

# From Scenes to Series: Writing Fiction

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Essential Question: How can I draw on my imagination, and the books I love, to create story scenes and series about realistic characters who get in and out of trouble?

Bend I: How can I use my pretending skills to invent characters and small moment adventures all on my own?

Bend II: How can I use all that I know about story writing to create a series of books about a character who faces lots of challenges and adventures?

Bend III: How can I use mentor texts and my own skills as a narrative writer to write even better realistic fiction stories?

Bend IV: How can I revise and edit my series books to prepare for publication?

## Welcome to the Unit

THE URGE TO TELL STORIES begins when children are very young. They love to tell you imagined stories and not entirely real Small Moment stories—and it’s amazing to hear the tension and drama they create as storytellers, as they tell the mostly real story of their first try on a bike or the mostly imagined story of why they left the bike out in the rain. Children are dying to “make things up” and to have their stories still sound believable. Allowing children to satisfy this dual urge taps an energy source, and the result is something to behold.

In this final unit in the first-grade curriculum, you’ll lead your first-graders into series writing. Yes, series! In the first two bends of the unit, you will lead your children, somewhat step by step, through the process of creating a pretend character, giving that character adventures in more than one booklet, elaborating and revising across books, and finally, creating a “boxed set” of their stories. Along the way, of course, you’ll be reminding students to use what they know from their Small Moment writing, and you’ll extend those skills. Then, you’ll invite students to use all they know to do it again with more independence and agency as they create a second “famous series.” On their second go, you’ll be steering children to do work at DOK level 4, which is the level of transference and application.

The focus of the unit is on realistic fiction rather than any kind of fiction. We know that some of your students would prefer to write stories about aliens and will even create more pages when they write about aliens. The thing is, while they write more, they rarely write better. When kids truly study what makes a story exciting and still realistic, they end up writing stories that have more heart. Also, kids write best about what they know, and when they realize that their true knowledge of the terrors of riding a bike or lying to a parent after a mishap can find their way into their stories, they inevitably find that they actually have a lot to write about.

This unit will no doubt be a big favorite among your children, so expect that they, and you too, will have lots of fun, but meanwhile this unit also sets children up to do rigorous work that addresses the Common Core State Standards’ expectations of them as first-grade writers—and as burgeoning second-grade writers, too. Perhaps most obviously, children will certainly write “narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure” (W.1.3) and “describe actions, thoughts, and feelings” (W.2.3). In fact, they will do much more than that. We fully expect that children will reach toward the second-grade narrative writing standards and sometimes, as they manage event sequences and develop character traits, even toward the third-grade standards. We have designed this unit carefully, so that children begin it, drawing on everything they have learned about narrative writing up until now and simultaneously learning essentials about writing *fictional* narratives. That is, they will draw on their ability to tell what happens first, then next and to bring their characters to life by describing what they do, say, and think.

As the unit progresses, children’s understanding of what it means to tell a story with shape and with a satisfying ending will grow. By the second bend, when children begin to write books that go together—that is, series—you will have exceeded the Common Core’s expectations of first-graders and will, in fact, also be drawing on the standards in reading. Specifically, children will need to understand how to “describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama” (R.1.3) to create these in their own stories. They will meanwhile also address reading standards 1.4 and 1.7 as they engage in some reading-writing connections; they’ll “identify words and phrases that suggest feelings or appeal to the senses” and will describe a story’s characters, setting, or events, using its illustrations and details. In the reading, your children will,

in response to your close study of a mentor text, be approximating the second- and third-grade standards 4–6 as they closely study the craft and structure of their touchstone texts.

The work of this unit also sets children up to address many of the speaking and listening, language, and foundational standards. Throughout the unit, children will engage in work with partners, where they'll both speak and listen, and as they write and read, they'll hone their “understanding of the organization and basic features of print” (RF.1.1), of “spoken words, syllables and sounds (phonemes)” (RF.1.2), and of basic first-grade conventions, including capitalization of names and dates, end punctuation, and conventional spelling of words with common spelling patterns and frequently occurring irregular words.

Throughout this unit, children will work with increasing independence, applying and transferring what they have learned both in prior narrative units and in this unit to lots of realistic fiction books of their own creation. They will be engaging in what Norman Webb describes as level 4 work, that is, working with independence to use what they learn in one context (stand-alone stories) to another (series). As you read this book, you will notice again and again that we challenge children to take stock of what they know, synthesizing skills they have learned across the unit and the first-grade year to push themselves to write more powerfully and with greater precision. Among many other of the first-grade standards in writing, reading, language, and foundations, they will be addressing CCSS W.1.5 as they work, with guidance from teachers and peers, to “add details to strengthen writing as needed.”

