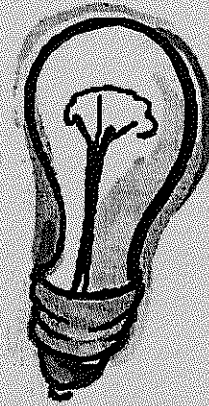


Ideas & Content

- ✍ clear
- ✍ controlling idea
- ✍ focused/ narrowed
- ✍ sufficient information
- ✍ insightful
- ✍ original
- ✍ interesting details
- ✍ complete



The ideas are the heart of the message, the content of the piece, the main theme, together with all the details that enrich and develop that theme. The ideas are strong when the message is clear, not garbled. The writer chooses details that are interesting, important, and informative - often the kinds of details the reader would not normally anticipate or predict. Successful writers do not tell readers things they already know: e.g., "It was a sunny day, and the sky was blue, the clouds were fluffy white...." They notice what others overlook, seek out the extraordinary, the unusual, the bits and pieces of life that others might not see.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

Summer 2004



Ideas & Content (Development)

- ☺ The topic is narrow and manageable
Ralph Fletcher: "The LARGER the topic, the smaller you write."
- ☺ A clear, central theme drives the writing
- ☺ Reader's questions are anticipated & answered
- ☺ Lots of showing (specifics) rather than telling (generalities)
- ☺ Quality of details matters more than quantity - accuracy counts!

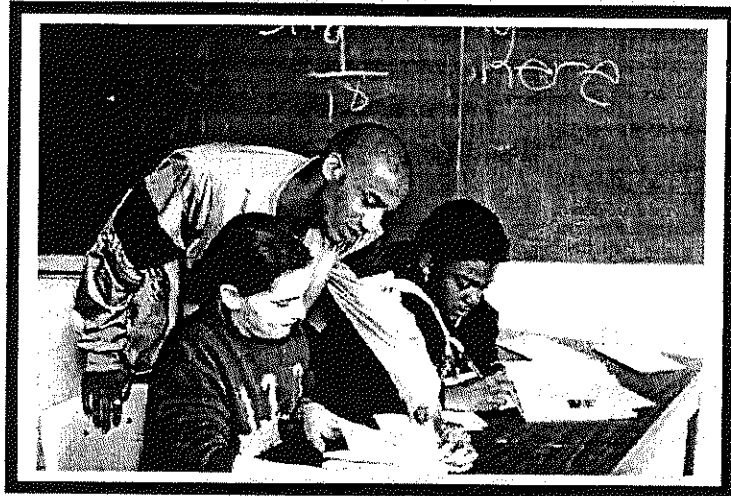
Key Question:

Did the writer stay focused and share original and fresh information or perspective about the topic?

Ideas and Content

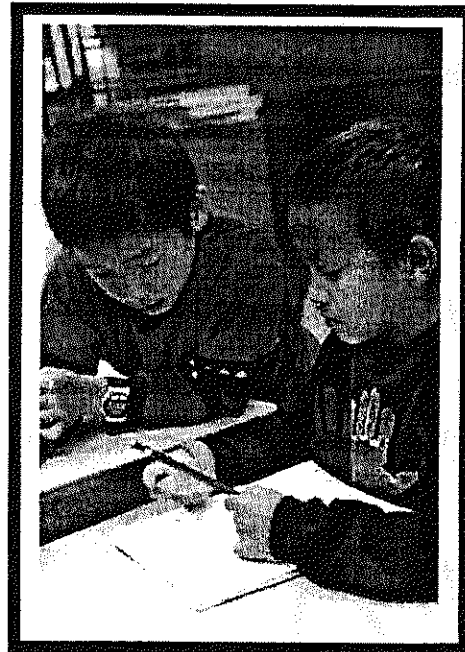
Keep in mind that you want to.....

- ✍ Make your ideas crystal clear.
- ✍ Surprise your reader with what you know!
- ✍ Keep it small.



Ideas and Content refer to the paper's purpose.

- ✍ Writer knows a lot about the subject matter and is sharing his/her knowledge with the reader.
- ✍ Writer *shows* what is happening; he/she just doesn't *tell* about it.
- ✍ The reader is able to answer the question "What is the purpose of this paper?"



6+1 Traits of Writing

Suggested steps on how to introduce and teach the individual traits.

By Jim Blasingame

1. Start class with a warm up that introduces the concept.

Think of this as an anticipatory set, an attention grabber that engages the students without even telling them yet the trait or trait focus.

2. Illustrate it through interesting literature or other age-appropriate written product.

3. Do hands-on activities to help students understand what it is and how to improve it in their own writing.

This is guided practice: an exercise that specifically breaks the trait down into its components and shows them how to manipulate these components.

