Unit Three - Writing Gripping Fictional Stories with Meaning and Significance

November/December

Welcome to the Unit

This unit has been a longtime favorite of young children. As any teacher of young students knows, children’s imaginations are brimful of story ideas—and your class will be chomping at the bit to start putting theirs onto the page. They’ll approach this unit with abundant ambition and zeal, ready to write, write, write. Chances are that children who eked out words during the previous unit will write with new volume, new stamina, and new engagement, their scrawl filling one page, then another and another as the unit taps into a great source of energy.

This genre of writing may or may not be new to your kids. Whether they have already experienced a unit in fiction writing or simply have a handful of personal narrative units under their belts, they can get a great deal out of this month. How you spin the unit—and what you teach—will depend largely on your particular students. Chances are your kids know a thing or two about crafting Small Moment stories. They know that it helps to zoom in on a particular scene—say, an event that occurs across fifteen minutes—and to write the story of that event in a step-by-step fashion so that readers can relive the event, picturing what the main character said and did first and then what occurred in response. If children have experienced units of study on narrative writing, they’ll also approach this unit already knowing about the value of stretching out the most important parts of those stories.

On the other hand, if children have not studied writing through units of study in K–1, they may not have been taught what we regard as a crucial concept: that it is far easier to write an effective story if one zooms in on a small moment, a particular scene, and writes that small moment, that scene, as a storyteller might tell it, allowing readers to almost live in the shoes of the character. That is, a child who has not studied Units of Study in Writing might approach the project of writing a story about a boy who learns to do a magic trick, planning to start the story, “Once upon a time a boy named Michael wanted to do a magic trick and so he did it. The audience cheered and he smiled big.” Contrast that lead with, “Michael held his deck of cards. He walked up to the stage and said, ‘Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.’” You’ll need, then, to be sure to highlight this part of your instruction. The unit contains lots of spaces for you to do that.
Either way, children come to this unit with a background not only as writers but also as readers. They've read narrative picture books and chapter books in which each chapter is rather like a self-contained story. Your children's experiences with short stories (whether in picture books, in episodic chapter books, or in collections of short stories) provides them with a reservoir to draw upon. It will be important for them to understand that they are being asked to write in ways that recreate the sounds and rhythms of stories. As you help children draw on their knowledge as readers, keep in mind that you are supporting their abilities to talk and think about published texts and about the author's craft in those texts. This is highly supportive of CCSS reading standards 4, 5 and 6.

This unit prioritizes story structure, spotlighting the plotting work that a short story writer does, emphasizing especially that a good story contains a scene (or small moment) or two and is told to build gripping tension. The character wants something and encounters trouble en route to that something. For your children, you capture this combination of motivations and obstacles by characterizing the stories they’ll be writing as “edge of the seat stories” or “trouble stories.” That is, this is not just about a character that does something (performs a magic trick in front of an audience). It is about a character who wants something, who encounters trouble. The story comes not from performing the magic trick, but from wanting to do well and struggling to master the trick. Tension can turn a sequential chain of events into something that feels like a story. To do this, teach your students how to develop characters in a way that builds tension, giving them dreams, desires, fears, and frustrations. One big goal of this unit (and of any writing unit) is to increase the volume of writing your children produce.

Meanwhile, you will also aim to raise the quality of your children's narrative writing. In this unit, then, you will remind children of what they already know about good narrative writing and then extend that repertoire, bearing in mind that the ultimate goal is for children to write well-elaborated short stories. Before you begin this unit, think back to when you were about eight years old. Chances are, you recall a story or two you wrote or wanted to write. Was there a character in that story who had a giant feeling welling up inside of her or him? Did that character want something—a friend, a prize, a chance—so badly it hurt? These are the feelings your children have surely had, and their characters can have these feelings too. Teach kids that in good fiction, characters’ wants, hopes, and aches are big. Then give your students space to write—and let their imaginations run free.
Overview

**Essential Question:** How can I use what I know about writing powerful personal narratives to improve my fiction writing?

