

Sample Mini Lessons for a Writer s Workshop First Unit

Here is a comprehensive list of mini lessons, or teaching points, that you could include in your first unit of writing workshop. By no means are you supposed to do all of them, they are simply a list of all the different mini lessons a teacher could do. They are in a chronological order. I am going to go through the list and highlight those things that I do as a writer, or have seen other writers do, and then those will be the mini lessons I start with. I will then decide on others based on the needs I identify in the classes I teach. The first unit should be 5-6 weeks, so that is 25-30 lessons. Good luck! (This list was taken from What You Know by Heart, by Katie Wood Ray.)

- * Sometimes writers make new writing out of existing writing*
- * Writers have strategies they like to use*
- * Sometimes writers reread their notebooks for ideas*
- * Writers get ideas in all kinds of places:*
 - things they see that are interesting*
 - very close observations of things, capturing sights, sounds, textures, moods, etc*
 - snippets of interesting dialogue they have eavesdropped on*
 - questions about a subject, a person, a thing, a place, etc.*
 - lists of things they might want to think about later*
 - quotations from pop culture that interest them*
 - ideas generated from photos*
 - things they remember about their lives in the past*
 - plot ideas from news blurbs or real life scenarios*
 - character ideas from interesting people they see*
 - interesting research data*
 - word play with words they like*
 - writing generated from conversations they ve had*
 - entries about things they care about*
- * One type of entry writers collect is an observation of something that fascinates them*
- * Notebooks travel away from our desks*
- * If you want to get it down with detail before you forget it, try writing it very fast first, with no attention to sound*
- * Sometimes great lines just come to you when writing*
- * Sometimes writers play around in their notebooks*
- * Writers know the sound of language in books they admire*
- * Try reading some literature that sounds like what you want to write, before you start writing*
- * Try extending a metaphor as one option for making writing sound more like literature*
- * Literature (crafted writing) sounds different than just fast writing in a notebook*
- * Sometimes writers come back to things that have potential*
- * Writers have dreams of things they d like to publish someday*

- * Writers find seed ideas in their notebooks*
- * writers reread their notebooks*
- * When rereading our notebooks, sometimes we find lines that ring true*
- * Sometimes writers choose projects based on their interests*

Readers

- * *Writers have a good sense of what's in their notebooks*
 - * *Try looking back through old notebooks to see what entries you already have that relate to your idea*
 - * *Sometimes we have the start of something bigger already in our notebooks*
 - * *Writers know themselves, their writing histories*
 - * *Sometimes writers pursue projects to stretch themselves*
 - * *Writers think about what work they need to do for a project*
 - * *Writers do research*
 - * *Sometimes writers don't know at the outset what genre a writing project will become*
 - * *Writers think about different kinds of texts they know as they plan writing projects*
 - * *Any single seed idea could be written in a variety of ways*
 - * *Writers think about the future of their writing projects, especially their audiences*
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- * *Writers use notebooks to find out what they need to say and to generate important material*
 - * *Writers use some strategies over and over*
 - * *Writers write different kinds of things*
 - * *Writers use notebooks purposefully, based on the work they're planning to do*
 - * *Sometimes writers force themselves to think in certain ways*
 - * *Sometimes in notebook entries, writers just put everything they can think of down at first*
 - * *Writers may have more than one writing project going at any time*
 - * *Writers sometimes ask questions to get their thinking going*
 - * *Sometimes writers use writing to think something through*
 - * *Writers reread what they've written*
 - * *Highlighters are good writing tools*
 - * *Try searching entries for ways of saying things you might use in your draft*
 - * *Seed ideas can lead to all kinds of writing*
 - * *Different kinds of writing require writers to think in different ways*
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- * *Writers use some of the strategies for revision again and again*
 - * *Revision is meant to make the writing the best that it can be*
 - * *Writers have other authors as mentors and texts they know and love*
 - * *Writers make moves when they craft a text*
 - * *Writers try things in drafts*
 - * *Touchstone texts don't have to be written in the same genre to help writers with their revisions*
 - * *Writers make things sound good with words, sentences, and parts of texts*
 - * *Writers use their notebooks to play around and try rewriting things in their drafts*
 - * *Writers think about what their readers' reactions will be*
 - * *Writers can speak directly to their readers' responses in their texts*
 - * *Writers let other people read their drafts while they are working on them*
 - * *Writers pay attention and remember their readers' responses*
 - * *Writers rewrite*
 - * *Writers add things to drafts*
 - * *Writers think about how their texts will work with readers*
 - * *Writers commonly fall into writing traps*
 - * *Writers draft with readers in mind*
 - * *Writing helps readers form understandings*

- * Writers have things they always check for during revision of any draft*
- * Writers reread their drafts looking for specific things*
- * Writers rewrite*
- * Sometimes writers use their notebooks to try out rewrites*
- * Writers can stretch ideas out*
- * Sometimes writers have to try a rewrite several ways before they are happy with it*
- * Writers can help each other*