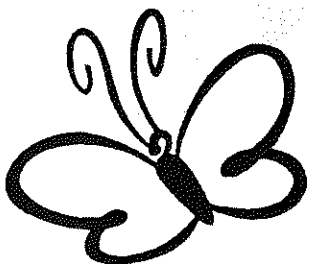
4. Guide them through the analysis of anonymous sample papers.

5. Follow with a writing assignment that facilitates that trait.

6. Use the 6-trait rubric to provide useful feedback.

7. Guide students through revising their papers based on that feedback.

8. Use a pre-identified rubric to assign a grade to the paper.



IDEAS

Any activity that allows students to practice ...

prewriting

generating ideas from thought/experience

borrowing ideas from other writers

keeping writer's notebooks

knowing the purpose for writing

moving from broad topic to focused theme

learning to observe carefully

developing thinking skills (comparison, analysis, inference)

1. J Peterman Owner's Manual

This delightfully creative catalogue of women's and men's clothing and accessories is the perfect idea resource. Begin by sharing several examples of the clothing items with the story text from the catalogue. Then ask students to select one item of their own clothing (outer wear is best!) and create a story about it - the catalogue can be used as a model. The purpose is to make the item so attractive, everyone will want to buy it. One teacher said that she gathered items from the lost and found and had kids work in groups to write the text and draw the pictures. There are lots of options! Call 800/231-7341 for your own copy of the J. Peterman Owner's Manual.

2. The Rock

Students bring a favorite rock to class (it's OK to find one enroute!) and select a partner. One person from each pair gets one minute to talk about his/her rock—then it's the other person's turn to talk for one minute. After talking, students write for two minutes, then share what they have written in pairs, small groups or with the large group (as appropriate). Here's a great resource to stimulate thinking: *Everybody Needs a Rock* by Byrd Baylor.

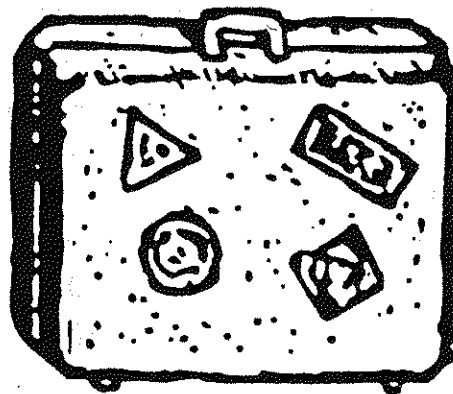


3. Popcorn Reminiscence

Pop some corn during class. While the corn is popping and the sounds and aroma fill the room, ask students to jot down bits of memories they associate with popping corn. At the end, they can write a story relating to popping corn. Or, perhaps they can write "10 Ways to Improve the Taste and Texture of Pop Corn." Or how about "Why Does Pop Corn Cost So Much at the Movies?" - or - "The Real Difference Between Air Popped and Oil Popped Corn!" Lots of topics can emerge here. Just allow the students to get into it before they begin to write. The smell and taste should do the trick! Great resource: *The Popcorn Book* by Tomie de Paola (interesting facts, data, history--even recipes)

4. Garbology

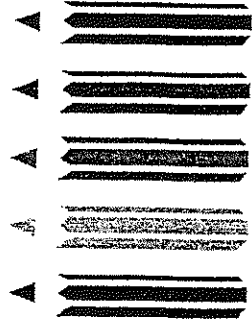
Create a collection of "clean" garbage - the sort of leftovers you might expect to find in a vacated but uncleaned hotel room. Or dig around in your purse or wallet for some stuff—a cryptic note, a used bottle, a piece of a list, pins, pen with a name on it, etc. Put the collection together and try to visualize the person behind the clutter.



Create stories, bits and pieces of scenarios about the person and the events. Invite small groups of students to make inferences about who this person might be. Write stories about the person, create biographies or character sketches—even pictures. Good resources: *Travel with Charley* by John Steinbeck (a chapter in his novel does exactly this - but appropriate for older students only) or *Motel of the Mysteries* by David Macaulay (great for all ages).

