



6TH GRADE

VOLUME 6.1

Realistic Fiction Writing Unit for *The Westing Game*

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Welcome to the 6.1 Realistic Fiction Writing Unit for *The Westing Game!*

If this is your first time using this guide, you will want to read through this introduction carefully, as it provides information that you will find critical to your establishment of a successful language arts block!

This realistic fiction writing unit is meant to be taught in conjunction with the *Read Side by Side Reading Program*, Unit 6.1, *The Westing Game*. The book *The Westing Game* will be used as a mentor text to build students' background knowledge and expose students to the craft of writing.

This unit takes approximately 15 days to complete, from brainstorming and planning to sharing the published piece! Lessons in this unit give students explicit instruction in the steps of the writing process and the structure of narrative writing. Some craft and grammar lessons will be incorporated as students revise and edit their writing. You may want to supplement with additional craft, grammar, and spelling lessons between writing units.

Students will be writing a chapter book. Before you begin teaching the unit, decide how this chapter book will be published—handwritten, typed, or other. Also consider how their stories will be shared. Students might read their story to their own classmates, visit another classroom, or make their writing available for others to read in the classroom, library or other public location.

After students have had the opportunity to publish their writing, assess their work using the checklist for grading a narrative story provided at the end of the unit.

Schedule

To complete this unit, you will need to set aside 30-minutes for writing, 2-4 times a week.

Instructional days begin with a whole-class lesson. Lessons will be 10-15 minutes in length, allowing a short time after the lesson for students to work on the assignment. While working, students will access the help of a writing partner as needed. It may be helpful to seat partners next to each other during the work time. The teacher then confers with partnerships as needed.

Working days allow students to get started right away on writing projects. During the work time, students will continue to access a partner or the teacher for help as needed. If it is challenging to find time every day for writing, teachers might assign these work-projects as homework.

Narrative schedule:

1. Brainstorm & Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make a list of story ideas.• Select a strong idea from the list.• Complete a <i>Narrative Writing Map</i>.• Write a blurb.• Design a cover.	Day 1-4
2. Draft	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Write a draft using the 4-quadrant method.	Days 5-8
3. Revise & Edit	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use dialogue to show a character's thoughts and emotions.• Use the rules for punctuating dialogue.• Use dialogue tags to show who is speaking.• Use chapter titles and cliff hangers to build suspense.	Days 9-10
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Edit and revise using a checklist.	Day 11
4. Publish & Share	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Complete a final product that is handwritten, typed, or other.• Share with a real audience.	Days 12-15

Day 1: Brainstorm Ideas & Plan

Lesson Goals: Brainstorm several ideas for writing and select one to write about. Begin to plan a piece of writing using the *Narrative Writing Map 1*.

Materials:

Narrative Writing Map 1

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* A realistic fiction story tells a fictional story with fictional characters. Some realistic fiction stories are mysteries, a story that deals with a puzzling crime. Realistic fiction stories are believable. Sometimes they are inspired by real people or events. Realistic fiction is typically written in the first or third person.
2. The book *The Westing Game* tells a fictional story using fictional characters. The story is told in the third person; from the perspective of an outsider looking in. The following pronouns are used: *he, she, it, and they*. The events of the story are fictitious but believable and are inspired by America's bicentennial and the death of Howard Hughes, a successful manufacturer, aviator, film producer, and editor who died in 1976. His total fortune at the time of his death was \$1.5 million and, at the time of his death, was the richest man in the world.
3. *Introduce the writing prompt:*
Write a story that deals with a puzzling crime.
You will tell the story from an outsider looking in. You will write in the third person, using the pronouns *he, she, it, and they*.
4. *Brainstorm:* Model brainstorming 2-3 ideas for your own piece of writing. Examples might include:
 - something stolen,
 - something vandalized; and
 - a missing person.
5. *Select:* Model selecting one story idea from your list. Share tips for selecting a strong idea for a story:
 - The story should be believable.
 - The story should have a series of problems and important events.
 - The events should create a change in the main character or teach a lesson.
 - The story should be something that you would enjoy writing about.

