

Writing Nonfiction in Third Grade

by Anna Wylie

This unit assumes that students have participated in writer's workshop throughout the year and are familiar with narrowing topics, choosing audiences, how to give feedback, and knowing what to do throughout the workshop time

Day 1

Standard 7: Comprehension- Students understand, interpret, and analyze narrative and informational grade level text.

Objective 3: Recognize and use features of narrative and informational text.

Mini Lesson: Text organization. Nonfiction text has certain organizational features.

Model:

Immerse students in nonfiction text. Show students two different nonfiction books. Point out the text features of each book. Nonfiction includes headings, table of contents, pictures, captions, glossary, index, maps, charts, organized into categories, factual information, etc.

As students help teacher locate the text features of nonfiction text, teacher leads discussion about how these features could help them if they were to write their own nonfiction book. The text features help to understand the information better. The text features keep information that is alike organized.

Shared or Guided Practice:

Ask students to "think about the fiction book they are reading in our read aloud time. Is it fiction or nonfiction?" (Answer: fiction) Use the two different books to compare the two different kinds of writing. Discuss what nonfiction is not: doesn't have characters, plots, setting, etc.

Say, "Turn to your neighbor and name three text features of nonfiction. Then let your neighbor tell you three more."

Assessment/ Accountability:

Say "Let's make a chart of the things we see in nonfiction that help us understand it better. Students should be able to recall the above features. Teacher writes list on chart paper to be hung in room as a reference.

Day 2

Standard 8: Students write daily to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Objective 1a. Generate ideas for writing by reading, discussing literature and informational text, and reflecting on personal experiences.

Mini Lesson: Getting ideas to write a class and your own informational text.

Immersion:

“Yesterday we talked about the difference between a fiction and a nonfiction text. We named some of the text features you would see if you read a nonfiction book or wrote your own nonfiction book. Today we will brainstorm some topics for nonfiction text that we could write together as a class.”

“I want to share with you a nonfiction book that I wrote. It’s about the city of Riverton. As I read it to you I want you to look at the chart on the wall that we made yesterday, and see what text features I used in this book.” I’d also like you to think about where I might have gotten the idea to write this book.

Teacher reads book to students.

Say, “Turn to your neighbor and tell two text features I used in my book.” Allow 1 min.

Say, “Turn to your neighbor and tell one idea you have about where I got the idea to write this book.” Allow 2 minutes.

Model:

Say, “When I write, I want to write about something that I think is really interesting. When I write a nonfiction text I want to choose something that I know a little bit about, and something that I know I can find a lot more information about later on. I make a list of topics, or brainstorm some ideas like we’ve done on several of our other writings.”

Teacher thinks aloud as she brainstorms her list of ideas, expressing why some topics are listed and why some topics might be difficult to find information on. Begin recording ideas on the overhead, in front of students.

Shared or Guided Practice:

Say, “We are going to write a class informational text. Let’s list some topics that we could write about.” Teacher records ideas on the board. Teacher encourages students to think aloud about their choice of topic as part of the class discussion.

Independent Practice:

When list is complete ask students to get out their writers workshop notebook and turn to the ideas section. Tell them that you will give them 5 minutes to continue a list of ideas in their notebook that they might be interested in writing about.

Accountability/Assessment:

Conference with individual students to view their list and discuss.

Day 3

Standard 8: Students write daily to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Objective 1b: Select and narrow a topic from generated ideas.

Mini Lesson: Narrowing your list of topics to specific choices.

Immersion: Read *The Popcorn Book* by Tomie dePaola. Generate a conversation about how the author decided on popcorn as a topic rather than a bigger idea of snack foods or food in general. Discuss the factual information in the book. Point out when topic of popcorn is discussed in smaller detail. Was it mixed in with narrative language?

Model:

“When I wrote the City of Riverton, I had a really hard time choosing the things that would go in my book. A history of a city is a very big topic. I had to leave a lot of things out of my book or it would have been too heavy to carry. Let’s look at the sub headings again.”

