determining theme and writing prompts for journal topics. All lessons include learning objectives and handouts.

***Resource:** Wonder Novel Study (Free To Teach)

I purchased this resource for \$9 from TeachersPayTeachers.com and it was well worth it! It begins with a thought provoking writing prompt that asks your students; Have you ever felt different? Describe a time when you felt different. How did people treat you? Describe your feelings. This resource also includes **Text**

Dependent Analysis questions for **EVERY** chapter!

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.2
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.4
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.6
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.10
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1

* Monologue Writing *

Regardless of grade or age, students can conquer the elements of great writing by starting to write their own monologues. My students were completely captivated with writing a monologue and literally giving their character a “voice” that is so personal, it brings the piece ALIVE!

10 Elements of Great Monologues

Element #1: Your character must have a strong want.

Element #2: The monologue must have high stakes.
(They must have something to gain or lose.)

Element #3: Variety of Tactics/Persuasive Moves

Element #4: Hook Opening

Element #5. Button Closing
(What’s the trigger that ties everything together?)

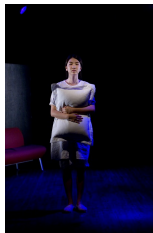
Element #6. Include details that engage the senses!
 (“If you want to write with all five senses, especially when it comes to setting, there’s really only one rule: Pay attention. The tiniest, most interesting details are usually the things that will make your writing come to life.” Ashley W., [The Inside Scoop](#))

Element #7. Character overcomes internal obstacle(s).

Element #8. Balance Past and Present Action.

Element #9. Discovery!

Element #10. Exercise restraint to build dramatic/comedic tension.



Here are two examples of monologues my students (from McDaniel) wrote. The latter one actually won first place in the Philadelphia Young Playwrights Monologue Festival and it was performed on stage at the Drake Theater in April 2018.

Life Is Not As Perfect As It Seems

(Cynthia's family apartment...Hot summer night...speaking to her best friend Ashlee who is 12.)

Cynthia:

I've always wondered what her life was like? You know that girl Cherry that lives across the hall? She's always out all times of the night...(smirking) I bet she has lots of fun, unlike me always cooped up in the house by myself. I'm really glad you slept over tonight. I needed to talk. Do you think she might ever notice me? (Quietly laughing) Oh, who am I kidding she'll never notice me. Oh I already know what you're gonna say, "Cynthia you don't need no one to notice you!" (Mocking voice) But Ashlee I want her to notice me! Do you see how beautiful she is in her expensive clothing and oh do you see her friends they're almost as gorgeous as she is? Do you think they know how much I peep on them? No, you can't call me weird I'm your best friend! How is it weird to be fascinated about someone's else life? It's not like I have anything else to do since summer's started. Life's been a bore! But anyway, what do you think Cherry does for a living? I bet she's a model. You know sometimes I see her on the corner of the Boulevard. I bet she's waiting for her boyfriends. (Jealous behavior...looking in mirror) You know she has a whole bunch of them. They come past the apartment all the time. And, I always see them leaving out in the middle of the night while I'm staring out my window. (Pointing to the bedroom window) No, (whispering) I do not stalk Cherry's boyfriends. (Aggressive) I just watch them as they leave the apartment. Is that so horrible? You know, Cherry may have many boyfriends, but you know, the one she's always with, is the one she calls Daddy. (Smiling) They don't look alike though! I think she works for him, but I don't think she enjoys it either. I mean he's always so angry and before you say anything, the walls are sooooo thin so (looking around and grinning) I hear their conversations. You know by accident and he screams really loud. Wait, you hear that? (Thug from the next room) I told you! I told you, you thought I was tripping, but Ashlee, I know what I hear. Do you hear them? He said, "WHO THE HELL DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?" I think they're fighting! (Picking up the phone) Should we call for help? (Putting the phone down) What does he mean? "If you keep your customers happy you keep me happy?" Huh? Hurry go look out the peephole, what do you see? Shhhhhh, you gotta tiptoe, or they'll hear us. You say he's dragging her by her hair? Her clothes? (Scared...trying not to scream or cry) What is she doing? Why do you think she takes that from him? I mean, he's her Daddy. I understand he gives her nice things like dresses and wigs and jewelry but she does not have to take that. Why can't she just go with her other boyfriends? She always has lots of money. One day, we were in the Papi store and she pulled out a stash and bought me fish, lemonheads, and twizzlers after school one day. I can tell just the other day I was looking outside my door and I saw her put a big wad of money in her purse. What's the point of having that much money and not doing nothing with it but buying nice clothes (snickering) that's kinda too small for her sometimes? You know what I think ... is that them again?

(Thump from next door) I wish he would just leave her alone...do you see that? She's running from the apartment now, Ashlee grab the phone! (Trying not to be loud, but not screaming) Is that a gun? (Screams Loudly) Cherry Runnnnnnnnn!

Here is the first place winner through PYP! (She wrote this based on her current situation at home with her family, so to be able to bring this to life, and have it acted it out on stage, was phenomenal. She was so PROUD!)

Is There Anyone There?

(Amy is in therapy, in the afternoon,
Amy is talking to her mom)

Amy:

So today I woke up angry. I woke up angry because I remembered that I can not trust you anymore. I cannot trust you anymore because a few weeks ago I was feeling really messed up. I was upset about my cousin passing away, because all my family was passing. So I asked myself why is everyone around me dying? I kind of felt that it was my fault even if it was not. I was so depressed! My heart was hurting really bad. I started bursting into tears, screaming and crying over and over again. So I went across the hall to where your room was to tell you how I felt and that I needed you mom and you told me to shut the hell up and get out of your room, but I really needed you so as I was walking out I turned back around to see if you would listen and you shut the door, you shut me out. You thought I was just being dramatic and that I will get over it but I never did and I never will. So you had to go and tell everyone what I said to you and that I am such a drama queen, but you don't know what I was feeling. I was feeling sadness and anger. There was so much rage in my body but I was mostly depressed and this is why I am the way I am today. So, this is why I brought you here to a couple of therapy classes so we can fix our problems and be more close, because all the times you made me feel alone, made me feel like my problems do not matter to you, even though you told me you will always be there for me and that I can come to you for anything. You said I can tell you anything, but you lied to me, you took advantage of me to make it seem like you are a good parent but to be honest in my eyes you are not. You hurt me and you try to blame it on someone else like my father because he has not been around in awhile. So this afternoon at therapy you opened up to me. You tell me it is because your father raised you the way you are, that he did not listen to you or talk to you like a caring father would. So you promised me you would change to be a better mother, to not be like your father, but I do not think I can trust your promises because you promised me things before, but you did not keep your promise, you lied to me. You think I am crazy because I am sensitive and emotional. You kept saying over and over that I need to be put

away because I tried to hurt myself, but I realized on that day that I have so much to live for and that I will not let anyone bring me down because I am strong and brave and I will succeed. I will make it and you will see! You try to make me believe that it is not your fault, but I, Amy, want you to know that I will not be brainwashed any longer. So I have to choose to leave it be and keep my head held high and to stay strong or to let your rudeness get to me. So I say to myself, yes, I will choose to be strong, I will be brave so I can succeed so I can keep my head up and to believe in myself and to work on my problems even if that means by myself. So I am giving one last chance, maybe everything will change because I want you to know I still love you with all my heart and we will work through our problems. So we will be better and we will be closer than we ever had before, and thank you for listening mom. I hope this is the beginning of a new start with our mother daughter relationship!

CHAPTER 3: FINDING LIGHT

Compliment Pages {Descriptive}

With the theme of light in this unit, I wanted to share an activity I've done every year for the last 20 years. That's a Compliment Page; I actually usually do it the last week of school so students can take it home as a memento for the year. However, it would also be a nice way to end this particular unit.

Objective~ Students will use positive descriptive words or character traits IOT compliment each member of their class.

