

Unit Ten – Revision and Assessment

June

Writing is a powerful tool for thinking precisely because when we write, we can take fleeting and intangible memories, insights and images, and make them concrete. When we talk, our thoughts float away. When we write, we put our thoughts onto paper. We can stick them in our pocket. We can come back to them later. We can reread our first thoughts and see gaps in them. We can look again and see connections between two different sets of ideas. Through rereading and revision, writing becomes a tool for thinking. A commitment to revision is part and parcel of a commitment to teach writing as a process.

Watch a child at work making something—anything—and one sees revision. The child pats a ball of clay into a pancake to make a duck pond, and then revises the duck pond by creating a fingertip rainstorm that dapples the water’s surface. Young children revise block castles to add protected hiding spots for archers, and they revise pictures of spaceships to add explosions. They revise clay rabbits to make one ear droop. Young children can revise their writing with equal ease and enthusiasm—as long as we don’t expect their revisions to look like those a grown-up would make. Kindergarteners can revise—as long as we expect their best! The beauty of this unit comes when our children see how their writing gets stronger because of the many ways they learn to revise.

There are several reasons why you may decide to revisit small moments again. First, if you have many ELLS or struggling writers in your classroom, they will have grown in both their oral language development and their ability to hear and record letters and sounds. Or perhaps your writers need some time to study focus and make their small moments even ‘smaller.’ Or, maybe you believe that the real energy in your classroom is around children’s own personal stories. Perhaps your children did so well with small moments earlier in the year that they are ready to revisit this unit, this time with a twist on creating setting in their stories over five-page booklets. Whether your reason is one of these or another, be sure to craft the unit to match your goals; what follows is simply one suggestion.

When you begin this unit, you may choose to revisit *The Snowy Day* by Ezra Jack Keats, or one story from *A Box of Treats* by Kevin Henkes and use these to mentor your children in their writing. In addition, you may want to create some class small moment stories with your children using shared or interactive writing, in order to support their language development and storytelling. For example, you may write a class story about when the lights in the classroom went out or when the principal stopped by to visit the classroom. This will continue to reinforce to see the difference between an “all-about” structure versus ‘a time when’ structure. You will want to re-teach some of the things you worked on in the fall during storytelling time, when the children practiced storytelling across three fingers. During this storytelling time, you can encourage them to add on to each finger as they practice rehearsing class stories and personal stories from their lives.

After having a year of writing workshop, inevitably your children already know a lot about revision. This unit is an opportunity for your children to reflect on all they have learned as writers and to marvel at their growth. You may decide to begin with asking the children, “What do you know about revision?” This will be an assessment of what your class knows about the process of revision. If your children say, “You use tape and post-its and add paper at the bottom of the page,” then they probably already know about the materials and tools. If not then that is an important place to begin. Perhaps they know to add more and make changes, but they are not sure how. This is helpful information to guide your unit. Keep in mind that you and your colleagues may notice different things so, it is important to personalize this unit to meet the needs of your class. Another possibility is to begin this unit by having the children do another on-demand piece so that you can assess what they are doing independently.

The unit can begin with children selecting their best pieces from the fall. It is important for you to decide if children can read these pieces and will be able to revise them. If they will be able to revise them, we recommend giving each child a special revision folder containing old stories from previous units that they can go back to with fresh eyes to make changes. You will want to continue to offer your children different types of three-page booklets to support them as writers. You may have one paper with a large picture box and one line on the bottom, and another paper with a large picture box and two-three lines on the bottom. You will want to make sure to give them plenty of room to elaborate in their pictures and their writing. Children can make their changes in a special color pen so that their revisions are easy to see, helping you and the child easily assess how far their writing has come since their original draft. Some teachers even have the children make their changes onto photocopies of the original writing so that by the end of the unit the progress is more visible. Giving children a revision folder and a color pen usually motivates them to bring zealous energy to the job of revising writing.

Although kids will be revising and trying many revision strategies on one piece, this may not sustain them for an entire workshop everyday. Keep in mind that kids will also be starting new stories and the intention is that the revision strategies that they are trying in their old pieces become internalized so that they don't wait for revision to add dialogue, but rather include as they write new stories.

Some kids may revise by keeping only the first page of a three-page story, stapling on two blank pages so that they can rewrite the middle and end with more details. They may have to ask themselves, “What is my story really about?” and then say more about that story. This can help with focus and elaboration. Children may discover that there are stories from the fall units that are really not small moments. This is a great opportunity for kid to practice zooming in on the important part, and then telling more about that.

Adding details is an important part of revision. Teach children how to reread their pieces thinking about which part is the most important. Often, this part will be the very thing that made them want to tell their story in the first place. If children are having a hard time figuring out the most important part of a story, you can teach them to ask themselves, “Where in my story do I have the biggest feelings?” This is the part we want children to

stretch out with details that spotlight what makes this moment so essential. For example, a child rereading a story he wrote about swinging on the monkey bars might realize that the most important part was when he slipped and fell. This, then, is the part of the story he will want to further develop, adding in dialogue and small actions that show his feelings.

Children will also add actions to their pieces, and you can teach them, as they do so, to imagine exactly what their bodies were doing and what the things around them were doing too. For example, in *Sheila Rae's Peppermint Stick* by Kevin Henkes, Sheila Rae stumbled, the books fell, the stool tipped and the peppermint stick broke. We can really picture what is happening here. This is a nice place to remind children of the envisioning work we do in reading. We picture what is happening when we read and so we need to create a picture for our reader when we write. It is basically, *show not tell* by adding actions.