Types of Notebook Entries

Memories
Experiences
Observations
Writing off a song line
Writing off a book quote
Writing off a cliché
Writing off what someone said
Overheard conversations
Lists
Collected words
Try-its
Writing off fortune cookie sayings
Noticings
Wonderings
Changes
Surprises
Twists and turns
Emotions: fear, anger, joy, frustration, love, annoyance, contentment, awe, peacefulness
Getting underneath something to the why and the how
Imagined conversations
Should have/could have
Dreams
Plans
Complaints
Questions
Thinking off someone's notebook entry
Thinking off literature
Response to literature
Original writing in response to literature
Collections (poems, ads, photos, tickets, headlines, clippings) and writing off them
Senses

Perspectives
Opinions
Differences/disagreements
Confusions
Struggles to understand
Insights
Wisdom
Playing with language
Revisions of previous thinking
Additions to previous entries
Details of an event
Timeline
Disappointments
Special moments
Zooming in
Breaking an entry apart to write more
Reflections
Processing information (what does it mean?)
Descriptions
Notes

Realizations

Explorations on meandering thoughts

Connections

Urgent Concerns

New Ideas

• Things people have told me that I don't believe.

• Regional language / phrases

• Creative story

Janet Angelillo, 2004

• Fears

Ways to “Nurture” an Idea: Preparing for Writing

- Free write about it
- Figure out the significance of it; why is it important?
- Think about how your mentor author might treat it
- Collect words that seem to fit it
- Make a timeline of it
- Zoom in on different parts of it and write them long
- Try it out in 2 – 3 genres; then decide which one works best
- Zoom out and write about it panoramically
- Write 3-5 more entries about the idea
- Talk to a partner about it
- Tell it in story form
- Interview someone about it to get more information
- Research it
- Find an angle on it
- Consider what you want your reader to know or feel
- Consider how you feel about it
- Play around with structure
- Think of an anecdote that fits inside it
- Use a mentor text to do some try-its
- Make some doodles or quick sketches about it
- Take notes on it
- Reread your entries and add something new to them
- Try to grow an insight to it
- Think about your opinion on it
- Imagine how it would sound if it were funny? Sad? Dark? Cool?
- Play with perspective and voice
- Play a movie in your mind of it; then write it
- Record details of time, place, mood, characters
- Clarify elements of story (if it's a story), especially conflict
- Carefully build characters; consider their voices
- Use setting to support the story
- Narrow your focus (for fiction and nonfiction)
- Force connections with other entries, books, ideas
- Try several beginnings and/or endings

*Give Kids
2 ways of
nurturing per
unit of study.*

What can I do in my reading log?

AUTHOR'S CRAFT

Sometimes authors use special words, paint pictures in my mind with words, make me wish I could write like they do, use funny language, or write really good dialogue. I can give examples of things the author does to make me like the story.

CRITIQUE

Sometimes when I'm reading, I think to myself, "This is really great!" Other times I think, "If I were the author, I would do this differently." I can write about things the author did well, and things he/she could do better.

WONDERFUL WORDS

I can find some really wonderful words—words that are new, crazy, descriptive, or confusing. I can write them down with a sentence or two telling why I picked them, and the page number so I can find them again.

COMPARE/CONTRAST

I can tell how two things are alike or different. Two characters, two books, myself and a character, a book and a movie—any two things that share similarities and differences.

INTERTEXTUALITY

Sometimes what I read about makes me think about another text—a book I've read or a movie I've seen. I can tell what other text this story reminds me of and why it makes me think of it.

VOCABULARY

Sometimes there are words in a story that I want to learn to pronounce, use correctly, and understand. I can list these words on a vocabulary sheet or in my log, with the page numbers. I can ask my group what they mean, or look them up later.

TITLE

EXPLANATION

Whenever I look at a new book or chapter title, I try to predict what the book or chapter will be about. After I read the book or chapter, I usually have a different idea of why the author used those titles. I can write about titles—what I think they mean before reading, and what they actually meant after reading. Some authors do not name their chapters. I can make up my own chapter titles and explain why I named them this.

POINT OF VIEW

Sometimes as I read about a character, I think that the author did not consider some ideas I think are important to understanding the character. I can write from the character's point of view to help explain those ideas.

INTERPRETATION

When I read, I think about what the author is saying to me, what he or she hopes that I'll take away from the story. I can write down my interpretation in my reading log and share with the rest of the group. I need to listen to

FAVORITE/ LEAST FAVORITE PART OR CHARACTER

During a book, I usually have a favorite part or favorite character, and I usually have a least favorite part or character. I can write about any of these, making sure I tell why I like or dislike them.

FEEELINGS

Sometimes a book makes me feel a certain way. I can write about that feeling, and why the book makes me feel that way. I can also talk about what the character(s) in the book feel.

CHARACTER MAP

I can draw a map of a character in the story. I can include personality traits, descriptions, actions, and anything else I think is interesting about that character.

SUMMARY/RETELLING

Sometimes it might be important to me to retell or summarize all or part of the story. I can write a summary and then tell why I decided to summarize this particular part.