Here is what I do:

1. Brainstorm positive words/phrases/traits that could describe their fellow classmates.
2. Give each student a copy of your class list.
3. Instruct each student to anonymously write at least one positive word next to each of their classmate's name.
4. Once the compliments are completed, I collect every class list, type a sheet for each student, and eventually print it on fancy paper and laminate it to look like this. ⇒⇒⇒⇒

MIA
Nice
Brave
Funny
Bold
Good listener
Big heart
Funny, honest, big heart
Joyful
Crazy
Friendly
Hysterical
Wild, good listener, kind, smart
Imaginative, beautiful, unique
Artistic
Beautiful in more ways than one

*How I Use the Light Task Cards (from the Elementary book)

In My Classroom* {See examples of task cards on next page}

Lighting With Compliments

Task Card #12

1. Write each student's name on a popsicle stick.
2. Put them in a bag and shake them up.
3. Call students one by one to draw a name from the bag (**Students keep their pick a secret**).
4. After everyone has drawn, give out 5X7 cards.
5. Tell students that they have to give a compliment to that person and write it on their card. **Again keep it a secret! Assist anyone who has trouble coming up with a compliment for their person.**
6. After everyone is finished start a chain reaction of compliments. You can start first. Stand and read your card. The person you complimented then stands and reads their card and so on and so on.
7. After the final card is read everyone retrieves their compliment card from the writer and students decorate them. Display compliment cards around the perimeter of the room.

Light Task Cards

For any teacher who doesn't have the Elementary version, here are the task cards we use around the holidays. For this assignment, I found an amazing FREE Light Unit on Teachers Pay Teachers published by Jennifer Martinez. To get the complete unit, please go to her website: everythingjustso.org.

1 HOLIDAY LIGHTS
Think about how lights are used around your home during the holidays. Describe the types of lights you use, where they are placed in or around your home, and how they are used to celebrate the holidays.

2 BEING A LIGHT TO OTHERS
Think about something you have done to be a "light" to someone else. Maybe you helped someone without being asked, noticed that someone needed a friend, or said something kind to someone you know. Describe your actions and how being a "light" made you feel.

3 A LIGHT TO YOU
Think about a time when someone was a "light" to you. Was there a time when someone was especially kind or thoughtful? Did someone help you in an unexpected way? Describe their actions and how you responded.

4 LIGHTING IT FORWARD
Think about someone in your class who could use a little light in his/her day. Explain why you think this person could use some light, ways you could be a light, and your plan to be that light in the next few days.

5 LIGHTING YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD
Think about people who live near you that might need a little light in their day. Are there ways you could be helpful? How about saying a kind word to make them feel special? Describe the people you're thinking of, why they might need some light, and ways you can be that light for them.

6 THE LIGHT IN YOUR FAMILY
What person in your family shares the most "light"? Maybe it's someone who doesn't live with you like a grandparent or cousin. Tell the person's name and describe ways that he or she is a light to the rest of your family. Then, write a short note thanking this person for being a light in your life!

7 SPREADING LIGHT
What are some ways you can spread light where you live? Sometimes we can spread light by stopping bad habits. Are there actions you can stop doing or words you can stop saying that would help you be more of a light to your family? Write about your thoughts.

8 LIGHT IN THE NEWS
Do you ever watch the news or read about world events on a computer? How about talk to friends about what happens in their classrooms? There are great things happening all around you. Think about some positive events you've heard about recently and write about them.

LIGHT AS A CLASS

What are some ways that you and your classmates could work together to spread light around your school? Think big! Be creative! Write about ways big and small that you can share light with others as a class.

9 © 2015 Jennifer Martinez, everythingjustso.org

LIGHT IN A LETTER

Do you like getting mail? I do! I love opening the mailbox to see a letter from a family member or a friend. Write a letter to someone you know and tell why he or she is a great person. Then write about your favorite time spent together. Make a plan to send the letter sometime soon!

10 © 2015 Jennifer Martinez, everythingjustso.org

LIGHT TO THOSE WHO HELP

Many adults help you every day at school. There are teachers, principals, secretaries, counselors, nurses, special teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, custodians, and others who help make your day great. Choose one person and write a letter thanking them for being a light to you.

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LIGHTING WITH COMPLIMENTS

Think about what your classmates do well. Is there someone who is always helpful? Maybe someone else who is great at solving problems? How about someone who is great at art? Make a list of the people in your class and what each one does well. Then, be sure to tell each person what you wrote!

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WONDER Connection*

10 Acts of Random Kindness

In the book Wonder, there is a heart tugging conversation that Auggie Pullman has with his mom after being physically and verbally bullied by older kids.

"Mom? Am I always going to have to worry about jerks like that?" I asked. "Like when I grow up, is it always going to be like this?"

"There are always going to be jerks in the world, Auggie," she said, looking at me. "But I really believe, and Daddy really believes, that there are more good people on this earth than bad people, and the good people watch out for each other and take care of each other".

Wonder by R.J. Palacio p. 279

After reading this chapter in Wonder write this sentence on the board.

WE are going to be the **GOOD** people on the earth today.

1. Give every student a piece of paper.
2. Have them write 10 Acts Of Random Kindness at the top.

3. Number their paper from 1-10

Then say:

Today you are going to perform 10 random acts of kindness. What does random mean? (Accept all responses)

Random means not planned. If you see someone who needs help be there for that person today. Remember, a little kindness goes a long way.

Since it's random your students might not finish their lists in school. Let them know that they can take the list home and extend acts of kindness to their families and communities. Students bring their completed lists to school and share out.

Student Sample Grade 4 (E. M. Stanton)

10 Acts of Random Kindness

1. Gave Albert a pencil told him he could keep it
2. Let Tracey hold my favorite book
3. Asked Mulan if she wanted a piece of my sandwich. She said no but asked for some Takis.
4. Picked up paper off the floor in class
5. Helped a kindergarten little girl tie her shoes
6. Delivered papers for Ms. Patty
7. Gave my mom a neck rub
8. Washed my own plate
9. Didn't hit my sister even though she hit me first
10. Helped Ms. Furlong collect music in class

“My Family is My Family” Activity {Narrative/Poetry}

- After writing about struggles with family members or family situations, students might want to think about the positive aspects of their families. Have students brainstorm the good things about their families in their notebooks. Think about things that make your family special or unique. Think about things that your family does that might drive you crazy, but if you didn't have them, you would miss them. You might want to go back to your family poem and revise it or add to it to show that even though you might have challenges within your family, you still love them and care for them.

***On the next page is one of the 2018 writing contest winner's essay about finding light in the darkness of her family.**

When The Darkness Became The Light Of My Future

There is one major issue in my life. Imagine not living with your mother or father. Who would you live with? This is major issue that I had to overcome. This problem has been going on since before I was one year old.

In the beginning, I was living with my mom. My life, as I remember, was good. My mom and dad were not together from the start. Eventually my mom and I moved up the mountains. Before I was one, problems started happening. Since I wasn't even one year old, some of the things I do not remember, For instance, I didn't know why the problems were happening or how I felt about the problems.

As I said I wasn't even one, all I remember was my mom getting in trouble with the law. Thinking back, I thought to myself, "Wow, before one?" I heard my mom was "on the run" with me. That made me mad but confused at the same time. This, of course, was not something I am proud of, but it is my mom. I do not know if this is 100% true, and if it is, I would be mad. No, I would not forget, but I can forgive.

Right before I turned two my mom gave me to my dad, and turned herself in. At this point in my life I remembered the problems that were going on in my life. Going on until about six years old, my dad caught a bad habit, and was no longer able to care for me. At times I felt like I didn't even want to be around my dad, but at the time I had no choice. After mom my did her time in jail, I did not hear from her much. That also hurt me because most of the time I would rely on her to come back. Every weekend I would go see my grandma I expressed myself to her because, at the time, she was the only person I trusted. I told her about my dad's bad habit. I never liked the path my dad was on. All I wanted was for my dad to understand where I was coming from. After a year of my grandma hearing of my problems, she went to court and got custody of me.

Living with my grandma truly changed my life. This wasn't an easy task. Sometimes out of the blue, I would think about my past, but I'd try and focus on school. I realized my grades were getting better each marking period, and each year. By third grade, I decided what career path I would take. When I go to college, I want to study the law and become a family judge. This is all because of one judge. The judge changed my life, and I want to listen to children and change all children's lives because this matters!

- Another twist on this idea is to write a poem about a family that you hope to have in the future. Brainstorm in your notebook what you want in a family or what you think would make a perfect family. List all of the qualities and traits that are important to you. These might be traits that you have in your family now, but might be things that you wish your family did or qualities you wish they had.

CHAPTER 4: DREAMS, ASPIRATIONS, AND THE FUTURE

*****Graduation Speeches*** {Expository/ Speech Writing }**

This is something that can be used for classes that are graduating (grade 4, 5, 6, or 8 depending on the school, just adapt accordingly)

I use a popular song as inspiration for our last writing assignment of the year: *If you could write a graduation speech, what message would you want to share with your fellow classmates?*

This song is basically a spoken word piece. I suggest showing them the video so they can focus on the lyrics because there are a lot of them.