You may also want to teach children to add new beginnings or endings. Show kids that they can try writing a few different versions of any part of their story, and then think about which version works best. One way to have them try out new beginnings or endings is to study some mentor texts the class has read. Being able to name what the writer did in his or her beginning or ending can be useful steps for young writers who are working on their own beginnings and endings. For example, children might reread the ending of *Fireflies* and recognize that Brinckloe ends the piece with a strong feeling. They could then try this in their own piece. They might notice that another author starts off her writing by describing the setting and still other authors begin with dialogue.

One sure-fire way to ignite new energy for revision is to let children know that writers sometimes revise by looking at their material and thinking, "What else could I make of this?" In addition to revising narratives, teachers may decide to have children revise their writing to other genres too. Just as Degas revised his drawings of ballet dancers to etchings, pastels, paintings and sculpture, children can revise one of their narratives to a poem, a letter, a how-to, or a fictional story. Just because you haven't taught a genre doesn't mean children have no sense of it. You'll be amazed at how much children have picked up about many of these genres just from living shoulder-to-shoulder with them. Children learn about genres from each other and from texts they admire. If you have examples in the classroom, they can go to these to get the gist of what a genre might be like.

If, after you assess your children's writing you decide they will not be able to revise pieces from the fall because their writing is too simple or disconnected from their current lives, or they no longer remember the story they were telling, you may decide to make the first week of this unit a time for children to write new small moment stories. Children can spend this first week exploring the idea of living like an author by using pocket-sized notepads, called "tiny topics notepads" to collect sketches of moments from their own lives and snippets of writing (but not the whole story) to create a collection of ideas for later stories. You will want to remind your children that they can write a small moment

story by thinking about one time with a person, one time at a place, or one time doing something they love. You can teach them to label the characters, setting and action on each page of their booklet as well as add more details to their pictures. Once children have these new pieces they can be introduced to the revision tools and folders. As the unit progresses, children will be studying an author and revising their writing using the author's craft.

As the unit continues, we recommend teaching them to try out some of the same craft moves their favorite authors use. Find mentor authors who write the way you hope your children will write. We recommend authors who use labels in their pictures, who write small detailed moments, who use dialogue (even speech bubbles), or tiny actions that show character feeling. You can teach your children to be "just like" these real, published authors. The most important message we give to children during a writing workshop is this, "You are writers, like writers the world over." It makes sense, then, that for at least one Unit of Study, children are invited to look closely at the work of one writer and let that writer function as a mentor. The mentor author you choose will help children revise their writing. A few of our favorites for this are *Joshua's Night Whispers* (Johnson), *The Snowy Day* (Keats), *Short Cut* (Crews), the five stories in *A Box of Treats* (Henkes), and *Those Shoes* (Boelts). It is important to note that while Keats' *The Snowy Day* is not a small moment story, there are small moments within the text that you can zoom in on and use as mentors for your children.

You might use your mentor author's books to marvel over the way he or she chooses and stretches out one small moment, instead of running from moment to moment. You'll ask children, "What do you notice that Ezra Jack Keats has done in his writing? Why do you suppose he did that?" Your final and most important question, of course, is "Can you try using that technique in your own writing?" Then children will try these techniques in their own writing. They will revise trying something that they noticed their mentor author used.

While studying the texts in detail, you and your children might notice that your mentor author uses punctuation to grow suspense (ellipses, dash marks or commas), or that some pages of the story are a "close up" like in *Snowy Day* when the snow falls on Peter, or the use of sound words to pull your attention to something important like in *Sail Away* by Donald Crews. We don't want our young writers necessarily choosing similar *topics* as our mentor author as much as we want them to use similar techniques to make their own stories come alive in the most vivid way.

Partnerships can meet and show each other places they revised. They can help each other plan possible revision strategies and read and reread their stories together thinking more deeply about their pieces. Children can talk to each other about what real world author they are trying to write in the style of, and why. Children can get ideas for revising their pieces, by asking each other "did you say everything about the most important part?" or "what did you do like (Donald Crews/Ezra Jack Keats) to make your writing better?" Partners can act out stories together to find places to add more actions or dialogue or feeling or thinking. They can reread their stories and use a revision checklist the class

has created to name what revision strategy you might try today. Partners can also read their stories and try to picture what is happening.

As always when getting ready to celebrate, the children will each choose one booklet to revise, edit, and make beautiful. You can remind children to go back and reread their pictures, labels and words to make sure their writing makes sense. They can revise their stories by adding details to the pictures which they can incorporate into labels or words, depending what they are ready for. They can look at their pictures to add feelings to the faces in their pictures and then add those into their writing, or speech bubbles if they are ready for it. Children may look back at their mentor author for illustration inspiration. They may look at books they've studied asking if the author uses particular colors or draws in a certain style. They may spend a day adding color or adding detail to their picture to get it ready for celebrating, also adding a cover and a title. Partners will be an important part of this revision work. Children can help each other find places where they can add more to their pictures, labels or words. Children can also use the word wall to make sure they spelled those words correctly.

Once children revise and do some beginning editing, they will be ready to fancy it up and share their writing with an audience. You may choose to celebrate by having children sit around and read the one line that they feel is most like the author they've emulated.

Suggestion For Compiling a Book List For This Unit

Teachers, we imagine that you will revisit your favorite mentor texts you used from across this school year depending on the genres your students will revise their writing into. For example, if a writer chooses to revise her small moment into a poem, you may want to refer to your Poetry mentor texts as a way to refresh the skills and strategies that were taught inside the unit.