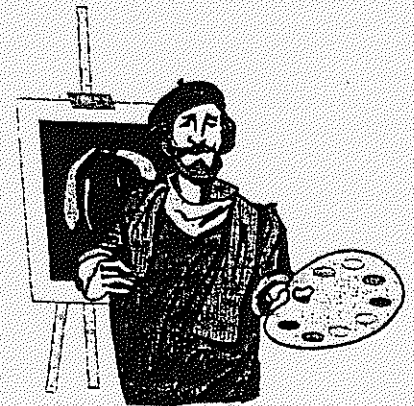


Word Choice

- ♦ natural
- ♦ active, energetic verbs
- ♦ new twists on everyday words
- ♦ precise, concrete nouns and modifiers
- ♦ simple language used well
- ♦ creative, memorable combinations of words
- ♦ minimal redundancy
- ♦ paint pictures
- ♦ accuracy of expression



Word choice is the use of rich, colorful, precise language that communicates not just in a functional way, but in a way that moves and enlightens the reader. In good descriptive writing, strong word choice clarifies and expands ideas. In persuasive writing, careful word choice moves the reader to a new vision of things. Strong word choice is characterized not so much by an exceptional vocabulary that impresses the reader, but more by the skill to use everyday words well.

1.

Northwest regional Educational Laboratory

Summer 2004

Alphaboxes: A Reflective Strategy

Alphaboxes are a fun and stimulating way to reflect on a story or a unit of study. After reading, students work in pairs or small groups to think of words that reflect important points in the story. They insert their words into the appropriate alphaboxes on the form, making sure they tell how each selected word related to the story. The class then can create a compilation of the most interesting words generated by the groups, making a special point to hear each justification. The result is a lively stretch of vocabulary, a rich network of different perspectives, and a wealth of conversation about the focus story.

Sample for Cinderella

A	B	C	D
	ball	cinders	dirt
		coachman	dainty
		clock	
E	F	G	H
	footmen	glass slipper	
	father		
I	J	K	L
		kind	
M	N	O	P
mean	no one to help		pumpkin
Q	R	S	T
	rags	slipper	
	rats	stepsisters	
U	V	W	XYZ
unfair			

Extension Idea

Students who have watched *Jeopardy* on television enjoy writing questions to go with the focus words. For example: If the students generate RAGS as a word under R, the accompanying question might be What did Cinderella dress in most of the time?

Alphaboxes

The Book _____

The reader(s) _____

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P
Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	XYZ

