

Biography Through Shared Research

An Interdisciplinary Unit for K-2

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Description

This interdisciplinary unit for the primary grades is designed to provide a springboard for the genre study of biography through the implementation of a workshop model of writing instruction with built-in social studies and science extensions. Although this is not a new idea in regard to teaching the genre of biography, accomplishing it with K-2 students is remarkable. Often, primary writing involves copying of teacher text and/or letter formation (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 2004; Routman, 2005). It wasn't until the implementation of the process writing approach, along with the work being done in New Zealand with emergent readers (Clay, 1991) that the capabilities of primary students to communicate through written print was understood (Calkins, 1994). A primary student's approximation (Cambourne, 1988) of conventional print is valued as a view into the student's understandings of print much the way Running Records provide a view of "in the head" (Smith, 1985) processing of beginning reading. Twenty years ago, the possibility of primary students' ability to write in a specified genre like biography would not have been considered.

This unit is designed to be implemented over four weeks with four to five lessons per week, concluding in a culminating project. Each lesson contains the following components:

- Essential Question(s)
- Text(s) (for read-aloud or for science or social studies connection)
- Scaffolded Skills
- Minilesson
- Exit Slip/Product
- Workshop Closing (wrap-up of workshop as a whole-group activity)
- Science/Social Studies Extension

This unit integrates science through work with the scientific process (Heisey & Kucan, 2010) by introducing what scientists do, making the process real for young learners. These themes are introduced through the read-aloud texts that extend into shared writing activities, shared graphic organizer development across texts,

and science notebook writing. This work culminates in a classroom-wide scientific experiment.

The social studies theme of community-building is also developed through the classroom process of having students interview and write about their peers. Investigations of families through comparison/contrast activities, family interviews, and potential extension to autobiography are included. This unit is implemented at the beginning of the school year to aid in developing a classroom and community of learners.

This unit is organized around the writer’s workshop model for process writing instruction (Calkins, 1994; Murray, 2004; Routman, 2000; Wood-Ray, 2004). Using the backward design model (Wiggins & McTighe, 2004) as well as the work of Calkins, Ehrenworth, and Lehman (2012) regarding Common Core implementation, we began with the Common Core State Standards’ Anchor Standards for literacy for grades K–5 to build up the concepts and activities for this unit.

Writing standards are addressed through the process approach of students’ drafting, revising, conferencing, and editing two major pieces of writing over the course

of this unit. In addition, the elements of the genre of biography will be introduced and reinforced through a variety of read-aloud texts and multimedia experiences included in each lesson. Reading standards are addressed through the read-aloud discussion in each lesson; they are developed through the reciprocity of reading and writing through student creation of their own texts. Scaffolded skills for reading are included within each daily lesson and implemented during the minilessons. Finally, listening and speaking standards are addressed through the processes of interview, discussion, peer conferencing, and presentation of the materials for the two biographies created during this unit. The unit focuses heavily on the reciprocity between oral and written language development.

Therefore, this “Biography Through Shared Research” unit demonstrates how to work through a number of Common Core State Standards for literacy while seamlessly integrating science and social studies content. Even in the primary grades, literacy is not just a subject to be mastered; literacy is used to study the world with meaningful engagement as the key concept.

Unit Overview

Week	Grouping	Central Ideas	Objectives	Teaching and Learning Activities	Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved	Texts Used
1	Individuals, small groups, whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is biography? • What do biographers do? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin to understand the biography genre through read-aloud, discussion, and writing • Listen attentively to a read-aloud • Support talk with textual evidence • Apply what is learned to future writing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interactive read-aloud with turn and talk • Shared writing to brainstorm • Shared writing from brainstorm • Model interviewing strategy • Exit slip 	W.1.2 W.1.5 W.1.8 RI.1.5 RI.1.6 SL.1.1 SL.1.4	<i>Snowflake Bentley</i> by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (book and video) <i>The Boy Who Drew Birds</i> by Jacqueline Davies <i>Rare Treasure: Mary Anning and Her Remarkable Discoveries</i> by Don Brown
2	Individuals, small groups, whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do biographers begin to write? • How do biographers introduce their readers to the person who they are writing about? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand how to turn notes and research into writing • Explore how authors introduce their readers to the person they are writing about • Write the introduction and main part of the biography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling and/or shared writing • Student interviewing and writing • Sharing/exit slip 	W.1.2 W.1.5 W.1.8 RI.1.5 RI.1.6 SL.1.1 SL.1.4	<i>Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa</i> by Veronica Chambers <i>Snowflake Bentley</i> by Jacqueline Briggs Martin <i>The Boy Who Drew Birds</i> by Jacqueline Davies

(continued)

Unit Overview (Continued)