PREDICTION

I can think about the story so far and predict what I think will happen next. I can predict a whole book, the next chapter, or how the story might end.

SEQUENCE

Sometimes events in the book might be important to remember in the order they happened. I can make a sequence chart, map, or list of these events, and tell why I think they are important.

ME & THE BOOK

Sometimes what I read makes me think about my own life. I can write about an event or a character in a book that reminds me of my life. I need to tell what is in the book, and what it reminds me of in my life.

QUESTIONS FOR MY GROUP

Sometimes there are things in the story that I wonder about. I can write questions to ask my group so they can help me understand the story better. Sometimes I might write questions to ask my group members how they feel about the story, or a certain part in the story.

SPECIAL STORY PART

When I find a part in the book that I really like, I can write the page number in my log so I can remember where to find it. I can write a few sentences about why I think it is so special.

Sentence Starters

- I noticed that...
- I don't understand...
- I'm surprised that...
- If... then...
- This reminds me of...
- I can't believe...
- I began to think of...
- I wonder...
- I'd like to know...
- Although it seems...
- I'm confused by...
- Even though it seems...
- I realized...
- I'm not sure...
- If I were...
- One consequence of...
- I think...

Reading Strategies

- Activating Prior Knowledge
- Making Predictions
- Questioning
- Visualizing
- Making Inferences
- Synthesizing
- Clarifying
- Fix-Up Strategies

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Name _____

When I Write in My Reading Notebook

① I think of interesting ideas and questions to write about.

- I make predictions.
- I write my opinion about a book and give reasons for it.
- I ask questions about some parts I didn't understand.
- I connect what I read to something that happened to me.
- I copy a particular line or phrase that I thought was well written.
- I compare stories and characters.
- I tell why I chose a book or abandoned a book.
- I tell about some writing techniques I learned from the author that I want to try in my own stories.

② I show that I understand literary elements (plot, setting, character development, and theme).

- I describe a character's traits (selfish, helpful, shy, friendly, and so on) and give examples from the story that back up my opinions.
- I tell how a character changed and give reasons for the change.
- I describe the story's problem and its resolution.
- I describe the story's setting (where and when it took place).
- I write about the story's theme (main idea or author's message).

③ I describe the writing styles of authors.

- I tell what I like about the way an author writes.
- I compare books by different authors.
- I tell which chapter titles I liked and suggest different titles for others.
- I copy the author's descriptions that put pictures in my mind (imagery).
- I quote lines from a story that show how the author writes.

④ I tell about myself as a reader.

- I write about my favorite books and authors.
- I describe my childhood memories of stories (favorite titles, being read to, and so on).
- I write about an experience I had in a library, book store, or book fair.
- I write about the ways I've changed as a reader.
- I write about my reading habits—where, when, and how I like to read.
- I write about people—family, friends, teachers—who influenced my reading.

Prompts

for Different Purposes

MAKING PERSONAL CONNECTIONS

- ◆ What did the story remind you of?
- ◆ Tell about at least one connection that you can make personally with the characters or story. Do you have some shared interest, feeling, or experience? Are you like or different from one of the characters?
- ◆ What kind of reader would like this book?
- ◆ Is there any character in this story/book like you? How is this character like you?
- ◆ Is there a character in this story/book who would make a good friend?
- ◆ Compare at least two characters to yourself, your family, or your friends.

IDENTIFYING IMPORTANT ELEMENTS

- ◆ What are one or two of the most important ideas from this story?
- ◆ What was the author trying to tell you about life with this story?
- ◆ What do you think was the most important or most interesting part of this story?
- ◆ Who do you think was the most important character? Why was this character important?
- ◆ As you get into your novel, you should get to know the main character. Describe the person physically, but also give examples of how she or he feels and what she or he does.
- ◆ Choose a character in the book who is important but not the main character. Describe this person, explain her or his relationship to the main character, and tell why she or he is important in the story.
- ◆ What surprised you in this story? Why was that a surprise? What did you expect instead?
- ◆ Does the title fit the story? Why or why not?

EXPRESSING FEELINGS ABOUT THE STORY

- ◆ How did the story make you feel? Tell what parts made you feel this way.
- ◆ Why do you think other students might or might not enjoy reading this story/book?
- ◆ Would you recommend this book to someone else? Why or why not?
- ◆ Would you read another book by this author? Why or why not?
- ◆ What was going through your mind as you read this story?
- ◆ What was your favorite part of this story? Why is that your favorite?
- ◆ Which character did you like best or least? Why?
- ◆ Did your feelings change as you read this story? How?

NOTICING THE AUTHOR'S CRAFT

- ◆ If the author of this book were in our classroom right now, what would you say to or ask that person?
- ◆ If you could change this book, how would you change it?
- ◆ Is anything in this book strange or weird? Why do you think the author put that in the story?
- ◆ Did the author write this book in a special way (for example, lots of visual images, flashbacks, told in the first person)? Do you think that made this a better story?
- ◆ Why do you think the author wrote this story?

(Graham and Spiegel, 1996)