**Bend I:** *(Think of a Character and of Small Moment Stories for That Character: Generating and Writing Several Short Fiction Books)*, you will set children up to generate edge of the seat story ideas and then quickly choose one, first storytelling it to a partner before sitting down to write, write, write. Children will write several focused stories during this first bend, writing in booklets. To do this they will draw both on everything they have learned about good narrative writing and on new strategies that you teach—on storytelling focused Small Moment scenes rather than summarizing, on using detail to build tension, and on stretching out the most gripping parts. Plan to spend at least a week in this bend. If children have never been in a Small Moment unit of study, this will require at least a week and a half.

*How can I use what I know about writing with details and suspense to write lots of interesting fictional stories?*

**Bend II:** *(Revise with Intention: Pull Readers to the Edges of Their Seats)*, children will return to the stories they have written, revising these stories for greater meaning and tension. They may revise by writing whole new versions of their stories, reaching toward the goal of storytelling rather than summarizing. If they have written their stories in such a way that the drama unfolds on the pages, then their revision will mostly involve reworking their drafting booklets, revising like carpenters. They’ll add pages and flaps and extenders to their booklets as they learn how to stretch out the “heart” of the story (the part that gets readers gripping their seats in anticipation), how to complicate the problem, and also to build tension also by having the character attempt first one thing, then another, then another to solve the problem before finding a way to resolve things. In short, children will learn how to revise with intention, just as they did earlier in the year during the Lessons from the Masters unit. Allow about a week to make your way through Bend II.

*How can I revise my fictional stories? Can I make big changes to my story, especially stretching out the most important parts?*
Bend III: (Repeat the Process and Accumulate Lessons Along the Way), children will repeat the process, this time focusing on doing all that they can do to make their stories even better. Children will self-assess at the start of and throughout this bend, setting goals for themselves based on the narrative checklist, on charts around the room, and on what they see in their writing. To support this push toward writing the best stories possible, you may teach them strategies to be sure that the parts of their story fit together or teach them to write more compelling endings, perhaps ones that convey a message to readers. Bend III could also take a week and a half. Expect students to produce at least three stories, two in each week, so more if this bend is longer than that.

*Can I set new goals for my writing and my revision so I write the best possible fiction stories?*

Getting Ready

Gathering Texts for Students

As with all units of study, you will want to select mentor texts to accompany your teaching so that you can provide your writers with examples. Some gripping picture books we recommend using throughout this unit are *Shortcut*, by Donald Crews; *Too Many Tamales*, by Gary Soto; *Koala Lou*, by Mem Fox; and *The Ghost-Eye Tree*, by Bill Martin. Or you might use parts of an early-reader chapter book from a series (Kate DiCamillo’s *Mercy Watson*, James Howe’s *Pinky and Rex*, Barbara Park’s *Junie B. Jones*, or Suzy Kline’s *Horrible Harry* are some possibilities). And remember that you have stories from your life that you can write with meaning, significance, and tension as a way to demonstrate for your children all that is possible. You can tailor these pieces of writing to demonstrate the skills your students need.

Use Additional Resources as Needed

You will also want to consult books on children’s literature because any such book can teach you the language that fiction writers use to describe their craft, and that language can lift your teaching in this unit. Of course it is always important to draw on the work of the children in your classroom. Workshop teaching is most powerful when you respond and teach to your kids’ successes and struggles. In the end, a good portion of your teaching will revolve around the responsive instruction you provide as you move kids along trajectories of skill development. You’ll want to become accustomed to fine-tuning your teaching.
through an attentiveness to student work, because the work your students do is not just showing you what they can or can’t do; it is also showing you what you can do.

**Choose When and How Children Will Publish**

Your students are likely to generate many pieces of writing during this unit. During the second and third bends, you will emphasize revision, and students will have the opportunity to deeply revise a book from the first bend and another book from the third bend. Those final stories can all be published in some fashion. For the publishing celebration, however, children will presumably need to choose just one of those stories to share; perhaps it will be one that builds the most tension or carries the most significance. Just as the gripping stories you read aloud to your class are meant to be discussed, so too are the gripping stories your students will write worthy of discussion. You may want to model your celebration after your whole-class read-aloud, giving students an opportunity to read their stories aloud and then giving listeners a chance to have a discussion. That, of course, would need to happen in small groups. You might do this with just your class or perhaps invite outsiders to participate in the celebration.

