# Grade 3 Mini-Lessons for Writing Workshop

## Table of Contents

- Varying Word Order ......................................................................................................................... 2
- Punctuating Dialogue .......................................................................................................................... 4
- Paragraph Structure ............................................................................................................................ 6
- Parts of a Friendly Letter ..................................................................................................................... 8
- “Backwards” Editing .......................................................................................................................... 10
- Narrowing the Focus of a Small Moment Story .................................................................................. 11
- Collecting Seeds for an “Edge-of-your-seat” Fiction Story ................................................................. 13
- Using Caution with the Thesaurus ....................................................................................................... 15
- Maintaining a Consistent Viewpoint ................................................................................................. 17
- Using A Variety of Time-Order Words* .............................................................................................. 19
- Using Pronouns Carefully .................................................................................................................. 21
- Run-on Sentences .............................................................................................................................. 23
- Answering Reader’s Anticipated Questions ....................................................................................... 25
- Using a Story Mountain to Show Rising Action .............................................................................. 27
- Using Story Mountains to Create Chapters that End with Cliffhangers ......................................... 29
- Varying Sentence Beginnings ............................................................................................................ 31
- Varying Sentence Types ...................................................................................................................... 33
- Using Synonyms for “Said” .................................................................................................................. 35
- Using the Three-Dimensional Bone Structure to Create Well-Rounded Characters .... 37
- Describing Settings Using the Five Senses ...................................................................................... 39
- Using Similes ....................................................................................................................................... 41
- Eliminating Filler ................................................................................................................................. 42
- Knowing When to Start a New Paragraph ......................................................................................... 44
- Partner Editing ....................................................................................................................................... 46
- Writing Effective Leads ...................................................................................................................... 48
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 1: 
Varying Word Order

Unit of Study: Any 
6 Traits Emphasis: Sentence Fluency 

Teaching Point: Simply by varying the arrangement of our words, we can improve our sentence structure and sentence fluency. 

Writing Process Stage: Editing 
CA Writing Standard: Language Conventions 1.1 (Sentence Structure). 
Teaching Method: Both demonstration and inquiry 
Materials needed: Pencils and writing notebooks 

Background: To help my students improve in Sentence Fluency, I created a chart containing four ways to improve our Sentence Fluency. The chart included the following ideas: 1) Vary the length of our sentences so that in our writing we have sentences that are short, medium, and long; 2) Vary the type of sentences we use so we have statements, questions, commands, and exclamations; 3) Vary the beginnings of our sentences so they don’t all start the same way; 4) Vary our sentence structure. This mini-lesson addresses the fourth point about improving our sentence structure. 

CONNECTION: We have been working for the past few days to improve our sentence fluency. That means, we try to have variety in our sentences so that they have a certain rhythm and flow when we read them aloud. We have talked about varying the sentence length so that some of our sentences are short, some medium, and some long. We have also discussed varying our sentence type so that we have not only statements, but also questions, commands, and exclamations. Finally, we have explored different ways of varying the beginnings of our sentences so they don’t all start the same way. Today, we will focus on varying our sentence structure. 

TEACH: Sentence structure deals with how we arrange the words in our sentences. I have noticed that many of our sentences recently have followed a certain pattern. Let’s look at the example on the board. “She walked to the park with her dog yesterday.” You’ll notice that the sentence is a statement that begins with the subject. The verb comes next, followed by the rest of the predicate. Many of our sentences lately have had this structure as well. Today, I want to show that simply by changing the order of the words that are already in the sentence, we can break this pattern and improve our sentence fluency.
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: When I say "Go," I would like each of you to take a few minutes to change the order of the words in this sentence to create as many new sentences as you can. You may not add, subtract, or change any of the words you see on the board. You simply rearrange the words that are already there. Go ahead.

(After the students write for a few moments, I have them share their newly restructured sentences with their "turn-and-talk" partners. We then share as a class and make a list on the board of all the possibilities they came up with.)

The following is a portion of the list we created:
Yesterday, she walked to the park with her dog.
To the park she walked with her dog yesterday.
With her dog, she walked to the park yesterday.
Yesterday, she walked with her dog to the park.)

Let's look at the list we made. You can see that by merely changing the order of the words, we can break the "subject-verb-rest of predicate" pattern and improve the rhythm and flow of our sentences. After looking at these variations, you, as the author, have to use your judgment to decide which one sounds the best. This is what authors do all the time. They don't simply write a sentence once and move on to the next one. They spend time crafting their sentences so that they have the best rhythm and flow possible.

LINK: When you return to your writing projects today, be thinking about how you can play with different possibilities for arranging the words in your sentences to improve your sentence fluency. Don't settle for the first idea that comes to your head. Be willing to spend the time and have the patience necessary to craft your sentences so they have the rhythm and flow you really want.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: During a brief whole class share, teacher asks volunteers to read aloud sentences that feature a structure other than the "subject-verb-rest-of-predicate" pattern described earlier.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Teacher invites students to sit in the Author's Chair and read their work from that day. Special emphasis is placed on the variety of sentences they crafted.
Gr. 3 Mini-lesson 2:  
Punctuating Dialogue

Unit of Study:  Writing Fiction (and other units with dialogue)  
6 Traits Emphasis:  Conventions

Teaching Point:  Quotation marks and other punctuation marks, must be put into certain places when incorporating dialogue into our writing.

Writing Process Stage:  Drafting and Editing

CA Writing Standard:  Language Conventions 1.1 (Using correct sentences), and 1.6 (comma usage).

Teaching Method:  Demonstration

Materials needed:  none

Background:  There are 3 main ways to organize sentences that include dialogue.  We can place the “(s)he said” at the beginning of the sentence, the middle, or the end.  This mini-lesson is an introduction to punctuating dialogue, so it focuses on the most common format, placing the “(s)he said” at the end.  Trying to show all 3 formats at once will overwhelm most students.  Once students learn how to punctuate dialogue sentences where “(s)he said” is at the end, then learning the other two formats usually doesn't require much additional instruction.

CONNECTION:  Over the past few days I have noticed many of us using dialogue in our new stories. Using dialogue is an important, exciting step in our growth as writers.  When we use dialogue, we show the exact words that people are saying when they talk to other people.  When we use dialogue in our stories, it’s important to know which punctuation marks to use and where to put them.  It can be tricky.  Today, we'll start by learning how to punctuate dialogue.

TEACH:  On the board I have written a sentence.  It says:

"I had a long baseball practice yesterday said Jordan"

We know that Jordan is talking about yesterday's baseball practice, but so far, there’s no punctuation.  Without any punctuation we don’t know which exact words Jordan said out loud.  We show this by putting quotation marks before the first word Jordan says and after the last word Jordan says.  It’s almost like the quotation marks are pieces of wrapping paper, and we are wrapping up the words that were said out loud.  (Our sentence now looks like this.)

"I had a long baseball practice yesterday" said Jordan

Next, we look at the end of the sentence.  We have to put a period there because it’s the end of a sentence.  But we also have to put something after the word “yesterday” to show that the sentence Jordan actually said is over.  This is the tricky part.  We want to put a period because the sentence is a statement, but we can’t put two periods in one sentence.
(Our sentence now looks like this.)

"I had a long baseball practice yesterday." said Jordan.

So, we put a comma after the word "yesterday" but before the quotation mark to show that Jordan’s sentence is over.

(Our sentence now looks like this)

"I had a long baseball practice yesterday," said Jordan.

We're not allowed to put two periods in a sentence, but we are allowed to put a period and a comma. The way it is written on the board now is correct. It has quotation marks around the words that were said out loud, a period at the end of the entire sentence, and a comma at the end of the actual sentence that was said out loud. One more thing: if Jordan’s sentence was a question or exclamation, we are allowed to put a question mark or an exclamation point.

(I show these other two possibilities on the board.)

"I had a long baseball practice yesterday!" said Jordan.

"I had a long baseball practice yesterday?" said Jordan.

We can have a question mark and a period. We can have an exclamation point and a period. We just can't have two periods.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: (I write a new sentence on the board that contains dialogue but no punctuation.) I would now like you to practice this important skill. Take a look at this sentence on the board. When I say "Go," please turn and talk with your partner about the punctuation you would add to this sentence in order to make it correct. "Go." After the students talk for a while, identify a few students to add the correct punctuation to the sentence.

LINK: Whenever you incorporate dialogue into your writing, pay attention to how you punctuate those sentences. It may take some time to become completely comfortable with this new skill, but when you do, your writing will be much easier for your readers to understand.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: While students work, find examples of dialogue in the students' stories. When halfway through, ask a few students to read their dialogue sentences aloud. In addition to the words, they will also read their punctuation marks aloud. For example, a student may read: "quotation mark, I had a long baseball practice yesterday comma quotation mark said Jordan period." Doing this will be especially helpful to auditory learners.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will read selections from today’s work that include dialogue. Lucy Calkins emphasizes the point that whenever we focus on a specific skill, such as punctuating dialogue, we must then put that skill work back into a larger context so the focus always remains on the larger meaning of our work. So, when the students share their work, we can return the students' attention to the ideas in their writing.

Outcome/Assessment: During conferring and editing conferences, and when assessing student work at the end of a unit, hold students accountable for punctuating dialogue correctly.
Gr. 3 Mini-lesson 3: Paragraph Structure

Unit of Study: "All-About" Books (or letter writing or other nonfiction unit)
6 Traits Emphasis: Organization

Teaching Point: Paragraphs contain topic sentences that introduce the main idea, supporting details that develop the topic sentence, and a concluding sentence that restates the topic sentence.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting
CA Writing Standard: Writing Strategies 1.1 (Create a single paragraph)
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: Accompanying "Hamburger" Graphic

CONNECTION: It is so wonderful to see how much information we all have for our "All About" books. We have done a terrific job of researching our topics and brainstorming what we already know about them. As writers, we can't just fill our books with ideas and have everything be connected in one big lump of sentences. We need to ORGANIZE our ideas into different paragraphs. Today we will learn the structure of a paragraph. Once you understand the structure of a paragraph, you will be able to create "All About" books that will make sense and that readers can understand clearly.