Week	Grouping	Central Ideas	Objectives	Teaching and Learning Activities	Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved	Texts Used
3	Individuals, small groups, whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do biographers finish their writing? • What is important for writers to do at the end of a biography? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore how biographers write a conclusion to their biography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling and/or shared writing • Student writing and guided revision • Sharing/exit slip 	W.1.2 W.1.5 W.1.8 RI.1.5 RI.1.6 SL.1.1 SL.1.4	<i>Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa</i> by Veronica Chambers
4	Individual, small groups, whole group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do I assess the content of my own biography? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create and use an editing checklist • Practice rereading for meaning • Polish up writing of first biography and begin the second biography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modeling and/or shared writing • Student peer editing and revision • Sharing/exit slip 	W.1.2 W.1.5 W.1.8 RI.1.5 RI.1.6 SL.1.1 SL.1.4	<i>Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa</i> by Veronica Chambers

Texts

This unit utilizes texts as supports for the writing process. Therefore, the issues of text choice and challenge are built into the individual writing work and sharing of the biography drafts as they are developed. The unit lesson plans have built-in reading and scaffolded skills for each lesson. This list includes text descriptions used to demonstrate biography (in addition to former student biographies).

Brown, D. (1999). *Rare treasure: Mary Anning and her remarkable discoveries*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Rare Treasure describes young Mary's discovery of a remarkable skeleton and other fossils. Because of her work, scientists were better able to understand extinct creatures from long ago. Brown's text provides a simple biography of Mary, with important events described in chronological order.

Chambers, V. (2005). *Celia Cruz: Queen of salsa*. New York, NY: Puffin.

Celia Cruz gives young readers a lyrical glimpse into the childhood of Celia Cruz. The book details her

early life, follows her inspiring journey toward fame, and tells how she became an internationally known salsa singer.

Davies, J. (2004). *The boy who drew birds: A story of John James Audubon*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

The Boy Who Drew Birds describes the findings of John James Audubon in his pursuit of understanding the disappearance of birds in winter and their return in spring. In the book, John James reads about birds and conducts experiments, which he carefully documents to support his theory that the birds leave their nests in the winter and return to them in the spring.

Martin, J.B. (1998). *Snowflake Bentley*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Snowflake Bentley tells the story of Wilson Bentley, referred to as Willie in the text, whose interest in snowflakes led him to take thousands of photographs using special techniques (specifically for snowflakes) that he developed over time.

Supplemental Texts

The following optional texts support the unit of study.

Adler, D.A. (1997). *A picture book of Thurgood Marshall*. New York, NY: Holiday House.

This picture book biography describes many events in Thurgood Marshall's life, including his childhood years. When he was young he wanted to shorten his name from "Thoroughgood," which was his real name, to "Thurgood" because he did not want to write out such a long name each time he went to write it. The book documents his father's influence in his early years and Marshall's successful career as a great lawyer arguing in the Supreme Court. Marshall had a great impact on race relations in America and was responsible for ending legal segregation.

Brown, D. (2004). *Odd boy out: Young Albert Einstein*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Odd Boy Out describes the childhood of Albert Einstein and how, in spite of everything that made him so different than his peers, his ideas were destined to change the way everyone would relate to and understand the world.

Bruchac, J. (1994). *A boy called Slow*. New York, NY: Philomel.

Joseph Bruchac describes the life of Slow, a Lakota Sioux who grew up in the 1830s. Slow is determined to become a Native American warrior and is inspired by his father's bravery. In the end, as a result of his bravery, Slow earns a proud new name: Sitting Bull. The book's illustrations reflect traditional Lakota life, and leading journals recommend this book for its multicultural content and authenticity.

Cline-Ransome, L. (2011). *Before there was Mozart: The story of Joseph Boulogne, Chevalier de Saint-George*. New York, NY: Random.

An early 18th-century "mulatto," Joseph Boulogne was taunted through his childhood about the color of his skin. In spite of this, he continued to develop his talents as a gifted musician and went on to play first violin with a Paris orchestra. Eventually, he became its conductor.

Engle, M. (2010). *Summer birds: The butterflies of Maria Merian*. New York, NY: Holt.

In this picture-book biography set in the 17th century, young Maria Merian is able, through careful observation, to disprove the long-held notion that

butterflies were "beasts of the devil" that spontaneously generated from mud.

Hill, L.C. (2010). *Dave the potter: Artist, poet, slave*. New York, NY: Little, Brown.

Transcending the limits of slavery in the 1800s, Dave was an exceptionally talented artist, poet, and potter. This book outlines his childhood struggles and how he overcame them to be the best he could be at everything he loved to do.

Napoli, D. (2010). *Mama Miti: Wangari Maathai and the trees of Kenya*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

This book details the true story of Wangari Muta Maathai, known as "Mama Miti," who founded an African grassroots organization known as the Green Belt Movement in 1977. Mama Miti was the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her movement, which has inspired many to fight for the environment. This story will show young readers their own potential to positively impact the future.

