

The “Write” Stuff: Strategies and Conventions for Essay Composition

Grade Level: Fifth Grade

Written by: Cyndie Stanley and Rebecca Welch, Jefferson Academy, Broomfield, CO

Length of Unit: Three lessons (each lesson can take 45 minutes to teach but you will need five 45 minute blocks for writing each of the three essays)

I. ABSTRACT

The focus of this fifth grade unit is essay composition while integrating content from the *Core Knowledge Sequence* in fifth grade literature, history, and science. Students will develop an understanding of the writing process while learning strategies and conventions involved in forms of essay composition. The lessons will address the organization and development of narrative essays, descriptive essays, and essays that explain a process. Writing topics will provide a means by which teachers can review and reinforce Core Knowledge content areas.

II. OVERVIEW

A. Concept Objectives (Jefferson County, CO Language Arts Content Standard: JCLAS)

1. Understand how to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences while applying conventions of language for effective communication. (JCLAS 3, 5)
2. Understand how to evaluate and improve the quality of writing. (JCLAS 8)

B. Content from the *Core Knowledge Sequence*

1. Produce a variety of types of writing – including narrative essays, descriptive essays, and essays that explain a process (page 109)

C. Skill Objectives

1. Students will produce an effectively written narrative essay. (JCLAS 3.3)
2. Students will produce and effectively written descriptive essay. (JCLAS 3.3)
3. Students will produce an effectively written essay that explains a process. (JCLAS 3.3)
4. Students will apply spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and usage conventions correctly. (JCLAS 5.1)
5. Students will follow the conventions of form for clarity and for different purposes of writing. (JCLAS 5.2)
6. Students will examine and improve their writing. (JCLAS 8.1, 8.2)

III. BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

A. For Teachers

1. Kemper, D., Nathan, R., & Sebranek, P. *Writers Express: A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners*. Burlington, WI: Write Source Educational Publishing House, 1994. 0-939045-93-1 (soft cover)

2. *Collections for Young Scholars Teacher Tool Cards*. Chicago and Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995. 0-8126-5453-6
 3. *Writer's Solution*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996. 0-13-828773-2
- B. For Students
1. Students will have produced written work with a beginning, middle, and end. (Grade 3)
 2. Students will have made reasonable judgments about what to include in their written work. (Grade 3)
 3. Students will have produced a variety of types of writing – with a coherent structure with guidance. (Grade 4)
 4. Students will have acquired the skills necessary for competent spelling, and usage of a dictionary to check and correct words that present difficulty. (Grade 4)
 5. Students will have the understanding of how to use a topic sentence, how to develop a paragraph with examples and details, as well as the mechanics of the writing process. (Grade 4)

IV. RESOURCES

- A. Kemper, D., Nathan, R., & Sebranek, P. *Writers Express: A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners*. Burlington, WI: Write Source Educational Publishing House, 1994. 0-939045-93-1 (soft cover)
- B. *Collections for Young Scholars Teacher Tool Cards*. Chicago and Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995. 0-8126-5453-6
- C. *Writer's Solution*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996. 0-13-828773-2

V. LESSONS

Lesson One: Narrative Essays

- A. *Daily Objectives*
1. Concept Objective(s)
 - a. Understand how to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences while applying conventions of language for effective communication.
 - b. Understand how to evaluate and improve the quality of writing.
 2. Lesson Content
 - a. Narrative essay development
 3. Skill Objective(s)
 - a. Students will produce an effectively written narrative essay.
 - b. Students will apply spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and usage conventions correctly.
 - c. Students will follow the conventions of form for clarity and for different purposes of writing.
 - d. Students will examine and improve their writing.
- B. *Materials*
1. Overhead projector