TEACH: A paragraph is a group of sentences that focus on one topic. Take a look at the paragraph on the board behind me. (See the accompanying "Hamburger" graphic. We will read through each part as we introduce the different components to the class.) You will notice that the sentences fit into a picture of a hamburger. The parts of a hamburger give us a great way to understand the parts of a paragraph. Let's first look at the top bun. In it is the first sentence of the paragraph. This sentence is called the TOPIC SENTENCE, and the topic sentence tells readers what our paragraph is about. Second, we look at all the ingredients in the middle of the hamburger, such as the patty, lettuce, tomato, and cheese. These ingredients help us remember the SUPPORTING DETAILS. We write the supporting detail sentences in these ingredients. Just as the ingredients add flavor to the burger and make the burger bigger and better, the supporting details add interest to the paragraph, making it bigger and better. Next, let's look at the bottom bun. It looks like the top bun, but it's a little different. Similarly, our CONCLUDING SENTENCE that's written in the bottom bun basically restates the topic sentence, but it looks a little different. The concluding sentence is the official end of our paragraph, and it reminds readers what we talked about in the paragraph. Finally, look up at the top left
corner of the paragraph. The hamburger looked so appetizing to me earlier today that I couldn’t wait to take a bite out of it. This bite helps us remember to indent before we write a new paragraph. Luckily, the bite I took is about the size of the two or three fingers that you use to remember how far to indent.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Take a look at the hamburger once again. I am going to ask you and your partners to do a few things to help you remember the parts of a paragraph. When I say “Go,” you and your partner will find the topic sentence and say it to each other. (The students do this.) Next, when I say “Go,” you and your partner will find the supporting detail sentences and say them to each other. (The students do this.) Now, when I say “Go,” you and your partner will find the concluding sentence and say it to each other. (The students do this.) Finally, when I say “Go,” you and your partner will grab the hamburger and take a big bite out of the top left corner. (This is the students’ favorite part.)

LINK: When you begin writing about a new topic, be sure to start a new paragraph. Also, be sure to include each of the parts that we talked about. As you build your “All About” book paragraph-by-paragraph, you will be creating something special that readers will enjoy for a long time to come.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: Ask selected students to share individual topic sentences, supporting details, and concluding sentences.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will share entire paragraphs that have been completed. As the students read, we will highlight each part of the paragraph.

Outcome/Assessment: I will analyze student paragraphs during conferring meetings to assess how well the kids are demonstrating proper paragraph format. Paragraph structure will also be featured in our rubric for the trait of “Organization.”
Gr. 3 Mini-lesson 4:
Parts of a Friendly Letter

Unit of Study: Letter Writing
6 Traits Emphasis: Organization

Teaching Point: Friendly letters contain 5 basic parts: the date, salutation, body, closing, and signature.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting
CA Writing Standard: Writing Application 2.3 (Write personal and formal letters)
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: Any sample letter on chart paper with the five parts included. During the mini-lesson refer to the sample letter as needed when introducing the various parts.

CONNECTION: Over the past few days we have been collecting and developing seeds to figure out what kinds of letters we want to write and to whom we want to write. Some of us have been talking about writing fan letters or letters to a friend or letters to a family member who lives in a different city. Today, I will show you the five important parts that all our letters need to have. No matter to whom we end up writing, our letters will have all five of these parts.

TEACH: The first part is the date, and we put it in the top right-hand corner of our paper. Sometimes, in class, we abbreviate the month by using a number, but when we write letters, we spell out the letters of the month. Then, we move to the next line and stay on the left side of the paper. There, we put the greeting. We begin our greeting with the word “Dear,” and the “d” is capitalized. In this letter, I am writing to my niece, so I wrote “Dear Jordyn,” and the comma goes AFTER the name, not before. Notice that the greeting is NOT indented. Third, we write the paragraphs of our letter. Each paragraph is indented, as it usually is. After we finish writing the paragraphs, we write the fourth part, the closing. The closing usually includes a word or phrase, such as “Sincerely,” “Love,” or “Your Friend.” You, as the writer, get to choose the closing word which feels right to you. Notice that the closing is capitalized and is followed by a comma. Finally, we sign our name directly under the closing, and that finishes the parts of our letter. You have two choices as to where you want to place the closing and signature. You can either place them halfway across the page, or you can line up the first letter of the closing with the first letter of the date.
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Let's review the five parts of a letter by placing them on our invisible, vertical pieces of paper. So, first, take your two index fingers and trace the perimeter of your invisible, vertical papers. (Give the students a moment to do this.) Now, let's take our hands and place the date in the top right-hand corner of the paper. Then, let's put the greeting on the next line. Remember, the greeting is not indented. Third, let's place a few well-written body paragraphs underneath the greeting. Fourth, decide whether you want to put the closing halfway across the paper or matched up with the first letter of the date. Then, go ahead and place it. Finally, place your beautiful cursive (Penmanship 1.2) signature under the closing. (Repeat this sequence once or twice.)

LINK: When you develop your next letter seed and when you begin drafting your letter, remember to have all five parts of a letter and remember to have them in the right places. Pay attention to which words need capitalizing, which parts require indenting, and which parts have commas after them.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: Ask the students to look at the work they have done today. Call out each part of a letter, in order, and have the students locate it on their papers. This reinforces the content of the mini-lesson. It's no problem if the kids haven't gotten to all five parts by that point.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The after-workshop share focuses on the content of the body paragraphs. Lucy Calkins emphasizes the point that whenever we focus on a specific skill, such as the parts of a letter, we must then put that skill work back into a larger context so the focus always remains on the larger meaning of our work. So, when the students share their work, we can return the students' attention to the ideas in their writing.

Outcome/Assessment: Students will be held accountable for including the five parts of a letter during conferring meetings. The rubric that is used to score their published letters will also contain a section relating to the five parts.
Gr. 3 Mini-lesson 5:
“Backwards” Editing

Unit of Study: Any
6 Traits Emphasis: Conventions

Teaching Point: By looking at words in reverse order when we edit for spelling, we can avoid the problem of getting caught up in the meaning of the words and improve our ability to locate misspelled words.

Writing Process Stage: Editing
CA Writing Standard: Language Conventions 1.8
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: Any chart paper that includes a group of sentences

Background: This mini-lesson helps in classes where students edit by first circling the words they aren’t 100% sure of and then checking these words in the dictionary.

CONNECTION: I have noticed that sometimes, when we edit our work, we don’t circle all the words we’re unsure of. Many times this happens because when we reread our work, we end up focusing on the meaning, and we lose focus on the spelling. (I demonstrate by reading aloud the sentences on the chart paper. I look at each word carefully; then, I get swept up in the meaning and “forget” to focus on the spelling.) Today, I will show a strategy called “Backwards” Editing that many writers use to avoid this problem.

TEACH: With “Backwards” Editing we start AT THE END of our paper, not the beginning. So, the first word we see is actually the last word of our story. As I look at the word, I ask myself, "Am I 100% sure this word is correct?" If I am, I leave it. If I'm not, I circle it. Then, I move to the left & repeat the process. I repeat the process until I'm back at the beginning of the story. By doing this, I don't get caught up in the meaning of the story because there is no meaning. Even if I tried to read the words backwards, they would make no sense. (I demonstrate this.) “Backwards” Editing, then, is a great strategy for editing because it helps us keep the focus on the spelling.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Now, let’s practice this skill together. Read the first sentence on the chart paper as you normally would. (The kids do this.) Now, move your eyes to the end of this sentence, and point to each word, one at a time. (The kids do this.)

LINK: The next time you edit your work for spelling, try “Backwards” Editing. You may find that your ability to find and correct misspelled words improves greatly. Then, readers will have an easier time reading your work and understanding the meaning of your stories.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT & AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Don’t focus on today's strategy. Instead, circulate to each student in order to see them put this strategy to use.

Outcome/Assessment: Students will demonstrate this strategy through improvement in their spelling and higher scores on the “Conventions” rubric that is used to score their writing.
Gr. 3 Mini-lesson 6:
Narrowing the Focus of a Small Moment Story

Unit of Study: Small Moments, Launching the Writing Workshop
6 Traits Emphasis: Ideas

Teaching Point: Using a storyboard to sequence the parts of a small moment story can help writers narrow their focus to an appropriately-sized seed.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting or revising
CA Writing Standard: Writing Application 2.1 (Write narratives).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: None

CONNECTION: Over the past few days we have been collecting seed ideas for our small moment stories. We have all done a very nice job thinking of true stories that happened recently and that gave us strong emotions. Usually, the hardest part of writing a great small moment story is narrowing our story to a small period of time. Sometimes, our stories end up covering too long a time period, and we lose the focus on that special moment we are trying to capture. Today, we will learn one strategy that can help us identify the special part of our story that we want to develop.

TEACH: In this strategy we get to make a sketch. Remember, a sketch is a quick drawing that doesn't have much detail. The purpose of our sketch is simply to get our ideas on the paper, not to create a work of art for a museum. Our sketch will take the form of a storyboard. To many of you, it may remind you of a comic strip. Our storyboard will have six boxes. We will use the boxes to share the different parts of our small moment story. I will demonstrate this method by sharing the story of my recent experience in spinning class at the gym.

I will start by sketching myself in the first box waking up and getting ready to go to the gym. See how quickly I'm sketching. Second, I draw myself parking my car at the gym and walking inside. In the third box I draw myself walking into class and getting my bike ready. Fourth, the song “Brown Sugar” by the Rolling Stones comes on, and I'm drawing myself in agony because I really don't like that song. The instructor, who I thought was my friend, then announces that since she doesn't ever to get to hear that song, she's going to play it again! I'm in even more agony because I realize that I'm going to have to suffer through that song again. In the fifth box, I'm leaving the gym. In the final box, I'm back at home checking my e-mail.
Now that my sketch is done, I circle the box on which I want to focus my story. I will choose to circle the fourth box because it captures the part that I think is the most interesting and that contains the strongest emotion. So, when I go to write my story, I will be able to zero in on this very small moment in time. I won’t be writing about anything that came before I got to the gym or after the song ended.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: When I say “Go,” take a minute to close your eyes and think about a seed you might want to develop into a small moment story. Then, in your mind, see the parts of your story from beginning to end. See each part as a different “box” in your mental storyboard. Then, think about which box might be the best one for you to develop into a small moment story. “Go.” (I then ask a few students to share what they decided.)