Say, A. (1990). *El Chino*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin. Billy Wong became the first Chinese matador. He grew up in Arizona, where his father encouraged him to do whatever he wanted. One day, when Billy was in Spain, he saw a bullfight and decided that this was what he wanted to do. Many people discouraged him and remarked that because he was Chinese, he had no chance. Billy also became discouraged after he spent considerable time in Spain at a bullfighting school without fighting a bull. He eventually got an offer to be a matador and became successful, overcoming great odds.

Say, A. (1999). *Tea with milk*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin.

Allen Say describes much of his mother's experiences, which involve problems relating to cultural differences. Her real name is Masako, but she prefers to be called May. The book describes much of her reluctance to move back to her native country, Japan. Although she graduated high school in the United States, Masako has to repeat it to learn her native language. She is not happy and misses the American lifestyle. Her classmates do not accept her as Japanese and treat her as a foreigner. She eventually meets her husband, Joseph, in Japan. This book is valuable because it describes the immigrant experience that many Americans must go through.

Teaching and Learning Activities

Week 1: What Is a Biography?

Group Description

This week’s lessons are designed for small groups and the whole group (as indicated).

Materials

- *Snowflake Bentley* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin (book and video)
- *The Boy Who Drew Birds* by Jacqueline Davies
- *Rare Treasure: Mary Anning and Her Remarkable Discoveries* by Don Brown
- Drawing materials
- Drawing paper

Objectives

- Begin to understand the biography genre through read-aloud, discussion, and writing
- Listen attentively to a read-aloud
- Support talk with textual evidence
- Apply what is learned to future writing

Common Core Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 2](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 8](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 6](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 1](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Day 1: Writing Workshop

Essential Questions

- What is a biography?
- What do we, as readers, notice about the techniques the author (biographer) used in their writing?
- Is a biography fiction or nonfiction?
- How can we get to know another person through the genre of biography?

Text

Snowflake Bentley by Jacqueline Briggs Martin was chosen because it chronicles the life of a boy and his favorite thing: snow. It also ties in explicitly to scientific inquiry.

Scaffolded Skills

Multiple sets of skills can be addressed when the text is projected for the class and through the shared writing in this minilesson.

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics
- Word recognition

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher will do an interactive read-aloud of the text. While reading, the teacher will pause and students will be given opportunities to “turn and talk” about the following: Who is the author teaching you about? How do you know? What do you know about this person based on what the author has written?

During the interactive read-aloud, the teacher will create, through shared writing, a brainstorming list with the students that captures their thinking about who Wilson (Willie) Bentley, or Snowflake Bentley, is. As the story ends, the students will finish capturing their thinking about the biography of William Bentley and what the author taught the readers about his life.

Exit Slip/Product

As this is ongoing work, you may choose to have students keep the exit slip in their writing folders.

- **Kindergarten:** Students draw a picture showing what the author taught them and label their pictures.
- **First Grade:** Students write one sentence that answers the question “Who is Snowflake Bentley?”
- **Second Grade:** Students respond to the question “What did the author teach you about William Bentley’s life?”

Workshop Closing (Small Group)

Students pair up and share their writing.

Science Extension

Show the video *Snowflake Bentley* (Weston Woods Productions). Students engage in understanding what a scientist is through discussion about things Snowflake Bentley does that exemplify the work of a scientist, such as observing, studying, asking questions, giving speeches, talking to others, persevering, and trying new things.

Day 2: Writing Workshop

Essential Questions

- What is a biography, and what do biographers do?
- What do we, as readers, notice about the techniques the author uses in his or her writing?
- Is this fiction or nonfiction?

Text

The Boy Who Drew Birds by Jacqueline Davies was chosen because it introduces the readers to another child with a special interest—an animal—to which many children of this age can relate.

Scaffolded Skills

Multiple sets of skills can be addressed when the text is projected to the class and through the shared writing in this minilesson.

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics
- Word recognition

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher will read the text aloud to students through an interactive read-aloud. As the text is read, the teacher will pause, and students will be given opportunities to turn and talk about the following: Who is the author teaching you about? How do you know? What do you know about this person based on what the author has written? What is this author doing that is the same or different than the author of *Snowflake Bentley*?

During the interactive read-aloud, the teacher will create a new brainstorming list (similar to the one created on Day 1). Using shared writing techniques, the teacher will elicit information from the students after they turn and talk about the life of John James Audubon.

As the story ends, the students will finish capturing their thinking about the biography of Audubon and how the author taught the readers about his life.