Go through the sub headings and discuss with the class whether or not a book could have been written just on the water problem in early Riverton, or, how a book just on the homes or what kind of transportation was used. Help students see how they can focus their topic to smaller units. Or how some of the smaller details in a book can give you an idea for a different book.

“Say,” Today we will look at our brainstorming list of possible topics for our class informational text.”

Look at the list created from the previous day and try to focus several of the items on the list to a smaller idea. Example: Disney World to machines that make the rides move.

Shared or Guided Practice: Have students get with a partner and choose 2 things from the list that they think would be a good topic to write about. Then have the partnership see if they can narrow the topic even farther.

Have partnerships write their idea on the board. Be specific in the praise you give about how they narrowed their topic.

Create a brief discussion about each of the ideas and why they would make a good topic for a class book. If class can come to consensus about which topic to choose that would be great. Otherwise a vote may have to take place.

Independent Practice:

Say, “During workshop today, look at your list of possible topics for your informational text. See if you can narrow those topics to something even more specific.”

Do a quick “status of the class” to see if students will be writing something new or revising a previous writing after they finish focusing their brainstorming list”

Accountability/Assessment:

For authors chair invite several children who think they have good examples focusing their topics to share. Invite listeners to give feedback on student work.

Day 4

Standard 8: Students write daily to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Objective 1c: Identify audience, purpose, and form for writing.

Immersion: Share small parts of the following books:

It's Disgusting and We Ate It! True Food Facts From Around the World and Throughout History by James Solheim

Are You A Snail by Judy Allen

Century Farm: One Hundred Years on a Family Farm by Cris Peterson

Mini Lesson: Choosing an audience and your purpose for writing.

Say, "Yesterday we worked on narrowing our topic. Now that we have chosen a topic, we need to decide who our audience will be.

Select parts of the above books that show whom the author has chosen as an audience. Think aloud about certain parts of the text that gave you clues as to why you think that. Also point out how all of the texts are written to inform but some are written in a very factual or scientific way and others are written like a story which sometimes could be a little more entertaining to read, depending on your audience.

Take those same parts you selected from above and say them differently with different vocabulary thrown in and different sentence structure, and see if the kids can guess what audience you are talking to now.

Guided practice:

Give each table a small paragraph from Century Farm: One Hundred Years on a Family Farm.

Allow students time to rewrite the paragraph for a different audience.

Accountability and Assessment:

Give each group the opportunity to share their rewrite with another group. The listening group then becomes the sharing group.

Say, "Who should we write to in our class book? Who should be our audience?"

Encourage students to tell "why" as well as "who" we should choose as our audience for our class book.

"As you begin workshop today, think about your audience for your informational text."

Day 5

Standard 8: Students write daily to communicate effectively for a variety of purposes and audiences.

Objective 1d: Use a variety of graphic organizers to organize information.

Mini Lesson: Show how to record important information on an-I chart.

Immersion:

Say, "We've worked really hard the last couple of days to chose and narrow our topic for our class book on _____"

I chose a few books and found some information on the internet about our topic. Let me share that with you.

Model:

We have a lot of information. “What do we do to organize our classroom book and the information that we find about it? What part of this information do we want to include in our book?”

“This is called an I-chart. The I stands for inquiry. Inquiry is what we do when seek information and learn about things. This chart will help us keep track of what we know and what we want to find out.”

	Question	Question	Question	Question
What I know				
Source				
Source				
Summary				

Guide class to generate specific questions on the areas that we want to include in our book about our topic. Record those on the chart. Answer the question with the information we already know about the questions that were asked (Teacher could choose these questions or they can be from input from the class.) Record it on the chart. Show how to record the sources.

Guided Practice:

Give each student a copy of the I-chart. Have them write their topic for their informational text at the top. Allow time for each table of students to generate questions about what they want to include in their book.

Assessment and accountability:

Students will conference with teacher over the next two days to discuss their own I-chart.