### Bend I: Think of a Character and of Small Moment Stories for That Character: Generating and Writing Several Short Fiction Books

**Introduce the genre**

Your students will undoubtedly be eager to write fiction, especially as they become more and more immersed in the fictional worlds of the characters they meet in books. Throughout this unit, the most important message you’ll convey is this: writers use everything they know to make up their own stories. You’ll tell your children, “Using everything you have learned about strong narrative writing, you can write realistic fiction stories about a character you dream up.” That is, you will want to make it clear to your children that while they are embarking on a new unit, they will want to bring all that they have already learned to the effort of writing realistic fiction stories. You will encourage writers to draw on all the craft moves they learned from studying mentor authors and all the strategies they now hold in their repertoire for writing small moments.

The Common Core State Standards call for second-graders to write sequenced narratives while providing a sense of closure, so you will want to help your writers think about the arc and language of their stories, about the passage of time, and about the need for a conclusion that brings the story together. The goal for this unit will be to write well-elaborated short stories.
You might begin this unit by asking children to recall what they already know about writing narratives. Produce charts from your prior narrative unit, and announce that the class will use and build on strategies. Perhaps you’ll ask children to bring a favorite published narrative they wrote earlier in the year with them to the carpet and then you can ask them to share some things they did that made that piece particularly strong. Of course, you’ll also want to make the new unit seem brand-new and exciting. You might say something like, “Writers, you have an exciting opportunity ahead of you. You are going to write edge-of-the-seat fiction stories. That means that you’ll write stories that keep your readers wanting more, ones that make them think, ‘Oh no, how will this story end?’ and ‘Oh my goodness, I can’t wait to turn the page.’ Edge-of-the-seat fiction stories are exactly what you think they are: fiction stories that put readers, literally, on the edge of their seat!”

You might then read an example of a story that is fictional, but realistic, and keeps readers on the edge of their seat. As mentioned earlier, Shortcut, by Donald Crews; The Ghost-Eye Tree, by Bill Martin; Koala Lou, by Mem Fox; and Too Many Tamales, by Gary Soto are four great examples, and they represent a range of ways to build tension. Some teachers share tension-filled clips from movies, like the garbage incinerator scene from Toy Story 3; if you elect to do that, you can narrate and story-tell as the scene unfolds to show children how a writer builds tension.

Meanwhile teach students to generate focused story ideas, choosing between them.

While you introduce the genre, you’ll also take the first day or two of the unit to teach children a few strategies to generate Small Moment fictional stories—fictional episodes—in which a character encounters trouble and somehow resolves it. Children will not need more than two strategies for generating gripping stories, but they will use these strategies often because they’ll probably generate a handful of possible ideas, then choose and write one story, then they’ll generate another handful of ideas and choose and write another story. Over the course of the unit, they will write four to eight stories, so they’ll generate lots of story ideas.

Both of the strategies that we most suggest involve students thinking of a strong emotion, one that they feel sometimes and that characters in the books they read also sometimes feel. The writer might select jealousy, embarrassment, frustration, surprise, or hope. And both of the strategies involve the writer making up a character and thinking of Small Moments stories (or “one time when” stories) in which that character had one of those feelings. One strategy for generating fictional stories begins with young writers thinking of “one time when’s” from books that they have read. A child might think, for example, of the awful embarrassment Pinky felt when he wet his pants during the spelling bee (in Pinky and Rex and the Spelling Bee). Then the job is to create a similar moment for a fictional character. Maybe the child who began by thinking about Pinky’s embarrassing moment might make up a story in which a character trips on the stage during a piano recital or
forgettable her lines during the school play or misses the ball during tryouts for the softball team. Another child who began by thinking of how desperately Ramona wants to pull her rival Susan Kushner's long blonde curls—and the moment when she does—might imagine his or her character is jealous of someone and longs to bring that person down in some way. Imagine the tension-filled scene leading up to the character's realizing this dream! The idea is to create a fictional character, zoom in on a strong emotion, and then create a time when that fictional character experienced that strong emotion.

Children's literature is full of characters who ache and want and worry and fume, so it won't be hard for your students to find an emotion or a scenario they can latch onto as a template they can borrow to help them with the story of their own making. Suspenseful fiction is full of stories of characters wanting something out of reach, not fitting in, getting into trouble, embarrassing themselves, facing danger. Your children, too, can draw on these topics and spin them in their own unique way.