It's called: **"Everybody's Free (to Wear Sunscreen)"** By: Baz Luhrmann. The song starts off slow, but the kids love it once the music kicks in. It's message is funny, simple, and profound.

Here's a sample of one of my favorite parts:

*Don't feel guilty if you don't know what you want to do with your life...
the most interesting people I know didn't know at 22 what they wanted to do with their lives
some of the most interesting 40 year olds I know still don't
Get plenty of calcium
Be kind to your knees, you'll miss them when they're gone
Maybe you'll marry, maybe you won't
maybe you'll have children, maybe you won't
maybe you'll divorce at 40, maybe you'll dance the funky chicken on your 75th wedding anniversary..*

Objective: Students will compose a graduation speech in essay or poetry form IOT share their inspirational message that will help guide graduates as they leave elementary/middle school.

This was a speech from a McDaniel student from the Class of 2018

Graduates... family members ... and staff, it is an honor to be part of this celebration here at McDaniel Elementary School.

It is such a pleasure to share in the intensity of emotions filling this auditorium, as you who are graduating, close this chapter in your life's story. I'm glad to say, we've definitely done it. As we sit here today, our middle school careers are coming to a close right before our very eyes. The next chapter in our lives lie ahead of us, and looking back on our past years, I feel confident in saying that we definitely are prepared in facing whatever obstacles we may encounter during our pursuit through high school.

All throughout middle school, we took chances and experienced changes, changes personally of setting higher goals and standards in life, changes academically with grades and extracurricular activities, and changes socially of branching out and creating new friendships or stronger bonds. We've all experienced our first serious incidents with close friends, experienced new relationships inside and outside of school, and we've all experienced true achievement.

All the paths we've taken and all the decisions we've made – they all helped us to realize who we are and who we want to be. We've learned not to follow footsteps, but to create our own. Middle school was a chance for us to shine once more; it was a time to discover how to stand up for our own beliefs. We didn't let our fears of belonging prevent us from showing our true selves. Middle school gave us a chance to learn to love ourselves, walk with confidence, and live without holding back.

With the next four years to define who we are once more, we will never forget what we have learned within these school walls, we will never forget the chances we took, the small to major transformations we've all undergone, and the opportunities that gave us a chance to realize our aspirations. Our memories we have created together in this school can never be erased, and now we sit here awaiting our future. So as this chapter ends, we are more than ready to begin the next one, with confidence, with trust, and with integrity.

My Utopia {Descriptive/Poetry}

This is my take on answering the question, "What is your perfect place?" This assignment I did with my middle school students and my high school students (in an after-school refugee writing program). It's really about pushing students to create a place, either real or imaginative, that would be considered their very own utopia.

Objective- Students will use descriptive and figurative language IOT compose an essay/poem painting a picture of their dream place.

*I introduce the assignment by reading the book: Imagine A Place by Sarah L. Thomson. It's a dreamy book with beautiful illustrations that will capture students' imagination. After reading the book and defining what utopia means, I lead my students through a visualization exercise sort of like this:



Close your eyes. I want you to imagine a place that is your version of the most perfect place. This place can be real, a place you've been to, or a place that lives only in your imagination. Put yourself in this place now. Look around, what do you see? Are there mountains, castles, rivers, forests, etc.? Are there people surrounding you or are you alone? What do you hear? What sounds are near you--the ocean, birds, your family's voices, etc.? What smells fill your nose in this perfect place? Food,

flowers, salt water? How do you feel in this utopia? What actually can you feel--are you sitting on a beach feeling the sand? Are you sitting in the clouds, a comfy chair, a float in a pool? Is there anything you're tasting in this place? Cookies, ice cream, your favorite homemade dinner? Or maybe nothing at all? [This can go on, but you get the idea.]

 I can see
 I can hear
 I can smell
 I can taste
 I can touch

Once your visualization exercise is done and students open their eyes, I have them quickly (so they don't forget) fill in this sensory chart as part of their brainstorming.

Once the brainstorming is done, I take them through the writing process I used and I show them the ideas I jotted down and how I took my ideas and turned them into sentences in my descriptive piece. Below is what I give to each of my students to use as an example of my brainstorming ideas and my final essay.

MY UTOPIA

Brainstorming

Hearing

- Rainfall against window

Tasting

- Hot tea--the good kind

Seeing

- Fall leaves, winter snow, summer vacation, spring gardening
- Bookcases to the ceiling where you need sliding ladders to reach the top
- Greens of Ireland
- View of a mighty mountain and a lake that's the color blue that makes you take a double take

Feeling

- Sun shining on my face

Smelling

- The smoky smell of firepits burning logs in the backyard

Imagine a Place MY UTOPIA

Imagine a place where all of your favorite things live in harmony, live in peace. There is the beautiful sun shining down on your face as you squint your eyes and soak in its light. In this place, there is also the kind of rainfall that makes you want to sit by the window and listen to the drops hit the windowpane with a hot cup of tea, the good kind, in hand. Next to me would be bookcases that reach the ceiling, the kind you need a sliding ladder to reach the top. Seasons, all four of them, will surround me: fall leaves, white winter snow at Christmas time, summer vacation, and spring flowers to take care of and watch in awe as they bloom. My home in my utopia will have a fireplace that fills the house with that cozy smell that makes you want to wrap yourself in a blanket. In this place, the greens of Ireland will be my view outside my window, with a mighty mountain in the background and a lake that's the clearest color of blue, the kind of blue that makes your brain take a double take! This is MY UTOPIA.

Student Example from Northeast H. S. After-School Refugee Program

Have you ever thought about a place where all your lost loved ones would be with you? Have you ever thought about a place where all your dreams come true? Well, let me tell you about my utopia. I hear the loud laughter of my siblings sitting under a cherry blossom tree. There is no ground in my utopia. It's all in the sky, a colored beautiful sky. It's a place where you can relax and have no worries about anything. At your left, you can see a waterfall, one beautiful waterfall with nothing in it. It's in the sky with smooth clouds. In my utopia, you can find any type of fruit. If you focus, you can hear soft relaxing music coming from a lake near the cherry blossom tree. The instruments are beautiful and they are on top of the lake. The air tastes sweet and you can smell the freshness of the fruits. The enchanting sound of the wind and the birds singing fill the air. The marvelous blinding beauty of that place is enchanting in every way. My greatest joy would be to enjoy my favorite show with all my lost loved ones on a big flat screen TV altogether on the smoothest of couches. Now, that's my utopia.

****As a culminating activity, I had my students create an iMovie of their utopia as a visual representation accompanied with music of their choice.**

CHAPTER 5: LOOKING

BEYOND OURSELVES/CHANGING THE WORLD

Objective: Students will be able to write a comprehensive essay IOT share their viewpoint on a particular topic highlighted in the current news.

Students had the opportunity to express themselves about current issues they may have been dealing with. This particular student wrote about a time in his life when he was bullied because he came to America in the middle of the school year, an immigrant, and he had difficulties. I'm sure other students will be able to identify with this topic. This was a winning essay from WM.

Domestic Tranquility (McDaniel student)

THEME - Our constitution states "a more perfect union." What does a more perfect union mean? Is it a more perfect union? How can we make it a more perfect union?

In my opinion, the thing that makes a union perfect is their ability to establish rights for themselves. These people know who they are and they stand for what they believe in. The union also needs to be protected such as needing to be safe in and out of their homes. Perfect unions are known to peacefully voice their opinions without riots or other rebellious actions because they believe in practicing domestic tranquility. Domestic tranquility means "peace at home" and this is important because everyone needs to know how to work together to make positive things happen for our schools, communities, and states which essentially is our home.

Along with making a perfect union, there are various problems that accompany the formation of a "perfect union." Social Justice and the "Union" have a strong connection with each other. If you have the authority to change lives and affect people who are in the darkness, you should take action to help. Some people don't have the courage or strength of voice to speak for themselves and they need someone to stick up for them. Therefore, people in the right position can definitely change lives and they deserve respect.

With that being said, when I was younger I could have used someone who was able to stand up for me, someone who had a voice to speak for me. At that time, I was experiencing some things that I could not speak about because I didn't have the right voice for people to hear my opinion. I needed someone to reach out to me and be that voice that I was scared to be. I was stuck in the dark and the worse part was being there while knowing that no one would hear me or even care to ask.

Many people in this world have their own problems and have probably experienced being stuck in a dark hole. Only certain people have the ability to solve that problem on their own but most people need help and that is where the perfect union comes in. To conclude, the official meaning of a perfect union is to have a real group of people who support you and support each other, come together, and stand up for what is right. A union is where all of the states unite and become a true unified union to fight for one cause.

