

Unit Nine – Revision

June

Now I see revision as a beautiful word of hope. It's a new vision of something. It means you don't have to be perfect for the first time. What a relief!

-Naomi Shihab Nye

By the time I am nearing the end of a story, the first part will have been reread and altered and corrected at least one hundred and fifty times. I am suspicious of both facility and speed. Good writing is essentially rewriting. I am positive of this.

-Roald Dahl

Writing is a powerful tool for thinking 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.

Revision allows students to step back and reflect on the power of a moment and can allow them to rethink the larger meaning. All too often, in the first round of narrative, students are working at capturing small moments and the larger significance can get lost. We can show writers that looking at a piece, asking “What is it I want my piece to show?” or “What does this moment say about my life?” can allow them to revise with attention to deeper importance.

Many students view revision as a quick fix in the writing process—a place only to change a word here, or add a sentence there. While revision does exist on the word or sentence level, what we want writers to do as they grow in their proficiency is to see revision as reworking or revisiting entire parts, and ultimately, the whole of a piece.

A commitment to revision is part and parcel of a commitment to teach writing as a process. All too often revision gets rushed as classrooms rush to make publishing deadlines. In this unit, then, instead of going back into their notebooks to collect ideas, choosing seed ideas, and drafting, children will look back at the pieces of writing they have created so far this year and try out revision and editing strategies in each. They will look over their pieces, rereading and reflecting on all the ways they have grown as writers, planning large scale changes to enhance the meaning and quality of writing. In addition to revising their writing, students could jot reflective entries in their writing notebooks, discussing the ways in which they have grown since writing the original draft and outlining their plans to showcase their learning throughout the year.

Create a Writing Center that Supports Revision

Materials and tools always seem to be an issue when it comes to revision. Tell students that part of the work involved in revision is not only deciding what you want to revise, but how you will revise and the tools you will need to support that work. For this reason giving students opportunities to use varied revision tools can help energize and encourage independence. Giving writers a revision folder and a colored pen usually motivates them to bring zealous energy to the job of revising writing. You will want to be sure that students have access to a variety of tools including perhaps strips of paper to add sentences and sections into the middle of their writing, flaps of paper to tape over neglected parts of their stories, and single sheets of paper to staple onto the end or the middle parts. You may also want your children to have access to post-it notes, tape, staplers and scissors during writing workshop.

You may want to create a chart for the writing center that lists the tools, what they can be used for, and what revision strategies they support. For example, you might list the tool “strips of paper,” and then describe a use of paper strips—to add details. You can describe strategies for how you can add dialogue, internal thinking, or physical description when adding details with the strips so students use them for specific reasons. This will help shift the focus to the strips and towards revision strategies. We also recommend that students be encouraged to create their own revision tools and possible usages.

Teach the Purposes for Revision, the Importance of Carrying Forward All We’ve Learned as Well as Teach New Revision Strategies

At the beginning of this unit, children learn that revision is a compliment to good work. The unit will begin with children examining their first on demand piece and then selecting their best pieces from the year by asking, “Which pieces feel worthy of revision?” Generally, the pieces students select should be meaningful (this may or may not be evident in the writing yet). Students will place these pieces in a special revision folder to revise.

In all of our teaching, but especially in this unit of study, it is critical to help students apply all they’ve learned about revision for the year. We want their work in this month to reflect the cumulative nature of workshop teaching. We can begin by having students recall revision strategies they’ve practiced throughout the year.

Children learn revision strategies for re-sequencing, including cutting and stapling. They also learn strategies for adding more details to the text using strips of paper in the middle of sections. It is important to teach students not only the physical work of revision, but also the reasons for altering a draft.

Adding details is an important part of revision. Children can reread their pieces and think about which parts of pieces are the most important sections, and they can elaborate upon those sections. If kids are having a hard time figuring out the most important part of a story, they might ask themselves, “Where in my story do I convey the biggest feelings or the most important ideas?” For example, a student rereads a story he wrote about cooking arroz con pollo with Grandma on Saturday, could realize that the most important part happened when he and his grandmother smelled something burning. He will then

decide to develop this part of the story, adding in dialogue and small actions that show his feelings. You can always remind your writers of previous revision strategies they used in units one and two.

You may also want to teach children to review their leads and 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. In order to write new leads or endings, children can study mentor texts the class has read, naming what the writer did that the child might emulate. For example, children might reread the ending of *Fireflies* and recognize that Brinckloe ended the piece with a strong feeling. They could then try to write similarly in their own pieces. They might notice that an author started off her writing by describing the setting and try to write similarly.

Many third graders are apprehensive about revision because they “like it the way it is.” We can immerse students in examples of revision by showing them how we revise stories from previous units of study, how past students revised (by showing a sample of a former student’s work) and by revising class stories together. If you wrote a class story or two in the first few units on chart paper or a transparency, you can have students join you in revising the class story using a variety of strategies.

Use Partnerships to Support Revision

This unit is a great opportunity to strengthen writing partnerships and teach students how to give each other constructive feedback. You may teach strategies for revision in a minilesson and send kids off to work with a partner on how they could try those strategies before they begin independent writing. In this case, partner conferences are used prior to writing as a way of planning for revision. Or you can teach a revision strategy, send students off to write independently, and then give partnerships time to meet at the end of the workshop. This allows students to share how the strategies are helping the piece or to ask each other for further suggestions. You’ll want to remind children that they don’t need to take all of their partners’ suggestions and that a suggestion is just that, not a command. Partners can read and reread their stories together, thinking more deeply about their pieces.

While many teachers give third graders revision checklists, it is often more helpful to list revision strategies in step-by-step ways on a chart. These charts can be typed up, given to students, stored in their revision folders, and used during partner conferences. In this way partners can discuss strategies such as adding setting by creating a movie in their minds, remembering where the characters were and what was around them and then adding description. We want to push partners to not just say, “I am going to add setting here,” but to say, “I am going to describe the kitchen by adding, “A round white table sat in the middle of the room with five wooden chairs around it...” By discussing the specific revisions they could make, children are more apt to follow through with what they said.

Word Study to Support Writing Workshop

Across the year, you've encouraged kids to give tricky words their best try, to move on, to use spelling patterns from word study to spell tricky words, and to use the word wall to help them learn commonly misspelled high frequency words. You've nudged kids to use big fancy vocabulary, even when they aren't sure of the exact spelling, and you've been studying words throughout the day, during word study, read aloud, and other times of the day.

Now is the time of year to bring it all together. Dust off all the old charts if you've still got them, and teach kids to use it all, all the time. In this unit, you may want to teach kids that they can create their own, personal editing checklists by looking across their own writing to notice the kinds of things for which they need reminders. Writers notice their own spelling challenges so that they can be on the lookout. Teach kids to search their writing to see if they are the kind of writer who misspells certain high frequency words every time. Maybe they are the kind of writers who always forget a particular spelling pattern, or do they forget to reread their writing to check it over? Teach kids that everybody has something, or even a bunch of things, that are patterns in their writing. Finding those patterns and knowing to double check for them is incredibly useful.

Celebrate the Process and the Published Pieces

This unit ends with a celebration of the many ways children have learned to revise, and with the knowledge that these revision strategies will continue to help children as they write during the remaining units of study. Some teachers copy children's original pieces and then (during the celebrations) students share and discuss how they revised the piece specifically. Other teachers have children write a brief reflection of their revision process and how this helped the published piece of writing grow better, and also how they grew as a writer. When sharing the pieces, some children choose to share one part of the story before and after revisions were made and to share why they chose those revisions to make the piece better.