Sx Trait Writing Warm-Ups

Trait #1: Ideas



PREPARATION

EXERCISE

FOLLOW-UP

1. Write on the board: "Why I Don't Have My Homework"	List a few possible reasons students could come up with for not having homework in on time. Have students add to the list. Encourage "imaginative" reasons.	Talk about the way imaginative ideas make a topic more "fun".
2. Write on the board: "Why I'm Late for School"	List a few possible excuses. Have students add to the list - the more imaginative, the better.	Talk about using the imagination to add interest to a simple topic.
3. Write on the board: "My Favorites"	Share with students some of your favorites: places, activities, foods, people, songs, books, etc. Have them create their own lists.	Save the lists in their writing folders.
4. Write on the board: "That Makes Me Mad!"	Tell students some of the things that make you mad and then have them create their own lists. Share ideas.	Save the lists in their writing folders.
5. Read aloud Joan Walsh Anglund's "A Friend is Someone Who Likes You"	Have students list all the different kinds of friends they have or can think of (older, younger, pets, toys, etc.) Talk about the qualities that make a friend.	Save the lists in their writing folders.
6. Read aloud Joan Walsh Anglund's "Love Is"	Talk about the many forms love can have. Have students list all the feelings and acts of kindness they can think of that are expressions of love.	Save the lists in their writing folders.
7. Write a nonsense word on the board - i.e. "gerplotz"	Ask students to write a brief advertisement that would convince someone to buy a gerplotz. Read ads aloud to one another.	Talk about what makes ads convincing.
8. Tell students: "You have a broken blatnik. What are you going to do about it?"	List on the board all the things students suggest doing for a broken blatnik. Draw attention to range of suggestions. Ask them what part their imaginations played in their suggestions.	Talk about the use of imagination to fill in blanks.

9.	Read Shel Silverstien's poem "I Cannot Go To School Today" aloud.	Have the children list all the imaginary ailments they would use to convince their mothers that they couldn't go to school.	Talk about how the imagination adds fun to writing.
10.	Write on the board: "What I'd like to change about school"	Tell students some of the things you'd like to change and then have them create their own lists. Share ideas.	Save the lists in their writing folders.
11.	Write on the board: 1. What 2 nd Graders Know 2. What 6 th Graders Know 3. What 9 th Graders Know	Ask students which topic they are the most capable of writing about. Ask why. Ask why writing about one of the others would probably be too difficult for them.	Talk about the importance of knowing about what you write about.
12.	Write on the board: "Five Good Uses for a Pocket"	Have children each make a list of the five best uses they can think of (limit it to five). Share ideas. Ask students to think about which ideas appealed to them most - and why.	Contrast ideas with imagination and those with little thought.
13.	Write on the board: 1. The Scariest Halloween 2. Radishes 3. How to Sharpen a Pencil	Ask students which story they'd want to read. Ask why. Have them suggest titles of stories they wouldn't want to read. Then list titles of stories they would want to read.	Talk about the importance of having an interesting topic to write about.

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Story Frame Example

The story takes place _____

The characters are _____

A problem occurs when _____

_____ solves the problem by _____

The story ends _____

Have the students read the story or read it aloud to them. As the story is read, have them compare it to their Probable Passage. Instruct students to modify their predicted story by writing a new summary paragraph including all the story elements.

Benefits of the Strategy

- Teaches pre-reading and pre-writing skills
- Incorporates important vocabulary in a meaningful way before reading
- Reinforces the story frame concept of before, during, and after reading
- Reviews the story elements with meaningful symbols
- Develops independent readers and writers

Story Frame Example

The story takes place in the tree houses in the backyard. Chrissy is a character who has a tree house and put a Keep Out sign on the door. A problem occurs when hurt feelings started. The story ends when they are friends again and then they make a bridge.

The Story

The Tree House

The story takes place in the backyards of Chrissy and Leah's house. Chrissy is a character who gets in a fight with Leah because Chrissy told Leah she couldn't come in her tree house. Chrissy said, "My house is better than your house" and then they said, "I hate you!" to each other. A problem occurs when hurt feelings started. "I don't like what you said, Chrissy." "I don't like you either, good-bye!" The story ends when they are friends again and then they make a bridge to each other's houses.

Show Don't Tell

- Action--something a character does; behavior, body movement; facial movement

Example:

- Dialogue--anything spoken out loud, including monologue

Example:

- Description of setting--physical details about the environment; space/time; mood; sensory details

Example:

- Physical description of a character--distinguishing features; appearance

Example:

- Internal thinking--"quoting" what is thought by major characters

Example:

- Internal physical sensations--physiological reactions not visible to the eye

Example:

"Why Don't You Wear Shoes"
from *Journey to Washington*
Senator Daniel K. Inouye

The year was 1939 and already times had turned tense in the Far East. The Japanese government was in the iron grip of fanatic warlords and the Imperial Army was waging aggressive war in China and menacing all of Southeast Asia. Day after day, the priest who taught us ethics and Japanese history hammered away at the divine prerogatives of the Emperor, and at the grand destiny that called on the Japanese people to extend their sway over the yellow race, and on the madness that was inducing the American government to oppose them. He would tilt his menacing crew-cut skull at us and solemnly proclaim, "You must remember that only a trick of fate has brought you so far from your homeland, but there must be no question of your loyalty. When Japan calls, you must know that it is Japanese blood that flows in your veins."