LINK: Today, as you plan prepare to write your small moment story, start by creating a storyboard and sketch the various parts. When you think you have found the one that you believe to be the most interesting and that contains the strongest emotion, you may begin writing it out.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the kids work on their sketches, I will circulate and select two or three storyboards to share with the class during the mid-workshop point. As I share these examples, I will talk about what is in each box, and then I will announce the box choices that the authors made, emphasizing why these boxes would be the most effective choices.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will share the beginnings of their written-out small moment stories. As the students share, we will pay attention to whether the stories appear to occur over an appropriate amount of time.

Outcome/Assessment: Students will demonstrate their learning by writing focused, small moment narratives that occur over a relatively short period of time. This aspect of the stories will be built into the “Ideas” rubric that we will use to score the stories.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 7: Collecting Seeds for an “Edge-of-your-seat” Fiction Story

Unit of Study: Small Moments, Writing Fiction
6 Traits Emphasis: Ideas

Teaching Point: When collecting seeds for “Edge-of-your-seat” fiction, it is helpful to write each seed in terms of what the main character(s) wants to accomplish.

Writing Process Stage: Collecting seeds
CA Writing Standard: Writing Application 2.1 (Write narratives) and 2.2 (Write descriptions of people, places, things, or experiences).

Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: none

CONNECTION: Today, we will collect seeds for our new “Edge-of-your-seat” stories. Remember, these stories contain excitement, suspense, and tension, and they are designed to keep readers on the edges of their seats. In order for our seeds to be as helpful as possible, I’m going to show you a specific way that I would like you to write your seeds in your writing notebooks.

TEACH: As you begin writing a seed idea, think first about who your main character is. Then, think about what that character or those characters want to accomplish in your story. By stating who the characters are and what they want to accomplish, we put ourselves in an excellent position to create excitement, suspense, and tension. Consider this seed:

“A 14-year-old girl named Susie wants to climb Mount Everest.”

Once we know her goal, opportunities to create excitement, suspense, and tension come flooding to mind. Maybe she gets hurt halfway up and isn’t sure if she’s going to make it. Maybe the weather turns bad just as she is about to reach the top. Maybe she gets separated from the rest of her group and has to finish the climb alone. The point is, having a goal for the character(s) enables us to think of obstacles, problems, and challenges that the character has to solve in order to reach his/her goals. These obstacles, problems, and challenges create the excitement that we are looking for.

Keep in mind, “Edge-of-your-seat” stories don’t have to include fancy goals like climbing Mt. Everest. They often include things that people do every day. Consider these
two seeds. They focus on everyday happenings, but they're still written in terms of what the main character wants to accomplish.

"Two friends from school want to have a great day at the park."

"A family travels to the lake for a relaxing camping trip."

No matter what topics we choose, when we write seeds in this way, we set the stage for many exciting things to happen.

**ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT:** Close your eyes and think of ideas you have for an “Edge-of-your-seat” story. Each time you think of one, say it to yourself in terms of what the main character hopes to accomplish. (The students do this.) Now, turn to your neighbor and share at least one seed you created. (The students do this.) Have a few volunteers share their seed ideas.

**LINK:** When you go back to your writing spots, think of as many seed ideas as you can and write them in terms of what the main character is trying to accomplish. Try also to create a wide variety of seed ideas so all your ideas aren’t about just one thing.

**MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT:** To get deeper into the idea of “seed variety,” I will share with the class a variety of seed possibilities, focusing on topics and genres such as trips, sports, adventures, mysteries, and spooky stories.

**AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE:** Selected students will share individual seed ideas written in the form I demonstrated. For full participation, I may even try to have each student share one idea.

**Outcome/Assessment:** This mini-lesson is one of the easier ones as far as assessing outcomes. As I circulate throughout the room, I will make sure that all students are writing their seeds in the form demonstrated. I will briefly confer with those students who seem to be experiencing difficulty.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 8: Using Caution with the Thesaurus

Unit of Study: Small Moments, Letter Writing, or any genre where students write from their own point of view

6 Traits Emphasis: Voice and Word Choice

Teaching Point: When using a thesaurus, we need to be careful to select words that sound like us and don’t compromise our voice.

Writing Process Stage: Revising

CA Writing Standard: Research 1.3 (Understand the structure and organization of various reference materials) and Writing Application 2.1b (Include well-chosen details to develop the plot).

Teaching Method: Demonstration

Materials needed: Enough thesauri for pairs of students to share one

CONNECTION: We have been using thesauri recently during revising to help us improve our word choice. It’s been great seeing how excited you are to use a thesaurus to find more interesting words to use in your writing. Today, you may continue these tools to improve your word choice, but I want you to be careful about avoiding a certain problem that happens sometimes when writers use a thesaurus.

TEACH: Look at the sentence on the board:

“I walked to the park to buy a popsicle from the ice cream truck.”

I like this sentence, except I think I can do better than the word “walked.” It’s a common word, and I want to find one that’s more interesting. So, I look in the thesaurus. I notice two interesting choices: “stroll” and “perambulate.” Like many writers, I sometimes like to use big, fancy words. So, I decide to use “perambulate.” Let’s see how my sentence looks now.

“I perambulated to the park to buy a popsicle from the ice cream truck.”

This new sentence sounds cool, but the problem is, it doesn’t sound like me. Quality writing sounds like the person who wrote it, and this sentence doesn’t sound like me. When
writers use words that don’t sound genuine, they risk damaging the relationship they have with their readers. I think I’ll try the other possibility. Let’s see how this sentence looks.

"I strolled to the park to buy a popsicle from the ice cream truck."

I like this choice better. “Stroll” is a word I might actually say. It’s more genuine, and the audience will believe that this word came from me. My audience might not believe that “perambulated” came from me. Remember, when you use a thesaurus to improve your word choice, stick with the words that sound like you.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Let’s practice this idea together. With your partner, find the word “write” in your thesaurus. Then, discuss the possibilities given. Determine which one would be the best choice for each of you. You may not agree on the same choice, and that’s fine. (Then, call on students to share their choices. With each student, emphasize the importance of choosing words that sound like the writer.)

LINK: Starting today, use caution when looking up words in the thesaurus. It’s wonderful to learn new words and expand our vocabulary, but be sure that the words you choose sound like you. You don’t want these new words to compromise your unique writing voice.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: A few students will share both the words that they replaced and the words that did the replacing. With each student, emphasize the importance of choosing words that sound like the writer.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will share paragraphs, sections, or chapters from their work. This is another example of placing a skill back in context after it’s featured in a mini-lesson.

Outcome/Assessment: Students who meet this objective will produce writing in which all the words sound genuine and natural. This aspect of writing will be built into the “Voice” rubric that we will use to score student work.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 9: 
Maintaining a Consistent Viewpoint

**Unit of Study:** Small Moment Story, Letter Writing, or any genre where students write from their own point of view or the point of view of the narrator

**6 Traits Emphasis:** Voice

**Teaching Point:** Writers need to maintain a consistent viewpoint so readers can understand who is telling the story.

**Writing Process Stage:** Drafting

**CA Writing Standard:** Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives).

**Teaching Method:** Demonstration

**Materials needed:** none

**CONNECTION:** Recently, I was reading a paragraph written by a former student. It started off very well. I kept reading, and, all of a sudden, I became confused. I reread the paragraph, and I was still confused. I then realized that it was confusing because the writer forgot which viewpoint she was using to tell her story. This type of viewpoint confusion is common, and I'd like us to address this issue today so that it doesn't happen in any of our writing.

TEACH: The paragraph you see on the board was the one written by Michelle, and she wrote it about herself from her own point of view. Let's read it together.

"My name is Michelle. I have blue brown hair and dark green eyes. I live in Santa Monica, and I have two sisters and a brother. My favorite sport is soccer. She even plays in a league on the weekends. She likes soccer so much that she wants one day to be on the Olympic team."

Notice what happens in this paragraph. Michelle starts telling about herself from her own point of view, but in the fifth sentence she switches, all of a sudden, to a narrator talking ABOUT Michelle. As the narrator, she is talking about herself as if she's somebody else. Writers have to avoid doing this so that readers don't become confused. Michelle either needs to write the whole paragraph from her own point of view or the whole paragraph from the point of view of the narrator. She can't switch back and forth.

**ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT:** Let's do a quick activity to help us understand the difference between talking from your own viewpoint and talking from the narrator's viewpoint. I am
going to say a few sentences aloud. If I talk from my own point of view, show me an "I" with your fingers. If I speak about myself as a narrator would, show me an “N” with your fingers. (I then say several sentences aloud with the kids responding via hand signals. I’m sure to mix the two types of sentences so the students can’t determine any pattern. As they signal their responses, I check for understanding and stop when I feel they understand the point of this lesson.)

LINK: When you return to your writing today, pay attention to the viewpoint that you are using and keep it consistent. Maintaining a consistent viewpoint helps our readers understand our writing.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: I will ask a couple of students writing from their own viewpoint to share their work. Then I will ask a couple of students writing from the narrator’s viewpoint to share their work. Hearing both ways should reinforce student understanding.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: I would ask an especially capable student to read his/her work from today as is. Then, I would ask the same student to read the same text again, but this time, alter the viewpoint so the class can hear how different the same ideas sound.