Alphaboxes

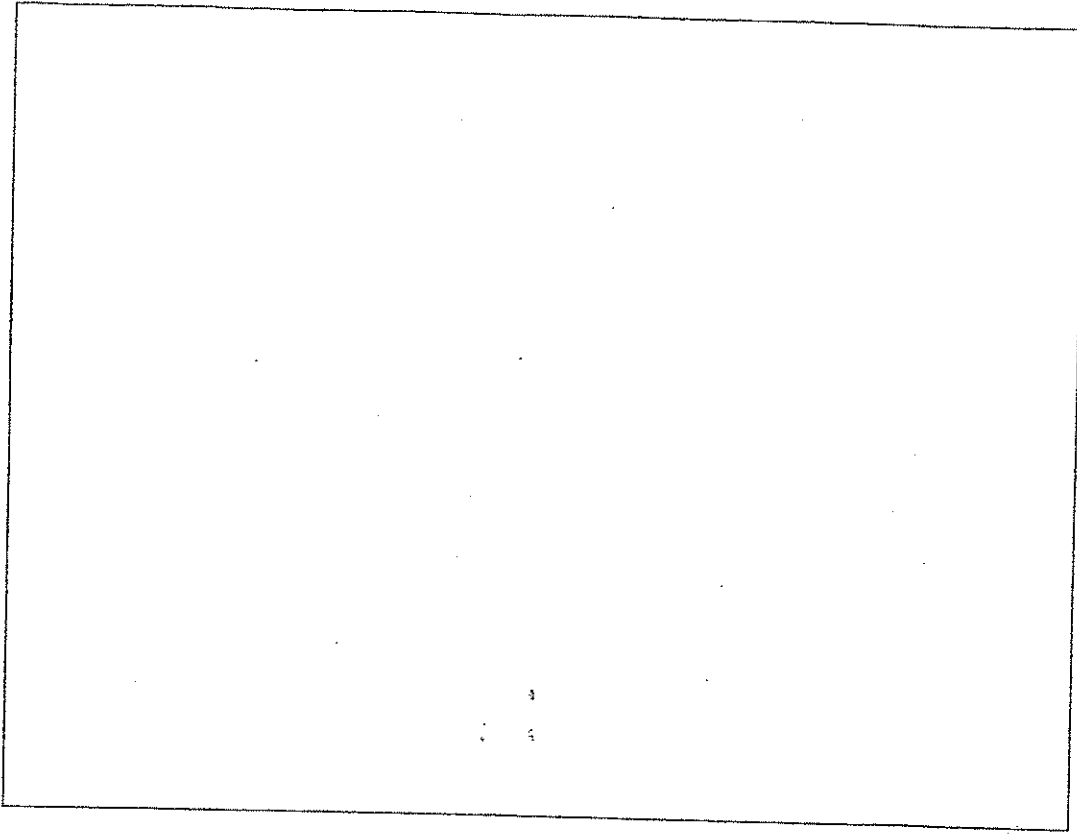
The Book _____

The reader(s) _____

A	B	C	D
E	F	G	H
I	J	K	L
M	N	O	P
Q	R	S	T
U	V	W	XYZ

Story Reflections

Draw a picture about the story.



One word about the main character

_____, _____

Two words describing the setting

_____, _____, _____

Three words telling the problem

_____, _____, _____, _____

Four words about an event

_____, _____, _____, _____, _____

Five words about the solution

Image Search: The Art of Good Writing

Name _____ Date _____

Please select three books that you are familiar with and either reread them or skim through them, searching for points where the author has used descriptive language to build strong visual images. Please use sticky notes to mark your favorite points in each book, then choose the *very best* example from each book. After you make your selections, think about how you will share them with others. You may want to practice reading them aloud with expression or think of how you can help others develop an appreciation for the rich language in your samples.

Example #1: From (book) _____

This excerpt came from page: _____

Written by _____

Example #2: From (book) _____

This excerpt came from page: _____

Written by _____

Example #3: From (book) _____

This excerpt came from page: _____

Written by _____

What did you learn about descriptive writing?

How will you change your own writing as a result of what you learned?

WORD CHOICE

Any activity that allows students to practice . . .
building vocabulary through reading anything and everything
brainstorming: how else could you say it?
learning to use resources—traditional and computer software
putting "tired" words to rest
playing with language, dialects, formal and informal word usage
building power in verbs
practicing precision—more for less

1. Forbidden Words

Together with students, brainstorm a list of "forbidden" words. Resolve not to use these words in writing or speaking. You may wish to write an obituary: list the words and actually "bury" them in a shoe box; or with some other ceremony, banish them from your literary lives. Establish a review committee of students who could grant a special exemption to a student who needs to use one of the forbidden words with a clearly written or presented justification.

2. Postcards

Build descriptive powers by brainstorming places or people shown on postcards—then write the postcard text that makes use of those words. See if students can match the resulting descriptions with the right cards. By the way, postcards are available at bookstores in sets on the same subjects, places, or activities. When the postcards all have the same basic theme, the students must write more carefully to describe the different pictures.



3. Alphabet Books

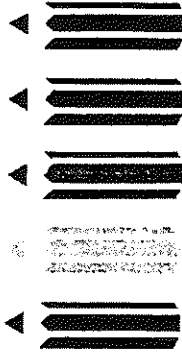
A favorite for beginning readers, there are lots of possibilities for older readers and writers, too. Share a good alphabet book with students—something from science or history, for instance. Then, using your own curriculum, brainstorm a list of topics or ideas that have promise for research projects. Select one or two and encourage students to use the alphabet book as an organizational strategy as well as a way to use key words for big sections of the book. Since there are so many letters in the alphabet, it's a good idea to assign one or two to individuals or small groups and then pull the whole thing together at the end.