Another strategy for coming up with an idea for a fictional story involves starting with small moments from one's own life instead of from literature. These stories can then be fictionalized or told from a different perspective to bring out the tension. For example, perhaps a student thinks of a moment when she was lost in the grocery store. In reality, she was only apart from her family for a minute or so, but in a realistic fiction story, the character might be lost for an entire day and maybe not in a grocery store but on the city streets. Often students will find that telling realistic stories based on real life is a powerful way to show how an event really felt. Sometimes the actual facts don't convey the powerful emotions that surround the moments from life that really matter.

Whichever strategy you teach and your children use, be sure that generating a list of possible realistic fiction ideas takes children ten minutes, not the entire workshop time, and that they then pick one to start writing about. Some teachers suggest that children generate something like four story ideas, then write the first page of a few of those stories, and then choose one to write as a whole story, leaving the remaining first pages as book-in-waiting.

As children plan stories, steer them to write with focus, limiting their characters and scope, and to plan through storytelling and sketching.

Your goal in this unit is for students to write stories that are comprised of two small moments (or scenes) at most, so this means it is essential that you guide your kids to select story ideas that can happen in one or two twenty-minute stretches of time. Make sure that many of the stories you study as mentor texts during this unit also cover short periods of time (picture books or short chapter books tend to work best for this), so that children
have models. Likewise, children should focus on maybe two or three realistic characters rather than a large cast, and the main character should be close in age to the writer. This will allow your children to get into the head of that character and to develop all the characters with some essential details rather than presenting them superficially one after another on the page.

One of the ways to channel children toward stories that are limited in scope and follow a clear arc is to continually remind them of all they know about Small Moment personal narrative writing. Make sure you remind them that instead of writing “watermelon stories” in which they tell all about their character’s life or time at camp, they are writing about a single seed story. Ask, “If you are writing about a character who went shopping at the mall and got lost, will you start when the character walks into the mall? When the character’s mother says, ‘I’ll be right back?’ Or when?”

Take time at the start of the unit to help children practice telling their stories aloud, telling their stories across pages of a drafting booklet a few times, first to themselves and then to their writing partners or to you during a conference or to the whole class during shares. As students improve their stories with each verbal retelling, make sure they have a system for quickly jotting down their ideas. For instance, they can sketch a quick, tiny picture in the top corner of each page to help them remember their plans. After they have story-told and planned their stories in their drafting booklets (which should take fifteen minutes, not days!) they need to draft. They’ll need five- to seven-page booklets in which to write, with each page of the booklet essentially functioning like one dot in the timeline of the event. Imagine that it should take children no more than a day and a half to write the whole story, front to finish. We have found that if children prolong this process for too long, the stories become disjointed.

Encourage volume in both the quantity of stories generated and the depth of individual stories.

If some children get going strong, they may ask if they can staple more pages onto their booklets. We suggest that instead of encouraging sprawling, long stories, you channel your children’s fervor for fiction into writing one fictional story after another. This also means that you’ll want to teach students that “when you’re done, you’ve just begun.” When a story is completed, it can be stored on one side of the writing folder, with unfinished stories on the other side of the folder. After completing one story, the writer can then go back to choose another idea from a list generated earlier, or make a new list of story ideas, and complete the process again. There should never be a reason to be completely stuck. If a story has become difficult, the writer can store it in their folder and work on something else. From time to time you might remind students to reread all the stories in their folder to see whether there is more they might add to them. Children love to tell a good story—the kind that gets a reaction. Take this energy and use it to stretch their volume of writing.
Expect most children to write two or three stories per week. Some might write two or three stories during the entire unit, but these will be children who write several completely new drafts per week. Either way, you will expect the volume to continually increase. Bend 2 of the first grade unit of study book, From Scenes to Series, teaches students to write story series, with one character and many different books or events. If you are having trouble with volume, you may want to look at this section for some inspiration. Session 6 explores how to write a series book—a notion we found children loved. The following chart is showcased in the session and is particularly helpful when trying to get children started on their own writing:

**How to Write Series Books**

- Use the same pretend characters.
- Start a new day or night in each story.
- Have things happen in the same place
- Include the same friend, pet, brother, or sister.
- Write different adventures.
- Have trouble repeat sometimes.