March For Our Lives { Expository/ Persuasive }

This past year, in 2018, students witnessed a strong push for comprehensive gun control after several mass shootings. Students in Florida led the fight with organized protests across the country entitled *March For Our Lives*. Since there was a large march in Philadelphia, many teachers had their students write about the event or their thoughts about gun control in general. The results, in my third grade classroom, stunned me.

Objective: Students will write an essay voicing their feelings about a current controversial topic affecting our country today IOT discuss, share, and make connections and change around that issue.

**To introduce this tough topic to my third graders, we looked at a few speeches that they could handle. One in particular was that of Martin Luther King Jr.'s granddaughter, who is around their age. Unlike the middle school teachers, I had to really choose wisely. I honestly only showed her speech and maybe one other generic one; we talked briefly about the march because I knew some of my students did not know about the Parkland shooting and I did not want to upset them. We talked more about gun control and being safe at school in general rather than focusing around the topic of MASS SHOOTINGS. I simply left them with the question, "What are your thoughts about gun control or the march? What are your opinions? Or what are some things that you're thinking about after our discussion that you'd like to say?"

HERE ARE THEIR RESPONSES (FROM THIRD GRADERS FROM J. HAMPTON MOORE ELEMENTARY):

Fight For Our Lives

People may be strong but words are stronger! Words are strong and weak. Words show action too! Words are the most powerful thing in the world. Words do a lot to this world. People use words every day. We use them to teach, and to make speeches too. People can do anything. Anyone can change the WORLD! Peace doesn't find you, you find peace. Make the world great again.

It's a shame that kids have to practice lockdowns to make sure they are safe. School should be a place to learn. School should not be a place to die. We shouldn't be practicing lockdowns. We should be able to learn peacefully. People should be able to live life in a good way. People should not be killing other innocent people. Earth is not supposed to be a place where you die. You should be grateful for god creating you. I hope you think about what I just said and will never act that way. I hope the world agrees with me.

I feel disappointed about how children and their parents must feel about going to school and work. They shouldn't be thinking about getting shot, they should be thinking about living their lives. They should be thinking, "I want my child to live" and not be thinking, "Is my child going to die today?" When I see the people that want to live, that want to stay alive, I think of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. My dream is that we not only live, but that we love and live. When I see people die, I say "No more lives should die in this world!" The world shall have peace and kids shouldn't have to go to school to die. They came to learn and live for the rest of their lives.

Losing people from our world.

Other people dying.

Stand in my shoes and see how it hurts me.

This is my dream that I will not keep holding this down because if you keep doing nothing they will keep doing something.

I think that we had this march to speak up for the people that can't speak for themselves. In Parkland, Florida, 17 students were shot and dead in 6 minutes. People are dying everyday everywhere all around us and they don't fix it! And how do you think I feel about that? Well I am absolutely furious. This has to stop! Today and everyday we have to fight and I'm tired of it. Marches, speeches, shooting, it all has to end today. But although I'm

tired I shall still raise my voice high for the whole world to hear. If they continue not to listen to the people of America that want things to change, we will take matters into our own hands and vote them out. And since we can't vote yet, we will continue to march and shout until we get the right to vote. My friends and I may just be 9 year old third grade students but God gave us a voice and I know how to use it. Yes I have a voice and my voice will be heard NOW! We say ENOUGH is ENOUGH and I mean it! We will fight for our gun laws even if they don't listen! We have a future you know and how can we live it if we're killed? Alex, Alyssa, Martin, Nicholas, Jamie, Christopher, Luke, Cara, Gina, Jaquin, Meadow, Helena, Alex, Carmen, and Peter all were killed in a shooting. Is it really that easy for a 18 year old boy to get a gun and get into a school? That brings us to the gun laws. We need to fight for school safety laws and gun laws because I believe 18 is too young to have a gun. You never know what someone so young will do with it. You're either part of the problem or part of the solution! So I think we need to shut this down real quick. God knows how many people die from guns every day. But today and tomorrow we raise our voices high and I promise you THEY WILL HEAR US LOUD AND CLEAR! This will stop and we will win.

***School Safety* {Persuasive}**



In recent times there have been tragic events that have occurred in our schools where children have been murdered. This has had a huge impact on the thoughts and fears of our students. Students might feel better if they are empowered to come up with solutions to these serious and deadly problems. As teachers, we want our students to feel safe in their place where they learn. Students can brainstorm ideas for changes that would make them feel safe in their school. The ideas may not be

the same ones that you as the teacher would choose, but remember, this is what students are thinking about in their own heads. After a class brainstorm, students can make a web and write an argumentative essay to persuade a school board or city council to implement their ideas. These can actually be shared with a government body, or published for others to see.

*One the next few pages are Student Samples from E. M. Stanton Elementary.

Safety in Schools

By: A 6th grader at E. M. Stanton

Lately, the USA has been talking about ways to make schools safer because of the incident that happened in Parkland, Florida. There's been all kinds of solutions of how to keep schools safer. People have come up with solutions such as arming teachers, but I have come up with three simple solutions, and you'll hear them in the paragraphs below.

One basic way of keeping school safe is having safe doors. Not all schools have safe doors, or they have them, but they don't use them. For example, my school has a safe door, it has a camera and voice recognition, but they don't use it properly. They just let anyone in and barely even look at who they're letting in. If the school is going to have safe doors, they should use it, right? There are some schools that don't even have safe doors to use. In my opinion, schools should have safe doors and use them properly by asking the person to state their name and why they're here before they let them in. You wouldn't let just anyone in your house, now would you? So don't let just anyone into our schools. You never know who or what you're letting into our schools.

Another solution to our safety issue is to have better ways to hide and better ways to escape. I don't know about your school, but in my school for a lockdown we have to hide in the back of the classroom. Now schools are already letting anybody in. If an intruder can get past a secure door, they can definitely get into our classrooms. Then what do we do? There's nowhere else to go, we have to stay put. We can be easily detected and there's nothing we can do, we definitely can't run, so we just have to stay put. And that's not going to have a good outcome. That's where my solution comes in, I think we should have hiding spots and escape routes in every classroom. It could even help if there are fires, but if the fire escape catches on fire, then what? Do you see my point? More escape routes and better hiding places for students will be better for schools.

Now, I have one last brilliant solution. Schools should have more security guards. Some schools have one or even no security guards. That's not good for that one security guard or for the schools. If we have more security guard jobs, they will be able to help out people like homeless veterans and give them more jobs. In my school, our security guard has to run up and down the stairs to different floors to deal with different problems. Imagine one security guard trying to find an intruder and they could be anywhere on any floor. If we have more security guards those wouldn't be problems. Having more security guards could really help out those schools in the community.

In conclusion, my three solutions of keeping schools more safe are very effective and helpful. Have safe doors, have better hiding spots or escaping routes, and more security guards.

"Violence In Schools"

By: A 7th grader at E. M. Stanton

In schools around Florida, there have been break-ins and murders. Because of these treacherous events, innocent students and staff have been murdered or hurt. This is dangerous for us students. If this dreadful stuff keeps happening, school won't be a safe place anymore. And who would want to learn at a place that isn't safe?

Recently, 17 people were murdered in Parkland, Florida. We should be able to have different ways to keep ourselves safe. One example is to have armed teachers. Teachers have more ability to fight back at the shooter than the students. So we should have the teachers armed so that if the shooter is killing most people, the teacher can defend us.

Another example is to have a safe room. We should have one because most classrooms have windows. If someone were to break the windows and come in, we would be in peril. Also, we wouldn't want anymore deaths in school. So we should have a safe room, so we can be safe.

Lastly, we should be able to have a back-up plan (Plan B). If any of the first plans don't work, we should be able to have a back-up one. Instead of doing nothing or improvising while we're being put in jeopardy, we should at least have a code name or while the shooter is somewhere else, we should call the police.

In conclusion, we should be able to have these changes in schools. Our lives depend on safety. We shouldn't be put in danger because of someone's carelessness. So, we should have the right to have reinforcements in our school.

"Safety for Schools"

By: A 6th grader at E. M. Stanton

A new year had begun which meant we had started a new year, free of all the wrong we had done the years before. But this "fake peace" was only temporary. January 20, 2018 was the date that all that had changed. On and after this unfortunate date, mass school shootings started happening all over the U.S. Not even a week had passed when the shootings started happening all over again. 2018 had certainly taken a dark turn for the worst. But what could we have done? What precautions should we have taken to protect the next generation? These are the ideas that I personally had that could have hopefully may not have saved but helped those innocents on that fateful day.