4. Word of the Week

Begin a list of words that students like. They may sound delicious as they speak them, they may be tricky to read, or they may just be new. Each week, focus on one and devise as many creative ways to practice the word as you can. This can become a great game and students get a chance to practice words they will be using in reading and writing. You can put a student or group of students in charge of this activity and let them pick the word and the different activities to practice for the week—then everyone gets a chance!



Six Trait Writing Warm-Ups



Trait #4: Word Choice

Preparation

Exercise

Follow-up

1.	Write "loud words" - i.e. KABOOM! CRASH! ROARING, THUNDERING, EARSPLITTING	Ask students for other "loud" words to add. Have students write down the five "quietest" or "softest" words they can think of. Have them share these words and list them on the board.	Talk about how words can convey the sound of things.
2.	Write descriptive words for how a pillow feels - i.e. fluffy, puffy, billowy, cushiony, etc.	Ask students for other words to add. Then have them write down 5 words that describe the feeling of mud. Have them share words and list on board.	Talk about how words can convey the feel of things.
3.	Write words that evoke smells - i.e. popcorn, brownies, roses	Have students list other words that describe pleasant smells. Then have them list words that describe unpleasant smells (sour milk, garbage, burned toast, etc.) See how many they can come up with.	Talk about how words can describe specific smells
4.	Write words that describe tastes - i.e. chocolatey, salty, tangy	Have students add other words that describe pleasant tastes. Then have them list words that describe unpleasant tastes (sour, burnt, HOT, etc.)	Talk about how words can describe specific tastes.
5.	Display pictures of two very different scenes - i.e. one city & one country, or one mountain & one seashore.	Have students list other objects they see in the first picture and words that describe them. Then have them list words that describe what's in the other scene. Compare similarities and differences.	Talk about how words can describe what you see.

6.	Write the word "walking"	Ask students to help you make a list of all the ways someone or something could be walking (marching, scuffling, stomping, dawdling, etc.) Now add adjectives (hurriedly, leisurely, angrily, etc.) Compare these verb/adverb combinations with the simple word "walking". Is there a difference in what you "see"?	Talk about how specific words can give you a clearer picture of what's happening.
7.	Display a few pictures with captions (from books or magazines) Display another picture without a caption.	Have students make up descriptive captions for the picture. Share captions. Discuss which make the picture seem more interesting and why.	Talk about how words can affect how you see things.
8.	Have several different kinds of catalogs. (i.e. - J.C. Penney, J. Peterman, L. L. Bean	Read the descriptions of similar articles. Ask students which they would be more likely to buy.	Talk about the importance of word choice in advertising messages.
9.	Write on the board: "Tired Words"	List a few overused words that "need a rest" i.e. - nice, fun, big, really, etc. Have children suggest alternate words that could be used instead of these. List them next to the tired words.	Point out how much more expressive the new words can be.
10.	Write on the board: "My favorite Words"	List some of your favorite (expressive) words. Have each student begin their own list. Share words.	Keep lists in writing folders to refer to and add to.

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.

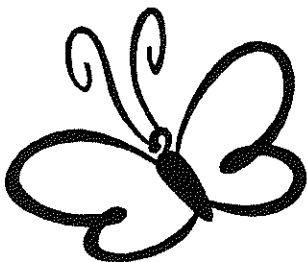
4. Guide them through the analysis of anonymous sample papers.

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

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

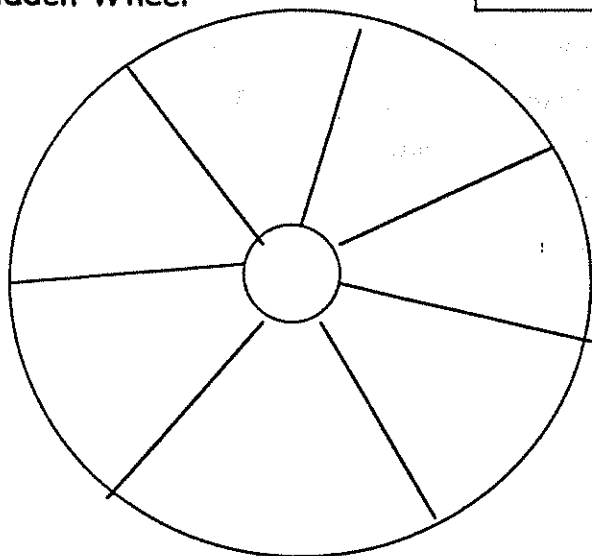
7. Guide students through revising their papers based on that feedback.