Outcome/Assessment: Maintaining a consistent viewpoint is built into the “Voice” rubric that is used to score student writing. During conferring meetings, keep an eye out to make sure that students maintain a consistent viewpoint as they write.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 10:
Using A Variety of Time-Order Words*

Unit of Study: Non-fiction Writing, “All-About” Books, Small Moments, or any unit where students need to know how to put events or ideas in a clear, logical sequence

6 Traits Emphasis: Word Choice (also Organization)

Teaching Point: Using a variety of time-order words helps writers express ideas and describe events in a clear, logical manner.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting (or revising)
CA Writing Standard: Writing Strategies 1.1 (Create a single paragraph and Evaluation and Revision 1.4 (Revise drafts to improve the coherence and logical progression of ideas)

Teaching Method: Demonstration

Materials needed: Any paragraph that contains a variety of time-order words to use as a model for the students

CONNECTION: Sometimes when I write about things that happened in a certain order, I find myself using the same word over and over. For example, when I'm describing my weekend, I'll say, "I went to the gym. Then, I went to the market. Then, I went to the beach. Then, I came home and read for a while." My retelling is organized, but it suffers from poor word choice. It's not enough to organize my ideas well. Writers always want to use different words so that their word choice is fresh and has variety. Today, I will show you how writers can have strong organization and strong word choice.

TEACH: On the board you see a list of time words that writers can use to achieve variety in their writing. You will notice that some of these words simply follow a numerical order: first, second, third, fourth, fifth, etc. Others don't follow any number pattern, yet they are still effective words to use: next, then, after that, also, finally, in conclusion. This list is by no means a complete one, but it gives you many, many choices to use when you are organizing your ideas in writing. In fact, we will keep this list on the board, and whenever we notice other excellent time-order words, we will add them to the list.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Now I'd like you to look at the paragraph next to me. As I read it aloud, I want you to do a little research. I want you to pay attention to the time-order words you see in the paragraph. (The students do this.) Now, when I say "Go," turn to
your partners and share all the time-order words you noticed. (The students do this. After that, a few students name these words.)

LINK: Today, when you return to your writing, pay attention to the times when you may need to use time-order words to organize your thoughts. As you use these words, try to use a wide variety of them. Using a variety of time-order words will make your writing clear and fresh.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: I will ask a few students to share the time-order words they have used thus far today.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will share what they have written today. (This is another example of putting a skill back in context after teaching it in isolation.)

Outcome/Assessment: During conferring meetings and as I score their published projects, I will keep an eye out to see whether students are using a variety of time-order words. This aspect of writing is built into the "Word Choice" rubric that will be used to score student papers.

*I use the term "time-order words," but the term "transition words" can easily be substituted."
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 11: Using Pronouns Carefully

**Unit of Study:** Any
**6 Traits Emphasis:** Word Choice

**Teaching Point:** When writers use pronouns, they must be sure that readers can easily understand to whom the pronoun refers.

**Writing Process Stage:** Drafting
**CA Writing Standard:** Grammar 1.2 (use pronouns correctly in writing and speaking).
**Teaching Method:** Demonstration
**Materials needed:** none

CONNECTION: As you know, we have been learning about pronouns recently. You will recall that a pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. So, instead of using the name “Bobby” over and over, I’ll sometimes use the pronoun “he” to take the place of his name. Pronouns are helpful because they enable us to have better word choice. Sometimes, though, we can have problems with pronouns when we aren’t clear about which name the pronoun takes the place of. Today, we’ll talk about how we can avoid this situation.

TEACH: Follow with me as I read the paragraph I wrote on the board about my friends Kelly and Shannon.

"Kelly gave Shannon a present for her birthday. She then thanked her for being such a good friend. Next, she started crying. She took out a tissue to wipe away the tears. She had never been in a situation like this before."

Notice that this paragraph is terribly confusing because we don’t know which “she” and which “her” go with which girl. The rule about pronouns is that the pronoun always connects to the name immediately before it. So, when we use pronouns, we need to make sure that we do, indeed, mean to connect it to the name that directly precedes it. If not, we need to correct our word choice because quality readers know (or will soon learn) to make that connection.

I am now going to read the paragraph aloud again and stop at the first pronoun I see. (I stop halfway across the top line and notice the word “her.”) The word “her” must refer to Shannon because it comes right after her name. This is what I meant to do, so I’ll leave it alone.
I'll do one more. I keep reading, and I notice that the first word of the second sentence is the next example of a pronoun. This pronoun also connects to Shannon because it's closer to Shannon's name than it is to Kelly's. That's a mistake. To correct it, I'm going to cross out the word "She" and replace it with the name Kelly. Now the sentence is correct: "Kelly then thanked her for being such a good friend. These are our choices. We can either leave the pronoun as it is, or we can substitute the person's name to make things more clear.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: I'd like you to practice with me now. As we continue to read the rest of the paragraph, say "Stop!" every time we come across a pronoun. When we identify the pronoun, we'll see whose name comes right before it. If it is correct the way it is, we'll leave it alone. If it's a mistake, we'll write the person's name as a substitute for the pronoun. (I take the kids through the rest of the paragraph, and we make any necessary changes.)

LINK: From now on, when you use pronouns to refer to people in your writing, be sure that the connection is clear so that readers understand whom you are talking about.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: I point out that the need for clear pronoun-antecedent connections doesn't just apply to people. The need also applies to things. So, when we use words such as "it" and "they," it's important for readers to know what the writer is talking about.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The students will share their work from that day. If any pronoun-antecedent issues arise during this sharing, we'll be on top of it.

Outcome/Assessment: From this point on, students will be held accountable for clear pronoun usage in their daily writing and speaking.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 12:  
Run-on Sentences

Unit of Study: Any
6 Traits Emphasis: Conventions

Teaching Point: Writers can avoid run-on sentences by reading their work aloud and listening for pauses. These pauses usually indicate that we have come to the end of a complete thought and that we need to end the current sentence and begin a new one.

Writing Process Stage: Editing
CA Writing Standard: Sentence Structure 1.1 (Understand and be able to use complete and correct sentences in writing).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: Chart or overhead of any paragraph with no ending punctuation or beginning-of-sentence capitalization. The paragraph should have at least seven or eight sentences.

CONNECTION: One of the trickiest things for many young writers is to know when they have reached the end of one sentence and need to start a new one. Remember, a sentence expresses a complete thought. Sometimes, we put too many complete thoughts into a sentence, and we create something called a run-on sentence. Run-on sentences can confuse our readers and make our writing difficult to understand. Today, I will show you one strategy that you can use to avoid run-on sentences.

TEACH: Take a look at the paragraph on the chart next to me. Read it with your eyes as I read it aloud. (I then proceed to read the entire paragraph without pausing because there are no periods or other pieces of ending punctuation that tell me to stop and that’s not good because this gets confusing and you probably see my point right now because I am guilty of this as we speak and I promise never to do this to you again.) You will notice that I read the whole paragraph straight through without stopping. That shouldn’t have happened because there are at least four or five sentences in this paragraph.

Let’s take another look at the paragraph. This time, as I read it aloud, I will pause every time I reach the end of a complete thought. Pausing as we read aloud usually tells us that it’s time to end a sentence and start a new one. Periods and question marks and exclamation points are like stop signs on the road that tell us to stop our cars. When we read and write, these marks tell us to stop our sentences and start new ones. (I then proceed to read the first three sentences, pausing after each one, placing the appropriate piece of end punctuation, and capitalizing the next word to begin a new sentence.)
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Now that I have shown you this strategy of reading aloud and pausing after each complete thought, I want you to try it out. When I say “Go,” I’d like you and your turn-and-talk partner to read the rest of the paragraph together aloud. Use your hands and hold up an invisible stop sign at the end of each complete sentence that you discover. Remember, pausing as you read aloud is usually a signal that you’ve reached the end of a sentence. (The students do this. Then, as a class, we read the rest of the sentences aloud together to determine where punctuation could/should have been placed. Each time we come to a pause, I have the students say “Stop!” as they hold out their hand “stop signs.”)

LINK: So, whenever you edit your writing, be sure to read it aloud so you can hear the pauses and discover where you may have run-on sentences. When we punctuate these sentences correctly, our readers have a much easier time understanding the meaning of our work.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students work, I will circulate to find examples of work that doesn’t contain any run-on sentences. At the mid-point, I will ask a few students to share their work. First, each student will read through the sentences without pausing. Then, each student will read aloud correctly, emphasizing the pauses between each sentence. This lighthearted, before-and-after approach will reinforce the difference between run-ons and non-run-ons.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will share what they have written today. (This is another example of putting a skill back in context after teaching it in isolation.)

Outcome/Assessment: Students will demonstrate the ability to avoid run-ons from this point forward and will be held accountable in all daily writing. I will confer privately with students needing further instruction or practice with this skill.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 13:
Answering Reader’s Anticipated Questions

Unit of Study:  Small Moment Stories
6 Traits Emphasis:  Ideas

Teaching Point:  When writers think about the questions their readers are likely to ask and then answer them in advance, readers are more likely to find the writing clear, interesting, and satisfying.

Writing Process Stage:  Drafting
CA Writing Standard:  Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives) and 2.2 (Write descriptions of people, places, things, or experiences)
Teaching Method:  Demonstration
Materials needed:  none

CONNECTION: As we begin to draft our Small Moment stories, it’s important to think about how our readers will experience our writing. Whenever we write for an audience, we want that audience to find our stories to be clear, interesting, and satisfying. One way to achieve this goal is to think about the questions that we believe our readers might ask as they read our stories. By thinking about the questions they might ask, we can answer them as we write our drafts. If we leave these questions unanswered, our writing may not be as clear, interesting, and satisfying as it could be.

TEACH: Take a look at the chart paper next to me. So far, it only has one sentence on it: “I walked across the street to buy a big jar of peanuts.”

This is the first sentence of my Small Moment story. As I read it, I think about the questions my readers might ask as they read. I come up with the following list:

• Which store did you go to?  • When did you go?
• Why did you only buy peanuts?  • Did you go with anybody?
• Can’t you come up with a better lead than that? (Just kidding. The mini-lesson on effective leads could come next, and we can improve our lead at that time.)