*Use writing partners to help students elaborate with focus.*

We hope that when presented with the added space, children's eyes will light up and their hands will begin to move faster than ever before. However, sometimes, children meet the business of writing longer stories with groans and complaints. Not surprisingly, the single most powerful ingredient in children's enthusiasm is your enthusiasm and attitude. If you focus too much on volume, demanding that students write a minimum number of pages, it is likely that students will bend their heads faithfully to this task, creating minimum pages that will be just that: minimum. Instead, if you present the opportunity to write longer stories as a new freedom or even as a characteristic of more accomplished writers, your young writers are more likely to be so excited by the challenge to fill the space that they will begin to write as much as possible across those pages. You might show how, as a writer comes to know more about how to craft a story, she simply needs more space to tell the story with all the details that help the story come alive for the reader. One teacher we know used a well-loved picture book and wrote an alternative version with only half the text, saying that the author might have chosen to write her story this way. She presented this barebones version to students, who easily recognized that the shorter story had lost much of its significance and power compared with the original. The same effect might be achieved using your own model text or the story of a shared class experience.

The challenge, of course, will be to help students write more while staying within two short episodes. The Common Core State Standards call for students to “recount a well-elaborated
event or short sequence of events” (W.2.3). You do not want your students to elongate their stories by including extraneous details or writing “bed to bed” stories (a story that begins when the main character wakes up in bed in the morning and ends when the character goes to bed at night). Rather, you will want to help them keep their focus on a short snippet of their characters’ lives, zooming in to elaborate with details that add tension. Help students stretch out the action in their episodes, going bit by bit through each small moment. For example, instead of writing, “I opened the door,” a child might write, “I gripped the knob and pulled with all my might.”

One strategy for helping students figure out how to say more is to encourage them to share their story with their writing partner, and to check whether their story is having the effect they hoped for. A writer might read the first portion of his story aloud and then ask, “What are you picturing?” or “Does that part make sense?” Feedback such as, “I’m confused. Can you say more?” or “What do you really mean?” can help writers to add more and more to their stories to clarify and extend. Their pages will become filled, and the need for more lines and extra pages will become clear. To practice visualizing how each bit of the story went, partners could act out their stories for each other. They can go page by page, acting out what happened, and then quickly writing down all the things they did. So the writer works on stretching out the part where he opens the door might stand up and act out opening a door with his partner. Then, the two can sit down and write all the little things that the writer had to do to get that door open.

**Bend II: Revise with Intention: Pull Readers to the Edges of Their Seats**

*Teach students to make their stories come alive through storytelling with detail and thinking about the internal journey of their characters.*

In this bend in the road of the unit, the focus shifts from drafting to revision, from writing with volume to writing effective stories. Your goal now is to dramatically improve your students’ writing so that their stories come alive and brim with meaning. Toward this end, one important focus will be storytelling with detail, not summarizing. Teach children that to tell a story, a writer first decides what the story is about: “This is a story about a girl who wants a dog because all her friends have one. At first her parents say no, but eventually, after a struggle, she gets it.” Next, the writer envisions each small moment of the story, rather than storytelling the whole of the story, which often leads children to summarize (“Emily wanted a dog. ‘Can I have one?’ she asked. Her mother said, ‘No,’ because they didn’t have the money. Then one day she was walking to school and she saw something and it was a dog. The end.”)

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Teach children to ask themselves, “What, exactly, will happen at the start of my story?” The writer of the story about a girl who longs for a dog might think, “If the girl wants a dog, what can I have her do that shows this? If this were a play, what would she be doing on stage?” Perhaps the main character talks to her mother about getting a dog. The child might write, “Emily walked into the kitchen. Her mom was making dinner. ‘Mom! Mom! Can I have a dog? Annie has one and it’s really cute,’ Emily whined.” Or the writer might create an opening moment in which Emily gazes longingly at her friend’s dog.