## OVERVIEW OF THE UNIT

Bend I begins with an invitation to children to do something they already love doing—pretending! Because children are natural pretenders, you'll be able to say to them with real—not feigned—confidence, “You're already good at this!” Tell your children that their instinct to pretend, to assume different roles and to see the world through those roles, is a fundamental part of fiction writing. On the first day, you'll teach children that fiction writers call on their pretending skills to invent characters and small moment adventures, and then children will come up with characters of their own, naming them and putting them into imagined scenarios. Throughout the bend, you will encourage your students to write lots of realistic fiction stories quickly and with independence, using all they already know about writing small moments

and bringing stories to life. You'll introduce the notion that characters face a bit of trouble—and that writers then get their characters *out* of trouble to give readers a satisfying ending. You'll engage your children to plan and act out and to bring their lively imaginations to their serious work as writers. Toward the end of the bend, you'll spotlight courageous word choice and spelling and will end by asking your young writers to reflect on their writing, using the narrative checklists to help set new goals.

In the second bend, you'll set your young writers on a new path—to use all they have learned up until now to write series. You'll teach children that series writers put their characters into more than one book, and more than one adventure, and that they give special consideration to what to put into the very first book—Book One—of a series so that readers are set up for the books to follow. As children stay with one or two characters for a few or even half a dozen books, you'll teach them to write with detail and to make their characters talk for different purposes. You'll use *Henry and Mudge* to model as you teach, beginning in this bend and then throughout the duration of this unit. While you won't engage children in a mentor study per se, you and they will lean heavily on an understanding of what beloved series book authors do to make their characters hit home with readers worldwide. The bend ends with a mini-celebration of children's first series. Children will edit their work in preparation for this and create a boxed set (perhaps a cereal box, painted, with a blurb about the famous young author on the back) to showcase their work.

In Bend III, the focus shifts to turning your children into more powerful writers of realistic fiction as you engage students in a study of the genre and of themselves as writers. The bend begins with a mini-inquiry, in which you'll use the class mentor text to determine what writers do to make realistic fiction realistic. You'll teach children that writers call on their own experiences to imagine tiny details they can include in a story to let their readers know a story is realistic. Children will then have a go at this themselves, adding little details to their second series to help readers picture the story in their minds. You'll spotlight how to show, not tell, and will then channel youngsters to think about the structure of their stories as they write chapters with a clear beginning, middle, and end. They'll learn that writers use patterns to elaborate, and they will then draw on all their skills and knowledge as writers of fiction to create even more powerful stories.

In the final bend of the unit, children will prepare to publish their second series. They'll work hard to showcase their work, making it both beautiful and colorful by adding important details to the illustrations, by creating a “meet

the author” page to introduce themselves to their readers, and by editing and revising in meaningful ways (with an emphasis on playing with punctuation) to make their work publication-ready. The unit ends with a grand finale, during which an audience will join the class to witness their newly published series.

## ASSESSMENT

Before the unit begins, we suggest you take just a bit of time to establish a new baseline understanding of your students’ skills as narrative writers so that you know where your children are in this progression at this stage of the year. It will have been several months since children last studied narrative writing, but of course, they will bring with them everything they have learned both this year and last, and you’ll want to measure their growth from the start of the year to now.

You may be wondering whether to assess your students by giving them a fiction on-demand task. While teachers have certainly opted to do so, our experience has shown that the writing children produce on-demand when prompted to write a personal narrative is a more accurate reflection of their capacity for narrative writing than is the fictional writing they produce under the same circumstances. Think of it this way: how apt would you be to showcase your understanding of narrative writing if you had to first come up with a fictional character and fictional circumstances, including trouble the character faces, all on the spot? And even if you somehow came up with ideas for these components, how likely would you be to do your best small moment writing? Wouldn’t you give greater attention to writing well if instead of having to weave a tale out of thin air, you could instead just tell a story about your own life—one that you knew inside and out? Consider this, too: the exact same basic qualities of writing that make a strong personal narrative make a strong piece of fiction: elements such as showing, not telling, writing with detail, writing with voice, including a blend of dialogue and action, placing the reader into the setting, and so forth.