Thinking about these questions gives me many ideas about how I can make my writing better. After thinking for a while, I add the following sentences, and my paragraph now looks like this:

Last Tuesday after school, I walked with my sister Lynn across the street to the new Pavilions market. Our mom asked us to go there to buy a big jar of peanuts. She needed the peanuts for a special dessert she was cooking for a dinner party that night.”
As you read these new sentences, you can see how much more complete and interesting my writing is compared to what I had before. It only took a minute or two to think about these questions and put the answers into my story, but the improvements I made are significant. Great writers are more than willing to make this effort to improve their work.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Let’s practice this strategy by looking at the next sentence on the chart:

"We had a substitute teacher for P.E. today."

When I say “Go,” I want you and your turn-and-talk partners to think of at least three questions readers might have when they read this sentence. (The students do this, and we share their questions aloud. As volunteers share the questions, we discuss sentences that we could add to our writing in order to answer these questions. I add these new sentences underneath the original sentence. When we have done three or four new sentences, we read our newly completed paragraph aloud, and I emphasize the improvement in quality from the first effort to the second.

LINK: Today, as you work on your drafts, think about the questions your readers might ask as they read your stories and answer them. Doing this will make your stories far more clear, interesting, and satisfying for the reader.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students write, circulate in order to find students using this new strategy. At the mid-point, select two or three students to share a) their original work, b) the questions they anticipated, and c) their new and improved versions that address these anticipated questions.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Continue the sharing format we used at the mid-point so that more students can demonstrate their skill with this new strategy.

Outcome/Assessment: Students will be assessed on this strategy both formally and informally. Formally, student work will be scored using the “Ideas” rubric that contains a section that focuses on developing ideas with adequate detail. Informally, I will discuss the topic of developing ideas with adequate detail during conferring meetings and future mini-lessons.
Using a Story Mountain to Show Rising Action

Unit of Study: “Edge-of-your-seat” Fiction, Writing Fiction
6 Traits Emphasis: Organization

Teaching Point: Creating a "story mountain" can help us plan our stories so that the excitement level builds from beginning to end.

Writing Process Stage: Prior to drafting
CA Writing Standard: Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: none

Note: This lesson refers to Chase Against Time, an "Edge-of-your-seat" fiction story I read aloud to my students just before starting this unit. Feel free to substitute the plot points of any similar story with which you may be familiar.

CONNECTION: As we begin our "Edge-of-your-seat" stories, it’s important to remember that our goal is to create the most exciting stories possible. We want to write stories that will literally keep readers on the edge of their seats. One way writers do this is to organize the events of the plot in such a way that the excitement level builds from the beginning of the story to the end. We wouldn’t want the most exciting part of the story to be at the beginning because then the story would get less exciting as it progressed. We want the most exciting part of the story, the climax, to occur after other events have led up to it. Today, I will show you a tool called the "Story Mountain" that can help us organize our stories so that the excitement level rises from beginning to end.

TEACH: On the board, I have drawn a diagonal line that starts on the bottom-left and gradually moves up to the top-right part of the board. On this line I am going to place the main events of the book Chase Against Time from left to right to show how the author tried to make the excitement level rise from the beginning of the story to the end.

First, I put the part where Chase interrogates Brock in the hallway early in the morning. Second, I move to the right and place the part where Chase talks to Dave outside of the classroom. Because this second part was meant to be more exciting, I place it higher and farther to the right on the story mountain. Third, I put down the part where Chase investigates Amy and discovers that an adult probably stole the cello. Fourth, I write down the part where he talks to Mrs. Washington and notices Coach Turner walking by the music room. Fifth, I note the part where Coach Turner takes Chase to lunch. Once
again, notice how each part of the story gets more and more exciting. Finally, at the top of the mountain, I write the most exciting part, the part where Chase is in the security room with Principal Andrews, who burns the videotape evidence. Having the events get more and more exciting as the story progresses is one of the best ways to keep readers on the edge of their seats.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: When I say “Go,” take a minute to close your eyes and think about the events you want to include in your “Edge-of-your-seat” stories. Imagine a story mountain in your minds, and think about where you would put these events on the mountain. Try to have the excitement level rise from event to event, and try to save the most exciting event, the climax, for the end. Go ahead. (I give the students a minute or two to do this. Two or three students share their thinking afterwards.)

LINK: Today, when you go back to your writing spots, open your notebooks and create a story mountain similar to the one I made on the board. Again, try to have the excitement level rise throughout your story, and try to save the most exciting part of the story for the end.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students create their mountains, walk around searching for some quality examples to share with the class. At the mid-point, ask a few students (who don’t mind “giving away” the plans for their stories) to share their mountains with the class.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Continue the sharing format used at the mid-point so that more students can demonstrate their skill with this new strategy.

Outcome/Assessment: Students who internalize the main idea of this mini-lesson will produce “Edge-of-your-seat” stories in which the excitement level rises from beginning to end.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 15:
Using Story Mountains to Create Chapters that End with Cliffhangers

Unit of Study: “Edge-of-your-seat” Fiction, Writing Fiction
6 Traits Emphasis: Organization

Teaching Point: Once we place the main events of our stories on a story mountain, we can use the story mountain to organize our story into chapters. Then, we can add excitement by ending these chapters with cliffhangers.

Writing Process Stage: Prior to drafting
CA Writing Standard: Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: Students’ Story Mountains from yesterday for active engagement.

Note: This mini-lesson goes hand-in-hand with the preceding lesson that introduces the story mountain. Teaching these two lessons on consecutive days can work well.

CONNECTION: Yesterday, I showed you how to use a Story Mountain to make your writing as exciting as possible. On this mountain, we place the most important events from bottom left to top right. We save the most exciting part for the end so that all other events build up to it. Today, I’ll show you how to use your story mountains to organize your stories into chapters. Then, I’ll show you how to create a cliffhanger to make the transition from one chapter to another as exciting as possible.

TEACH: Let’s look back at the Story Mountain I showed you yesterday. It has six important parts from Chase Against Time. I’ll simply make each of these parts its own chapter. I’ll put the part about Chase investigating Brock into one chapter, Chase talking to Dave in another chapter, and so on. What the Story Mountain helps us do is focus the reader’s attention on one important event at a time. If we put too many important events into one chapter, each event may seem less important. So, if you have seven events on your mountain, you’ll have seven chapters. If you have four events, you’ll have four chapters. This is a simple organizational system, but it will help you structure your stories very effectively.

Now that we have our different chapters, let’s talk about how we transition from one chapter to another. We can use a terrific device known as a “cliffhanger” to end each chapter. Cliffhangers are fun because they allow us to end each chapter, but we do so in a way that leaves our readers hanging. We tease them or confuse them or keep some
information secret from them in order to get them excited about reading the next chapter. A cliffhanger is like a bridge, connecting the end of one chapter to the beginning of the next.

Let me share a sample cliffhanger from *Chase Against Time*. As Chase investigates Dave, Dave tells him that the suspect who was seen outside the office wasn’t a he; it was a she. This cliffhanger ends the chapter because we know Dave didn’t take the cello. It’s an exciting cliffhanger because it leads readers to think that the girl is Jenny, one of Chase’s best friends. So, any time you can end the events of one chapter while also getting your readers to look ahead to the next chapter, you have a great cliffhanger.

**ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT:** Please open your writing notebooks to your story mountain from yesterday. We’re going to do two things. First, count how many events are on your mountain. This will tell how many chapters you’ll have in your story. (The students do this and signal this number to me using their fingers.) Second, when I say “Go,” take a few minutes to come up with a cliffhanger of your own. Start by finding two chapters that are next to each other. Then, try to think of a sentence that can end the first chapter while also leading into the next. You can do this by teasing your readers, confusing them, or keeping some information hidden. Go ahead.

*Note:* This step may be difficult for some students, but is worth doing because it gets them thinking about something challenging in a safe, “practice” type of environment.

After a few minutes, students share first with their partners (to maximize participation), then with the whole class.

**LINK:** Today, as you begin drafting, you may or may not reach the end of your first chapter. If you do, pay close attention to your first cliffhanger. Try to end the chapter in a way that closes out the first important part of your story while also leading to the next.

**MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT:** I will share a few more cliffhangers from *Chase Against Time*, so that students can hear even more examples of how one can transition effectively from one chapter to another.

**AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE:** Students will share their work from today’s session. Students who have reached the end of a chapter and have cliffhangers will share first.

**Outcome/Assessment:** Following this lesson, students should be able to create “Edge-of-your-seat” stories that are logically divided into chapters. Creating effective cliffhangers is a much more difficult skill to develop, and it is one that will develop over time.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 16:
Varying Sentence Beginnings

Unit of Study: Any (This lesson is applies in situations where students write character descriptions or any other type of paragraph where the tendency to repeat the same sentence beginning is strong.)

6 Traits Emphasis: Sentence Fluency and Word Choice

Teaching Point: There are a number of ways to vary the beginnings of our sentences. Using these strategies can improve both our sentence fluency and word choice.

Writing Process Stage: Revising
CA Writing Standard: Language Conventions 1.1 (Sentence Structure).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: None

Note: For the sake of efficiency, I am including several strategies in this mini-lesson. You may decide to separate the contents of this lesson into two or three mini-lessons.

CONNECTION: We have been writing very interesting character descriptions lately as part of our new stories. One thing I’ve noticed, however, is that many of us are creating sentences that all start the same way. Great writers try to start their sentences in different ways so their writing has variety. Today, I will show you a few strategies you can use so that you won’t have sentences that all begin the same way.

TEACH: Take a look at the paragraph on the chart next to me:

“I have a friend named Kelli. She is nine years old. She likes playing handball and basketball. She has four brothers and one sister. She works hard. She takes school seriously. She eats healthy foods. She is one of the kindest people I know.”

You will notice that after the first sentence, every sentence starts with the same word. It may look silly when we read it together like this, but this type of pattern happens quite a bit. It’s easy to do this if we’re not careful.