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



Forbidden Wheel-

Word Choice Activities....

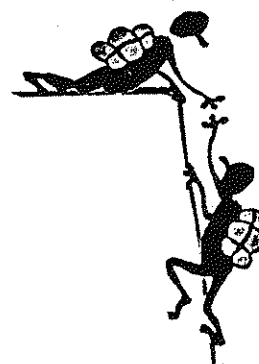


Mouth-Watering Menus-



Coaching Checklist...

1. Do you have favorite words or expressions in this piece? Show me.
2. Are there any words you used for the first time? Which ones?
3. Are there any words you weren't sure of? Which? Shall we look the
4. Did you use a thesaurus or dictionary? Tell me about that.
5. Are there any words or phrases you're not happy with? Shall we brainstorm some other ways to say it?
6. The word or expression which caught my attention was.... (explain it to the writer)



Close Procedure for Word Choice

My Mistress' Eyes are Nothing like the Sun William Shakespeare

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;
_____ is far more red than her lips' red;
If snow be white, why then her _____ are dun;
If hairs be _____, black _____ grow on her head.
I have seen roses damasked red and white,
But no such roses see I in her _____;
And in some perfumes is there more _____
Than in the breath that from my mistress _____.
I love to hear her speak, yet well I know
That _____ hath a far more pleasing sound;
I grant I never saw a _____ go;
My mistress, when she walks, treads on the _____.
And yet, by _____, I think my love as _____
As any she belied with false _____.














Minilesson:

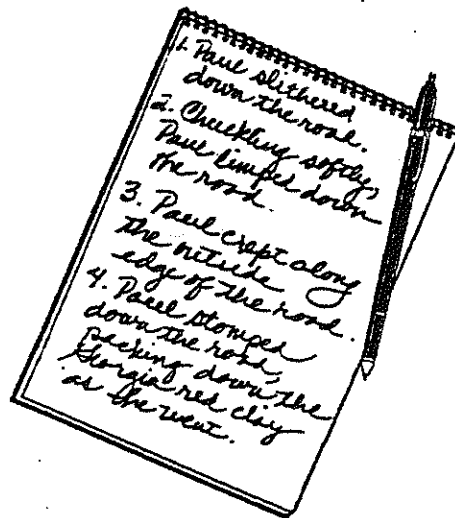
Paul went down the road

Here's a simple sentence:

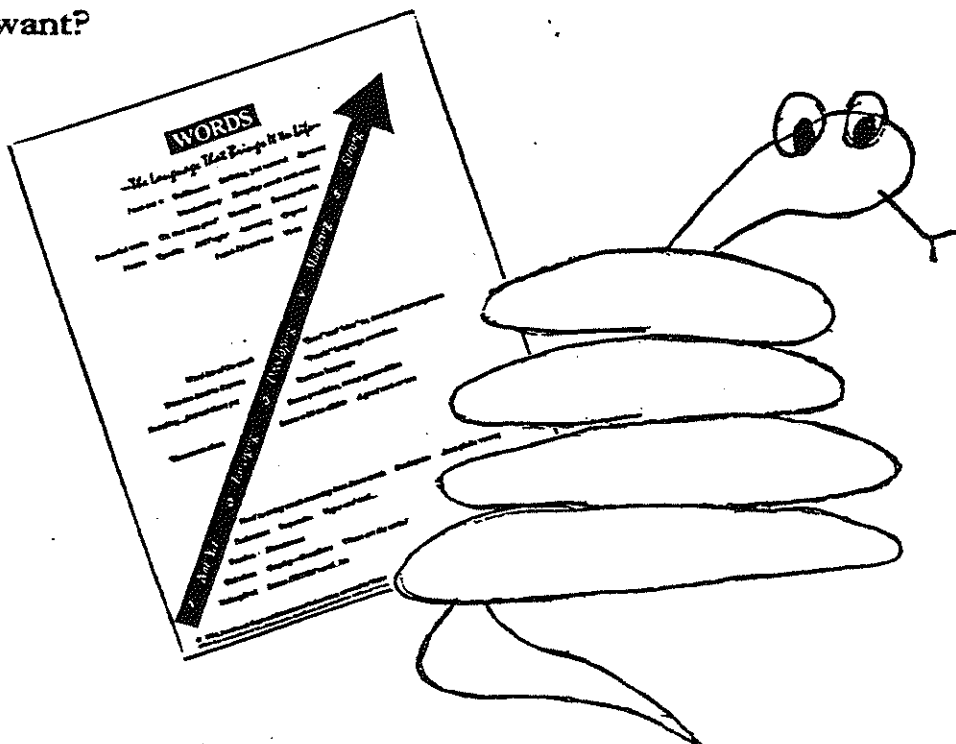
Paul went down the road.