Some of you may question whether an on-demand assessment is even necessary. After all, this is the children’s first time writing fiction, you may argue. There’s a reason we believe this assessment is crucial: the short amount of time it takes to set children up to complete this task is nothing compared to the invaluable, endless data it provides. Not only will it serve as a measure for children’s growth across the unit, but it will also help to track their growth

across the year. You’ll be able to see improvements each child has made—and to share this with the kids, themselves, and their parents. If you write narrative report cards or have another meeting with parents planned, you can say, “This is what your child’s writing was like at the very start of the year, and this is what it was like at the start of this unit. And look, this is what he (or she) can do at the end of the unit!”

In *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, K–5*, we’ll provide you with instruments—including checklists and learning progressions—that will help you to see where, in the trajectory of writing development, each of your students lies.

For this initial assessment to provide accurate baseline data on your writers’ narrative skills, be careful not to scaffold your students’ work during this assessment. After all, the worse they do, the more dramatic their progress will be! You’ll want to simply remind students of the basic qualities you expect in a piece of narrative writing, then step back and leave them to their own devices. We recommend you give students the following prompt to start them off.

“I’m really eager to understand what you can do as writers of narratives, of stories, so today, will you please write the best personal narrative, the best Small Moment story, that you can write? Make this be the story of one time in your life. You might focus on just a scene or two. You’ll only have forty-five minutes to write this true story, so you’ll need to plan, draft, revise, and edit in one sitting. Write in a way that allows you to show off all you know about narrative writing.”

Because assessments are more valid across grades if the testing conditions are the same, we also recommend you give students additional specifications that we know most first-graders will ignore (but some will find helpful.) You can find these in *Writing Pathways: Performance Assessments and Learning Progressions, K–5*.

It is, of course, your school’s decision whether it is acceptable to alter this protocol. We simply want to remind you that if you do so, it is important that you are transparent about this and that you and your grade level colleagues agree on the same alterations because it’s essential that children across classrooms do the assessment under identical conditions. This way, you can accurately compare data across the grade, which will be invaluable to growing your own understanding and performance as first-grade teachers.

Because your children will be familiar with the format of on-demand assessments by this stage in the year, they won’t need much to get started. We



suggest that when you tell students the prompt and show them the chart of suggestions, kids be already at their regular writing seats, with familiar paper to draw on and a supply of additional pages if they want them.

Once children have completed the assessment, we suggest you duplicate their work so that each child has a copy of what he or she has written. By having the on-demand writing close on hand, writers will have a comparison piece against which to measure the subsequent writing they do across the unit. Periodically across the unit, then, you'll remind them to look between the stories they are writing now and the one they wrote at the start of the unit, to check that they are growing as narrative writers.

You, meanwhile, will assess where each writer falls in the Narrative Writing Learning Progression and where the bulk of your class falls, letting that information inform the upcoming unit of study. Read each student's draft, comparing it to the exemplar texts, and then read the descriptors to determine the precise ways each student can improve. Many of your children will probably be working toward achieving end-of-second-grade standards, which is very exciting. No text will match the checklist in its entirety, so don't be knocked off kilter if a piece of writing has a few descriptors that show a great deal of Needs Improvement. The descriptors will be particularly useful as you share with children concrete steps they can take to make their writing better. That is, if a writer's narrative is level 1, you and that writer can look at the descriptors of, say, character development for level 2 and note whether the writing adheres to those. If so, tell that child (or your whole class if this is broadly applicable), "You used to develop the people in your stories by . . .," and read the descriptors from the prior level, "but now you are . . .," and read the level 2 descriptor. "Can I give you a pointer about a way to make your writing even better? You can . . .," and read from the level 3 descriptor. You can even say, "Let me show you an example," and then cite a section of the level 2 and the level 3 exemplar texts.

## GETTING READY

Probably the most important work to do in readiness for this unit is reading work. You'll want to read aloud some delightful and enticing realistic fiction

stories to immerse the children in the genre they will be writing. Choose stories you love, stories that are part of series—since the children will write series—and stories that are within their range as writers and readers in terms of length and complexity. In this unit of study, we pay special attention to the Henry and Mudge series by Cynthia Rylant. We look very closely at *Henry and Mudge* and *the Happy Cat* as well as the first book in the series.