Exit Slip/Product

- **Kindergarten:** Students draw and label a picture of what the author taught them about John James Audubon.
- **First Grade:** Students answer the question “Who was John James Audubon?” by using the brainstorming list to help them gather their thoughts for their writing.
- **Second Grade:** Students answer the questions “How are John James Audubon and William Bentley alike? How are they different?” Students use the brainstorming lists to help them gather their thoughts for their writing.

Workshop Closing (Small Group)

Students pair up and share their writing.

Science Extension

Using a Venn diagram, have students compare and contrast how the work of John James Audubon and Snowflake Bentley is the work of scientists. What do they both do that shows that they are scientists?

Days 3–5: Writing Workshop

Essential Question

How do I, as a writer, begin to write a biography like Jacqueline Briggs Martin and Jacqueline Davies?

Text

Rare Treasure: Mary Anning and Her Remarkable Discoveries by Don Brown. This is yet another remarkable biography—this one of a young girl and her fascination with fossils. It adds to the depth of conversation that scientists aren’t only male.

Scaffolded Skills

Multiple sets of skills can be addressed through the shared writing in this minilesson.

- Phonological awareness
- Phonics
- Word recognition

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher will show and refer students to the brainstorming lists created on Days 1 and 2. The teacher will then model for students how they will interview another student about some of the student’s favorite things. Creating a brainstorming list on the projector for the class, the teacher will place a student’s name at the top of the list. Teacher will then model for the class how to conduct their research by asking the student about his or her favorite things: food, colors, sports, academics, holidays, pastimes, and games are all possibilities.

The teacher will capture the student’s responses on the brainstorming list. Then the roles will be switched and the student will model-interview the teacher. Afterward, time should be allotted for students to do what was modeled: interview one another and take notes on their findings, similar to the lists they created on Day 1 or Day 2. The teacher may wish to create a specialized paper on which students can capture their interview questions and notes (research).

Exit Slip/Product

Have students of all grade levels use their research notes and go around to as many people as possible, telling

them what they learned from their research about the classmate they interviewed.

- **Kindergarten:** Students draw pictures of their interviewee’s favorite things for their list and label, if able to.
- **First Grade:** Students sound out words and draw pictures for their list to capture their interviewee’s favorite things.
- **Second Grade:** Students write phrases for their list to capture their interviewee’s favorite things.

Workshop Closing (Whole Group)

Have a discussion on what worked well in students’ interviews and what could have been done to make the interviews better.

Science Extension

Teacher creates a chart titled “What Scientists Do.” Brainstorm what scientists “do” based on the information (evidence) from the read-alouds, using the following procedure: Code what Snowflake Bentley does in one color, what John James Audubon does in another color, and if they both do it, circle it in a third color. Read aloud *Rare Treasure: Mary Anning and Her Remarkable Discoveries*. Return to the list. Code, using a different color for what Mary Anning does. Then circle the things she does that are similar to Bentley and Audubon. Through coding and circling, the students will be able to understand that many scientists follow the same pattern of doing things to understand what they are studying. (See the rubric assessment for Week 1 in [Figure 3](#).)

Week 2: From Research to Writing: The First Biography

Group Description

This week’s lessons are designed for individuals, small groups, and the whole group (as indicated).

Materials

- *Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa* by Veronica Chambers
- *Snowflake Bentley* by Jacqueline Briggs Martin
- *The Boy Who Drew Birds* by Jacqueline Davies
- Drawing materials
- Drawing paper
- Lima beans
- Soil
- Pots for beans
- Water

Objectives

- Understand how to turn notes and research into writing
- Explore how authors introduce their readers to the person they are writing about
- Write the introduction and main part of the biography

Common Core Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 2](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 8](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 6](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 1](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Days 6–8: Writing Workshop

Each day will follow the procedure described below, beginning with some modeling and shared writing from the teacher. The students will have time to write and interview (as needed). They will be using the information from their brainstorming lists to write the pages of their biography.

Essential Question

How do biographers take their notes (from their brainstorming lists) and begin to write?

Text

A selected few student brainstorming lists from prior lessons, as well as the teacher’s list

Scaffolded Skills

- Speaking and listening (through collaborative conversations and describing people)
- Phonemic awareness
- Phonics
- Word recognition (through shared writing)

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher says to the class, “Today, we will take a look at the information we gathered through interviewing our partners. This is called research. We will select one of our partner’s favorite things from the list and find out more information using an interview technique. Remember, when we interview, we ask questions. Watch

me as I interview Carlos about his favorite toy, the ninja man.”

Teacher will then proceed to interview Carlos about his toy ninja man, modeling key interview phrases and questions: “Why do you like this toy? Who gave it to you? When? Why is it special to you? Tell me more. Talk more about the day you received this toy.”

After the interview, the teacher will model through shared writing a number of sentences that capture for the whole group what Carlos said in the interview. The teacher will model what will happen if they forget what Carlos told them: “I’m fortunate to have Carlos right here, so if I forget, I’ll just go ask him again and then come back and write it.”