6. *Plan*: Model filling out *Narrative Writing Map 1* for the story you will be writing, saving the last section (question/prediction) for Day 3. Demonstrate how to think about and jot notes about the:
- main character,
 - secondary characters,
 - setting (time, place, and circumstance); and
 - problem/conflict.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time brainstorm ideas, select an idea, and fill-out *Narrative Writing Map 1*. Then, give time for partners to share their writing plan and receive feedback.

- What do you like about my story idea?
- What might I do to improve my story idea?

(Title)

Main Character			
Secondary Character(s)			
Setting	<u>Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Circumstance</u>
Problem/ Conflict			
Question / Prediction			

Day 2: Plan

Lesson Goals: Continue to plan a piece of writing using the *Narrative Writing Map 2*.

Materials:

Narrative Writing Map 2

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students they will now be planning for the events of their story. They will write their story in four-quadrants.
2. *Plan:* Model planning quadrant 1 of your story using *Narrative Writing Map 2*.
 - How does the problem (the mystery) start?
3. *Plan:* Model planning quadrant 2 of your story using *Narrative Writing Map 2*.
 - How does the problem (the mystery) continue?
 - How does the main character feel?
4. *Plan:* Model planning quadrant 3 of your story using *Narrative Writing Map 2*.
 - What causes the main character to change? How does the main character change?
5. *Plan:* Model planning quadrant 4 of your story using *Narrative Writing Map 2*.
 - How is the problem (the mystery) resolved?
 - What does the main character learn?

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to fill-out *Narrative Writing Map 2* for their own story. Then, give time for partners to share their writing plan and receive feedback.

- What do you like about my story?
- What might I do to improve my story?

NARRATIVE WRITING MAP 2

Q1	How does the problem start? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Q2	How does the problem continue? How does the main character feel? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Q3	What causes the main character to change? How does the main character change? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>
Q4	How is the problem resolved? What does the main character learn? <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>

Day 3: Plan

Lesson Goals: Continue to plan a piece of writing by writing a blurb.

Materials:

Narrative Writing Map 1

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students they will be writing a blurb for their story. Remind them that the blurb does not give away how the story will end. The blurb usually ends with a question so that the person reading the blurb will want to read the story. For example, the blurb for *The Westing Game* asks the question, “All they have to do is find the answer—but the answer to what?”
2. *Plan:* Model writing a question to use in the blurb of your own story.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to finish filling-out *Narrative Writing Map 1* and then write the blurb for their own story about conflict. Then, give time for partners to share their blurb and receive feedback.

- What do you like about my blurb?
- What might I do to improve my blurb?

Day 4: Plan

Lesson Goals: Continue to plan a piece of writing by making a cover.

Materials:

Blank paper and art materials for designing a cover or illustration software.

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students that they will be designing the cover of their book. Every book cover begins with a great title. Share tips for writing a good title:
 - It should provide a clue about the conflict in the story.
 - It should be relatively short.
 - It should get the reader interested.
 - It should put a picture in the reader's mind.

2. *Plan:* Model writing a title for your own story.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to create a cover for their book. Then, give time for partners to share their covers and receive feedback.

- What do you like about my cover?
- What might I do to improve my cover?

Day 5: Draft, Quadrant 1

Lesson Goals: Begin drafting a piece of writing.

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students they will now be drafting quadrant 1 of their story. Quadrant 1 might be 1-2 chapters.
2. *Draft:* Model writing quadrant 1 of your story. Demonstrate how to include details about the:
 - Characters
 - Setting
 - Conflict

Demonstrate how to write in chapters (students will choose chapter titles on Day 10).

Model using descriptive language and details to help the reader picture the characters and the setting in their mind.

TIP: Share with students that an appropriate length for quadrant 1 is about 2 pages, handwritten. (Each quadrant should be about the same length so that the full story is about 6 pages.) To help keep students organized, it may work best to have students use a new sheet of paper for each quadrant, even using different colors of lined paper if available.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to draft quadrant 1 of their book. Then, give time for partners to share writing and receive feedback.