2. Narrative Essay Model – as an overhead transparency (Appendix A{1})
 3. Essay Checklist – one per student (Appendix A{2})
 4. Essay Grading Sheet – one per student (Appendix A{3})
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
1. Essay – short piece of writing that deals with one topic and expresses the author’s view point on a subject
 2. Narrative – telling a story by sharing details of an experience
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
1. Ask students who has ever told a story about something that they have experience. Have two or three share briefly what they experienced.
 2. Explain to students that if they had written these experiences down, they would have written a narrative essay.
 3. Go over Key Vocabulary with students.
 4. Tell students that a narrative essay should pull their readers into the story and keep them wondering what will happen next. It’s important to include a lot of colorful details to make the experience come alive.
 5. Go over the overhead of the Narrative Essay Model (Appendix A{1}). Read it aloud to the students.
 6. Explain to students that they will be writing a narrative essay sharing an experience. Make sure students understand that their essay will differ from the model because they will have at least three paragraphs, with a beginning, middle, and end.
 7. Remind students that the beginning, your first paragraph, should say something interesting or surprising about your subject to get your reader’s attention. (Refer back to the overhead - first sentence of Appendix A{1}.) It should also name the specific part of the subject that your essay will cover.
 8. Remind students that the middle should include all of the ideas (facts, figures, examples) that support the subject. This information must be clearly organized. Refer back to the overhead of Appendix A(1). Also tell students that although, they are learning a three paragraph essay, it is alright for this middle to be longer than one paragraph if their narrative needs more description.
 9. Remind students that the ending, your final paragraph, summarizes the main points covered in the essay. It should also remind readers why the subject is important or help them remember it better. Refer back to the last sentence of the overhead of Appendix A(1).
 10. Pass out the Essay Checklist (Appendix A{2}) to each student. Explain to them that this is for them to use when they write their own narrative essay. Tell them that the checklist will help them improve their first draft.
 11. Have students begin writing a narrative essay.
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
1. Have students turn in their narrative essays. Use the Essay Grading Sheet (Appendix A{3}) to score each student’s essay.

Lesson Two: Descriptive Essays

A. *Daily Objectives*

1. Concept Objective(s)
 - a. Understand how to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences while applying conventions of language for effective communication.
 - b. Understand how to evaluate and improve the quality of writing.
2. Lesson Content
 - a. Descriptive essay development
3. Skill Objective(s)
 - a. Students will produce an effectively written descriptive essay.
 - b. Students will apply spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and usage conventions correctly.
 - c. Students will follow the conventions of form for clarity and for different purposes of writing.
 - d. Students will examine and improve their writing.

B. *Materials*

1. Overhead projector
2. Descriptive Essay Model – as an overhead transparency (Appendix B{1})
3. Core Knowledge Content Area Recommendations (Appendix B{2})
4. Essay Checklist – one per student (Appendix A{2})
5. Essay Grading Sheet – one per student (Appendix A{3})

C. *Key Vocabulary*

1. Descriptive – describes a person, place, a thing, or an idea; you should use words that help your reader see, hear, smell, taste, and feel what you are describing

D. *Procedures/Activities*

1. Write on the board the headings: see, hear, smell, taste, and feel. Next, ask students to look around the classroom and give words that fit under the headings.
2. Write student's suggestions under the appropriate headings.
3. Discuss with students that they are finding ways to describe the classroom. Explain to them that if they had written these down in complete sentences and paragraphs, they would have written a descriptive essay.
4. Tell students that a descriptive essay should use words that help your reader see, hear, smell, taste, and feel what you are describing. Explain that they don't have to use all the senses for each descriptive essay, but they should choose the ones that would best develop their description. Remind them to tell their reader what color things are, how big things are, what things sound like, etc. Their readers should feel as if they are right there with you.
5. Go over the overhead of the Descriptive Essay Model (Appendix B{1}), reading it aloud. Ask students to find the words that help them visualize what the writer is telling about. Take these answers orally.
6. Explain to students that they will be writing a descriptive essay. Make sure students understand that their essay will differ from the model

because they will have at least three paragraphs, with a beginning, middle, and end.

7. Remind students that the beginning, your first paragraph, should say something interesting or surprising about your subject to get your reader's attention. (Refer back to the overhead - first sentence of Appendix B{1}.) It should also name the specific part of the subject that your essay will cover.
 8. Remind students that the middle should include all of the ideas (facts, figures, examples) that support the subject. This information must be clearly organized. Refer back to the overhead of Appendix B(1). Also tell students that although, they are learning a three paragraph essay, it is all right for this middle to be longer than one paragraph if their description needs more developing.
 9. Remind students that the ending, your final paragraph, summarizes the main points covered in the essay. It should also remind readers why the subject is important or help them remember it better. Refer back to the last sentence of the overhead of Appendix B(1).
 10. Pass out the Essay Checklist (Appendix A{2}) to each student. Explain to them that this is for them to use when they write their own descriptive essay. Tell them that the checklist will help them improve their first draft.
 11. Have students begin writing a descriptive essay or use one of the Core Knowledge Recommendations (Appendix B{2}).
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
1. Have students turn in their descriptive essays. Use the Essay Grading Sheet (Appendix A{3}) to score each student's essay.