Students will then have time to interview and write, following the same procedure.

Exit Slip/Product

- **Kindergarten:** Students will draw a detailed picture and write (label) what they learned about one of their partner’s favorite things from their brainstorming list.
- **First Grade:** Students will write two or more sentences that accurately describe one of their partner’s favorite things.
- **Second Grade:** Students will write three or more sentences that accurately describe one of their partner’s favorite things.

Workshop Closing (Whole Group)

The teacher will select one or more of the students’ writing samples from workshop and guide a discussion of the work: “I chose Tamika’s writing today. She interviewed Lara and found out why Lara likes balloons. Let’s read what Tamika said about why balloons are one of Lara’s favorite things.”

Social Studies Extension

Building Community: In a whole-group circle, have students introduce their partner to their class and state some of their partner’s favorite things.

Science Extension

Now that students are more familiar with what scientists do, they will begin their culminating science project. The teacher gives each student a lima bean and has them observe the bean, using their senses and some methods they have learned from the biographies of other scientists. Have students refer to the charts about what scientists do. Some students may break the bean, pull off the seed coat, and make predictions. Instruct students to write their observations in their science notebooks.

Additionally, the teacher should conduct a class experiment based on students’ wonderings. For example, students may want to know what happens if several lima beans are placed in a large jug of water. For any class experiment that may be conducted, daily observations should be made (and recorded as shared writings).

Days 9–10: Writing Workshop

Essential Question

How do biographers introduce their readers to the person they are writing about?

Text

Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa by Veronica Chambers. This text was chosen for its connection to students of diverse cultures.

Scaffolded Skills

- Print concepts
- Production and distribution of writing

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher reads aloud the biography of Celia Cruz, stopping after the first two pages. Teacher then talks about how the author introduced Celia to her readers and rereads the introductions of *Snowflake Bentley* and *The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon*.

Teacher says, “Writers give their readers an introduction to the person who they will be reading about using vivid language. Let’s reread how Veronica Chambers introduced us to Celia Cruz. ‘In the fabled land of Havana, where rhythm grows, sweet and juicy, like the oranges in Florida, there lived a girl. She looked like a girl and talked like a girl, but everyone who ever met her agreed, she sang like a bird.’ Remember Carlos? Today, I’m going to model for you how I can do like Veronica Chambers and introduce my readers to Carlos.”

Teacher will do a shared writing and think-aloud: “I want to let my readers know what an exceptional boy Carlos is. How could I begin? I know Carlos is in first grade, and he is 6 years old. What if I described Carlos? He’s right here. I can look at him and get some ideas. [Look at Carlos.] Got it! Watch as I write. ‘Carlos is a 6-year-old first grader. He has a smile that lights up the room. Carlos has many favorite things, and this book will tell you about the joy Carlos feels about his favorite things.’ Teacher may want to model a few more introductions, orally or in shared writing.

Group two pairs of students who interviewed each other and have them practice oral introductions. Model, “fishbowl style,” how the four students could help each other to get an introduction idea. Sentence stems could

be provided to scaffold language for second-language learners.

After sufficient time for groups to practice introductions, the teacher will call the class together, saying, “Now, it’s time to write an introduction of your partner. We’re doing it just like the authors of *Snowflake Bentley* and *Celia Cruz*. Go and write the introduction that you practiced with your group.”

Exit Slip/Product

- **Kindergarten:** Students draw a picture of their partner, noting specific details that will be an introduction of their peer.
- **First Grade:** Students draw a picture and introductory sentence(s).
- **Second Grade:** Students draw a picture and write sentences that introduce the reader to their peer.

Workshop Closing (Whole Group)

The teacher will select one or more of the students’ writing samples from workshop and guide a discussion of the work: “Let’s read Tamika’s introduction to her biography about Lara. We will expect Tamika to introduce us, her readers, to Lara so that we will be excited to keep on reading about Lara.”

Science Extension

Teacher should be referring to the class experiment (e.g., lima beans in a jug of water), conducting shared writings for students’ science notebooks. These shared writings can integrate technology by using photographs of the jug posted in a large notebook. Students work as a whole group to construct a short paragraph about what is happening to the beans in the water (the smell, how they look, etc.).

Allowing the students to now capitalize on and extend their understanding of the scientific process, divide the class up into groups. Provide each group with a lima bean, soil, pots, and water. Direct each group with the question “How will you get your bean to grow?” Students decide through collaboration how they want to plant their bean, determine how much soil and water it needs, and where they are going to place it (near a window, outside, etc.) for ongoing observation. They may choose variables—break the bean, use soil, use water (a little or a lot), use a combination of soil and water, use light, use darkness, keep the container open, use a closed container, and so on—and collaboratively construct a hypothesis about how/if their bean will grow.