- What do you like about my story?
- What might I do to improve my story?

Day 6-8: Draft, Quadrants 2-4

Lesson Goals: Continue drafting a piece of writing.

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students that they will now be drafting quadrants 2-4 of their story.
2. *Draft:* Model writing quadrant 2 of your story. Demonstrate how to include details about the:
 - Conflict
 - The main character's actions, words and feelings

Demonstrate how to write in chapters (students will choose chapter titles on Day 10).

Model using descriptive language and details to help the reader feel how the main character is feeling.

3. *Draft:* Model writing quadrant 3 of your story about conflict. Demonstrate how to include details about the:
 - Conflict
 - Change in the main character

Model using descriptive language and details to help the reader understand that the main character is changing.

4. *Draft:* Model writing quadrant 4 of your story about conflict. Demonstrate how to include details about the:
 - Resolution
 - Author's message

Model using descriptive language and details to help the reader understand how the story ends and a lesson is learned.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to continue drafting their own stories. Then, give time for partners to share their writing and receive feedback.

- What do you like about my story?
- What might I do to improve my story?

Day 9: Revise & Edit, Dialogue

Lesson Goals: Reread a piece of writing and make revisions and edits.

Materials:

Dialogue Sheet 1

Dialogue Sheet 2

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students that they will now be revising and editing their stories to make them easy to read and enjoy.
2. *Revise:* Narrative stories use dialogue to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Dialogue is between two or more characters.

Read the example at the top of *Dialogue Sheet 1*.

“Do you think—do you think old man Westing’s up there?”

“Naw,” Otis Amber, the old deliver boy answered. “Nobody’s seen him for years. Supposed to be living on a private island in the South Seas, he is; but most folks say he’s dead. Long-gone dead.”

“Serves him right,” Sandy said. “But somebody must be up there. Somebody alive that is.” He pushed back the gold-braided cap and squinted at the house through his steel-framed glasses as if expecting the curling smoke to write the answer in the autumn air. “Maybe it’s those kids again. No, it couldn’t be.”

“What kids?” the three kids wanted to know.

“Why, those two unfortunate fellows from Westingtown.”

Discuss: *How does this dialogue reveal each character’s thoughts and feelings?*

Model searching for a place in your writing where two or more characters are talking. Model revising the dialogue to reveal the feelings, thoughts and emotions of the characters.

3. *Edit:* When author’s use dialogue in their stories they follow rules for punctuation.

Discuss: the dialogue rules listed on *Dialogue Sheet 1*.

Model editing the dialogue in your story to match the dialogue rules.

4. *Revise:* Authors use dialogue tags to tell who in the story is talking.

The most common dialogue tags are:

- *said* – used when the character makes a statement.
- *asked* – used when the character asks a question.
- *exclaimed* – used when the character says something in surprise, anger, or pain.

When used repeatedly in our stories, these dialogue tags can make the story feel flat.

Discuss: *Dialogue Sheet 2* which provides some other ideas for dialogue tags. Encourage students to add some of their own ideas to each list.

Revise: Model revising dialogue tags in your own writing, choosing alternatives to *said*, *asked*, and *exclaimed*.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to revise and edit dialogue in their own stories. If a student does not have dialogue, encourage them to add it. Then, give time for partners to share their dialogue and receive feedback.

- What do you like about the way I used dialogue in my story?
- What might I do to improve it?

DIALOGUE SHEET 1

Narrative stories use dialogue to reveal the thoughts and feelings of the characters. Dialogue is between two or more characters.

Example from page 6-7 of *The Westing Game*:

“Do you think—do you think old man Westing’s up there?”

“Naw,” Otis Amber, the old deliver boy answered. “Nobody’s seen him for years. Supposed to be living on a private island in the South Seas, he is; but most folks say he’s dead. Long-gone dead.”

“Serves him right,” Sandy said. “But somebody must be up there. Somebody alive that is.” He pushed back the gold-braided cap and squinted at the house through his steel-framed glasses as if expecting the curling smoke to write the answer in the autumn air. “Maybe it’s those kids again. No, it couldn’t be.”