I had heard his jingoistic⁴ little speeches so many times that I suppose they no longer really registered on me. He was an old man, to be respected for his station, but when he began spouting nonsense I could easily tune him out. But one day he shifted his scorn to the Bible and I reacted by instinct—and violently. He had been discussing the inadequacy of Christianity compared to Shintoism, the state religion of Japan, and already my hackles were up. Then he favored us with an elaborate grin and, mockery dripping from his every word, he said, "I give you the Bible itself as the best evidence of this Christian foolishness. Their God made the world in seven days, it says. Ha! Then he made a man and from a rib of that man—a rib, mark you!—he made a woman. Ha! Anyone with only part of a brain can see that this is the wildest nonsense!"

I never realized that I was on my feet and shouting until I saw the grin on his face twist, first into astonishment, and then into fury. Then my words echoed in my head:

"That's not right! That's not fair! I am a Christian, a lot of us here are, and you mustn't talk that way! I respect your faith. You must respect mine."

"How dare you!" he roared.

"I do. I do dare! You have no right to make fun of my beliefs."

"You are a Japanese! You will believe what I. . . ."

"I am an American!"

He flinched, exactly as though I had struck him. With a single compulsive jerk, he threw the book he had been holding through the open window, and we watched the pages flutter in the wind for a moment. Then he started toward me, and the class watched in silent terror, and his face was black as a thunderhead and his mouth worked violently as he cried, "You are a Japanese!" Now his fingers clutched at my open collar and he was shaking me back and forth. "Say it!" he screamed into my face. "You are a Japanese!"

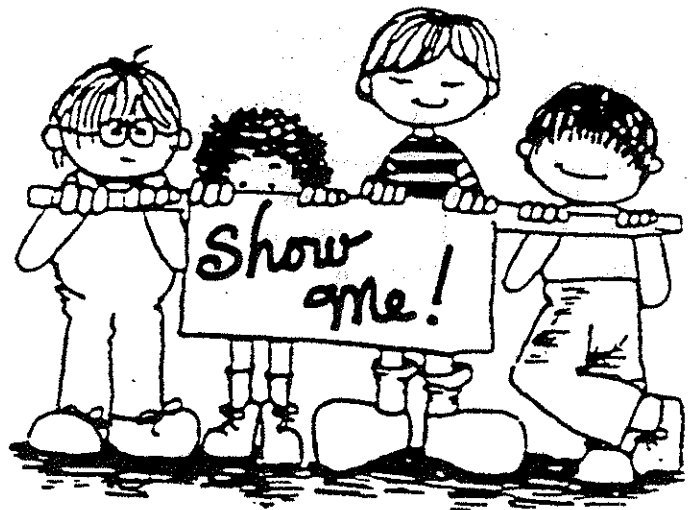
And barely able to bring my voice up out of my tortured throat, I muttered, "I—am—an—American."

With that, he lifted me from my feet and half-dragged, half-carried me to the door, and he threw me with full force into the schoolyard. "You are a faithless dog!" he screamed, and slammed the door closed.

Telling Examples

Can you turn these into Showing Examples?

1. The room was a mess.
2. She was a kind person.
3. He had a temper.
4. The situation was frightening.
5. He felt depressed.
6. The storm was violent.
7. The dog looked dangerous.
8. She was a good problem solver.



Alternative

Have students, in groups, make up their own "telling" examples, then exchange with another group and turn them into "showing" examples. Share the results and talk about the differences between showing and telling—and the impact on both IDEAS and VOICE.

WRITING SMALL !

"The bigger the issue, the smaller you write, "he (teacher/writer Richard Price) said. "Remember that. You don't write about the horrors of war. No. You write about a kid's burnt socks lying on the road."

Ralph Fletcher
"The Art of Specificity"
What a Writer Needs, 1993, pg. 49

Instead of writing about...	You could write about...
1. Achieving world peace	1. _____
2. The challenges of teaching	2. _____
3. The beauty of fall weather	3. _____
4. How difficult in-laws can be	4. _____
5. How it feels to be grown up	5. _____
6. Getting rid of stress	6. _____
7. The importance of courage	7. _____
8. What it means to be a friend	8. _____

OR...???

SAMPLE PAPERS FOR PRACTICE SCORING

PAPER 12. "SOME CARTOONS ARE VIOLENT!"