By changing the word *went*, you can create lots of different moods, images, and meanings. For instance, try substituting a word that makes Paul seem ...

-  old
-  depressed
-  young
-  frightened
-  in a hurry
-  tired
-  something other than human
-  determined
-  on his way to a specific place
-  clumsy
-  lost
-  noisy
-  irritated



How else might you make Paul look or seem? What word will create the effect you want?



Biopoem

Line 1. (name)

Line 2. (4 character traits)

Line 3. Relative of

Line 4. Lover of

Line 5. Who feels

Line 6. Who needs

Line 7. Who fears

Line 8. Who gives

Line 9. Who would like to see

Line 10. Resident of

Line 11. (name)

15.



Element Biopoem

*Information used in the Element Biopoem must be based on the periodic table of the elements.

Element name:

Symbol:

Atomic number and mass:

Protons in nucleus:

Discovered by:

Used for:

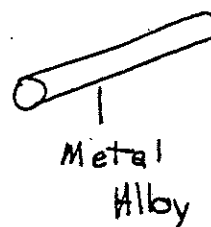
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Other important information:

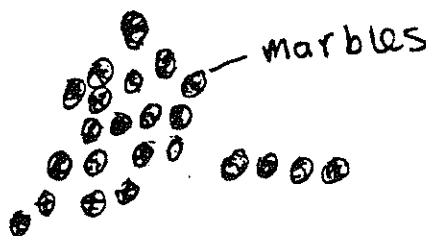
Thanks to Dan Stangby, Escalante Middle School, Durango, CO for contributing this activity

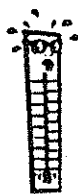


Silicon



Whose symbol is Si;
Whose atomic number is 14 and atomic
mass of 28.0855;
Whose nucleus contains 14 protons;
Who was discovered by Jons Jakob
Berzelius;
Who is used for metal alloy, plastic,
lubricants, and glass making;
Who is obtained from quartz, mica, and
talc;
Who cannot be found in a pure substance
in nature;
Silicon.



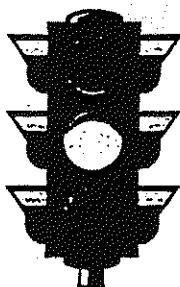


Hello, my name's Mercury,
For short, you can call me Hg,
My Atomic Number is 80, I weigh 200.59
(that's my Atomic Mass),
My nucleus contains 80 protons,

My age is unknown,
You probably see me around all the time,
In traffic and advertising lights, dental preparation,
Batteries, electrical equipment, and even in
thermometers,

I'm also used in fungicides, pesticides, caustic soda,
chlorine production, catalysts, silent electrical
switches, and in barometers,

I'm obtained from Cinnabar (Mercury Sulfide),
I am the only liquid metal,
Mercury is my name!



18.



Once in a while, when I'm getting ready in the morning, I see my reflection in the mirror and I stop. I look far into my eyes past my face, deeper. I begin to see more than a sixteen year old girl. I see the places I've been, the things I've learned that are important to me, and the person that I have become. Many experiences have made up the path of my life so far. Every day the definition I give of myself, my world and the people in it changes. A time when it changed quite drastically was last December on Christmas Eve.