“What kids?” the three kids wanted to know.

“Why, those two unfortunate fellows from Westingtown.”

Dialogue rules:

1. Put quotation marks around words that are being spoken.
“Do you think—do you think old man Westing’s up there?”
2. Punctuation goes inside the quotation marks.
“Do you think—do you think old man Westing’s up there?”
3. Use dialogue tags to show who is speaking. **“Serves him right,” Sandy said.**
4. Typically, the dialogue tag comes *after* the dialogue. Put a comma inside the quotation marks and a period after the dialogue tag. **“Serves him right,” Sandy said.**
5. Capitalize the first word of what is being said. **“Serves him right,” Sandy said.**
6. Use commas to separate spoken language from the rest of the sentence.
“Serves him right,” Sandy said. “But somebody must be up there.”
7. Start a new paragraph each time a new person speaks.
——> **“Do you think—do you think old man Westing’s up there?”**
——> **“Naw,” Otis Amber, the delivery boy answered. “Nobody’s seen him for years. Supposed to be living on a private island in the South Seas, he is; but most folks say he’s dead. Long-gone dead.”**
——> **“Serves him right,” Sandy said. “But somebody must be up there. Somebody alive that is...Maybe it’s those kids again. No, it couldn’t be.”**
——> **“What kids?” the three kids wanted to know.**

DIALOGUE SHEET 2

STATEMENT	QUESTION	EXCLAMATION
said	asked	exclaimed
uttered declared announced mentioned shared blabbered blurted proclaimed commented whispered murmured remarked answered replied responded	questioned quizzed begged demanded pressed	blurted uttered cried hollered shouted chirped bellowed thundered hailed shrieked announced

Day 10: Revise, Personification

Lesson Goals: Add chapter titles and cliff hangers to build suspense.

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students that they will now be revising and editing their stories to make them easy to read and enjoy.
2. *Revise:* Today we are going to add chapter titles and cliff hangers to our stories to build suspense. Suspense puts the reader in a state of feeling excited or anxious for what will happen next.

In the book *The Westing Game*, Ellen Raskin uses chapter titles and cliff hangers to build suspense:

- Chapter 2 is titled, “Ghosts or Worse” and ends with the cliffhanger, “Relax and watch the wind tangle the smoke and blow it toward Westingtown.”
 - Chapter 4 is titled, “The Corpse Found” and ends with the cliffhanger, “By the time the sun had set behind the Sunset Towers parking lot, Otis Amber, *deliverer*, had finished his rounds.”
 - Chapter 8 is titled, “The Paired Heirs” and ends with the cliffhanger, “Someone had stolen the shorthand notebook.”
 - Chapter 12 is titled, “The First Bomb” and ends with the cliffhanger, “It might be a trick but it was no coincidence. The voices were one in the same.”
3. *Revise:* Model revising your own writing to include chapter titles and cliffhangers that build suspense.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to revise their own stories by adding chapter titles and cliffhangers that build suspense. Then, give time for partners to share their writing and receive feedback.

- What do you like about the way I used chapter titles and cliffhangers in my story?
- What might I do to improve it?

Day 11: Edit & Revise

Lesson Goals: Reread a piece of writing and make revisions and edits.

Materials:

Editing and Revision Checklist

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students they will now be revising and editing their stories to make them easy to read and enjoy.
2. *Edit:* Model editing your own writing using the editing checklist.
3. *Revise:* Model revising your own writing using the revision checklist:

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to revise and edit their own stories. Then, give time for partners to share their stories and receive feedback.

- How did I use proper punctuation, grammar, and spelling in my story?
- What might I do to improve it?

Editing Checklist:

- _____ Sentences start with a capital letter.
- _____ I used capital letters for proper nouns.
- _____ I have punctuation at the end of each sentence.
- _____ I checked my words for spelling.
- _____ I indented paragraphs.