Grade 3, Persuasive

Some cartoons are violent. And sometimes ther not! Some ar just funny like Tinny Tunes but some aren't. Take loony Tunes wich is violent but ther not all violent. They could be both. I wach cartoons a lot and some are violent. Thers boms that get thrown down in som cartoons. and blows them up. But me I like cartoons some of the time. never will I stop waching but well more are violent than the loony toons. but if I were to mak a cartoon myself I would have well mabe just I maine violent thing and then just keep the rest runny OK?

Getting inside Student Writing

"ZEENA & THE MARSHMELLOWS"

Grade 5, Persuasive/Narrative

Zeena, I know just how you feel. I love chocolate covered marshmallows too! But let me tell you what happened to me.

My mom came home from the store one day and let me have a chocolate covered marshmallow. It was love at first bit. So lite, fluffy, chewy and slipped down my throat like a small piece of heaven. Just thinking about it makes me want to have another one until I recall what happened when I finished my last bag of those spuishy delights.

My mom told me I can help myself to a few and before I knew it the whole bag was gone. My mom called me to dinner, and you know, the last thing I wanted or even cared about was dinner, but you know how mothers are, I had to sit down and take one bite of everything. And after that, I had diaria, diaria, diaria.

Last fall my mom bought me all of these cute clothes for my birthday, shorts, jeans, skirts, so when the weather got warm, and I went to put on my new clothes, they didn't fit to my amazement and not because I had grown too tall, just because I couldn't even zip them up. But it couldn't be the marshmallows, their too lite and fluffy; infact a whole bag of marshmallows doesn't weight as much as one orange.

One day, when I put the tight clothes out of my mind, I grabbed myself some chocolate covered marshmallows, when I was biting down on one, a sharp stabbing pain went up my tooth and the side of my head. And when ever I ate, my teeth hurt. So my mom took me to the dentist, and let me tell you it was not a pretty picture. I had seven expensive, painful cavities.

So Zeena, you can keep popping those marshmallows into your mouth, 13. but before you do, remember not everything about chocolate covered marshmallows is sweet.

Earth

The Earth has lots of meaning to me.

I like it cause it is where i live. And there are butiful things in the would lick trees, flowers, rocks and The nature that lives on the Earth, mountains, rivers, My grandparents, mon dad, my pets and my pets friends, the governor, My teacher, all my friends, my brouther, my cousinon, and all the nice people in the world.

But the best thing on The Earth is my relatives my relatives are very very nice.

The will do anything for you And i am glad they are here.

I like the nature cause that gives the animals a lot of homes and a river lets the animal get a drink and the trees
some of them give food to the animals, and some trees give us food.

The mountains are rilly nice it is part of nature and thy are pretty big and they are part of nature and History like pikes peek and the mountions rushmore with the four presodent.

Earth has 50 states and about 7 countrys and most of the Earth is water there is Indian ocean Atlantic pacif and the golf ocean.

And It is important to me cause if we didn't have trees we would died. That is the main reason.

Runaway Ralph

The object that means the most to me is a book called Runaway Ralph. I picked this object because it's a very neat book and I read it a lot. I also really liked it.

I think it's a really neat book because I think it's a whole lot of fun to read. It has a real nice and colorful cover that really appeals to me. Runaway Ralph is all about a little mouse and his motorcycle that runaway together. Since this book has a mouse in it, and I really like mice, especially little white ones. I thought it was a really great book. The book was also good because of the number of pages. It wasn't too long and it wasn't too short of a book.

I read this really great book a lot because it's not only exciting but interesting. Runaway Ralph was the first book that I ever read, liked, and not only exciting but interesting too. This book is all the things listed above and more, like fun to read I thought with all the excitement and interesting parts in the book that it was fun to read. It was also a very good book. With all that stuff going on it's hard to say that it's a bad book. Therefore, in general, it's a very good book. I also read it a lot because I got it for my 8th birthday.

I really liked it too. It's the best book I have ever read. The book was not too hard to read yet it wasn't too easy to read either. Reading this book really improves my reading skills.

In conclusion I think this publication is a very good learning book it's also a very fun book to read.

Grade 8

Harder Than You Think

I walk up the hill with my friends, then turn into our cul-de-sac, go to the front door, put the key in the lock, turn, and step in. The house breathes a kind of spooky hello as I set my books down and go to the kitchen where the inevitable note is waiting: "Have a snack. Be home soon. I love you." As I'm munching cookies, I think how I'd like to go out and shoot a few hoops if I had someone to do it with. You can play Nintendo by yourself but it isn't the same. So I forget that for now. I should be doing my Spanish homework anyway. Too bad I don't have an older brother or sister to help conjugate all those dumb verbs. I could call a friend, but if I had a brother or sister, I'd have a built-in friend.