I took the bus downtown to buy the last minute presents that I had forgotten to get. It was cold outside but my thick cotton sweatshirt provided more than sufficient warmth. It was past three when I finally finished shopping and I was about to cross the street when I saw him. On the adjacent street corner stood my best childhood friend who had moved away. He looked different enough to elicit disbelief. He ran to me, dodging traffic, and hugged me. The coincidence of our meeting again after this many years was surreal. We talked about life after what must have been ten cups of coffee at the fourth avenue Denny's. He told me about how his family had died in a car accident and about his abusive uncle. He was on his way to a youth shelter when we saw each other.

I begged him to come and have Christmas with my family. He explained that the youth shelter was expecting him and that they would call the police if he didn't show up tonight. We made plans to meet so we could spend a day together soon and I walked him to the shelter which was near by. It was difficult to let him go but the promise of seeing him soon was enough to ease my discomfort. On the way back to my bus stop I reveled in what had been the most remarkable Christmas Eve to my memory.

While waiting I saw an older man about fifty. He was sitting on stairs asleep against a tattered brick doorway. He was dirty and slumped over. It was obvious to me that he was homeless and all of a sudden I realized that I was extremely fortunate. I was on my way home to people that I love who love me in return, to a warm house and warm smiles. I removed my sweatshirt and folded it neatly beside him. On the bus ride it began to rain outside. My stop came and I got off. I took my time walking in the cold December rain because I knew that far too many people lived out here on the streets and it wouldn't hurt me to put up with it. On that walk I decided that I would never take advantage of the people who are special to me and never forget the people who have less.

Salsa Music

I'm writing an essay on my favorite music. My music comes from Latin America. It is called salsa. It has a really nice beat to it. They also play with lots of different kinds of instruments They really sing nice to.

One of the reasons why I like it is because you can do any type of movements you what to when you are dancing to these type of music.

Another reason why I like it is because it has been around for a long time. Also because they really know how make music back then. It can be a lot of fun if only you make it fun if you don't make it fun that I guess you will not have fun. These are the reasons why I like salsa music.



Horses really mean a lot to me. My favorite horse is a Black Stallion. I also like mules, donkeys and birds. My favorite bird is the swan. I can talk like a duck, a hawk and a crow. I like chipmunks but not as much as horses. I like to look up funny words in the dictionary. It's a lot of fun to go on a walk in the spring, because there is a lot of stuff to look at.

Grade 3

My First Pair of Stitches

One day, a couple of years ago I was skipping towards the gate to the backyard. I pushed the gate with a tremendous push. It sprung forward. I was about to go when the gate suddenly came flying back! Then there was a noisy BANG as my head hit the gate! Suddenly my head was bleeding. I started crying because of the bad cut that felt like a knife slicing through my head. The blood was gushing out. My family heard me. Uncle Chip came out. He tried to slow the bleeding. He told everybody to get back inside. Somebody got a car to go to the AEA. When we arrived at the AEA went to a room. It had lots of different gadgets like needles. The smell of rubber gloves crept up my nostrils as the doctor put them on. The needle that had anesthetic (something that makes the pain less) was put on. It felt like a misquito that went for what seemed like a long time. A light was turned on. The blinding light even went through my eyelids! Then the stiches were put on. They felt like little pricks. In about 5 minutes the light was turned on. The doctor said, "Good-bye." Then we payed for the stiches and went back to the Canadian Emmbassy.

Grade 5

Paper 1

Grade 3

dinosaurs

The animals are one of the most interesting things. But the animals that I think are the most interesting are the dinosaurs. They are extinct but I still like them.

My four faivorit are the tricaritops, stegasaurs the anklyasaurs, and tyranasaursex. Why do I like these in paticular dinosaurs? Because they have good protection.

Take the tricaritops for instens. It has three horns on it's head. It was one of only dinosaurs that could beat tyranasaursex.

Speaking of tyranasaursex he was the most feared dinosaur. He had six inch long teeth. I wander if he brushed his teeth? Oh well.

Another well protected dinosaur was the anklyasaurs. This dinosaur had protection of a armed ball, a hardshell, and sidespikes.

