

# **WHAT DOES IT MEAN , "SHOW ME, DON'T TELL ME?"**

## **TELLING:**

The first day of school was really hectic.

## **SHOWING:**

I say this every year—I'm getting too old for this! Glazed-eyed kids running, stumbling, frantically searching for their lockers and often close to tears when their fingers don't respond to the number sequence printed neatly on the 3x5 index card. What they don't know yet is that learning to open a locker in middle school is one of the greatest challenges they will face all year. As I run from student to student, assuring each that it **WILL** get easier—automatic even, I can't help noticing that their small motor coordination is something akin to tying flies while wearing woolen mittens. At least for this first day, everyone is equal. No jocks, no nerds, no bullies, no victims—just a bunch of anxious, sweaty-palmed adolescents struggling to gain access to the only private space they can call their own for the next 9 months.

Ruth Culham

1996

# 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, p. 49

## Instead of writing about ...

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

## You could write about ...

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.

OR ... ????



## Story Ideas

Model on a chalkboard a list of all the things you feel you do well. An example of a teacher-list might be:

- Grocery shopper
- Driving teacher (if you have children)
- Artist
- Author
- Cat or dog groomer
- Cake or cookie maker

Ask the students to think about all the things they could teach someone else. Encourage them to not overlook the daily things they do such as:

- Riding a bicycle
- Hitting a baseball
- Kicking a soccerball
- Making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich

This expert list is filed in their "Work in Progress" folder to be used for story ideas during the year.

Make lists of "Things I Want to Know More About." This list can be used later for I-Search topics, where the students make themselves experts on a particular topic.

Share lists and encourage students to add to their lists if they hear an idea that sparks their interest.

The following is a third grader's "expert list."

<u>Expert list</u>		<u>author's list</u>	
①	acrobats	⑩	writer
②	reader	⑪	Right Brain user
③	swimmer	⑫	Good Story teller
④	Roller skater	⑬	friend ship maker
⑤	Ice skater	⑭	Good colorer
⑥	neat hand writing	⑮	make beliver
⑦	friend	⑯	siter
⑧	stundit	⑰	clauter
⑨	listner	⑱	giver