While I'm feeling sorry for myself, I hear my friends Denise and Kevin across the street. She's screaming bloody murder because he is throwing leaves in her hair and threatening to put a beetle in her backpack. She has just stepped on his new Nikes. I do not have these squabbles. I guess the big advantage, if you call it that, to being an only child is my room is my own, nobody "borrows" by CDs or my books or my clothes. I also get a bigger allowance than I probably would if I had siblings. My parents take me everywhere, from the mall to the East Coast. Maybe they wouldn't if they had other kids. (On the other hand, it would be more fun going if I had someone my own age.)

All these great advantages are over shadowed by one big disadvantage, though, and it's the main reason I would change things if I could. When you are an only child, your parents depend on you to be the big success all the time. You are their big hope, so you cannot fail. You have to be good at sports, popular, and have good grades. You need a career goal. You have to have neat hair and clothes that look pressed. You have to have good grammar, clean socks, good breath, and table manners. If you've ever felt jealous of somebody who is an only child, don't. It's a lot of pressure. I often wish for a little screw-up brother my parents could worry about for a while.

So—while having a neat room with nothing disturbed is great, I'd take a brother or a sister in a minute if I could. The big irony is, if I had that mythical brother or sister, I would probably be wishing myself an only child again the first time my baseball shirt didn't come back or my stereo got broken. Life is like that. What you don't have always seems to be what you want.

Grade 11

SHARING YOUR WRITING: A FOCUSED REVISION LESSON

If you write regularly and share your writing with students, by all means keep on doing whatever good things you have going. This is a wonderful way to model the kind of responses you want your students to give each other when they are talking about their writing and asking for suggestions—plus it gives you the opportunity to tell the stories of your writing and revision. How else can students learn what revision looks like if we don't take them through the process from the inside out and talk to them about how writers think and feel?

Suppose, however, you do NOT routinely write or share with students. In that case, here's an easy, non-threatening approach that might get you started.

1. Think which trait you'd like to focus on for this lesson on revision—Ideas? Organization? Voice?
2. Create a SHORT (one paragraph is enough) piece of writing that is WEAK in the trait. Let's say you choose organization. You might—deliberately, mind you—make the lead weak, jumble the details to make the text hard to follow, leave out transitions, put in too much information, or leave the ending off altogether. It's up to your students to use their rubrics to help you identify and revise these problems.
3. Plan a time to read your paper aloud and discuss it. You may wish to put it on an overhead or make copies to hand out. You may wish to ask students to score it for the trait you've selected. (In the example that follows, Organization was the selected trait). Then, ask students to help you make a Plan for Revision—a list of very specific suggestions for making the piece stronger for the focus trait. If their list is long, ask them to show you where to begin. For example, you may wish to revise the lead and then see what happens. One step at a time . . . building toward the bigger picture!



4. Save their suggestions on an overhead so you can refer to them later.
5. Revise your paper, making it stronger in the trait you're working on. It does NOT have to be a masterpiece. In fact, it shouldn't be a masterpiece—that kind of progress will seem out of reasonable reach for many of your students. It just needs to be noticeably better, something they can see themselves doing later on their own work.
6. Read and share your revision. Ask students to score the new version, to comment on differences they see. Ask what still needs to be done. What would make it stronger yet? Tell students what you did to revise. Did you read your work aloud? Work on a word processor? Cut out whole paragraphs? Read it to someone else? Show them the piece in various stages of revision if you can. Talk through it—talk, talk, talk, and think aloud some more. Then ask for questions and listen carefully!
7. Next steps:
You could:
 - Revise further for that specific trait
 - Score for another trait and revise some more
 - Move on to a new piece and repeat the process
 - Share a reflection of the process from your point of view

The whole secret of this activity is to have some fun—and to show positive ways of working with and responding to a writing group! When you do this, you make revision possible for students on their own work.



Original

"My Teacher had a Rip in his Pants"

Just about a week ago my teacher had a rip in his pants. It was really funny. I didn't see it right away but someone told me then I saw it and wanted to laugh but I held it in. Then someone told him and everyone started to laugh. Then he went home to change. The End.



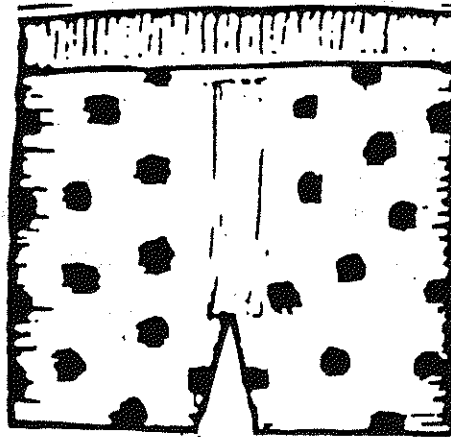
A Kid's Dream Come True

Every kid has a dream that their teacher will disappear one day. Well, in our case, it finally came true.