In addition, we suggest you get ready by . . . writing stories! The unit is going to make so much more sense to you and you'll feel so much more prepared if you've done the writing and faced the challenges that your children will face. So prepare your own collection of stories about one character that you can use as your demonstrate writing in front of the children. It's often great fun to do this work with colleagues. Work on these stories together, each writing some texts that you can use for the predictable small groups and one-on-one conferences you'll have, as well for minilessons. Find an afternoon, a sunny table, and some friends, and compose some rollicking fiction stories. We tend to keep in mind the range of interests and personalities in our classes, so while we might have written stories that were more internal, emotional struggles because that's what we tend to think of, we make sure to think of Ralph Fletcher's advice from *Boy Writers*, and we also push ourselves toward action, moments of grossness, and the kinds of characters and events that will reach various children in our class.

Of course, be sure your writing center is stocked with paper with various numbers of lines and a picture box and maybe even paper full of lines and no picture box for those who are ready. Keep the revision strips and revision pens available too.

Lastly, we suggest that you start to collect cereal boxes since as a celebration we ask kids to create a boxed set of their collection of stories. Each student will need two cereal boxes, and you'll need a couple to experiment with. You may want to go around the school as well, or raid your own shelves, for some beloved box sets, whether it's Captain Underpants or Misty of Chincoteague. Just handling these sets, and writing in their shadow, will inspire all of you.

## Session 3

# Writers Learn to Get Their Characters Out of Trouble



**B**Y NOW YOUR WRITERS will have two, three, or even four stories. Some of these stories will be “done,” and others may still need endings. Even the ones that end may not actually have any kind of ending that we recognize. It’s somewhat mysterious what leads kids to say that a story is done. Sometimes they seem completely at ease ending the story before anything has actually happened. Other times they end it with a cliffhanger. Their sense of logic is not ours.

This seems true even when students have been read to a lot. It’s rare to find a children’s story that doesn’t have a problem-solution structure. *Harry the Dirty Dog*, *The Paper Bag Princess*, *Ferdinand the Bull*, *Mr. Putter and Tabby*—they all circle around a problem that gets resolved. And yet six- and seven-year-olds resist this logic in their own writing.

You’ve done some work now on structure, teaching children that they can develop some trouble the character gets into and then think about how the character will get out of that trouble. What often happens, though, is that children elaborate the beginning of a story, and the middle of a story, but they rarely stretch out the ending.

To elaborate on the ending, it’s often helpful to think about “endings” rather than “the end.” An ending implies that something happens—there is action or dialogue or the character feels something (all part of the narrative learning progression for first grade). In this session, you’ll narrow the focus to what happens to the characters at the end of the story, with the aim of teaching your writers to get their characters out of trouble. This work will help them meet and go beyond the Common Core expectations for first-grade narrative writers, where they are expected to “provide some sense of closure” (W.1.3). The children will also have an opportunity to practice their close reading skills, as they study your exemplar text for evidence of details such as action, dialogue, and feelings. You’ll model all of those, and your writers will probably try one. Really, though, the purpose of this lesson is to show kids how to stretch out a part of their story with detail. In this session you will show how to do that as revision, but you will want kids to know that this is something that they can do as they draft or as they revise their stories.

**IN THIS SESSION**, you’ll teach children that writers make endings that satisfy their reader; they make something happen through action, dialogue, or feeling to get their characters out of trouble.

### GETTING READY

- ✓ A story that has a missing ending, leaving the kids wanting more or wanting an ending. The story used here originates in the narrative learning progression exemplars (see Connection).
- ✓ Two versions of a story about your own character from Session 1, one without a satisfying ending, which you’ll read aloud, and one with a good ending to show your revision! (see Teaching)
- ✓ “Ways to Bring Stories to Life” chart from Unit 1, *Small Moments*. You may want to pull it from the wall and bring it front and center during the minilesson (see Teaching).
- ✓ Paper and tape on hand (see Share)

**COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS:** W.1.3, W.2.3, RL.1.1, RL.1.3, RL.2.3, SL.1.1, SL.1.4, L.1.1, L.1.2





## MINILESSON

# Writers Learn to Get Their Characters Out of Trouble

## CONNECTION

**Tell a story that has a missing ending, leaving your students wanting more.**

"Come close, children, I have a story to tell you. It's a little scary, so come in nice and close with your partner." I waited until they were leaning in, eyes big.

"Sarah and Julie were walking to school. It was Julie's first day of kindergarten. Her big sister, Sarah, was going to keep her safe on the way to school. 'Bye!' they shouted, as they left the house. 'This is great!' Julie said as they walked down the block. The sun was shining. The flowers were out. They turned the corner." I made my voice low and full of tension. The kids leaned in even closer. "That's when they saw it. They saw . . ."

I stopped and sat up. The kids, of course, whispered, "What? What did they see?"