Lesson Three: Essay that Explains a Process

A. *Daily Objectives*

1. Concept Objective(s)
 - a. Understand how to write effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences while applying conventions of language for effective communication.
 - b. Understand how to evaluate and improve the quality of writing.
2. Lesson Content
 - a. Essays that explain a process
3. Skill Objective(s)
 - a. Students will produce an effectively written essay that explains a process.
 - b. Students will apply spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, and usage conventions correctly.
 - c. Students will follow the conventions of form for clarity and for different purposes of writing.
 - d. Students will examine and improve their writing.

B. *Materials*

1. Process Essay Model (Appendix C{1})
2. Describing a Process (Appendix C{2})

3. Core Knowledge Content Area Recommendations (Appendix C{3})
 4. Essay Checklist – one per student (Appendix A{2})
 5. Essay Grading Sheet – one per student (Appendix A{3})
- C. *Key Vocabulary*
1. Process – the step-by-step explanation of how to accomplish a task or an activity
- D. *Procedures/Activities*
1. Ask the students how they would explain to a small child the way to prepare a bowl of cereal with banana. Tell them to imagine the child has just walked into the kitchen and has never prepared a bowl of cereal before. (Use Process Essay Model – Appendix C{1} as a guide.)
 2. Explain to students that it is easier to first put your steps in a list and then put them in order. Write these on the board as they are given.
 3. Encourage the students to decide what order the steps should occur in. As they agree on each step, write the number beside it.
 4. When students have finished giving the steps, ask them how telling the child steps out of order, for example on the model, step 8 before step 6, would affect her or his ability to follow the directions. The students should understand that mixing up the steps would confuse the child.
 5. Ask the students to determine which steps could and could not be switched to have the process still work successfully.
 6. Then ask the students what would happen to the process if they forgot to tell the child to do one of the steps, for example step 3 on the model. The students will probably determine that all the steps are essential to the process.
 7. Ask the students what is important to remember when describing a process in writing. If necessary, remind them that it is important for all the steps to be given and in the correct order. Also remind them that the use of signal words such as, *first, next, then, later, after, and finally*, make the order of the steps clear to their readers.
 8. Suggest to students that when they describe a process in their writing, they should imagine they are explaining it to someone who is unfamiliar with the procedure.
 9. Pass out Describing a Process (Appendix C{2}) to each student. Tell them that this reference for them when they write their own process essay.
 10. Explain to students that they will be writing a process essay. Make sure students understand that their essay will have at least three paragraphs, with a beginning, middle, and end.
 11. Remind students that the beginning, your first paragraph, should say something interesting or surprising about your subject to get your reader's attention. It should also name the specific part of the subject that your essay will cover.
 12. Remind students that the middle should include all of the ideas (facts, figures, examples) that support the subject. This information must be clearly organized into steps that follow a logical order.

13. Remind students that the ending, your final paragraph, summarizes the main points covered in the essay. It should also remind readers why the subject is important or help them remember it better.
 14. Pass out the Essay Checklist (Appendix A{2}) to each student. Explain to them that this is for them to use when they write their own descriptive essay. Tell them that the checklist will help them improve their first draft.
 15. Have students begin writing a narrative essay or use one of the Core Knowledge Recommendations (Appendix C{3}).
- E. *Assessment/Evaluation*
1. Have students turn in their process essays. Use the Essay Grading Sheet (Appendix A{3}) to score each student's essay.

VI. HANDOUTS/WORKSHEETS

- A. Appendices A(1-4) – Narrative Essay and Assessment Tools
- B. Appendices B(1-2) – Descriptive Essay
- C. Appendices C(1-3) – Process Essay

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- A. Kemper, D., Nathan, R., & Sebranek, P. *Writers Express: A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners*. Burlington, WI: Write Source Educational Publishing House, 1994. 0-939045-93-1 (soft cover)
- B. *Collections for Young Scholars Teacher Tool Cards*. Chicago and Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995. 0-8126-5453-6
- C. *Writer's Solution*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1996. 0-13-828773-2

APPENDIX A(1) – THE WRITE STUFF

MODEL NARRATIVE ESSAY

Evan leaves a trail of trouble even when he isn't trying. The last time I baby-sat for him, we were painting pictures at the kitchen table. Evan painted a couple of monster faces, and then decided he wanted to do something else. He even offered to help clean up, which surprised me a little. He was carrying the bowl full of dirty water from our paintbrushes when disaster struck. He tripped right in front of the sink in the utility room and the dirty water went flying. I did my best to clean up the mess while Evan had a snack. As I worked, I reminded myself never to let Evan help again.