The first of my three ideas was what if all schools had armed security? Now most schools had this, but what did they do? They cowered in fear and did nothing. This is not the security that we need. We need people, men and women, who can look at death in the face and walk past it calmly to try and protect the children of tomorrow. These are the kind of people that we need. The law that ensures that teachers may bear weapons is a foolish idea. Allowing teachers to bear arms is dangerous which would increase the likelihood of something wrong going wrong.

Another thing all schools should need is security. Not just the armed security like I previously mentioned. I believe, as well as armed security, we need cameras, reinforced doors, and metal detectors. Security cams would allow us to monitor any and all activity within or outside the schools. Metal doors are also a smart idea, how long until the old hide in a dark room trick gets old? The technique that all schools have used is now common, so how long until someone breaks down a door knowing children are inside? Metal detectors would be placed in secret places to not make it too obvious. As well as detecting weapons they would probably detect any stolen weapons.

And a final idea that seems real silly could also help. Like I previously mentioned locking teachers in a dark room with their students isn't a good idea. So what about other ways of hiding children. My final idea for security towards school is secret passages or hiding compartments. This would help if a classroom is infiltrated and there is no where else to hide during these invasions.

Sadly these events happened, and there is no way to be certain that these ideas would have worked, but maybe, just maybe, these ideas could have worked. But I hope that this insignificant little essay from a 6th grader can get somewhere.

***HOW I INTRODUCED THE TOPIC OF SCHOOL SHOOTING:**

PBS NewsHour is an amazing resource. I used an article titled, "How Teens Want to Solve America's School Shooting Problem"

In this article, there are multiple viewpoints featured of solutions to the problem presented by students from across the country. There is a very powerful video as well. After analyzing and discussing the article, my students wrote their own solutions.

Here is the link to the website:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/how-teens-want-to-solve-americas-school-shooting-problem>

Here's an excerpt from the article:



"On average, there are about 13,000 deaths in the United States resulting from gun violence each year. Seventeen of those deaths were people I attended school with. People I passed in the halls everyday. Not many realize how much the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students are grieving. We are traumatized. We are scared. But we are ignoring all of that because we are trying to make a difference. We haven't had a minute to process or grieve. We are just trying to make sure that this does not happen again. We, as high school students who just went through something traumatic, are forced to beg and plead for change."

[By: Carly Novell, 12th grade, Marjory Douglas Stoneman High School, Parkland, Florida]

Current Events: School Shootings Across the U.S. (McDaniel Student)

The current school shootings have made kids like myself afraid to come to school. It has impacted a large amount teachers, staff, and community members as well, either mentally or physically. For me, it impacted me mentally not being sure whether I'm safe going to school. School is supposed to be a place of safety, a place to learn, a place where the fundamental values of education are paramount, not walking through a security scan every morning and afraid that someone around you may have a weapon they could easily use on you within minutes.

In addition, these school shootings have made a major statement towards the United States and its overall safety and protection to stop things like this from ever happening again. With these shootings, it's unbelievable that since January 2018, there has been dozens and dozens of shootings that have impacted school students. How could this ever happen with over hundreds of people who did absolutely nothing to have this happen to them and are injured, paralyzed or dead. These people left their families behind and not being able to live life to the fullest.

Finally, these incidents impacted me because it shows how dangerous the world is and how fast things may escalate regardless of where you are and no matter how safe you want to be.

Writing Through Music



Every once in awhile, I like to break the monotony of having students read articles or see news stories to learn about events or current views that affect us all. There are those moments when I prefer to play music that is relevant to our society and have them write about their feelings while listening to the song. After listening to the song once, I'll play the song again and give them the lyrics while it's playing so they can see the words that are being sung so they can connect more as they write. This particular time, I had them listen to Big Sean's "One Man Can Change The World".

Be careful, this song makes me cry everytime I listen to it. It's really outstanding! Have the kleenex ready! (You should checkout the video on you tube:)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GBVotNefYME>

Here are McDaniel Student Responses to the Song:

"One Man Can Change The World"

The world is a beautiful place,
But it can be filled with negative people.
It's slowly turning into a disgrace,
Where we're afraid to look into a peephole.
Gun violence is destroying the world,
The horror is starting to look endless.
Some aren't trying their best,
While some are making a statement.

The people of the country aren't responsible,
Leaving children without parents.
But "One Man Can Change The World",
You too can make a difference.
Big Sean, Oprah Winfrey, and Maya Angelou,
All people that weren't raised by parents,
It's so sad, people are so careless.
Money is large in this place I call home,
Money can change everything.
Money is used to do bad things, but
Money is a very funny thing.
We can buy houses and we can buy cars,
We can go places, but we won't get very far.



Although money is good to have,
Anything evil can turn good things bad

So, in the end,
What I'm trying to say.
Make a difference, do things your way.
Don't get caught up in a mess,
Change the world, or try your best.

"One Man Can Change The World"

"One Man Can Change The World" inspired me because this song made me feel like I wanted to cry, it made me feel upset, and angry like my heart was broken.

"One Man Can Change The World" makes me feel happy because it's great that he was brave enough to even sing this song. I feel pain while I listen to him singing and I even want to start crying. However, I, like Big Sean, will not give up because I was taught not to give up what you want to accomplish in life. It is just like the expression "When I fall, I get back up!"

"One Man Can Change The World" makes me feel upset, and angry because this song reminds me of my grandmother, and my grandfather. It reminds me of my grandparents because my grandfather died on my birthday and it makes me feel so much pain in my heart because I really never met him. From what I hear, people say, "What a great guy," he was and how he was strict.

This song reminds me of my grandmother because she passed away when I was very young. I loved my grandmother so much and I still do. My grandmother was strict, beautiful, nice, sweet, and she was very funny. She always made the family laugh, but the good thing is that her daughter is my mother and they act just the same and they both make me happy. They also look a lot alike.



I understand that when Big Sean wrote the song, it was shortly after losing his grandmother and their connection was so strong that she inspired him to travel through life and make the right choices, make better decisions and live up to the name she gave him. That type of inspiration is what inspired me to think of my grandparents and what paths they would want me to travel. I want to make decisions that are the right and the best ones. So this is my story about how this song makes me feel.



“This is America” Connection

Another new song, just released in spring 2018 that has caused much controversy is Childish Gambino's "This Is America". Let me first say, **this is strictly for upper middle school students who are mature enough to tackle watching the video on youtube.**

There is a clean version, but the uncut one even shocked me. (See

both as I reference, but clearly the clean video is most appropriate.) The song references "messaging about race, violence and the entertainment industry in the song and video. It also causes us to grapple with internal conflicts about a black artist's placement in society. In "This Is America," cars are set ablaze, a man drops to his apparent death from a balcony, and Glover mercilessly guns down a joyful church choir. The children dance unfazed all the while, each time bearing a different type of witness to what's happening. A child is the one to handle Glover's weapon after each shooting, and it's children who sit in the rafters above, recording the bedlam with their phones. Our normalization of racist violence has come at the cost of not only black lives, but black innocence." Tre Johnson of Rolling Stone Magazine

Here is the clean song version on youtube link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIk9D9kY7ps>

If your students are mature and you can preface the exploitation and violence they are about to witness, showing the video can be very powerful in message.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VYQjWnS4cMY>

Here is the New York Times article explaining the reasoning behind the video and song and it should be taught, read and discussed before watching the actual video.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/08/arts/music/childish-gambino-this-is-america-roundup.html>

For this lesson to be successful, it's important that each student has the lyrics to the song and literally review each line and have them identify the message that's being revealed. There are some powerful lyrics, for example "you just a barcode", "look what I'm whippin'", "police be trippin'", "I got the strap!" Why are these and other lyrics so powerful and what do they mean in the society we live in today? Have the students write what they think Childish Gambino means when he says these things. Refer to the NY Times article provided or any other source you may find referencing this song and the lyrics well before you allow them to hear the song or see the video if they are age appropriate.