"Wouldn't it be mean if I ended the story there, readers? If I just said, 'They saw . . . *the end!*' You want to know what happens next, right?"

The children nodded fiercely.

### ✿ Name the teaching point.

"Writers, today I want to teach you that readers love satisfying endings. One way writers create satisfying endings for their readers is by telling what happens to their characters at the end of their story. This makes their readers happy!"

## TEACHING

**Show students that they can make something happen to their character. Demonstrate with your own story that has a missing ending, leaving the reader feeling unsatisfied. Then offer choices about what could happen to the character that would satisfy the reader.**

"Writers, I'm just finishing a Gretchen story. I'm going to share the way the story ends right now. Can you give me a huge thumbs up if you like the ending, and a thumbs down if you don't and think I should revise it? Thumbs up for a satisfying ending—it makes you happy because you know what happened. Thumbs down if it doesn't."

## ◆ COACHING

*Storytelling is a key element of engagement. Learn to be a dramatic storyteller, and you'll never struggle to hold your children's attention.*

*This kind of mini-drama, an enactment of an actual story, makes your point better than any amount of explanation. To parallel this work in reading, when you're reading aloud, you might sometimes pause and ask, "Could that be the ending?" just when it's at a cliffhanger moment.*

I picked up my booklet, ready to read. First, I retold the story so far. "This is a story where Gretchen got stuck in the tree house in a thunderstorm. Gretchen was in her tree fort when it began to thunder. She couldn't decide whether to stay in the tree fort or run for the house. Then lightning came, close! This is where I want to work on the ending. Listen to this ending. Thumbs up, or thumbs down?"

*Lightning flashed. Gretchen trembled. "Mommy!" she yelled. No one came. Then suddenly . . . a bigger flash! CRACK!*

"Thumbs up or thumbs down, writers? Does it seem like I fixed the trouble? Are you satisfied?" Thumbs turned down everywhere.

"Hmm . . . the way that story ended didn't seem so good! Maybe it's because Gretchen was still stuck in the tree fort."

I put down the booklet. "I should try to get my character out of trouble. I need to make sure that I fix the trouble she is in. Watch me try that. Watch as I revise the ending." I looked at my booklet and then stared into space. On the chart paper I wrote:

*Gretchen hid her head in her hands. CRACK! She was cold. Then the storm passed. Gretchen's mom yelled, "Gretchen, come inside and get dry. I made hot chocolate!" Gretchen climbed down the tree house. She felt safe at last!*

I looked up. "Thumbs up or down?" Thumbs flashed up. "You feel better, right?" I asked. "It's because now something happens at the end, to my character. Writers, you can make your readers happy too, by getting your character out of trouble."

I pointed back to the chart paper with my exemplar ending and picked up a marker to add to the chart. "Here's a tip for writing endings that make readers happy. First and most important—write a solution! Get your character out of trouble!" In big red letters I added to the chart, above my ending, "Fiction Writers Get Their Character Out of Trouble!"

"Another tip is that everything you learned about bringing stories to life in small moments works for when you want to stretch out the ending of your story too. Remember when you learned to make people move or talk, and to feel and think?" I pointed to the "Ways to Bring Stories to Life" chart from *Small Moments*, which I had moved to the front of the room before the minilesson. "Well, you can do the same thing in your endings. You can add action by telling what the character did; dialogue by telling what the character said; or feelings by telling how the character felt.

"Look, see if you find evidence of those in my ending." I said them again, "Action . . . dialogue . . . feelings. Quick, work with your partner. Do you see evidence of any of these?" After just a moment I interrupted. "I saw you pointing out the action here," I pointed and annotated the ending as I spoke, "the dialogue here, and feelings here!"

"Let's keep this example up, to help us." I moved the chart to the side.

SESSION 3: WRITERS LEARN TO GET THEIR CHARACTERS OUT OF TROUBLE



*This chart will serve as a reminder of prior teaching.*

①



Gretchen hid her head in her hands. Crack! She was cold.

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②



Then the storm passed. Gretchen's mom yelled, "Gretchen, come inside and get dry. I made hot chocolate."

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③



Gretchen climbed down the tree house.

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④



She felt safe at last.

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FIG. 3-1 Once again, the teacher's demonstration text will be an important scaffold in the room, not only during the minilesson but also as a cuing system for children to turn to when they need a familiar mentor.