Now, take a look at the list I have made on the board. It contains several strategies we can use to improve our sentence beginnings so they’re not all the same.
The list contains the following strategies:

- Use the person's name sometimes instead of "he" or "she."
- Use other pronouns such as "her" or "his."
- Use other terms such as "This girl" or "This boy."
- Combine two short sentences into one sentence.
- Reverse the order of the words so the beginning is now at the end and vice versa.

(I explain each strategy on the list and show how they could be used to improve the first four sentences in the paragraph above.)

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: I have just demonstrated how to use these strategies to improve the first four sentences in the paragraph above. Now I'd like you to have a chance to practice these strategies. When I say "Go," turn to your partners and read the rest of the sentences in the paragraph. Then, decide how you would like to use the strategies I demonstrated to improve the beginnings of these sentences. Go ahead. (I give the students time to do this. Then, I choose volunteers to suggest the options they came up with. It's important to keep in mind that there are no "right" answers to this activity; there are merely options, and many options may be equally valid.

LINK: As you begin to revise your work today, keep a close eye on whether the beginnings of your sentences have enough variety or whether they all start the same way. If you need to create more variety, use the strategies we just discussed to make it happen. Great writers are willing to make changes to their work when the effort is worth it, and in this case, the effort is definitely worth it.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students revise, I will look for students who are revising using these strategies. At the mid-point, I will select a few students to share what they had before they revised and what they had afterwards. This type of before-and-after sharing should reinforce the difference in how these paragraphs sound.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: I will continue the sharing format we used at the mid-point so that more students can demonstrate their skill with this new strategy.

Outcome/Assessment: Should students continue to experience difficulty with creating variety in their sentence beginnings, I will confer with them either privately or in a small group. This idea of sentence-beginning-variety is also included in the Sentence Fluency rubric we use to assess student work.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 17:
Varying Sentence Types

Unit of Study: Any
6 Traits Emphasis: Sentence Fluency

Teaching Point: Writers can improve their sentence fluency by using all four sentence types in their writing.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting and Revising
CA Writing Standard: Language Conventions 1.1 (Sentence Structure).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: none

Note: To help my students improve in this area, I created a chart containing four ways to improve our Sentence Fluency. The chart included the following ideas: 1) Vary the length of our sentences so that in our writing we have sentences that are short, medium, and long; 2) Vary the type of sentences we use so we have statements, questions, commands, and exclamations; 3) Vary the beginnings of our sentences so they don't all start the same way; 4) Vary our sentence structure. This mini-lesson addresses the second point about varying our sentence types.

CONNECTION: We have been working for the past few days to improve our sentence fluency. That means, we try to have variety in our sentences so that they have a certain rhythm and flow when we read them aloud. We have talked about varying the sentence length so that some of our sentences are short, some medium, and some long. We have also discussed varying our sentence structure so that there is variety in the way we arrange the words in our sentences. Finally, we have explored different ways of varying the beginnings of our sentences so they don't all start the same way. Today, we focus on varying our sentence types so that we have not only statements, but also questions, commands, and exclamations.

TEACH: Take a look at the paragraph next to me on the chart paper. We have seen this paragraph about Kelli before. We wrote it a few days ago to improve our sentence beginnings. Let's take a look at it.

"I have a friend named Kelli. She is nine years old. Her favorite sports are handball and basketball. This girl has four brothers and one sister. Boy, she works hard and takes school seriously. Healthy food is what she likes to eat. Kelli is one of the kindest people I know."
This paragraph solves the problem of having every sentence start the same way, but now there is another issue we need to address. Every sentence is a statement. Great writers strive to include questions, commands, and exclamations in their writing, not just statements. So, I’m going to read through the paragraph and look for ways to change some of the statements to other types of sentences. As I make these changes, pay close attention to what I do.

First, I want to change the sentence about her being a hard worker to an exclamation because I think the sentence involves strong emotion. I’m going to change it to: “Boy, does she work hard and take school seriously!” Then, I’d like to include a question, so I’m going to do that with the sentence that tells us about her siblings. I’m going to change it to: “Can you believe she has four brothers and a sister?”

I don’t want you to think that you need all four sentence types in every paragraph, so I’m not going to put in a command. It’s important to have variety, but don’t feel that you have to overdo it. Our new paragraph has three different types of sentences, and that’s a nice improvement. That’s enough variety to make our paragraph more interesting.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: I’d like us to practice this together as a class. When I say “Go,” turn to your partners and find one more statement in this paragraph that you could change to a different sentence type. It could be either a question, command, or exclamation. Go ahead. (The students do this, and then we share a few possible changes they could make.)

LINK: Today, when you return to your writing, pay close attention to the variety of sentence types that you have included. Decide if your writing can benefit from further attention to this idea. Do you already have quite a bit of variety? Should you perhaps include a question, command, or exclamation every once in a while? Make the best decision for yourself.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students work, look for students who are trying to add a greater variety of sentence types. At the mid-point, select a few students to share what they had before they revised and what they had afterwards. This type of before-and-after sharing should reinforce the difference in how these paragraphs sound.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students share their work from today’s session.

Outcome/Assessment: The Sentence Fluency rubric used to score student papers will include a section about using a variety of sentence types.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 18:
Using Synonyms for “Said”

Unit of Study: Any unit where students use dialogue in their writing
6 Traits Emphasis: Word Choice

Teaching Point: When writers use synonyms for the word “said” (which doesn’t need to be all the time!), they think about the situation or the emotion involved and then select the best possible word.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting or revising
CA Writing Standard: Research 1.3 (Using a thesaurus), Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives), and Writing Applications 2.2 (Write descriptions).

Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: none

CONNECTION: As you know, we have been working to improve our word choice recently. With word choice the first thing to understand is that all writers are in full control of the words they use in their writing. Instead of just writing down the first thing that comes into our heads, great writers understand that we always have a choice (sometimes many choices) and that when we make our choices, we pick the words that are most appropriate for that situation. Every word has a job to do, and we want to choose the words that get the job done in the best possible way. Today, we will focus on how choosing the best possible word applies to the word “said.”

TEACH: On the board, you will see several sample lines of dialogue. Watch me carefully as I read each line aloud and decide how best to improve my word choice.

Sentence #1: “Where are you going?” said Emily.

With this sentence, since Emily is asking a question, I will change “said” to “asked” because I think it fits the situation better. Keep in mind, I also could have chosen other words such as “inquired” or “questioned.”

Sentence #2: “There’s no way I’m going outside in this weather!” said Emily.

With this sentence, there is strong emotion involved, so I need a stronger word than “said.” I’m going to change “said” to “insisted” because I feel it best captures the emotion of the sentence.

Sentence #3: “I think I want to go outside for a walk,” said Emily.
With this sentence, I think I'm going to keep the word “said.” “Said” is a fine word to use, but it often gets a bad rap. It may not be the most glamorous word in the English language, but it gets the job done. In fact, most professional writers use said over half the time when they use dialogue. So, the lesson here is that sometimes we don't need to change anything at all. With this sentence, the word “said” matches the situation and the emotion of the sentence just fine.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Let's practice using our word choice judgment together now. When I say “Go,” read the fourth sentence on the board with your partners and decide what you will do with the word “said.”

Sentence #4: “What in the world do you think you're doing?” said Emily.

(The students do this. Then, we share some of the possibilities they came up with, such as “demanded,” “asked,” and “shouted.”)

Note: One example may offer enough practice for your students during active engagement. If not, feel free to provide one or two further examples and ask the students to consider synonyms for these sentences.

LINK: When you return to your spots, read over what you have written so far. Every time you come upon the word “said,” take some time to consider whether this word does the job you want it to do in the best possible way. If it does, then leave it alone. If it doesn't, be willing to spend some time thinking of synonyms or locating synonyms in the thesaurus. Remember, of course, that the best thesaurus is in your head. Choosing the best possible words that capture the emotion of the situation will have an enormous impact on the overall quality of your writing.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students work, circulate to find examples of excellent word choice. Ask certain students to share these examples at the mid-point.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: Students will share their work from today's session. As the class listens to each reader, we will be on the lookout for examples of excellent word choice.

Outcome/Assessment: Because the spirit of this mini-lesson is an important part of our overall writing culture, assessment in this area will be ongoing, both formally (through use of our Word Choice rubric) and informally (through conferring meetings, peer revising, and future mini-lessons and discussions).
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 19:

Using the Three-Dimensional Bone Structure to Create Well-Rounded Characters

Unit of Study: Any unit where students create fictional characters
6 Traits Emphasis: Ideas

Teaching Point: We can use a tool called the Three-Dimensional Bone Structure to create characters that readers will find interesting and care about.

Writing Process Stage: Prior to drafting
CA Writing Standard: Writing Applications 2.2 (Write descriptions of people).
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: A Three-dimensional Bone Structure sheet for each student (included in 2005-06 Writing Workshop Notebook of Helpful Stuff)

CONNECTION: One of the best parts about writing fiction is that we get to create our own characters. We get to make up people who don’t really exist and bring them to life as if they do. Many times when young writers make up characters, they give those characters a name, an age, and that’s pretty much it. That’s really a shame because there’s SO much more to people than just their names and ages. Today, I want to show how we can develop characters more fully so our readers will care about them and find them interesting to read about.

TEACH: To create well-rounded characters, I want to show you a tool called the Three-dimensional Bone Structure. It’s a piece of paper divided into three sections. Each section focuses on a different part of being human. When we use all three sections to describe our characters, readers will be more likely to care about them. The section at the bottom deals with what people look like. The section at the top left focuses on what people are like on the inside. The section at the top right pertains to a character’s family background. In a few minutes, I am going to give you a sheet for each of your main characters. I want you to try to fill in a few items in each section. You absolutely don’t need to address every item. I’m now going to fill out my sheet for a character I created. (I then proceed to go through the three sections, defining terms as necessary and filling in as much as I can.) When I write my draft, I will use the information from this sheet. My readers will take an interest in my character because I will have done a solid job of bringing her to life.
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Here is a copy of the bone structure for each of you. Before I give it to you, I want you to close your eyes for a minute and think about who the main character of your story will be. (The students do this. Then, I hand out the sheets.) Let’s do the bottom section together. (We then go item-by-item so the students can determine the physical appearance of their characters. We then stop.)