After they are finished planting their beans, the young scientists collaboratively write about their

scientific process in their science notebook. On subsequent days, they observe their beans and keep detailed notes and drawings about their observations.

Week 3: Bringing It All Together: Writing a Conclusion to the Biography

Group Description

This week’s lessons are designed for individuals, small groups, and the whole group (as indicated).

Materials

- *Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa* by Veronica Chambers
- Drawing materials
- Drawing paper

Objective

Explore how biographers write a conclusion to their biography

Common Core Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 2](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 8](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 6](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 1](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Days 11–15: Writing Workshop

Essential Questions

- How do biographers finish their writing?
- What is important for writers to do at the end of a biography?

Text

Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa by Veronica Chambers

Scaffolded Skills

- Rereading for meaning
- Reciprocity between reading and writing
- Listening critically
- Giving feedback

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher says to students, “Writers, today we are going to look at some of the biographies we have shared together. I know we have learned a lot about one another through our shared research. Today, I want us to start thinking about how, when we’re ready, to end our biographies. Let’s return to our beloved Celia Cruz and pay attention to how Veronica Chambers ended her biography.”

Teacher rereads the last three pages of *Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa*. Teacher may also choose to reread several of the endings of multiple biographies that were read aloud during this unit of study.

Teacher says to the class, “Writers, do you know notice how Veronica Chambers ended her biography mentioning how Celia ‘sang like a bird’? Do you remember, in her introduction, she wrote that Celia sang like a bird, too? Veronica did something very intentional here. She made her beginning and ending match using some of the same language. This gives the readers a sense of ‘Ahh, the biography is complete.’ We can do this in our writing today, too. Let’s all take a few minutes to get our introductions out and reread what we wrote about the person we interviewed.” Allow some time for students to reread not only by themselves, but to a couple of partners as well. “Let’s come back together now. I brought out my writing about Carlos. Remember my introduction?” Read introduction from the chart paper: “Carlos is a 6-year-old first grader. He has a smile that lights up the room. Carlos has many favorite things, and this book will tell you about the joy Carlos feels about his favorite things.”

Teacher now says, “I’m now going to use the technique of making my beginnings and endings match, just like Veronica Chambers did in her writing. Let’s see.... I like how I said Carlos has a smile that lights up the room. I like that because it really captures Carlos. Hmm...let me think...I might have to try this a few times. Any ideas? OK, now that I’ve listened to some of your ideas, let me write.” Teacher will write in front of the students, “Carlos has many favorite things. His smile lights up the room whenever he gets to do one of his favorite things.”

Then, the teacher concludes with, “Writers, let’s reread this. Do you get the sense that my biography is done? Do you like how the ending used the same language as the beginning? This is one technique writers use to help their readers enjoy the feeling of being done with a good book. I want you to try that today. Get together with some fellow writers and reread your introductions. Help each other come up with some language that could be used to write the ending of the biography. When you think that you have it, go get started writing.

Remember, if you need help, go ask your fellow writers again.”

Exit Slip/Product

- **Kindergarten:** The writers retrieve their introductory picture and talk about it again with a group of other writers. Students draw/label a picture that is similar to the one they drew on their introductory page.
- **First Grade:** Students write one or two complete sentences using the same language as they did in their introduction.
- **Second Grade:** Students write several sentences that capture the same language as their introductions.

Workshop Closing (Small Group)

Allow students to pair up with the original partner that they interviewed to read their introductions and conclusions. Choose one or two students to share their introductions and conclusions with the whole class, eliciting feedback as necessary.

Science Extension (2+ Days)

Now that students have had the opportunity to construct hypotheses and explore the scientific process through both a class experiment and their own group experiments, students will be able to draw conclusions about each of the groups’ hypotheses. Allow the students to form their groups and set up stations “science fair” style. Their experiments and written observations should be clearly displayed for all to see. Students will walk around to all the stations and write their conclusions based on what is seen and noted at each station: “Whose bean grew the most? Why do you think that is so?” Some plants will likely sprout bean pods, showcasing the entire life cycle of the bean plants, since those beans could be planted again. The whole group will come together to debrief the process with the teacher and reflect on the work they all did as scientists, comparing and contrasting the process to that of the scientists whose work they read about in the unit’s biographies.

Week 4: Time to Polish, Edit, and Show What We Learned!

Group Description

This week’s lessons are designed for individuals, small groups, and the whole group (as indicated).

Materials

- Completed biographies
- Writing utensils

- Editing checklist (to be completed together)
- *Celia Cruz: Queen of Salsa* by Veronica Chambers

Objectives

- Create and use an editing checklist
- Practice rereading for meaning
- Polish up writing of first biography and begin the second biography

Common Core Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 2](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Writing, Grade 1, Standard 8](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 5](#)

[Reading: Informational Text, Grade 1, Standard 6](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 1](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 1, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Day 16: Writing Workshop

Essential Questions

- How do I edit my writing with a peer?
- How do I self-assess the content of my biography?