Persuasive Speech Writing

Writers Matter is the perfect platform to give students a voice on issues that are important to them. Tell students that they will write a 3 minute persuasive speech on something that they are passionate about. Tell them that at the end of this project they will deliver their speeches to an audience. Go to Youtube and show clips from famous speeches i.e. “I Have a Dream” by MLK, Barack Obama’s Inaugural speech, Herb Brooks Miracle on Ice speech, or Oprah’s 2018 Golden Globe speech. Discuss the characteristics of great speakers.(45 minute lesson)

List the Components of a Great Speech (45 minute lesson)

1. Know your audience!
2. Start with a great hook to capture your audience’s attention. It could be a joke, a personal story, or compelling facts about the topic.
3. Include research and statistics to establish your credibility. Make the audience believe that you know what you are talking about.
4. Close with a Bang! Here is where you want to evoke emotion to drive your point home and illicit your audience to act!

Student Speech Writing Session (45 minutes)

1. Brainstorm topics. (Chart each idea the students generate)
2. Have students pick a topic from the class generated list. There will be a student who may have a topic idea not on the list and that’s okay too! Write the students’ topics on a list next to their name to avoid several students picking the same topic. (See Speech Planning Worksheet)
3. Students write the first part of their speech. The Hook! (45 minute lesson)
4. Students conduct research and continue to write the body of their speeches.
5. The Conclusion- End strong! Wrap up and summarize your main points.
6. When students complete their rough drafts, have them practice reading their speeches with a partner and use a timer to work on their delivery. Students practice dramatic pauses, occasional eye contact, projection, and enunciation. Encourage students to practice at home. Pick a day that students will deliver their speeches.
7. Speech Day! All of your students’ hard work is ready to be celebrated! Invite other students, staff, and parents to hear the students on Speech Day!

Speech Planning Worksheet

Introduction (The speaker sells the idea to the audience so they'll want to listen. The first few minutes of a speech are very important.) 10%

A. Get Audience's Attention

- Share a brief story or example that directly relates to the speech.
- Mention a startling statement, statistic or fact.
- Start with a question, quotation, or familiar saying that has to do with the topic of the speech.

B. State The Topic

C. Identify your Audience

- People pay attention to things that concern them
- You might refer to a common experience, fear, or situation with which everyone is familiar
- Challenge the audience with a question, invitation or quiz.

D. Preview Main Points

- Simply list the points in the order they will be presented.

E. Body of Presentation (The body includes the main points of your message.) 80%

Select three main points you want to emphasize.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

A point can be expressed in many different ways.

Repeat an important point before moving on to discuss another point.

Use transitions to connect parts of the presentation. Transitions are words or phrases that allow you to move smoothly from one point to another.

Use stories, personal experiences or humor to add interest and reinforce each point.

Picture words help individuals visualize what you say and keep the listener interested

- Main Point #1:
- Main Point #2:
- Main Point #3:

F. Conclusion (The speaker wraps up by summarizing the main points the audience needs to keep in mind. Just as first impressions are important, the same is true of final ones!) 10%

1. Signal the close of the speech by using a simple transition sentence that lets the audience know the speech is nearly finished.

2. Reinforce the main points by reminding the audience about the most important things they have just heard.

3. End strongly

- Use a brief story, example, or quotation.
- Or, encourage the audience to do something to follow up on what they have just heard
- Sometimes it is helpful to mention where additional information can be obtained.

Persuasive Writing Transition Words

Introductions	Making Your Point	Details	Endings	Other Words
I think...	Firstly, secondly,	For example...	For these	Reasons
For this reason...	thirdly...	In fact...	reasons...	Arguments
I feel that...	Furthermore...	For instance...	As you can see...	For
I am sure that...	In addition...		In other words...	Against
It is certain...		As evidence...	On the whole...	Unfair
I am writing to...	Also... Finally...	In support of	In short...	Pros
Of course...	Likewise...	this...	Without a doubt...	Cons
In the same	Besides...		In brief...	
way...			Undoubtedly...	
On the other	Again...			
hand...	Moreover...			
In this	Similarly...			
situation...	Surely...			
	Certainly...			
	Specifically... If...			
	then...			
	because...			

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Student Samples from E. M. Stanton

Student Sample #1

How many kids in this room never eat school lunch? More than 30 million children line up in school cafeterias everyday across the United States. A lot of these kids hate school lunch. I eat it sometimes but most of the time it tastes horrible. I feel strongly that school lunch is in serious need of improvement.

Why is school lunch so disgusting? Maybe its because the people who make it don't use good ingredients. The School Nutrition Association or SNA is a national organization of school nutrition. Their job is to advance the quality of school meal programs through education and advocacy according to state and federal policies. But the lunches they come up with are awful.

A group of students in Chicago are protesting for better school lunch to be served in their cafeteria inspiring real change. A junior at Roosevelt High School said "It is not fair for us to go throughout the day unsatisfied. If our hunger isn't satisfied then we cannot learn or focus."

The School Lunch Project was created to bring attention to this problem. They have a website that features photos of nasty food, spoiled produce, and questionable meats. The students also include a proposal for change.

In conclusion as I said in the beginning of my speech, our school lunches are in serious need of improvement. I think the SNA should provide schools with healthy foods that are tasty and no more mystery meat!

Student Sample #2

Who's your favorite basketball player? Is it LeBron James? What about Steph Curry? My favorite is Stephen Curry. He's my favorite because he has a great 3-point shot.

Today I would like to discuss the importance of playing basketball as a team sport. Let's get back to Steph Curry. Many sports analysts call him the greatest shooter in basketball history. His current position is point guard for Golden State.

Playing basketball can help you build teamwork by working together, it can keep you in shape, and it can build your self-esteem.

During practice and games you get to collaborate with others to reach your goal building team working skills. You also get to find out what your teammates' talents are and how to best use them to make sure your team wins.

In addition, basketball can help you stay in shape. Can you imagine running up and down the court during 4 quarters that last 15 minutes each? I bet you didn't know that the more you exercise the better you get at thinking and problem solving too.

The last point I want to make is that playing basketball builds your self-esteem. It builds a sense of community It feels good when you know that your teammates have your back

In conclusion, if you want to build your self-esteem, stay in shape, and be a part of a community play basketball and take it to the hoop!

Student Sample # 3

The time is now to throw away all those hair products that you've been spending so much money on. In fact, when added up the average woman will drop \$55,000 in a lifetime on hair products and treatments! You can save yourself a whole lot of trouble by wearing your hair in a natural style just like me. Wearing your hair naturally has become a movement. People everywhere have started to wear afro textured hair in its natural coarse state rather than chemically straighten their hair.

There are many men and women who have now opted to wear their hair in natural styles all across the United States. "Nappy" is a term that's been used to describe natural hair since the days of slave trading. When used to emphasize the difference between natural hair and European hair, it took on a derogatory meaning. Today many African American women are reclaiming the word.

I started growing locks when I was very young. Reason number one: I feel like this is a good topic to talk to you about because when I was little, my mom told me that I had to stop going to the barber shop getting my haircut because I had eczema. Eczema is a dry skin disease that includes symptoms like itchy, red, dry skin caused by inflammation. It is also known as atopic dermatitis. Sounds awful right? Trust me, it is. Ask the 35 million Americans who suffer from eczema too. Wearing your hair in natural styles eliminates you making your condition worse.

Natural hairstyles can range from the very simple [TWA](#) to more sophisticated styles like [bantu knots](#), box braids, crochet braids, hair twists, and dreadlocks. Many people may just put their hair in a bun or a ponytail. You could rock your hair any way you want. Just wear it in a way that's comfortable to you.

This is the best time to join the movement. Natural hair is increasing in popularity. Even stars like Janelle Monae, Lupita Nyong'o, and Erykah Badu rock their natural styles. So make your natural style what you want and wear it proudly.

"Still I Rise" and "Rise Up" Activity* {Poetry}

Throughout the book, we have talked about the struggles and challenges we face as people in our lives. It is important for young people to express themselves and share their struggles, but they are also inspired to overcome those challenges. There are many people and places that inspire our students to be the best that they can be. There are two works they can read and study that can help them think about overcoming the tough parts of life.

You can use the wonderful and famous poem by Maya Angelou "Still I Rise" and the stirring song "Rise Up" by Andra Day. Have copies of each piece and compare and contrast the two. Look for poetic devices in each and discuss. You can also hear an audio recording of Maya Angelou reading her poem and of course, Andra Day singing her song. Discuss with students what struggles each speaker has overcome and see if they can identify how they manage to do just that. Brainstorm struggles that we have and ways in which we overcome them to use to inspire the students to write their own poems. Be sure to have the students include elements of figurative language in their work!