# AN IDEA WHEEL

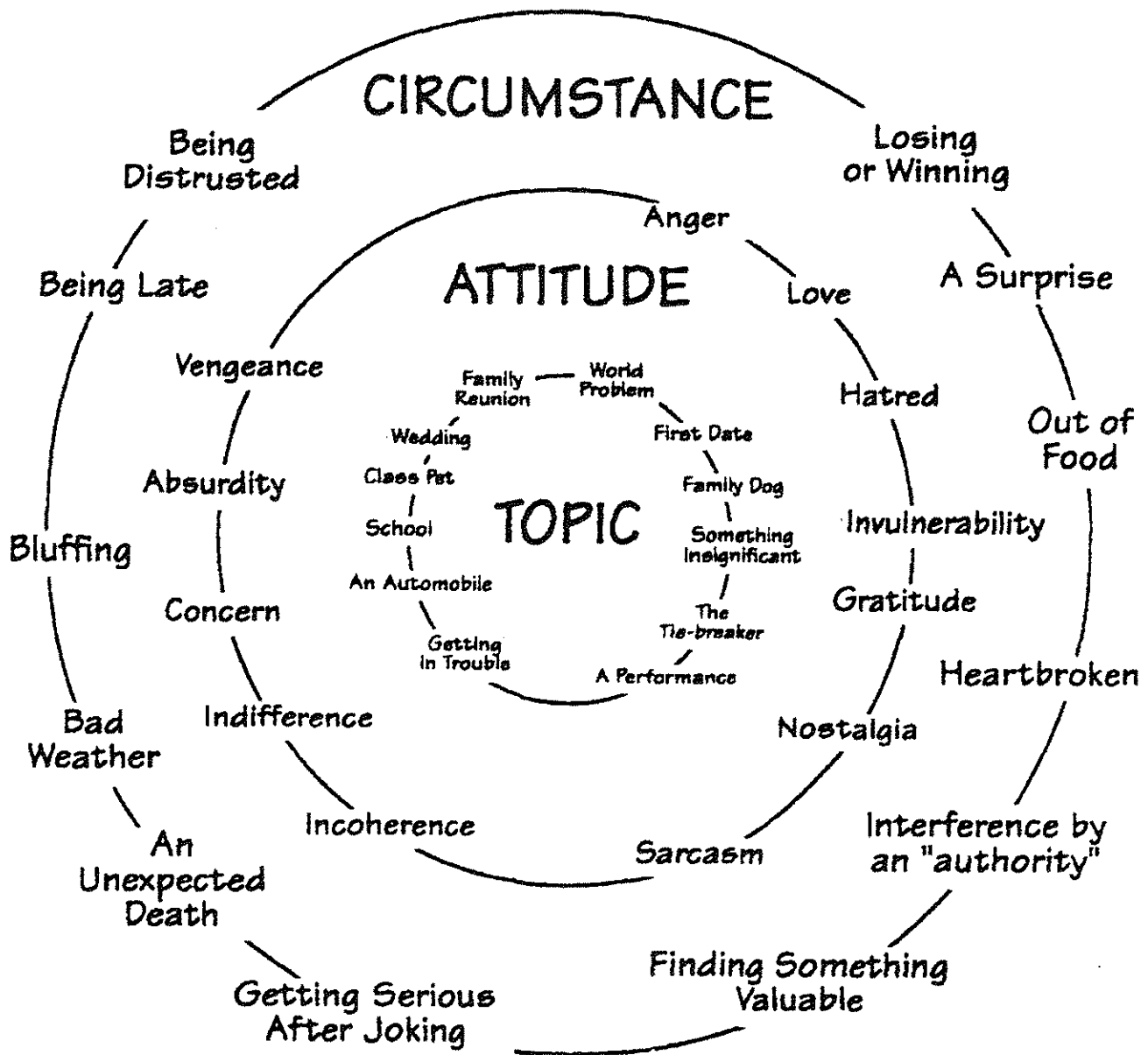


Figure 3-1. An Idea Wheel

## **Six Trait Writing Lesson: Ideas and Content—Keeping to the Topic**

Review Ideas and Content rubric items

Review the meaning of *keeping to the topic*

Step 1: Good Quality Literature

Read Thank you, Mr. Falker by Patricia Polacco

Look at rubric and identify descriptors that are true about this literature

Step 2: Activity to Define Trait

Create a Beginning-Middle-End list of events on overhead transparency

Step 3: Sample Papers

Strong example of ideas and content: Thank You, Mr. Falker

Weak example: Cut wrist story

Step 4: Peer Revision and Editing

Complete the Beginning-Middle-End list of events

Use highlighter to find the sentences in Wrist Story that do not keep to the topic

Give the students their own Beginning-Middle-End list of events organizer which they can complete and later use to write their story.

## Keeping to the Topic

### Ideas and Content

- \_\_\_\_\_Presents a fresh/original idea
- \_\_\_\_\_Topic is narrowed and focused
- \_\_\_\_\_Develops one clear, main idea
- \_\_\_\_\_Uses interesting, important details for support
- \_\_\_\_\_Writer understands topic well

**Main Focus:** *Why was this a special event?* Mr. Falker helped Patricia Polacco to learn to read as a child and this allowed her to become an author.

### Beginning

Grandpa drizzled honey on a book and told her to chase knowledge through the pages of a book.  
Her family read to Trisha.  
Other kids in her class began to read, but not Trisha.  
Trisha couldn't sound out words.  
Trisha began to feel different and dumb.

### Middle

Trisha's grandparents died.  
Her mom got a teaching job in California.  
She hoped the people at the new school wouldn't know she was dumb.  
She still had trouble reading and kids made fun of her.  
Mr. Falker told the kids not to laugh at Trisha when she read.  
Trisha started to hide from the kids at recess.

### End

Mr. Falker and the reading teacher worked with Trisha after school every day studying letters and words.  
Trisha was able to read sentences and a paragraph.  
She was now able to chase knowledge by reading books.

One summer night my dad went outside after supper to feed the cats. I like cats. My favorite cat is an orange and white tabby. I wanted to help him so I followed him out the back door of our farmhouse.

The old wooden door with six glass panes came swinging shut. I caught the door with the palm of my hand on one of the glass panes. The next thing I knew my hand had gone right through the window pane. I was bleeding. I was standing there with my hand encircled by jagged glass. I was afraid to pull my hand back because the glass shards might cut me even more. My mom wrapped my hand and arm in a towel to protect it before pulling my hand back through the hole.

Then she and my dad took me in our car to town to the hospital. The hospital was a three-story brick building. I had never been anywhere in the building except the waiting room. I had to sit in the waiting room when my parents were visiting my grandma when she was in the hospital once. We went into the emergency room. A nurse looked at the cut on my wrist and said it would probably need stitches. The nurse wore a white uniform and a white starched hat with a black stripe on it. When I was younger I thought I might want to be a nurse. I did NOT like to hear that! Soon the doctor came and he said he would need to stitch up my wrist. They gave me a shot so I couldn't feel the needle as he put eleven stitches in my wrist. Afterwards the nurse wrapped my wrist and arm in a white gauze bandage. I learned a lesson that night about never trying to catch a door using the glass window because it could be dangerous if the glass breaks.