Finally, teach children to make movies in their minds of the exact story, imagining it bit by bit, as they write. Reliving stories, imagining the events unfolding, elicits writing that is organized and fluid. Children write sequenced stories with greater elaboration. One of the best ways to help children imagine a story is by acting it out. As children act out one moment, then another, they can not only record what each character says and does but also describe each bit of the story in detail, including where the characters are and what is happening around them. Partners can work together to find words that describe the actions and bring voice to the dialogue they act out together.

Children can also look closely at the books they are reading to explore how these authors bring their favorite characters to life. Teach them how to study these texts to discover ways authors use time transitions to make each scene of their story flow. This will help children transition more smoothly from one part of the story to the next and also use more sophisticated sentence structures as they compose their own stories. Session 9 in From Scenes to Series invites kids to a revision party! Your writing is your invitation. The minilesson invites kids to study their favorite author as a class, then their own independent books in small groups. During a small group session you might say something like, “Choose a book from your baggie that you want to look at more closely. As you read it over, remember to stop if you find a place you love, a place you want to be like the author, a place you see something you can try, too.” First graders were able to see that some of their favorite series authors:

Sample list from the 1st grade book:

Our Favorite Series Authors . . .

- Describe the setting (the place, the weather, the season, the time of day)
- Make the action exciting!
- Give a lot of details for new characters
- Add special details to their pictures

“Today I want to teach you that writers use other books to get ideas. As you read a book over, stop if you find a place you love and try that same move in your writing.”
Unit Three - Writing Gripping Fictional Stories with Meaning and Significance

- Make a pattern (“he worried about . . . he worried that . . . mostly he worried . . .”)
- Add POP-OUT words
- Show characters’ strong feelings in pictures
- Repeat action in pictures and words

Of Course, you can highlight what your students both notice and need to help their writing sparkle. As your students story-tell and act out parts of their stories, they’ll then turn to their drafts and make changes so that their written work matches their oral rehearsal. In the first bend you taught children that they could story-tell across the pages to figure out how the story might go and then make a quick sketch at the top of each page. In this bend, you might build on that strategy, teaching kids that they can sketch to plan what happens but also to plan how the character will feel on each page of the story. They can do this by either jotting a word or two along with the sketch or matching the faces of the characters to the feelings conveyed. You can share with kids that one of the many secrets to good fiction writing is that writers pay attention to what’s happening both on the outside of the character, and the inside. On the outside a character might be walking down the street, carrying a backpack. On the inside, he’s thinking, “I’m so nervous! I hope the other kids will like me!” As kids develop plans for new stories, they can begin to think about the internal journey of their characters (their thoughts, feelings, worries, struggles), as well as the external journey.

Children might also look to their favorite books and characters to see how good writers flesh out their characters in ways that bring them to life, showing their feelings rather than telling them. You might say, “To write stories that will draw readers in, you can look at the work of other writers who have done this, noticing how they show to bring their characters to life.” “Emily walked into the kitchen where her mother stood cooking dinner. She said, ‘Mom, I’m the only kid at school without a dog!’ Emily had her fingers crossed.” Notice how this example weaves dialogue with characters’ actions. Teach your children to do likewise. Similarly, remind children that when they revise fiction, they can draw on the exact same techniques they used for revision of personal narratives. Keep your charts that support elaboration and revision from the previous unit front and center.

Create tension: include obstacles, complicating problems, and challenging situations.

Another important focus of this bend, of course, will be on building tension. Reiterate to your students that tension is that quality in a story that compels the reader to keep turning the pages out of eagerness to know what happens next. Tension keeps the reader on the
edge of his seat! Writers weave tension throughout the story, especially at the beginning. Tension builds the momentum of the story. Early in a story, it can help to include a line or two that shows how the character is feeling or what she is thinking. This shows the inner story and piquing readers’ curiosity, encouraging them to read on, anticipating what will happen next. You might say to children, “You know how when you read, you often think, ‘I bet such-and-such will happen next!’ You want the readers of your stories to think like that, too, but they need your help. They need you to drop a hint here or there so that they can begin to guess what might happen next. You can do this by sharing what a character is thinking or feeling.”

The easiest way to create tension is to make it hard for the main character to get what he or she wants. In a story about a girl who wants desperately to visit her grandmother in South America, the writer should create a situation that keeps her from getting on that plane! The writer might ask herself, “What will make this difficult to achieve? Does the girl’s father not want her to go? Is the girl afraid of flying? Is the plane ticket too expensive?” Encourage your writers to ask, “What trouble will get in my character’s way, stop him from getting what he wants?”