LINK: You all now have the beginning of a great 3D Bone Structure. When you return to your writing spots, I want you to work on the two sections at the top. You may go in any order you wish, skipping around however you wish. You may move on to drafting when you think you have created a well-rounded character that readers will take an interest in and care about. If you’d like to fill out a bone structure sheet for one or two other characters in your story, you may do that as well.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students work, circulate to find excellent examples of bone structures. Ask a few students to share these at the mid-point break.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: We will continue to share the way we did at the mid-point because I want more students to have the chance to share their ideas.

Outcome/Assessment: Completed student stories should contain character descriptions from all three parts of the bone structure.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 20:
Describing Settings Using the Five Senses

Unit of Study: Small Moment Stories, “Edge-of-your-seat” fiction, or any other unit where students describe settings

6 Traits Emphasis: Word Choice

Teaching Point: The “You see birds. You hear cars,” construction is very common when young students attempt to use the 5 senses to describe settings. This construction may address the 5 senses, but it results in poor word choice and repetitive sentence structure. In this mini-lesson, I show an alternate way to use the 5 senses that results in far better word choice.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting

CA Writing Standard: Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives).

Teaching Method: Demonstration

Materials needed: none

CONNECTION: We have been working on how to use the 5 senses to write great setting descriptions. Remember, writers try to appeal to these senses so that readers can picture the story setting in their minds and feel like they are actually there as the story takes place. Sometimes, though, in our effort to address the various senses, we end up with poor word choice and with sentences that all look the same. Today, I will show you a strategy that enables us to use the 5 senses to describe our settings—and to do so in a way that significantly improves our word choice.

TEACH: Take a look at the paragraph below. It describes the park where I like to go. You’ll notice that it addresses all 5 senses. You may also notice a slight problem.

“I love to play at the park. You see grass. You hear the ice cream truck. You feel sand in your shoes. You smell barbecues cooking chicken. You can practically taste the chicken.”

Notice that every descriptive sentence starts with the word “you” followed by the sense to which we want to appeal. Starting every sentence this way leads to poor word choice. Instead, we want to use different words that are interesting and active. Watch what I do next.

Let’s start with the first sentence: “You see grass.” I am going to cross out the first two words and then start my new sentence with the word “grass.”

The sentence: “You see grass.” becomes “The grass ______________________.”

Now that we have started with “The grass,” we need an active verb to follow it and complete the sentence. So, I ask myself, “What does the grass do?” Then, I think: The blades of grass sway
back and forth in the wind. That's a much better sentence than the one I had before. Let's move on to the next sentence.

The sentence: “You hear the ice cream truck.” becomes
“The ice cream truck ______________________.”

Again, starting with the thing I'm describing (e.g., the ice cream truck) forces me to choose an active verb to continue the sentence. So, I think to myself, "What is the ice cream truck doing?" Then, I think: The ice cream truck glides slowly down the street trying to get people's attention. Whenever we begin a sentence with the object I'm describing, the active verbs just seem to flow, and we unleash a lot of great vocabulary. Let me show you another example.

The sentence: "You feel sand in your shoes" becomes
“Sand ______________________ in your shoes.”

Again, I think about what the sand is doing in my shoes, and I come up with the following sentence: “The sand crawls into my shoes and gets under my socks.”

Let's review what we've just done. In a few short minutes “You see grass. You hear the ice cream truck. You feel sand in your shoes” has become: "The blades of grass sway back and forth in the wind. The ice cream truck glides slowly down the street trying to get people's attention. The sand crawls into my shoes and gets under my socks.”

This is a big improvement because we now have active verbs in each sentence. We no longer start our sentences with the word "you." Instead, we start with the object we are describing, and we go from there.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Let's practice this skill with the next sentence: "You smell barbecues cooking chicken." When I say “Go," turn to your partners and start with the word "Barbecue." Talk with your partner about how to complete the sentence using an active verb. Go ahead. (The kids do this, and we share as a class. We then practice one last time using the final sentence in the paragraph.)

LINK: Starting today, when you use the five senses to describe your setting, try to use the strategy I just showed you. Begin with the object you are describing and follow it up with an active verb. You will be amazed at how quickly and how significantly your word choice improves.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: As the students work, circulate around the room and look for excellent examples of setting descriptions that contain active verbs. At the mid-point break ask certain students to share these examples.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The students will share their work from today's session, and we will give special emphasis to setting descriptions that contain active verbs.

Outcome/Assessment: The Word Choice rubric that we use to assess student work contains a section about using strong, active words.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 21:
Using Similes

Unit of Study:   Poetry
6 Traits Emphasis:   Word Choice

Teaching Point:   Writers can improve their descriptive writing & word choice with similes.

Writing Process Stage:   Drafting or revising
CA Writing Standard:   Writing Applications 2.2 (Write descriptions).
Teaching Method:   Demonstration
Materials needed:   none

CONNECTION: Ava is a fast runner. If I were to write about her speed in my poem, I could just say, “Ava is a fast runner.” This sentence, though, is rather ordinary. I can spice it up by using a simile. A simile lets writers describe something by comparing it to something that’s familiar to us. Similes make our writing more interesting. Today, I will show you the 2 ways to create a simile.

TEACH: A simile contains the words “like” or “as.” We use these words to build a comparison. Let’s go back to the example about Ava. I’m going to create a simile by comparing her to something else that moves quickly, such as a cheetah or the weeks of summer vacation. I can either write that:

Ava is fast like a cheetah. or Ava is as fast as a cheetah.

It doesn’t matter which choice you pick; the message is the same. Let’s do another one. “The sky is blue.” Again, my sentence isn’t wrong. It’s just ordinary. We can make it better through using a simile. I need to think of something else that’s blue so I can compare it to the sky. I try this:

The sky is blue like a Dodger helmet. or The sky is as blue as a Dodger helmet.

Once again, all I did was a) make a comparison and b) use the words “like” or “as.”

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Take a look at this sentence: “That boy is tall.” When I say “Go,” turn to your partner and make up a simile to improve this sentence. Be sure that you compare the boy to something else that’s tall. Also, I want you to say your simile two times, the first time using “like” and the second time using “as.” Go ahead. (The students do this, and then we share as a class. If you’d like to do another example, you can use the sentence, “That toy is small.”)

LINK: When you return to your writing today, consider using a simile when describing something or someone. This extra bit of creativity will make your writing more interesting.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: I will caution the students not to go overboard with similes. I will tell them that similes should be used every once in a while, NOT EVERY SENTENCE.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The students will share their work from today’s session. We will pay special attention to any similes, reinforcing the format as necessary.

Outcome/Assessment: Students will include similes as opportunities present themselves. Some students may need to use similes more frequently while others may need to be reined in.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 22: Eliminating Filler

Unit of Study: Any
6 Traits Emphasis: Ideas

Teaching Point: Filler serves no valid purpose in writing and must be eliminated.

Writing Process Stage: Drafting or revising
CA Writing Standard: Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives) and Evaluation and Revision 1.4 (Revise drafts to improve coherence).

Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: none

CONNECTION: Usually, when we talk about how to create quality writing, we focus on things, such as character description, leads, and dialogue, which SHOULD appear in your writing. Today, I want to talk about something that should NEVER appear in your writing, something called “filler.” Filler is simply writing that fills up space. It serves no purpose, and it distracts readers from the focus of your writing. I will show you how to find filler and get rid of it.

TEACH: Take a look at the following paragraph. It’s about my recent trip to the bakery. The cashier accidentally gave me back too much change, and I want the focus of my paragraph to be on the honesty I showed when I returned the extra change.

I love blueberry muffins. Oh yes, I do. I love them so, so much. Oh yes, I do. I can talk for hours about how much I love blueberry muffins. I have loved them since I was a kid. So, I went to the bakery last week to buy one. It cost $2.50. I paid with a $5 bill, so I should have received $2.50 in change. The cashier accidentally gave me $3.50. Did I mention how much I love blueberry muffins? Oh yes, I do. Anyway, let’s get back to the story. I noticed the mistake and gave her back the extra dollar. She thanked me, and I felt good about what I did.

I’m going to read through these sentences one at a time to see which ones stick to my focus and which ones simply take up space. If I find filler sentences, I’m going to cross them out because they distract from my focus.

(I then read through the first half of the paragraph aloud and cross out the sentences below that have a line through them. Of course, there’s judgment involved in determining...
which sentences are filler. Feel free to cross out different sentences than I did. As I cross out each sentence, I explain the reasons for my decisions.)

I love blueberry muffins. Oh yes, I do. I love them so, so much. Oh yes, I do. I can talk for hours about how much I love blueberry muffins. I have loved them since I was a kid. So, I went to the bakery last week to buy one. It cost $2.50. I paid with a $5 bill, so I should have received $2.50 in change.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Now I’d like you to have a chance to practice looking for filler. When I say, "Go," read the rest of the sentences with your partner. As you read, decide which sentences are filler and get rid of them! Go. (The students do this. Then we go through the rest of the paragraph and discuss their recommendations. Below, see the sentences they will likely suggest for elimination.)

The cashier accidentally gave me $3.50. Did I mention how much I love blueberry muffins? Oh yes, I do. Anyway, let's get back to the story. I noticed the mistake and gave her back the extra dollar. She thanked me, and I felt good about what I did.

Now that we have eliminated the filler sentences are paragraph looks like this:

I love blueberry muffins. I have loved them since I was a kid. So, I went to the bakery last week to buy one. It cost $2.50. I paid with a $5 bill, so I should have received $2.50 in change. The cashier accidentally gave me $3.50. I noticed the mistake and gave her back the extra dollar. She thanked me, and I felt good about what I did.

Because we eliminated the filler, our paragraph is clear and focused. We should always strive to write clearly.

