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Unit of Study

6TH GRADE
VOLUME 6.1

Realistic Fiction Writing Unit for *The Westing Game*

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Read Side by Side

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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**	• Make a list of story ideas. • Select a strong idea from the list. • Complete a *Narrative Writing Map*. • Write a blurb. • Design a cover.	Day 1-4
2. **Draft**	• Write a draft using the 4-quadrant method.	Days 5-8
3. **Revise & Edit**	• 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
	• Edit and revise using a checklist.	Day 11
4. **Publish & Share**	• 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	**Time**	**Place**	**Circumstance**
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?

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

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?

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.**

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

Cover _____/6	_____ Has a title that is short. _____ The title puts a picture in the reader's mind. _____ Includes a blurb that talks briefly about the story. _____ The blurb entices the reader to read the book. _____ The cover gives the reader a clue about the story. _____ The cover gets the reader interested.
Exposition _____/6	**Characters** _____ Introduces more than one character. _____ Gives important details about each character. _____ Is written in the first or third person. **Setting** _____ Establishes a setting: time and place. _____ Gives important details about the setting. **Problem** _____ Introduces a problem/conflict.
Rising Action _____/8	**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. **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.
Falling Action & Resolution _____/3	_____ The problem is resolved. _____ The character has changed or learned something. _____ The ending is satisfying to the reader.
Revision and Editing _____/5	_____ Writing is edited for spelling. _____ Writing is edited for grammar. _____ Writing is edited for punctuation. _____ Writing shows evidence of revision. _____ Published writing is polished.
Collaboration & Effort _____/4	_____ Worked well with a partner. _____ Respectfully gave feedback to a partner. _____ Respectfully received feedback from a partner. _____ Showed good effort and persistence.
Total: _____/32	**Comments:**