Student Samples

"Overcomer"

By: A 7th grader at E. M. Stanton

When it feels like there is coal in your throat
every time you try to speak!
Feels like your future is on hold by death and deceit.
When you're told who you will be before you are even born.
When they look at your skin and assume the actions you will perform.
When friends split into two people, a friend and an enemy.
And form the beast they call a frenemy.
Do not let this be the start of your demise.
You are an overcomer, it's already in your veins.
It's in the very nature of your name.
You are an overcomer and will stop being afraid.
You are an overcomer in the middle of rage.
But although you are an overcomer, things still bring you down.
Like when the mirror image of you isn't good enough
so you look to someone else's reflection now.
Know that you are unique, that one in a billion people is you.
You will overcome the desire for light skin and pretty eyes.
Long hair and a thinner size.
You are an overcomer, so you pave your own way,
they say you have a smart mouth when you speak your mind
and you're black
But listen to me
and speak your mind anyway.

"LIFE"

By: A 7th grader from E. M. Stanton

If I didn't have any color
just bones
would you judge me of my blackness?
Would you talk about what my people have to do to put food up in their cabinets?
The long weaves, dirt on tees
is what they call ratchet.
Girls in 8th having babies
This era's tragic.
We are all in the same line
I ain't speaking traffic.
I care for other people who don't care about me.
That's a big problem
'cause when I'm telling them my story
they're steady laughing.
I'll cry myself to sleep,
don't think I'm weak
'cause Imma rise up like the people before me.
Imma live freely and happy.
Love I'll never be lacking.
I'll rise and overcome the obstacles in my life,
that's all I need to do to make everything alright.

"I'll Still Rise"

By: A 7th grader from E. M. Stanton

From being broken down, to being in pain, I'll still rise
From being told that I am not pretty enough or being
Told I'm not as smart as you, I'll still rise
To kids talking a lot, to kids being quiet,
I'll still rise.

From kids being rude to you to make you feel bad
But they're feeling worse, I'll still rise
You might think I'm just being nice to be nice but
I'm being nice because I don't have the strength to be mean,
I'll still rise

From ignorant kids talking like they have dirt in their mouth,
But people say the only reason they say mean things is because
They learn it from their parents
To distracting me, to attaching me, I can't be broken
From being bullied to be one of them
I'll still rise

I try to keep my head high, like in the sky
To keep focusing on school work and home,
Just because you say something doesn't make it true
Like saying the sky is blue because it's just blue
From knowing that I'm not that great,
to knowing I'm unstoppable.
Still I'll rise.

But I know my poem isn't the greatest
But remember the saying, "Still I'll Rise"

Rise Up

There are so many issues that affect our children. We should allow them to speak on these issues. Allow them to voice their opinions whether in speech or poetry. Let their voices ring.

Have the class make a list of issues they feel are important and relate to them as growing children in this society. Supply complex reading material relevant to these issues. After research and analysis, allow students to voice their opinions on the subject.

On the next page, you'll see that we focused on the issue of mass incarceration. They were able to write about what their heart was feeling at the time. Their pieces on pages 76-81 show growth in their level of consciousness of the society in which they live.



Mass Incarceration

Using The Issue of Mass Incarceration of African American Men in the U.S. to teach lessons on Race and Racism: The Connection to Slavery and How Will Change Ever Manifest?

A way we can relate and incorporate some of our readings and techniques to classroom pedagogy is by having students and even teachers in your building understand the school-to-prison pipeline epidemic in America. A major problem is African American students do not understand there is a problem in our country when it comes to mass incarceration. Depending on where the child lives, their influences, and role models, they may feel going to jail is what gives you “street credibility,” it’s your “rights of passage.” This misconception plagues many of our communities, African American students, and therefore, causes the spiraling down of Black men to continue and the breakdown of the Black family.

The government has set up government housing, money, food, childcare, education (if they take advantage of it), and even jobs. This subsidized living for black women, over the years, have pushed black men out of the family and out of the community. Being so, not having black men in the homes leaves women to raise their boys into men, and how can a woman raise a boy to be a man? Addressing the issue of mass incarceration of black men helps us to understand:

- Where are the black men in our community?
- What are the devastating effects mass incarceration has had on our communities?
- What can we, as educators, do to inform our students of how the system is designed for the failure of Black students and what we can do for ourselves, in our schools, and in our communities to stop it?

This lesson can be developed in so many ways. There are so many routes to take because there are so many reasons why this has happened. Allowing this issue to unfold naturally and organically would probably benefit the lives of our black boys and girls.

Students could:

- Go on a neighborhood walk and complete a photojournalism project with interviews about the effects of mass incarceration in the community.
- Read complex text and analyze the history of mass incarceration.
- Create community projects that provide literature on the effects of mass incarceration and the destruction of the black family.
- Write poetry.
- Write argumentative essays.
- Show/make a YouTube video.
- Whatever will be relevant to the minority students you teach

Here are some resources to start with:

Taking excerpts from the book *Locking Up our Own* speaks volumes about mass incarceration.

Teaching for Black Lives section 4

Netflix TV documentary: 13th

Solis, M., (2017). White People Get Better Plea Deals from Prosecutors, Study Shows. Newsweek Magazine. Retrieved from <http://www.newsweek.com/prosecutors-give-white-people-better-plea-deals-black-people-study-shows-691838>

Western, B. & Wildeman, C. (2009). *The Black Family and Mass Incarceration*. Retrieved from <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/brucewestern/files/westernwildeman09.pdf>

Zaru, D. (2017). *Is Meek Mill the Poster Child for Mass Incarceration? What The Outrage is All About*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2017/11/24/politics/meek-mill-prison-judge-mass-incarceration/index.html>

Ideas for songs/movies that can be used are:

- “The People” - Common
- “Glory” - Common & John Legend
- “Be Free” - J Cole
- “Letter To The Free” - Common
- “Stand Up For Something” - Andra Day & Common
- “Wake Up” - John Legend, Common, The Roots, Melanie Fiona
- Movie: Fruitvale Station

Student Samples from Wagner Middle School

GOLDEN

The melanin in my
In our skin
Makes us darker
Makes us different
Makes us golden
When I look in the mirror
I see a
Beautiful
Young
Smart
Wonderful
Empowered
Black child
When i look I'm the mirror I see me
When you look in a mirror, what do you see?
Down
Down
Down
That is the story of the African American
No..
You never heard the side of a black man or
black woman
Or you never listen
Listen to the pain in my voice
Listen to the pain that was blind to the white
man's eye
The color of blood fills the eyes of the ones
that lost
We've been brainwashed
Brainwashed to just have tears fill your eyes
with pain
But not do anything else.

Brainwashed to think that we are done
Brainwashed to sit back
And watch..
Thinking that
Fighting is a choice, not a right
So we sit back
Because all we hear is..
Fighting is a choice not a right.
Gun shots..
Stabs..
Tears down my mother's face
Black and blue..
Bruised..
But we're supposed to keep a smile be happy.
I've seen cops attacking black kids just for
going to the prom
Yet we sit and smile
Get up
Get up
Fighting IS the right choice..
Fighting is our right
Down
Down
Down
Will forever be the past of an African
American
Up
Up
Up
Will forever be the future
Golden is in our eyes
We might be brainwashed but we're not dumb
Golden is in our blood
So own up to it.

The Real You

There was once a beautiful girl and she would always watch TV.
Every time she watched something she saw the same light face.
"I want to be just like her!" she'd always tell her Mother.
Though her Mother never really paid much attention.
She started to make her hair just like the girls she saw on TV,
a straight and long weave.
She wore the same clothes, crop-tops and short skirts.
She tried to become a replica of her.
But one day...
Her Mother noticed how much she started to change.
"This isn't my daughter.." she thought to herself.
Her mother picked up a picture.
"Cedella! Come here please!"
Cedella came to her mother smiling, long black straight weave and a tight skirt...
Looking almost the same as the girl she saw on TV.
"You see this" Her mother said handing the picture to her.
"Yes...she's so..Pretty"
She looked at the dark-skin woman with an afro and beautiful features.
"Don't you know who she is?" her mother asked.
"Not at all Mother.." She replied.
"This is you! You couldn't recognize your own self?"
Her mother laughed and held her hand, sitting her down in a chair.
"You know...You don't have to be someone you know you're not...You are beautiful the way you are.
Your own name even means beautiful my dear."
"It does...?" she asked
"Of course! Cedella is a Jamaican black name that means a beautiful princess."
"And that beautiful princess right here...is you and I know all this."
As her mother points at her clothes and weave.
"This isn't the real you."
"So.. you want me to.. Be myself?" Cedella asked her Mother.
"You got it!" Her mother smiled.
Cedella hugged her mother and went to her room,
looking in the mirror.
"Be..myself... Be...myself..."
She took off the tight skirts, weave, and crop-top.
And wore only what she liked.
She put her hair in an afro and put on a beautiful, long pink dress.
She began to smile and people all over gasped to see her own style.
She became the most popular girl in school just for being herself.
And she began to spread the word.