## Fiction Writers Get Their Character Out of Trouble!

Gretchen hid her head in her hands. CRACK! She was wet and cold. Then the storm passed.  
Gretchen's mom yelled, "Gretchen, come inside and get dry. I made hot chocolate!" [DIALOGUE]  
Gretchen climbed down the tree house. [ACTION] She felt safe at last! [FEELINGS]

## ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT

**Invite students to create other endings for the story you told. Remind them to get the character out of trouble.**

"Writers, let's give you a chance to try this. There's no one way to end a story. In fact, writers often try more than one ending. Let's go back to my story again and imagine some other endings. Remember your tips—get your character out of trouble! And to stretch out the ending, you can use action, dialogue, or feelings."

I retold my story. "Gretchen was in the tree fort when it began to thunder. She couldn't decide whether to stay in the tree fort or run for the house. Then lightning came, close!

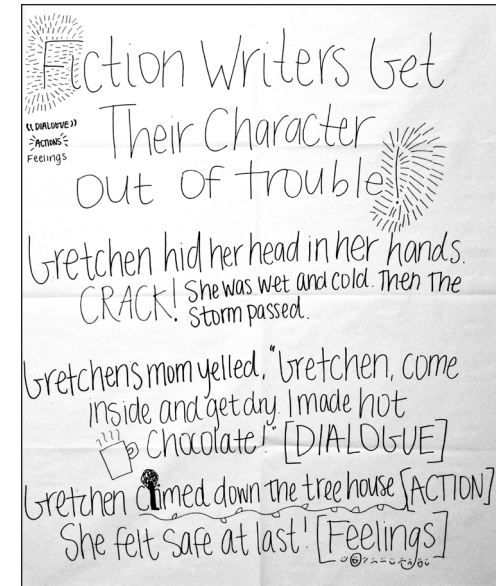
"Writers, I'm going to give you a chance to work on revising the ending with your partner. If you were going to get Gretchen out of trouble, what might you do? Go ahead. Give it a try. I'll listen in."

**Listen in as the kids give it a try, and then retell some of their endings, illustrating that there is no one perfect ending but that writers work hard on their endings and make choices.**

"Eyes up here, writers. I heard some endings that would make me really satisfied as a reader! Annabel and Miles came up with this ending: 'Gretchen scrambled down the ladder. Gretchen raced for the house. Her mom was in the door. She ran fast. Phew! She was safe!' That ending gets Gretchen out of trouble with a lot of action! Elisa and David said, 'Gretchen hid in the corner of the tree fort. The branches overhead kept her dry. 'This is fun,' Gretchen thought. Soon the storm was over.' That ending included what Gretchen thought. I love these endings, writers—they really get Gretchen out of trouble. I'll have to think about which ending I like best for my story—I have a lot to choose from."



FIG. 3-2 Stretching out the ending can provide more closure to a story—as well as added drama!



By having the children rehearse a different ending than the one they just heard, you also implicitly reinforce the notion that writers experiment—they try things more than one way. If you play up that skill, your children may follow suit.

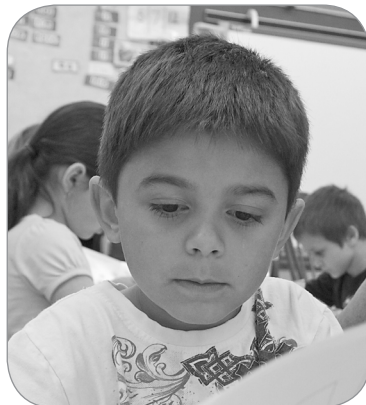
**Restate the steps your students just followed, so kids can follow the same process when they give it a try on their own stories. Tuck in the tip about using dialogue, action, or feelings to make something happen.**

I paused. “Writers, let’s review the work you’ve just done, because it’s very important. You learned that writers can go back into their stories and work on their endings. One way they can work on their endings is to get their character out of trouble. A special tip you learned was if you use dialogue or action or feelings, it helps you stretch out the ending. What’s important is that you know you can go back into your stories and elaborate on them—even when you thought they were done!”

## LINK

**Send the children off, taking the opportunity to explain what it will look like as they go off to write.**

“Writers, this is an important step you’re taking today, which is to think about making your reader happy as you write—that means that you want to make sure you have an ending that satisfies your reader. You can do this in the story you are working on now, or you can look back and revise one of your endings to a story that you have finished. Whenever you are writing, you can add on and make it better. I’m going to admire you as you get started. I’m sure I’ll see some of you finishing a story and some of you getting out the stories you already wrote and adding new pages to the endings. Remember, you can grab some tape, and add more pages or revision strips to your stories if you want to add on to them!”