Mr. Friedman was writing our math homework on the board last Wednesday. The list was getting longer and longer, and finally, as he bent down to write the last list of problems to do from our math textbook, his pants ripped—right in a very embarrassing spot. We'd all noticed that his pants were getting tighter and tighter over the past few months, but none of us dreamed that they would finally just give up.

Everyone started to laugh, and Mr. Friedman, turned, glared at us, grabbed at the rip and darted out of the room. It wasn't long before Mrs. Ahlery came in to finish up the class. She told us all to settle down and get back to work. I think she was trying to hold back a little giggle, but she never talked about what had happened. The good news is Mr. Friedman never did come back that afternoon.

Group write - grade 4



'My Teacher Got a Rip in his Pants'

My teacher got a rip in his pants. He got one of those oh-my-gosh-my-pants-have-a-rip-right-in-the-you-know-where-and-what-do-I-do-now looks on his face as they pulled completely apart at the seam.

Our whole class watched in breathless anticipation of what would happen next. It was dead silent for at least a count of 5. Then Ramon yelled - "Hey Mr. Foster - let 'er rip!" Everyone burst into laughter; you could hear it echoing off the wall into the other classrooms. Everyone, that is, except me. I was just too embarrassed for Mr. Foster to do anything but grin and let out a nervous giggle. He caught my eye and smiled back - I guess that made it OK, because then everyone started realizing how awkward it was and began looking for ways to help.

Somebody went to the office for the secretary, and several kids kept saying, "Don't worry, Mr. Foster. It will be OK," but then they'd start to look at each other and laugh again. Pretty soon the secretary and principal came in and Mr. Foster went home to change.

When he came back about an hour later he was smiling kinda sheepishly. He didn't say too much about what had happened and before long he seemed like his old self. But I kept wondering if this was one of those times he would remember and tell classes in the years to come about the day he got a rip in his pants!

Grade 9-10 revision

Rip in the Pants: the Teacher's Perspective

Rip. I didn't think much of it. Kids are always ripping something. I continued to teach. Giggle, snicker, snicker. I didn't think much of it. Students get off task. I addressed it, and continued to teach.

I felt a draft. I didn't think much of it, until I realized there shouldn't be a draft, especially there. I continued to teach.

A slow tingling, horrifying realization. The rip was from my pants - in a place it shouldn't be. The laughs were AT me and my new drafty trousers. The red burned slowly from my neck to my forehead and when my eyes met theirs... "Well," I said, "just get over it."

Rip in the Pants: One for the Pants

This is not right. I wasn't made to be worn by a guy this big. WwwwOhww! Every time he does anything but stand still, I hurt. I'm pinched and mushed and cramped so tight I can hardly breathe. I need relief. What I really want is revenge. I know. . . Rrrrip! Ha! That'll show him. But wait, what happens next? Maybe he'll just throw me out and I'll never see the light of day again. Man oh man, if only I'd been a tie, then i could've just choked him!

Ideas and Content

We don't want [the writer] to describe every ride at Disneyland, or tell us that the Grand Canyon is awesome. . . If one of the rides at Disneyland got stuck, or if somebody fell into the awesome Grand Canyon, that would be worth hearing about.

—William Zinsser

Ideas and Content is what you have to say—the reason for writing your paper. Everything about your writing begins with that message. If you can choose your **own** topic, pick something important to you, that you know a lot about. If someone picks the topic for you, look for a way to connect it to your own experience. That way, you can use what you know.

This is one of the secrets~~**keep it small**. If your topic is too big (like "Animals of Africa") you'll wind up trying to tell too much and not be able to focus on any one idea long enough to make it clear. Skinny it down ("Why Lions Hunt in Pairs") so you can handle it. Put in the kind of details to show you pay attention to the world and notice how it works.

Surprise your reader with what you know. Don't spend time on things that anyone else could write. Don't say, "Cooking in a restaurant can be hard work." Even people who don't cook can figure that out. Instead, tell what goes on in the kitchen if an angry customer sent the food back. *That* would be an interesting insight!

One more hint: **Make your ideas crystal clear**. Avoid general statements like "Our trip was exciting." Exciting how? Instead, say "I chased two very hungry black bears away from our camping supplies." Specific details that help the reader picture what is happening can **make or break** your writing.

Human beings have a great need to represent their experience through writing. We need to make our truths beautiful.

—Lucy McCormick Calkins

Green is Good

Vegetarians. Aren't they those health-food-nut, skinny-as-a-rail joggers we all see so much of? No.