Now thats what I call good pertection. Now the stegasaurs was veary calm. Know one knows what the plates and spikes were for. Were they for fighting or to make him look dangerous? Yoy deside.

dinosaur's stragly disapeared of the face of the earth. Some say it was a meatyer or a comet. I guess the world will never know.

Paper 2

Grade 3

I like my grandma's dog. She is funny and crazy. I like my dog. She is cool. Her fur is warm as a fireplace. I love her. I like her. And She like me to. I like my grandma's dog more than my Dad. And she like's me more than my grandma. She is fun and weird I love her. And she love's me too. She is nice and friendly. And she is prite. Sometimes my grandma get's mad at my dog.

24.

Paper 5

Grade 5

What Makes a Person Truly Successful?

A wise man named James Metcalf once said, "On the plains of hesitation lie the bleached bones of men who, on a dawn of a great victory to their lives, lay down to rest."

A successful person won't give up as easily as most people will. They might try something three or four times, then lay down, but always get back up.

Success isn't getting a lot of money, or being the best looking, it's having the best life, working hard and learning all we can.

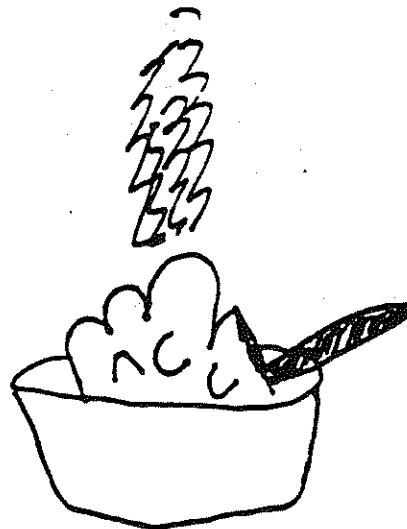
A successful person can communicate well with people, stick to a task and has endless determination.

Some of life's greatest rewards come from the biggest challenges. In 1914, at the age of 67, Thomas Edison's lab burned down. He lost \$1,000,000 dollars plus the records and notes to most of his work. The next morning, as he walked through the asks he said, "There is value in disaster. All of our mistakes are burned up! Now we can start anew." Thomas Edison went on to invent the light bulb.

Don't count how many times you have to lay down; all that matters is if you always get up again.

Airline Food

I've been on an air plan The food was sick. The crackers are fun you have to paste them together with the cheese because they are all craked. For breakfast you get omlet. And when you cut it all ozeystoff comes out. And you get a rolle that is imposible to cut. Then comes snake you get penuts there are at leste 10 of. Then comes lunch. Lets trie the chicken Oh no! The chickens raw agen. And when you open the saladressing it explods all over your shirt. Then you get dezert its a small pecie of cake And on the way to your mouth it crumbles to pecis and stics to the salad dressing you spille on your self eler after a wile you wish the stoirdest wold come. No way they make you site there tell the plan travels for a nother 5000 milse. Then the stords come and says 'are you don no but if you don't get this mess out of hear I will be.



If there happened to be one thing in this land I could change, it would have to be the confusing, weird rules and properties of algebra. I have many arguments in favor of this movement.

Sit back and take a look at yourself in junior high school struggling to grasp just WHAT the commutative property actually is! And what the whole point of having it was. Personally, I wish I *did* know what the basic principles of the commutative property are. There are hundreds of other mystifying rules that apply to algebra and appear to make no sense *what-so-ever*. For instance: If a negative number times a negative number makes a positive number, what do *two* negative numbers times a positive number make?

I believe that a group of scientists should get together and come up with and unveil a much simpler number system. This mathematics plan would have nothing like $2a + 7a = 36$, so what is "a"? *Keep mathematics simple!!!*

If I were in charge of inventing a new number system, I would eliminate negative integers, take out material like finding what x, y, z and b are in an equation eight inches long. Who ever heard of ordering -7x yards of plywood, or -3 two-by-fours?

My conclusion is abolish all properties that only three percent of the populace are able to understand. Algebra?!? It's for the birds!!! I wish I could wring the neck of that despicable individual who invented it. Say "See-ya!" to algebra and the world will be free of students crying because they didn't know what the heck they were learning.