Extra paper can also help with tension. Teach young writers to insert extra pages into the important parts of their stories to make sure they are telling those parts bit by bit, drawing them out. You are keeping them from just adding more pages at the end. This is revision with a purpose, as opposed to revision merely for the sake of revision.

Teach writers that as the story continues, they can add more hurdles that make things hard for the main character, and that leave the reader thinking, “What is going to happen next?!” You might teach kids that often there are several “bumps in the road.” If you are modeling a story about the time two friends went bike riding and one had an accident, you might begin with the moment when one friend falls off her bike. Then, in the next part of your story, perhaps the other character notices that her friend has cut her upper lip and is bleeding. She tries to help her up to walk back home when she realizes that her friend has sprained her ankle and can’t move. Now the problem spirals from a fall off the bike into a major accident, leaving the reader thinking, “Oh no! How are they going to get out of this?”

Reflect on past work and set goals for future work.

You can help children self-assess using the checklist for narrative writing. They can evaluate their writing, deciding whether it includes the skills on the learning progression,
and if not, decide what they need to do to make sure that it does. You may also ask them to look for evidence of one or two additional skills that you have taught.

These concepts are sophisticated for young writers, so you will want children to practice them in lots of pieces. Each time they begin a new five-page booklet, encourage them to draw on all that they have learned so far, aiming to make their next book even better. You might say to children that the first thing any writer must do before beginning a new story is to sit down and think about what she knows makes for good writing.

Then the writer sets a plan for what she will do to improve her writing. When writers embark on new stories, they need to ask themselves, “What did I do in my last story that made it so good I want to do it again? What else might I try?” And if your children are returning to a piece they began the day before, they might look at it and ask, “What else might I work on today to make this my strongest piece of writing yet?” To support this work during your conferences, you will want to refer to the charts and to their plans. You might ask, “What is your plan for today? What goal are you working on as a writer?”

Revise for elaboration and character. Story-tell to uncover important details and add dialogue to highlight important character traits.

Plan to spend the first portion of this final bend encouraging children to use all they know to write lots of stories, and emphasizing revision. To begin this work, remind students of any revision strategies and tools you taught them during prior writing units this year. Revision, you'll remind them, is a complement to good writing. If they have a small stack of stories that they like, those stories merit being revised. If a child really doesn't like one or two of the books she has written, those texts might not “deserve” revision.

Take this time to post the anchor charts from this unit and earlier narrative units around the room for children to refer to. Students can study the charts and think, “What will I work on today? How will I make my piece the very, very best it can be?”

Then, with their plans in mind, they can gather the necessary materials from the classroom writing center before diving into their work. Of course, to facilitate this work, you will need to ensure that children have access to the necessary materials. You will likely want to provide them each with a revision folder and a colored pen, swatches of paper on which they can add paragraphs to their drafts, and flaps of paper that can be taped over parts of the story they decide to revise. Teach them to use staple removers, if they don’t already use these regularly, so they can make their books longer or shorter.
At this point in their school careers, your writers will be familiar with many purposes of revision, and they will be adept at setting goals for their own revision using the charts. Because it is likely that many children are still summarizing rather than storytelling with detail, highlight that one of the most important reasons for second graders to revise is to elaborate. If a child wrote, “For Jorge’s birthday, he got a bike,” teach this child that he can cross out that summary of the event and instead story-tell exactly what happened, step by step. Injunctions to “add more information” or “add details” don’t necessarily help writers shift from summarizing to storytelling. Instead, such comments too often lead to pages that contain a lot of summary—pages like this: “For Jorge’s birthday, he got a bike. It was red and had a basket. He liked it.

He was happy. It was a great, great bike.” So coach children to make a movie in their mind, to think, “What did the character say or do exactly?” and to tell the story bit by bit. For children who are storytelling with detail, you can remind them to build up the tension in the story. For example, instead of writing, “Jorge got a bike,” the writer might write, “The box was really big. Jorge closed his eyes and wished. ‘Please, please, please let it be a bike,’ he thought. ‘Go on, open it,’ his dad said. Jorge pulled back the top and saw a red thing. Could it be? Then there was a basket. ‘A bike!’ Jorge yelled. He was happy.”