Scaffolded Skills

- Grade-appropriate grammar and punctuation skills
- Critical listening
- Reading for meaning
- Providing feedback

Lesson Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher says, “We want to polish up our writing so that our readers can understand it. We want our writing to be as clean and sparkling as a baby out of the bathtub! Let’s create together a checklist of what we think our writing needs to look like to be sparkling.” Together, create a conventions checklist that addresses the particular standards for the grade level (e.g., punctuation, capital letters, spaces between words, conventional spelling of high-frequency words). Make copies of the checklist for students to use first in a self-assessment and then to assess a partner. (See Figures 1 and 2 for sample checklists.)

FIGURE 1. Conventions Assessment Checklist

Does my biography

use capital letters at the beginning of sentences?

use spaces between words?

use ending punctuation correctly (periods, question marks, exclamation points)?

use lowercase letters throughout?

spell high-frequency words correctly?

use handwriting that is as neat and sparkling as a baby out of the bathtub?

Comments:

FIGURE 2. Peer Assessment Checklist

Does my peer’s biography contain

a cover with the title and author listed?

an introductory page in which the writer introduces the person to readers?

captivating illustrations?

a conclusion page that gives the reader a sense of “ahh, this is done”?

Comments:

Exit Slip/Product (All Grade Levels)

Have students attach the peer checklist to their writing, with the signature of the peer who reviewed it at the bottom.

Workshop Closing (Whole Group)

Discuss what went well with the editing checklist and what could be improved upon. Add more items to the checklist as needed to facilitate the process.

Science Extension

Continue the rotations that began at the end of Week 3. (For detailed instructions, see the end of Week 3.)

Day 17: Writing Workshop

Essential Question

How do I evaluate and edit my biography for content?

Scaffolded Skills

- Critical listening
- Reading for meaning
- Providing feedback

Format for Minilesson (Whole Group)

Teacher says, “Today, we are going to look at our writing and create one more checklist. This checklist will address the content of our biographies. We want to make sure that we have evidence of our learning from the minilessons in our workshop. Let’s see...we want to make sure that we used our brainstorming lists to write our information about the person from our interview. Let’s put that on the checklist. Next, we learned about introductions. Let’s add that to our checklist. Finally, we learned about conclusions. Let’s add that to our checklist, too. Writers, when you meet with your partner or with me in a conference, we’ll use this checklist to evaluate your writing. It’s important that we see evidence of your learning from our minilessons. If not, you will always have a chance to polish it up.”

Exit Slip/Product (All Grade Levels)

Have students attach the peer checklist (see Figure 2) to their writing, with the signature of the peer who reviewed it at the bottom.

Workshop Closing (Whole Group)

Discuss what went well with the editing checklist and what could be improved upon. Add more items to the checklist as needed to facilitate the process.

Science Extension

Allow time for each group to prepare a presentation that showcases their experiment and results for another class in the same grade level or a different grade level.

Days 18–20: Writing Workshop: The Second Biography

Allow students to share their writing with their peers. Create a browsing box of student-created biographies for reading during reading workshop. As time permits, have students write a second biography using the techniques taught to them in prior minilessons. This biography will allow them to choose a new partner or work with the same one. The focus will be on their partner’s family. The teacher, at this point, can also introduce the concept of an autobiography for students to explore as well.

Culminating Project

The unit culminates with two student-written biographies. The first one is about a peer’s favorite things (an

easy way to consider a fellow student is through that person’s favorites); the second biography moves into more abstract ideas about a peer, with a focus around family members. In addition, to tie up the science emphasis around what a scientist is and what a scientist does, there is a “be the scientist” activity at the end of the unit where the class works together to implement a scientific experiment using everything they have learned about this process.

Finally, the community-building social studies aspect of the unit culminates in a biography tea party. Parents are invited to the classroom to celebrate the children’s biographies and get to know each other as the students read their works about their classmates.

Assessment

Grading and evaluation for the unit are addressed through both formative and summative assessments. The Conventions Assessment Checklist (see Figure 1) is developed to support students’ initial self-evaluation of conventions used in the draft and final versions of the two written biographies. During group and individual writing conferences, a more formal assessment will also be used by teachers and interns. These assessments are kept in student portfolios for documentation and grading.

The Peer Assessment Checklist (see Figure 2) provides students with input on how well the process elements of a biography are developed, as defined in minilessons each day. In groups of two, students read their drafts to each other and use the Peer Assessment Checklist to look for and discuss the elements of a biography as they assess each other’s work. These checklists are also kept in a student portfolio for documentation and grading.