*In your link, you can refer to the choices writers might make. While it’s more efficient to encourage them all to do one thing (usually what you just taught), independent writers need to learn to make effective choices.*



## CONFERRING AND SMALL-GROUP WORK

# Writing for the Reader

TODAY, AS YOU TAUGHT YOUR WRITERS TO STRETCH OUT THEIR ENDINGS, you emphasized that they do this work to satisfy a reader. Whenever we are reading silently in the presence of children, we let our bodies convey the sense of drama capturing us as readers. We grip the book tightly. We murmur, “Oh no!” Time and again, children will ask, “What? What? What’s happening?” When we read aloud, we let our bodies *and* our voices respond to the narrative, bringing our voice to a whisper for tense moments, reading at speed for exciting parts.

Teaching children to read their own writing with this same sense of drama helps them as readers and writers. As readers, it helps their intonation. As writers, noticing the drama in their stories helps them go back and add on to their writing, especially when you highlight how writers use dialogue and action to create drama. You might, then, gather a partnership and show them how to read their stories with feeling and expression, and then show them that adding action or dialogue can make their stories even more dramatic.

You may say to your kids, “You can read the books you write the same way you read books from our library. Really listen for when the characters get in trouble—and make that very dramatic. Listen for the dialogue too—are people talking? Yelling? Make your voice capture that excitement. And if you want more excitement, add some dialogue or action.” Partners can help each other read, reread with more drama, and add things into their writing to make it more dramatic.

Autumn, for instance, worked with her partner on reading her story about finding a slug. At one point in her story, she had written, “Tewac started to run away.” She read that with drama. Then her partner said, “Maybe he could YELL something as he ran. That would make it even more exciting.” After some consultation, the girls came up with, “Then Tewac started to run away and yelled I don’t like slugs!” which Autumn read aloud with much drama.

“So the question to ask yourself,” I said to Autumn, “is what can you do as a writer to really make sure the reader knows that Tewac is yelling? What clues can you give?” I asked. “I could use exclamation marks,” Autumn said. I nodded. “Anything else?” I queried. “And I could make big letters,” Autumn added. I left her to it.

### MID-WORKSHOP TEACHING **Trying More than One Ending and Using a Partner to Get Feedback**

“Writers, can I stop you for a moment? Autumn and Annabel are doing some great work that I want to share with all of you. Annabel wrote *three* different endings to one of her stories! Isn’t that amazing, that she would work that hard as a writer? That’s going to take you far, Annabel. She has her three different endings on different pieces of paper. Now she and Autumn have put all three in front of them on the floor, and they’re deciding together which ending they like the best. Isn’t that a great way for partners to work together? You are *so* lucky to write with your friends.” (See Figures 3–4 and 3–5.)

I held up Annabel’s papers, put them back down again, and shook both of their hands, formally. “Well done, partners. I’d be honored to work with you sometime.”



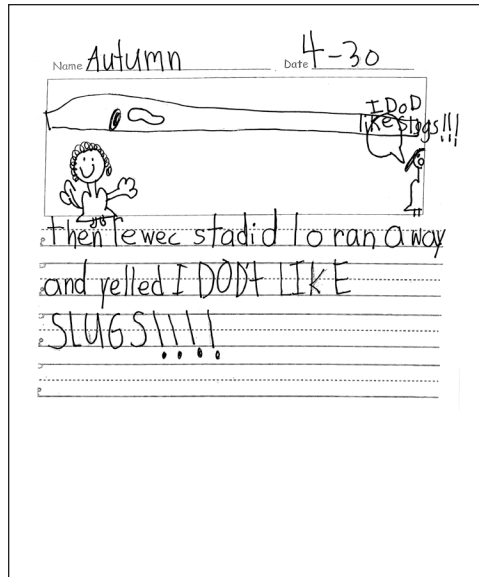
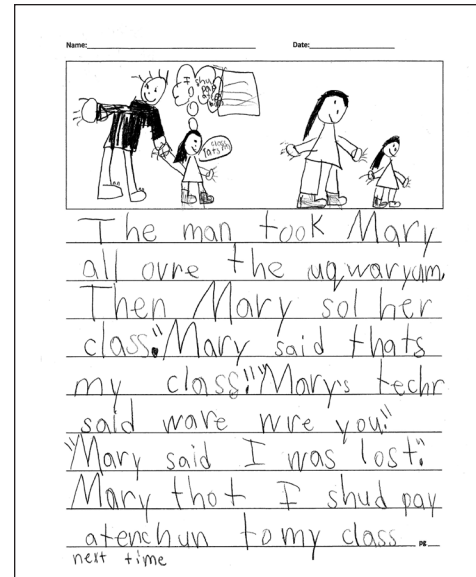
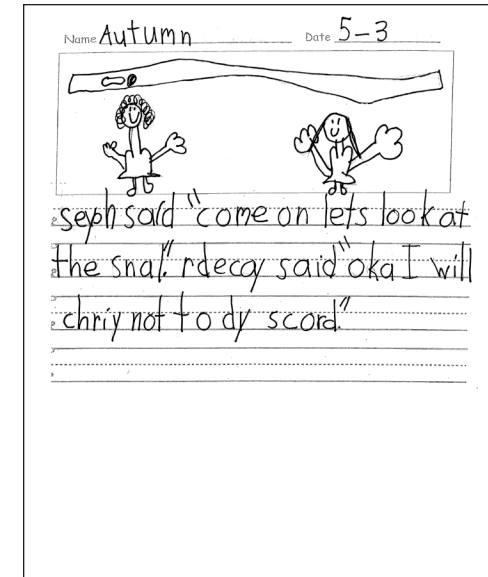