Revision Checklist:

- _____ I started with an introduction that is clear.
- _____ I ended with a conclusion that is clear.
- _____ I used transition words at the beginning of paragraphs.
- _____ I used language to show how one event may have caused another event.
- _____ Sentences make sense.
- _____ Sentences stay focused on the topic.
- _____ I added details and elaboration that are important to the topic.
- _____ I used key vocabulary.

Day 12-15: Publish & Share

Lesson Goals: Publish a piece of writing.

Instructional Procedures:

1. *Introduction:* Tell students they will now be preparing their piece of writing for others to read. This is called publishing.
2. *Discuss:* how stories will be published—handwritten, typed, or other. Let them know when and how their stories will be shared with the class.

Work Time & Collaboration: Give students time to publish their writing and share their writing with an audience.

Ideas for publishing:

- illustrated book,
- chapter book,
- handwritten book; and
- audio book.

Ideas for sharing:

- read stories aloud to classmates,
- read stories aloud to another class,
- make stories available for others to read (in the classroom, library, or other); and
- take stories home to share with family.

An **author's chair** is a fun classroom tradition. It is a decorated chair in which an author sits to share his/her writing. Teachers can paint a wooden chair or have each new class decorate a pillowcase to go over the back of a chair. This quickly transform a standard classroom chair into something special for young authors.

Checklist for Assessing a Narrative Story

<p>Cover _____/6</p>	<p>____ Has a title that is short. ____ The title puts a picture in the reader's mind.</p> <p>____ Includes a blurb that talks briefly about the story. ____ The blurb entices the reader to read the book.</p> <p>____ The cover gives the reader a clue about the story. ____ The cover gets the reader interested.</p>
<p>Exposition ____/6</p>	<p>Characters ____ Introduces more than one character. ____ Gives important details about each character. ____ Is written in the first or third person.</p> <p>Setting ____ Establishes a setting: time and place. ____ Gives important details about the setting.</p> <p>Problem ____ Introduces a problem/conflict.</p>
<p>Rising Action ____/8</p>	<p>Text Structure ____ Presents a logical series of events that result from the conflict. ____ Events build toward a climax. ____ The events reveal the author's central message or theme.</p> <p>Craft ____ Includes the development of a main character. ____ Includes dialogue and/or interior monologue. ____ Uses language to show the passage of time. ____ Uses descriptive language. ____ Includes humor and/or figurative language.</p>
<p>Falling Action & Resolution ____/3</p>	<p>____ The problem is resolved. ____ The character has changed or learned something. ____ The ending is satisfying to the reader.</p>
<p>Revision and Editing ____/5</p>	<p>____ Writing is edited for spelling. ____ Writing is edited for grammar. ____ Writing is edited for punctuation. ____ Writing shows evidence of revision. ____ Published writing is polished.</p>
<p>Collaboration & Effort ____/4</p>	<p>____ Worked well with a partner. ____ Respectfully gave feedback to a partner. ____ Respectfully received feedback from a partner. ____ Showed good effort and persistence.</p>
<p>Total: ____/32</p>	<p>Comments:</p>

The Missing Emerald

Blurb: The night of the Marlow Town Museum Gala was supposed to be perfect until the lights went out and the most valuable jewel in town disappeared. Twelve-year-old Tessa Marlow never expected to solve a crime, but when strange clues start piling up, she couldn't ignore them. Will she figure it out before someone innocent takes the blame?

Chapter 1: A Sparkling Night

The museum looked different the night of the gala. Soft golden lights glowed from every corner, and music floated through the air like a gentle breeze. People dressed in shiny black suits and long dresses crowded together in the center room, anxious to see the famous Davenport Emerald. The green gem sparkled under the lights, safely enclosed in a tall glass case.

“It’s kind of small,” Liam whispered.

“It’s worth thousands of dollars,” Tessa whispered back. “Mrs. Davenport donated it. It’s supposed to be her family’s legacy.”

Across the room, Mrs. Davenport smiled at guests. Her smile looked perfect, almost too perfect—like a mask.

Then suddenly, the lights flickered. The room went dark. Someone screamed.