My First Gold Medal

It was the last tournament of my first year. My coach told me that he might not be there. Earlier, he had given me the entrance fee and the membership card so I could go.

I woke up earlier than normal, to weigh in and register. When I returned from breakfast at McDonalds, the tournament was just about to start.

I walked to the front desk to find out who, when, and where I would be wrestling. The sheet with all the people who registered, in my weight class, read that there were only two people entered in my weight category, including me.

I first wrestled an opponent who I had never beaten. Butterflies were forming in my stomach as I stepped on the line, waiting for the whistle.

I heard the whistle loudly and clearly. My heart was pumping as fast as a runner's footsteps in the Olympics. A sea of sweat was forming in my palms. Butterflies were flapping their wings like humming birds in my stomach.

I moved around in a circle, waiting for him to attack. With no coach in my corner I felt helpless and alone.

He shot like an arrow and I tried to sprawl, but my feet were glued to the mat. I was falling straight for my back, and out of instinct, I fell to my stomach. The sound of a whistle was music to my ears.

I said to myself, "This is for first place! Give it all you got! There's no way I'm losing this one."

As soon as the whistle blew, I went for a head throw. Once my hands were behind his head, I threw him over my body with all my might.

He was on his back, but he wasn't pinned. I thought, what was I doing wrong? and checked everything off my mental list. There was one thing I knew I forgot, and I still couldn't remember.

Just then, out of the corner of my eye, I saw my coach coming with sunglasses. Once he saw me in a pinning position, he came running.

I'll always remember what he said. He said, "Lift the head! Lift the head!"

I lifted his head and two seconds later I heard the referee's hand hit the mat.

The referee's hand grabbed mine and raised it I was the happiest man in the world.

I looked at he coach. He just smiled and waited until I went to go talk to him. He said, "Congratulations."

I was going to buy a shirt, but they only had extra-large. Even though I don't have a shirt, I'll always have the medal.

I don't know who was happier, me or Mr. Wilks.

Even as we speak, the medal's hanging in my room, a great memory to tell my children.

Word Choice

I do not choose the right word, I get rid of the wrong one.

—A.E. Housman

As you read and listen to other people speak, you cultivate a rich vocabulary of **precise and colorful words** that let you say exactly what you want—not come close, but nail it right on the head. This is the essence of good word choice. Every new word increases your power.

"But there are so many words to learn; where do I begin?" you might ask. In his book, *On Writing Well*, William Zinsser says, "Verbs are the most important of all your tools. They push the sentence forward and give it momentum . . . flail, poke, dazzle, squash, beguile, pamper, swagger, wheedle, vex. Probably no other language has such a vast supply of verbs so bright with color." Learn to **develop a critical eye toward the verbs** in your work. Are they active, powerful, full of energy and pizzazz?

Keep the vocabulary natural. Never write to impress or you'll end up with sentences like this: "He cultivated his way into the kitchen," or "Our friendship was highly lucrative." See what happened? In an attempt to use words that were bigger, these writers forgot to make sure they made sense. A thesaurus can be a good friend to a writer, but only if used sparingly and with thought.

Your writing works best with **specific words, carefully chosen to create a vivid picture in the reader's mind.** Play around with the words until they sound good. Don't say, "The dog was big and mean." Say, "A hundred pounds of snarling yellow fur launched itself from the porch, straining at a rope thin as spaghetti." Now that's something we can see happening!

The race in writing is not to the swift, but to the original.

—William Zinsser

Coaching checklist for Word Choice

1. Do you have favorite words or expressions in this piece? Show me.
2. Are there any words you used for the first time? Which ones?
3. Are there any words you weren't sure of? Which? Shall we look them up?
4. Did you use thesaurus or dictionary? Tell me about that.
5. Are there any words or phrases you're not happy with? Shall we brainstorm some other ways to say it?
6. The word or expression which caught my attention was.... (explain it to the writer)
7. Very vivid language, many great action verbs.
8. Inventive and risky-thanks for making me pay attention to your words.
9. I can picture this!
10. Nice variety of key phrases and words.
11. You chose your words very carefully and they work.