Summative assessment is addressed at key points throughout the unit (e.g., at the end of each week) as well as at the point of unit completion. The information generated from the checklist assessments during student and teacher conferences is supplemented with the content assessment. The assessment rubrics (see Figure 3) look at skills taught during minilessons to assess how well these skills have been internalized and used in each student’s draft-level writing. These rubrics are used during more formal writing conferences between teachers and students as well as independently, looking at writing folders and writing portfolios where work in progress is kept. These rubrics are used to define future whole-group- or small-group-focused instruction throughout the unit and to generate final grades for each student.

FIGURE 3. Summative Assessment Rubrics for Weeks 1–4

Week 1			
Emergent	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Listens to read-alouds but does not connect to learning goals of minilesson through drawing or writing	Listens to read-alouds and shows some evidence of learning through drawing or writing; may or may not be comprehensible to the reader without support from the writer	Listens to read-alouds; actively participates in shared discussions; shows evidence of understanding in pictures and/or writing appropriate to grade level	Listens to read-alouds; actively participates in shared discussions by adding to others' contributions; goes beyond grade-level expectations for drawing and/or reading
Conferencing Comments:			
Weeks 2 and 3			
Emergent	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Interviews a peer but does not keep notes accurately; little or no evidence of learning from minilessons is evident in the student's pictures and/or writing	Interviews a peer and keeps notes; some evidence of learning from minilessons is evident in the student's pictures and/or writing but may not stay on topic or be comprehensible to the reader without the writer's support	Interviews a peer and keeps detailed notes to use for writing purposes; evidence of learning from minilessons is easily detectable and writing and/or pictures are comprehensible	Interviews a peer and keeps detailed notes to use for writing purposes; evidence of learning from minilessons is beyond grade-level expectations for writing
Conferencing Comments:			
Week 4			
Emergent	Developing	Proficient	Advanced
Does not use the Conventions Assessment Checklist (CAC) or the Peer Assessment Checklist (PAC) effectively; items were checked without doing the work <i>or</i> does not yet employ the conventions; cannot yet verbally articulate to the teacher in a conference the need for editing or show understanding of what needs to be edited	Uses the CAC and PAC with some evidence of understanding of conventions and content; is able to verbally articulate to the teacher in a conference some of the editing that was done or needs to be done	Uses the CAC and PAC effectively with evidence of understanding conventions and content by correct revision; is able to verbally articulate to the teacher in a conference all of the editing that was done and why it was done	Uses the CAC and PAC effectively with evidence of understanding conventions and content by correct revision; is able to verbally articulate to the teacher in a conference all of the editing that was done and why it was done; can be a "teacher helper" to help edit others' biographies for conventions and content
Conferencing Comments:			

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About the Authors



Kimberly Hartnett-Edwards, PhD, has been working in reading education and teacher preparation for 25 years. She is currently an assistant professor at the University of Denver in Colorado working in the Teacher Education Program and Curriculum and Instruction programs at Morgridge College of Education (MCE). In addition to her work with teacher effectiveness in preservice and in-service professional development, her research addresses oral and written language acquisition for divergent readers through intervention support. This work includes research on effective classroom literacy coaching models in Southern California and the Hawaiian Islands. Dr. Hartnett-Edwards is a member of the International Reading Association, the American Educational Research Association, Phi Delta Kappa, the Association of School Curriculum Development, and the American Association of Teaching and Curriculum. In 2014, Dr. Hartnett-Edwards is working to develop the Leadership Academy Fellowship for teachers who have completed the MCE Teacher Education Program. In addition, she is part of the research team for the Institute of Educational Sciences grant focusing on *An Exploration of Novice Teachers' Core Competencies: Impacts on Student Achievement, and Effectiveness of Preparation* (portfolio.du.edu/IES). She can be contacted at khedward@me.com.



Keith Garvert, MEd, has been a teacher of the primary grades for more than 16 years. The development of literacy in young children has long been Keith's passion. He is currently employed with the Cherry Creek School District as an Elementary Literacy Coordinator. Keith is also an adjunct professor for the Teacher Education Program at the University of Denver. The ability to stay current in the classroom and research best practices in literacy drives Keith's pursuit to make every child a reader and writer through the workshop model. The idea for this unit of study was conceived after years of working with second-language learners as a first grade teacher. Keith saw a need to engage students in talk as the cornerstone of his writing workshop and capitalize on that oral language to catapult the students into writing. Keith is also a co-director of the Denver Writing Project, whose goal is to help teachers develop their personal writing and deepen their own practice of writing instruction in their classrooms. He can be contacted at garvert3@aol.com.



Jamie D'Angelo is a graduate of the University of Denver in Colorado. She has spent the past three years exploring literacy in primary grades. She completed the University of Denver's Teacher Education Program in Spring 2011. Jamie was an AmeriCorps

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