LINK: Starting today, pay careful attention to whether you include filler sentences in your writing. If you're not sure if a sentence is filler, ask yourself if the sentence is necessary. If your paragraph is just as good, or better, without that sentence, it's probably filler.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: Share with students one of the main reasons why many young writers include filler in their writing--to make their stories longer. Use this opportunity to remind students that longer writing is not better than shorter writing. It's the quality of the writing that counts, not the length. (This issue arises occasionally, and this lesson provides a natural opportunity to address it.)

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The students will share their work from today's session. We will, of course, be on the lookout for any filler.

Outcome/Assessment: Students will demonstrate proficiency by producing writing that establishes and maintains a clear focus while avoiding filler. The Ideas rubric used to score student work includes a section about whether the writing has a clear focus.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 23:
Knowing When to Start a New Paragraph

**Unit of Study:** Any Fiction unit  
**6 Traits Emphasis:** Organization

**Teaching Point:** There are certain times when writers should end one paragraph and begin another. Writers need to be aware of these times.

**Writing Process Stage:** Drafting  
**CA Writing Standard:** Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives).  
**Teaching Method:** Demonstration  
**Materials needed:** A Chart of “Reasons to Start a New Paragraph” (In this mini-lesson I detail the items that should be on this chart.)

**CONNECTION:** Writing a single paragraph with a topic sentence, supporting details, and closing sentence is one of the most important skills we have learned this year. You will remember that we used this skill when we created our nonfiction “All About” books and when we wrote our letters. Now that we are working on fiction stories, we don’t seem to rely as much on this structured approach to paragraph writing because our stories are more free-flowing. Even though our fiction paragraphs may not follow this structure all the time, we still need to pay attention to paragraphing. Specifically, when we draft, we need to know when to end one paragraph and begin another. Otherwise, our stories will just be one long paragraph. Today, I will show you a list of reasons why we would start a new paragraph.

**TEACH:** Take a look at the chart next to me. (I read the chart to the class and explain bullet points along the way.)

**Reasons to Start a New Paragraph**
- Introducing a new character
- Describing a new setting  
- During dialogue, when a different person begins speaking  
- When one event ends and another begins  
- Any other change of topic, focus or time period

Now that I’ve shown you this chart, let’s take a look at the following piece of writing. You’ll notice that it’s simply one long paragraph. I get worried whenever I see a paragraph this long because it’s usually the case that there are at least two or three different paragraphs in there that need to be separated. Follow with your eyes as I read the paragraph aloud, and notice where I end one paragraph and begin another.
Shaun is a great chef. He’s only nine, but he’s already memorized over twenty recipes. The Food Network is his favorite. One day he wants to open his own restaurant. Olivia is different. She doesn’t like to cook. She likes to eat. One day she wants to go to Shaun’s restaurant and have a great dinner. Olivia looks forward to this day. “I’ll give you the best table in the restaurant,” Shaun promises his friend. “That will be great!” replies Olivia. Later that day, they went to the cafeteria for lunch. Shaun went over to the salad bar and began describing to Olivia the type of salad bar he’ll have at his restaurant.

I end my first paragraph before the word “Olivia” because that’s the end of the description of Shaun. (I place the paragraph symbol at this point as a signal that a new paragraph needs to start here.) I end the second paragraph on line five after the word “day” because it’s the end of my description of Olivia. (I put another paragraph symbol.) I end the third paragraph after the word “friend” on line six because there’s about to be a change of speaker. (As I make these announcements, I’m always referring back to the chart so the kids know why I’m doing what I’m doing.)

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Now that you have seen me use our chart to separate this large paragraph into smaller ones, I want you to have some practice doing it. When I say “Go,” turn to your partner and read the rest of the sentences. Decide if there are any other places where you need to end one paragraph and begin another one. Go ahead. (The students do this, and then we share their results. Likely, they will end a paragraph in line six after the word “Olivia” because she has finished speaking, and there’s a change of both place and time.)

LINK: As you continue your drafts today, refer to this chart when necessary so that you can develop that awareness of when to end one paragraph and start a new one. Remember, you don’t want your story to be one long paragraph. That’s a danger signal.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: I will take an informal class survey in order to reinforce the items on the chart. First, I will ask, “Has anyone started a new paragraph today because you have started a new character description?” After a show of hands, I will ask, “Has anyone started a new paragraph today because you are describing a new setting?” I will continue through the list this way.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The students will share their work from today’s session. As the students read, I will listen for times when I think a new paragraph should have been started. After each student reads, I will ask if they did, indeed, start new paragraphs at those spots.

Outcome/Assessment: Students who internalize this mini-lesson will develop, over time, a strong awareness of when to end one paragraph and begin another.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 24:
Partner Editing

Unit of Study: Any
6 Traits Emphasis: Conventions

Teaching Point: Editing with a partner can help us find and correct errors that we might not be able to find and correct on our own.

Writing Process Stage: Editing
CA Writing Standard: Written and Oral Language Conventions 1.0.
Teaching Method: Demonstration
Materials needed: One handout for each partnership. The handout can be any piece of writing containing errors that students can find easily.

CONNECTION: Yesterday we began editing our stories. Editing, you will remember, focuses on the correctness of our work. Specifically, when we edit, we are trying to find any mistakes we may have made with spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar. Our goal is to find 100% of our errors, but that’s very difficult to do when we edit alone. So, today we will edit with partners. Editing with partners is wonderful because it gives each of us another pair of eyes and ears, and as a result, we are far more likely to locate all our errors. I’m now going to demonstrate the way I’d like you to edit today with your partner.

TEACH: (Using popsicle sticks, I select a volunteer, Ethan, to be my editing partner.) First, notice how Ethan and I are sitting shoulder-to-shoulder with my story right in between us. With the story positioned this way, both of us can read it easily. Next, I will read my story aloud, and Ethan will follow with his eyes and ears. I will point to the words as I read aloud to make it easier for Ethan to follow along. My job is to read slowly and clearly. Ethan’s job is to say the word “stop” every time he thinks he sees a mistake. Every time he says “stop,” I stop so that we can take a look at it. If I agree that there’s a mistake, we correct it on the spot. (Note: I use the word “correct” rather than “fix” because “fix” implies that something is broken. This is a minor point, but the words we use with students send powerful messages.) If I disagree, we discuss it to try to arrive at a resolution. If we still disagree, we will ask the teacher for help. We continue until we have reached the end of my story. Then, we follow the exact same procedure as he reads his story to me.

ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: We’re now going to practice this procedure together. Take a minute to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with your partner. I’m now going to give you a piece of
paper to practice with. Be sure that the paper is exactly halfway between the two of you. (The students do this.) When I say “Go,” partner one will read aloud, pointing at the words as (s)he goes. Partner two will say “stop” every time (s)he notices a mistake. Go ahead. (The partners then switch roles and practice for a few moments.)

LINK: Today, when you edit with your partner, be sure to follow the procedure I just demonstrated. Remember the job that each person needs to do. When you’re the one giving assistance, be sure to give the reader the same attention and respect that you want them to give you. You both should get so involved with each person’s story that you feel like co-owners of each story.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: Inevitably, there will be questions or issues that arise the first time the class does peer editing. We will use the mid-point break to problem solve.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: The students will share excerpts from their stories.

Outcome/Assessment: Following peer editing, the quality of student editing should improve significantly. The Conventions rubric used to score student work addresses the areas of spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.
Gr. 3 Mini-Lesson 25:  
Writing Effective Leads

**Unit of Study:**  Small Moment Stories  
**6 Traits Emphasis:**  Ideas, Organization

**Teaching Point:**  An effective lead draws readers into your story, piques their interest, and makes them want to keep reading.

**Writing Process Stage:**  Revising or drafting  
**CA Writing Standard:**  Writing Applications 2.1 (Write narratives).  
**Teaching Method:**  Demonstration  
**Materials needed:**  none

**CONNECTION:** As we revise our Small Moment stories today, we are going to pay special attention to the very beginning of our stories. The first line of our story is called “the lead,” and it’s important to have a lead that grabs our readers’ attention. If we don’t have an interesting lead that hooks our readers right away, they may decide to put our story down and read another one. (Yes, I agree, that would be rude, but sometimes it happens.) So, today I’m going to show you a few strategies you can use to create a lead that pulls readers into your story so they want to keep reading.

**TEACH:** The chart next to me lists some choices we have when we are thinking about the kind of lead we want. I will read each item on this list and give an example for each. (Below you will find this list. The example in brackets is the one I will read to the kids.)

**Ways to Create an Effective Lead**

- Use dialogue
  
  ["This is the best field trip I’ve ever been on," Tyler shared.]

- Begin with a question
  
  [What else was I supposed to do in that hot weather?]

- Describe the setting
  
  [The sun was shining brightly in the sky on this warm January morning.]

- Lead with an interesting or surprising character description
  
  [Spud Webb was only 5’3” but could still slam dunk a basketball.]

- Put your readers right into your story
  
  [After I heard that, I picked up my things and left.]

- Start with a strong emotion or exclamation
  
  [Ouch!]
ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: Now, I’d like you to begin thinking about how these possibilities might benefit your story. We’re going to go through this list one item at a time. First, take a minute and think about how you could write a lead that includes dialogue. (The students do this, and then we share a few ideas.) Second, think about how you could write a lead that is a question. (Again, the students do this, and then we share. I then take them through the rest of the strategies on this list, and they share their ideas.)

LINK: When you return to your writing spots, take some time to find the lead that works best for your story. Don’t settle for the first one that comes to mind. Be willing to come up with many choices, think about these choices, and make the most thoughtful decision possible.

MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING POINT: I will grab some popular books (about 5 or 6) from our class library and share some leads with the students.

AFTER-THE-WORKSHOP SHARE: As the students work, circulate to find excellent examples of leads. Ask many students to share their leads at this time.

Outcome/Assessment: Published Small Moment stories should include an effective lead. One additional step we can take to raise student awareness of leads is to create a “Lead Board.” For this display I invite the students to find effective leads in the books they are reading and write them down on an index card so we can put them up. It helps to organize the board into categories, such as the ones I used to create the above list.