Vegetarians are just everyday people like you and me, especially me. I have been a vegetarian for almost three months now and I still can't find a reason to go back to eating meat.

Why do people eat these innocent animals if they know the harm that it's doing to their bodies? Studies show that vegetarians have a lower risk of heart disease, diabetes, and some forms of cancer. Besides that, red meat will clog up your kidneys.

I really don't understand hunters. How can they kill anything as precious as a deer, then shoot it, cook it, and eat it? Just hours before it was grazing in the grass, pondering the finer aspects of life and now there it is laying helplessly on your plate.

Deciding to become a vegetarian took me weeks of in-depth research. I had to keep my protein level up somehow. After reading that most of our forests were being cleared away for cattle grazing, I finally made my decision. So eat the greener way and avoid all those guilty feelings.

Persuasive
Grade 8

Think of one school supply that you think would make it easier for you to learn convince your teacher to purchase it for you.

It is a school supply that means a food supply because people put school supply they don't let us know that word. I know that first because somebody tell me that word I know that first then anyone because it is a word everybody knows that word I know that word is a good word for me some people hate that word because it don't sound good to them they sometimes like that word because only I like that word because that word is important to me because I like that word because that word sound very great to me sometime I rite a story I allways put that word in because I allways remember that everyday and night even when I sleep because I can't not stop this word even in school I can't not stop that word school supply I allways say that word even in class even everywhere even at my house then I think of a animal then I forgot what I thinking about.

Grade 3

I'll always remember the last month of summer vacation, and all the great games and activities I learned at session six, Camp Orkila.

It was my very first time away from home that long. I was having a great first week at camp, and everyone was having fun and getting along.

One night, the sneaky racoons snuck into "Kalakala" cabin (my cabin) and pushed over our cabin wastebasket and pulled out an amazingly large amount of "Dr. Pepper" cans and "Skittle" wrappers.

Of course, our cabin did not want to make the same mistake again, so this time, pop cans and candy wrappers stayed out of our waste basket, and always in the lodge trash can.

Just to be sure, my cabin mates asked me to close the window flap because my top bunk was the closest to the window. I carefully crawled onto the large cabinet next to my bunk to bring down the flap. As I began to unroll it, I caught a small spider scurrying quickly across the black materials. "Oh my gosh there is a spider on the window flap!" I yelled. My friend began to say, "Gosh, if you're so scared of it, take it, and throw it out the window!" I replied, "I'm not touching that!" Fear filled my voice. My friend reluctantly got out of her bunk and began to drag herself across the wood planks along the cabin floor to my bunk to observe the small speck of a spider.

The spider scampered to a crevasse in my bunk by my pillow and of course, I did not want the nasty little fellow weaving a home next to my head, so I borrowed my friend Lucy's very heavy flash light (it belonged to her grandfather when he was a police man), and I shone it where it crawled. My eyes widened with terror when I saw a incredibly huge, hairy wolf spider sitting on a web a size of a pretzel roll! I screamed as if an airplane on fire came crashing down unexpectedly from the skies!

I desperately tried to clutch on to the ladder, with my free hand, which was shaking wildly. But without waiting, I stumbled over the wooden safety railing. I tried to hold onto it, but instead, I flipped over and landed on the hard, cold floor with a loud THUD! And to top it off, the flashlight rolled off my bunk and landed on my hand, leaving a painful bruise. Terrified, I ran out of the cabin screaming and crying.

My personal experience with my cabin buddies was shocking, and I know for sure I'll remember it forever, and I'll have a good laugh every single time I tell the story.

Grade 5

Scores:

Ideas	Organization	Voice	Word Choice	Sentence Fluency	Conventions
5	5	5	5	5	5
5	5	5	5	5	5

Narrow It!

Summer Vacation



Redwoods

Summer Vacation



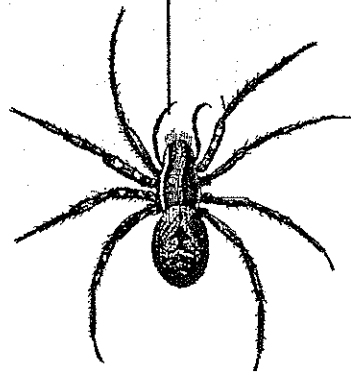
Camp Orkila



Camp memories



The spider in my cabin



Narrow It!

My Family



My Sister, Laura



Living at my Dad's house in the summer



The time my sister drove her car into dad's living room.

Crash! The tremendous noise boomed and shook the house. I ran from the bedroom, not knowing what to expect. My dad's screams led me to the awful scene. Imagine my surprise when I saw my sister's car sitting in the living room of my dad's house.

Narrow It!

Weather