## Keeping to the Topic

### Ideas and Content

- \_\_\_\_\_Presents a fresh/original idea
- \_\_\_\_\_Topic is narrowed and focused
- \_\_\_\_\_Develops one clear, main idea
- \_\_\_\_\_Uses interesting, important details for support
- \_\_\_\_\_Writer understands topic well

**Main Focus:** *Why was this a special event?*

I learned that the safest way to catch a door is not to use the glass window in it.

### Beginning

Dad went outside and I wanted to follow him  
The door came swinging shut and I caught it on the glass with the palm of my hand

### Middle

My hand went right through the window  
I was bleeding  
I was standing there afraid to pull my hand back because there was jagged glass around it

### End

My mom and dad took me to the hospital where the doctor put eleven stitches in my wrist.  
Afterwards they wrapped my wrist and arm in a bandage.  
I learned never to catch a door using the glass window.



# Six 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 blotnik. What are you going to do about it?"	List on the board all the things students suggest doing for a broken blotnik. 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 <sup>nd</sup> Graders Know 2. What 6 <sup>th</sup> Graders Know 3. What 9 <sup>th</sup> 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.

**Gaye Lantz, Instructor 011-966-3-673-0473 (fax)**  
**Saudi Aramco Schools, Saudi Arabia**

## **Ideas and Content Activities**

### **Story Starter Pages**

**Read introduction from The Mysteries of Harris Burdick by Chris Van Allsburg.**

Hand out story starter pages from the book. The writer must use the trait IDEAS and write a story to be shared.

### **Comprehension Check**

Comprehension on any subject can be checked through writing. After a topic or theme has been studied, have students write in a learning log about their understanding of a subject.

Compose a dictionary of terms taken from the study. Have students select a word to define, write a definition in their own words, and illustrate the term. Collect all definitions into book form for class sharing.

### **Prompts**

From Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory website at [www.nwrel.org/eval/writing/prompts.html](http://www.nwrel.org/eval/writing/prompts.html) are a variety of writing prompts.

### **Keep a Class List of Writing Topics**

Keep a class list of writing topics and add to it whenever anything occurs that would be a good topic. Whenever, you read a book aloud to students that would make a good jumping off place for writing, add the idea to the list.

For example, after reading Big Mama by Donald Crews you could add "A Visit to my Grandma's" to the class topic list. After reading Hazel's Amazing Mother by Rosemary Wells, you could add "The Time Some Big Kids Picked on Me".

At writing time students can take topics off the class list, make them more specific, and put this on their own lists. You can model how to do this in a mini-lesson.

## **Binoculars**

Tell students that binoculars can help you see the details in things that are far away.

When we write we can use questions, and like binoculars, the questions we ask can help us add more detail to our writing.

Begin by posting a very vague story that you have written. For example: "I have a dog. He is funny."

Have students ask you questions about your story. Hopefully, they will ask questions such as: What's your dog's name? How long have you had your dog? What does he look like? What does he do that is funny?

List their questions at the bottom of your piece of writing. After they are finished asking the questions, model for students as you rewrite your piece to include the answers to the questions they asked.

Have your students reread their own stories and give you any pieces they would like to use binoculars on. You can use these pieces for future mini-lessons. Put the students' work on an overhead transparency and record the questions. Be sure to share the rewritten versions as a future mini-lesson and compare the two pieces of writing. Ask students which gives them a clearer "picture".

## **Telling Examples**

Turn showing examples into telling 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

## **Story Ideas**

Model for the class making a list of all the things you feel you do well. Ask the students to think about all the things they could teach someone else. Encourage them to not overlook the daily things they do. This expert list is filed in their "Work in Progress" folder to be used for story ideas during the year.

Make lists of "Things I Want to Know More About." This list can be used later for I-Search topics, where the students make themselves experts on a particular topic. Share lists and encourage students to add to their lists if they hear an idea that sparks their interest.

## **"I Used To...But, Now..." Poem**

I used to feel that all a person's dreams  
    would turn out true.  
But now I feel  
    that some of mine  
    had better not.

## **The Rock**

Students bring a favorite rock to class. Students work with a partner spending one minute talking about his/her rock. Switch to have the other partner talk about his/her rock. After talking, students write for two minutes, then share what they have written in pairs or other small groups. Resource: Everybody Needs a Rock by Byrd Baylor

## **Garbology**

Create a collection of "clean" garbage. It might be the type of junk that would be found in a vacated hotel room or pulled from a woman's purse. Try to visualize the person behind the collection of clutter. Create stories, biographies or character sketches about the person.