FIG. 3-3 Autumn's creative control of capitals and exclamation points leads her readers to read with greater emotion.



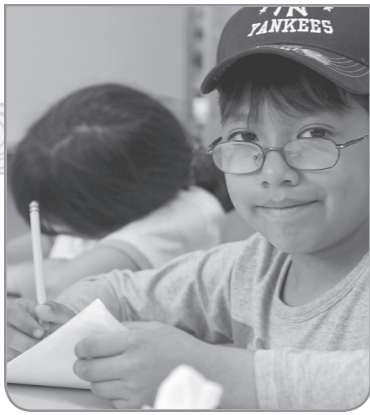
The man took Mary all over the aquarium. Then Mary saw her class. Mary said, "that's my class!" Mary's teacher said, "Where were you?" Mary said, "I was lost." Mary thought that I should pay attention to my class next time.

FIG. 3-4 Annabel works on her ending. This ending includes a moral, or lesson—something Annabel carries over from reading workshop!



Seyony said, "come on let's look at the snail." Rdecoy said, "Ok, I will try not to be scared."

FIG. 3-5 Autumn's use of dialogue in the ending to her story captures her character's emotions of being afraid of a slug.



## SHARE

# Beginnings that Have Action, Dialogue, or Feelings

**Draw parallels between how writers work on endings and how they work on beginnings. Remind students they can add onto their stories and share their work with their partner.**

"Writers, pens down for a moment, please, and eyes up here." When all the children were looking up, I said, "Children, one of you just asked the most interesting question. The question was, 'Can I work on the beginning of my story again too? What if I want to use action, dialogue, or feelings at the beginning of a story?' Isn't that a good question? I bet you already are thinking that the answer is . . ." I paused until they were saying, "Yes!"

"Yes, writers go back and add on to the beginning of their stories as well. They look over their stories, and they think about the beginnings just as they thought about the endings. I'm thinking that at the beginning of my story about Gretchen, I should say more about Gretchen's feelings about storms—and maybe add in some dialogue or action rather than just saying she was cold. I think I'm going to write two extra pages and tape them into my 'Gretchen and the Big Storm' book.

"I'm sure you've got ideas for how to add on to your beginnings too. Right now, why don't you take out your stories." I waited as they did so. "Find one that you think you could add more to the beginning. Put your finger on the part you're thinking about." I waited again. "Could you add a whole page? Could you add some dialogue, or some action? Think for a moment about the action you could add . . . or characters talking . . . or what characters feel . . ." I waited. "Now, turn and tell your partner . . . what do you want to add?"

After they had talked for a few minutes, I motioned to the paper and tape at hand. "Writers, there are three important things you are doing that I'm hoping you'll keep doing as writers." I put my finger in the air. "One, you realized that when you learn to improve one part of your writing, you can do that work in any part of your writing. Two, you used your partner to rehearse the parts you wanted to add. That's always a good idea. And three, writers capture those words on paper while they're thinking of them. So there's tape and paper on hand. Go ahead, add some words to the pages you have, or add in a revision strip or a new page! And remember, the next time you start a new story, you can be thinking of the same things you're thinking about as you revise your stories—adding action, dialogue, or feelings for your character as you write.