Taken from Kemper, D., Nathan, R., & Sebranek, P. *Writers Express: A Handbook for Young Writers, Thinkers, and Learners*. Burlington, WI: Write Source Educational Publishing House, 1994. 0-939045-93-1 (soft cover)

APPENDIX A(2) – THE WRITE STUFF

ESSAY CHECKLIST

Yes	No	
_____	_____	I have used complete sentences.
_____	_____	I have at least three paragraphs.
_____	_____	My beginning was interesting.
_____	_____	My middle is well developed.
_____	_____	My ending summarizes the main points.
_____	_____	I use commas, periods, and other punctuation correctly.
_____	_____	I have used capitalization rules correctly.
_____	_____	I have used correct spelling throughout.
_____	_____	I am proud of my essay. It reflects my best effort.
_____	_____	My essay would be better if I added more details.
_____	_____	My essay would be better if I added more descriptive words.
_____	_____	My ideas flow well.

** If you answered “no” to any of the above checklist items, you need to revise your writing. Do not complete your final draft until you are able to answer “yes” to all checklist items. **

APPENDIX A(3) – THE WRITE STUFF

ESSAY GRADING SHEET

Content

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1. Subject is clearly identified | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 2. Beginning is interesting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 3. Middle paragraph(s) is well developed | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 4. Ending summarizes the main points | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 5. Ideas are described fully and flow well | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Content: _____

Mechanics

- | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|----|
| 1. End marks and capital letters used correctly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 2. Other punctuation marks used correctly | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 3. Writing utilizes complete sentences | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 4. Variety in sentences are utilized in paragraph development | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| 5. Spelling is correct throughout piece | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Mechanics: _____

Paper Total _____/100

Letter Grade _____

APPENDIX B(1) – THE WRITE STUFF

DESCRIPTIVE ESSAY MODEL

The moment we walked into the movie theater, we could smell the freshly popped popcorn. The old theater was dark. All that we could see were miniature lights along the floor of the narrow aisles. We found three empty seats in the last row. The theater was quiet except for the rustling of candy wrappers and some whispering. Finally, the movie began. It was so funny we could hardly find time to enjoy our popcorn between bursts of laughter.

Taken from *Collections for Young Scholars Teacher Tool Cards*. Chicago and Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1995. 0-8126-5453-6

APPENDIX B(2) – THE WRITE STUFF

CORE KNOWLEDGE CONTENT AREA RECOMMENDATIONS

Literature

1. Describe the secret garden.
2. Describe the red headed league organization.
3. Describe Don Quixote.

History

1. Describe Abraham Lincoln.
2. Describe a plantation.
3. Describe the life of a slave.
4. Describe the Inca civilization.
5. Describe the Mayan civilization.
6. Describe the geography of Japan.
7. Describe one of the states.
8. Describe Christopher Columbus.
9. Describe the Black Codes.
10. Describe the Transatlantic Slave Trade.

Science

1. Describe a moneran.
2. Describe a protist.
3. Describe a fungus.
4. Describe Anton Van Leeuwenhoek.
5. Describe Ernest Just.
6. Describe Galileo.
7. Describe an animal cell.
8. Describe a plant cell.
9. Describe a mammal.
10. Describe an amphibian.

APPENDIX C(1) – THE WRITE STUFF

PROCESS ESSAY MODEL

1. Get out a bowl, a spoon, and a knife.
2. Get out the cereal.
3. Get out the milk.
4. Get out a banana.
5. Open the box of cereal.
6. Pour cereal into the bowl.
7. Peel the banana and slice it onto the cereal.
8. Open the milk and pour it over the cereal.

APPENDIX C(2) – THE WRITE STUFF

DESCRIBING A PROCESS

Remember to do the following things when you describe a process in your writing:

- Include every step of the process
- Describe the steps in order
- Use signal words such as *first*, *then*, *next*, *after*, *before*, and *finally* that show order

APPENDIX C(3) – THE WRITE STUFF

**CORE KNOWLEDGE CONTENT AREA
RECOMMENDATIONS**

Literature

1. Explain the process used to clean up and take care of the secret garden.
2. Explain the process that Sherlock Holmes used to solve the case of the red headed league.

History

1. Explain the process of becoming a state.
2. Explain the process of becoming a freed slave.

Science

1. Explain the process of seed fertilization.
2. Explain the process of photosynthesis.