Why The Violence (6th grade)

Guns and violence
Black people killing black people
Keeping guns in pockets
Drive by shootings...
But, why?
What for?
What does the violence prove?

Man thugs in gangs
Black people killing black people
Angry because your father isn't there
For you...
I understand, because my father isn't there for me...
But still, why?
What for?
Why the violence?

In black neighborhoods, all you see is...
STRUGGLE
Bringing guns to school
Shooting peers

All Lives Come Together

Do black lives and all lives matter to you?
Let me give you a hint....
We need to all talk together, does it ring a bell?
No, well let me break it down for you
Black lives and all lives matter is all about
when we all take a chance and choose to
engage in positive actions.
Black lives matter is not just a statement,

Killing them...
For what?
What did they do?
What did we do?
What did anybody do?
To You?

Is it so bad
That you felt you had
To create a world
Of violence
Making someone else suffer
For a little joke
Or something that went to far

Now his mother is crying
Because her child may be dying
And the violence continues
But, why?
What for?
What does the violence prove?
So please choose...

To do the right thing.

it's a movement.
All lives matter, we are all HUMAN!
Black lives and all lives can be strong and
independent
You may call yourselves... innocent Lives?.
But we're not innocent are we?
Because black people shoot other people that's
not innocent.
That's why all lives matter for all different
reasons
so think about it.
Because It should ring every bell.

WHY? (6th grade)

Why are cops killing us when they are supposed to be protecting us?

Why are black men killing each other when they are supposed to be providing for their family?

Everyday do you wake up and ask yourself why?

At night do you just hear gunshots and hope it's not someone you care about?

Why are people killing themselves when they have a whole life to experience?

Why do I hear and see a boy yelling for help because his demons are getting the best of him and he's just ready to pull the trigger?

Why are people shooting up schools? I guess what they say is true, a school can really change your lifestyle.

Why do I see a mother doing drugs in front of her daughter and her daughter is starving?

Why do I see a black man holding his 3 year old baby girl with blood on his hands and the cops automatically thinks it's him?

Is it because he's black, he has blood on his hands, and that maybe you hate black people because they don't look like you?

Why do I see a girl getting raped and everyone just watching not doing anything to help her?

Why do I see kids picking on a boy because they thought he was gay but really he was just confused?

Why do people I care about talk to me about suicide?

Why did white people enslave black people when all they wanted was to be free?

Why did 3 year old, Bella Edwards, have to get beat to death by her mother's boyfriend?

Why did close to 3,000 people die in 9/11 and 6,000 get injured?

Why do I see boys on the street with their underwear showing and their pants on their knees, when they are supposed to be acting like gentleman and getting their education?

Why does rape, racism, suicide, bullying, & murder happen?

WHY?

A Dark Happy Place

While the pain and happiness are fighting,
I'm left with confusion.
I'll go to my happy place.
Sounds of cars and trucks passing through.
The faces and smiles will lie to you.
Without care.
After the sorrow, I'll put on the fake smile,
And mask
The mask then forgets to cover a crack of light.
The next time I'll take that mask off and kill the
darkness.
And the light will help me with it.
Overcoming it will let me breathe it out.
Now I wear a mask of truth.
Without a crack of darkness... it won't make that
mistake.
My bad ol' bed was the happy place.
Covering your bad feeling ...
without the mask, helps you.

Your OWN Kind Of Beauty

They going call you ugly, bald headed, and fat!
But you have to stand tall
And be Different
be confident
Don't let your crown fall it may tilt
but make sure it doesn't fall
Look in the mirror and tell yourself YOU ARE beautiful.
Rock your hair
It doesn't matter what the length is.
You're beautiful
doesn't matter what the length is
You're beautiful

My ol' room is my Dark Happy Place.
If the darkness consumes me,
The light will save me.
Light will hopefully take me over ...
But darkness will find more darkness, and get
revenge.
It's their life cycle.
Fake faces are bad for you.
But the mask is deceiving you.

FACTS. If you get trapped in the darkness...
ZAPPED. It'll consume you.
LURK. Lurking in the dark will get you killed.
RACKS. The money doesn't matter cause it can
consume you too.
MAP. If you don't know your way home, the light will
help you.
Darkness cannot drive out darkness.
Only light can do that.
Hate cannot drive out hate.
Only love can do that-- Martin Luther King Jr.

It doesn't matter what size you are
So I suggest you do what ya mama told ya...
Be bold,
Be strong,
be a leader,
be confident,
Be unique
And love You!
Don't try to fit in
If You were made to stand out...
STAND OUT AND
BE YOUR OWN YOU!

Smile The Pain Away

Deep in a dark world.
There's a hole where each person feeling pain lies alone.
No one to talk to no one to see.
And one of those people used to be me.
Everyone was gloomy and sad.
Thinking that everything they did was bad.
Criticized for differences.
Hated by looks.
Everyone was scared and still, like books.
But one didn't want to feel this way anymore.
She climbed out her dark hole and begin to smile.
The light appeared after awhile.
When she was in her dark hole she thought of how to make herself happy.
She decided she was going to keep herself happy by doing different things and things
she enjoyed.
She felt like it was time.
To leave her hole.
And be free with the light.
She smiled happily.
Crying tears of joy.
She yelled out to everyone crying more as if her tears were waterfalls.
"It's all over now!"
"Don't hide your specialty!"
"As long as you feel happy... Being you.."
"Then there's no need to feel pain!"
She yelled and felt as if her heart was beating out her chest.
The others heard her touching words and one by one felt the strength to climb out
their hole.
They all cried, all tears like rain.
As more light began to appear.
All the pain.
Tears and sadness.
All gone. Just happiness.. And acceptance.

About the Authors



Kimberly Lewinski is Associate Professor of Education and Associate Director of the Writers Matter Program at La Salle University in Philadelphia. Kimberly teaches both undergraduate and graduate students in the Education Department. In 2014, she published, with Drs. Yost and Vogel, *Empowering Young Writers: The Writers Matter Approach*. The Writers Matter Program involves close to 2000 students yearly in the Philadelphia Area. She can be reached at Lewinski@LaSalle.edu.



Erin Cunningham is a middle years ELA teacher with the School District of Philadelphia. Erin has taught middle years for over twenty years and has been involved with Writers Matter for the past nine years. She believes that Writers Matter has allowed still voices to rise and protected walls, broken. She currently teaches 7th/8th grade ELA at McDaniel Elementary School. "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men."
(Frederick Douglass) She can be reached at ercunningham@philasd.org.



Michelle Todd - Coleman is a native of Philadelphia and teaches 6th Grade Literacy at Wagner Middle School for the School District of Philadelphia. She has taught for Philadelphia schools since 2003 and plans to stay in Philadelphia to empower the voices of Philly students. She has been part of Writers Matter since 2010. Michelle was also part of the Philadelphia Writing Project in 2018. All children can learn, they are our future, teach them to be leaders. Michelle can be reached at metodd@philasd.org.



Kelly Ann Coughlin is a third grade teacher at J. Hampton Moore in Philadelphia. She had taught all subjects in middle school for seventeen years. It was there where she fell in love with teaching Creative Writing & Technology. It is in the art of writing where students share their voice, their passion, their true selves. She can now share that love of writing with her third grade students. She can be reached at kcoughlin@philasd.org.



Anne Olvera teaches at E.M. Stanton School. She has taught there for 10 years and has been a teacher for 26 years. She has found that giving students more opportunities to write about themselves and their own experiences has allowed them to express their voices and truly enjoy writing. The approach we discuss in Writers Matter is so different from our test driven focus yet it still manages to encompass the standards we need to teach. Writers Matter reminds us that writing is fun! She can be reached at afolvera@phila.k12.pa.us



Joan Carter Williams has been a teacher with the Philadelphia School District for 20 years. She currently teaches 4th grade at E.M. Stanton Elementary. She's shared laughs and tears with her students and has really gotten to know them better through their writing thanks to Writers Matter. Joan received The Lauretta Woodson Award for Teaching Excellence in 2017-2018 and the PA Social Studies Teacher of The Year Award 2015. She can be reached at jcarterwilliams@philasd.org