When the lights came back on, the glass case was open. The emerald was gone.

Chapter 2: No One Leaves

People started talking all at once.

“This is terrible!” Mrs. Davenport cried.

Mr. Holloway hurried to the doors. “No one is leaving,” he announced nervously.

Officer Ruiz arrived soon after. She looked calm, but her eyes were sharp. “We’re going to ask everyone a few questions,” she said firmly.

Tessa looked around the room. There was no broken glass. No smashed lock. The case had been opened carefully. This wasn’t random. Someone had planned it.

Then Tessa noticed something near the display—a faint green smudge on the floor.

Chapter 3: The Strange Smudge

Tessa bent down, pretending to fix her shoe.

“It looks like chalk,” she whispered to Liam.

“Why would chalk be here?” Liam asked.

Tessa thought about it. The art room at school had bright green chalk just like that.

Across the room, Ms. Reed, the museum assistant, stood very still. There was a small green mark on her sleeve.

When Officer Ruiz spoke to her, Ms. Reed answered in a steady voice. “I was setting up the refreshments,” she explained calmly.

Tessa wasn’t fully convinced. Then she noticed something odd. Mrs. Davenport didn’t look upset anymore. She looked thoughtful.

Chapter 4: Who Benefits?

As the questioning continued, Tessa overheard Mr. Holloway whispering to Officer Ruiz.

“The museum has insurance,” he said quietly.

Insurance. That made Tessa think. If the emerald was stolen, someone might get money for it.

“Who would benefit?” Liam asked softly.

Tessa’s mind raced. Mrs. Davenport had donated the emerald. If it disappeared, insurance might pay her. But why would she do that? Unless it wasn’t really stolen.

Just then, the fire alarm suddenly went off. People panicked again. Tessa felt sure this was no accident.

Chapter 5: Another Distraction

“There’s no real fire,” Officer Ruiz announced minutes later. “False alarm.”

Tessa folded her arms. “That’s the second strange thing tonight.”

First the lights. Then the alarm. It felt like a chain of events meant to confuse everyone.

Back inside, Tessa looked closely at the display case. The lock wasn’t damaged.

“It had to be opened with a key,” she murmured.

Only three people had keys: Mr. Holloway, Ms. Reed, and Mrs. Davenport. Suddenly, an idea hit her.

“What if the real emerald wasn’t even here tonight?” she whispered.

Chapter 6: Looking Back

Officer Ruiz checked security footage from earlier that week. The video showed Mrs. Davenport visiting the museum alone. She leaned close to the case while Mr. Holloway stepped away. For just a second, her hand disappeared inside her purse.

“Pause it there,” Officer Ruiz said.

The gem in the case after that visit looked slightly different. It had a tiny scratch in a different spot. Tessa’s heart pounded.

“The real emerald was switched,” she said quietly.

Mrs. Davenport’s calm look finally cracked.

Chapter 7: The Truth Comes Out

“You don’t understand!” Mrs. Davenport exclaimed. “My business is failing. I needed the insurance money!”

The room fell silent.

She had replaced the real emerald with a fake earlier that week. Tonight’s blackout made it look like a dramatic theft. But Tessa still had one question.

“If she swapped it before the gala,” she said slowly, “who took the fake tonight?”

Everyone turned toward Ms. Reed.

Ms. Reed swallowed. “I thought if the fake was stolen, the truth would come out,” she admitted. “I didn’t mean for it to get so out of control.”

Two plans, one night, both crashing together.

Chapter 8: One Last Clue

In the end, the police found the real emerald hidden in Mrs. Davenport’s safe at home. Ms. Reed admitted to taking the fake during the blackout. The museum reopened a few weeks later with tighter security.

“You really figured it out,” Liam said, grinning.

Tessa shrugged, but inside she felt proud. “I just paid attention.”

As she walked toward the door that evening, she noticed something small under a bench near the entrance. A tiny green chip of glass. She picked it up and stared at it.

Had everything truly been solved?

Or was there still one more secret waiting to be uncovered?