All students can do the same sort of revision with any story. Help them check to be sure they are storytelling, creating little scenes using dialogue and small actions to let the story unfold on the page. You might teach your students that writers of fiction often use dialogue not just to show what’s happening but also to show characters’ personalities. Since you can make characters say anything, why not have them say things that show what they are like? A bully wouldn’t say, “Pass me the peas, please.” She might instead say something like, “Hey, Stupid, hand over the peas!” In a minilesson, you might demonstrate how you reread your writing, revision pen in hand, focusing just on the dialogue and saying to yourself, “Is there something else this character could say that would show his personality?” To help figure out what the character could say and do, you might suggest that kids think of a person in real life who is like your character and think about what they would say and then add on to it.

**Revise for Meaning**

You might also teach children that it can help to think about the really important life lessons their character learns, and to show those life lessons. Often writers will add something about those lessons as a way to end a story. “From that day on, Anna always remembered that she could take the time to make her grandma happy.” “After that, Otto
always remembered to keep his toys in his backpack until recess time, and he didn’t get in trouble again.” You might also teach children to create more literary beginnings or endings. It is useful to show kids that they can try writing a few different versions of a lead or an ending (or any part of their story, for that matter) before deciding which one works best. To broaden their understanding of the various ways published story beginnings and endings are structured, children could study mentor texts the class has read, trying to name what the writer did in the beginning or ending. For example, in Short Cut by Donald Crews, he begins with, “We looked, we listened, we decided to take the shortcut.” Here Donald begins with small actions. Many of the Pinky and Rex series by James Howe begin with dialogue.

As mentioned earlier, you may decide to make endings a big deal. The Common Core State Standards for reading call for children to be able to recount stories and determine their central message or lesson by the end of second grade. You might ask your children to do this same kind of lesson or message work in their writing. Teach children to ask themselves, “What does my story teach other people?” Kids might do this work with a partner. The partners might read each other’s writing and then try to jot down what the main character learned—or what they learned. You may want to teach some of your more advanced writers that the lesson and the heart of the story usually go together. You could refer to the incinerator scene in Toy Story 3 to help teach this concept. This scene sends the message that friends stick together no matter what.

**Have students polish for publication.**

As you near the end of this unit, tell children that they will be celebrating soon. To prepare, they should spend some time polishing their writing—capitalizing proper nouns such as names and special places, rereading to ensure that the story remains in a third-person voice, and adding words or punctuation that may have been left out. You may want to refer to Session 16 from the 1st grade book, *From Scenes to Series*, where kids are invited to a punctuation party! In this particular session, students learn that writers use punctuation to give orders to their readers. To ensure they are giving the right orders, they reread their writing aloud and add exclamation points to exciting parts and questions marks to parts where a character is questioning or wondering. This lesson could be especially helpful for some of your students that still struggle with ending punctuation.

**Celebrate student writing by reading aloud and having book talks.**

Your children will write many pieces during this unit, and you will likely have each child pick one that he or she will publish. Encourage students to reread their pieces to find the one that builds the most tension and/or carries the most significance. Then you might make your celebration an “accountable talk” celebration. Ask your authors to read their
stories aloud to the class and then give the class time to talk about these moments. If you have done the message work described in the final bend above, you will be acknowledging especially that their stories are very important. They are so significant, they need to be read and also discussed. In preparation for this, children might practice reading these stories in their best read-aloud voices, slowing down at parts and then reading with excitement at others.

Alternatively, you might set up a time to share the stories with another class or older buddies in another grade. You might even add the stories to your classroom library to be shared year after year. (Your kids could group together the ones with similar messages.) Or each child could think of a place in the classroom or the school where their story might live. For example, stories about getting hurt might live in the nurse’s office, or stories about being a new kid at a new school might live in the main office.

Whatever you choose to do with the writing from this unit, your larger message will be that you and your students have worked hard to make this writing stand shoulder to shoulder with the best writing on your classroom’s and the school library’s bookshelves. Perhaps you’ll ask partners to work together, writing blurbs for the back of each other’s books to convince people to read them!