

## *Craft Lessons* *Teaching Writing K–8*

**Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi**

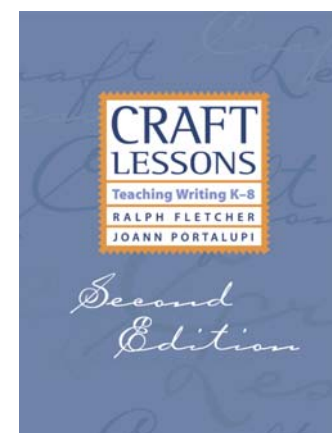
“Craft is the cauldron in which the writing gets forged.” With these words, Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi introduce teachers to a rich array of strategies for teaching the writer’s craft in the classroom. The excerpts in these workshops help participants learn how to match short, insightful lessons to their students’ needs. These workshops give participants the chance to test a few of the lessons through their own writing and to try some craft lessons with their students.

### Contents

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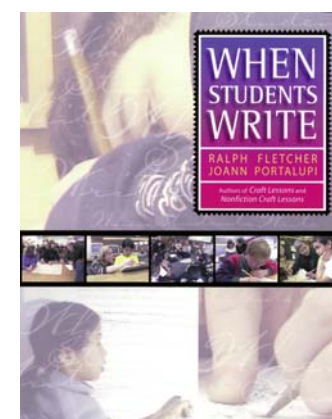
Craft Lessons Organized by Subject  
Acknowledgments  
Introduction  
Setting the Table for Craft  
Craft Lessons K–2  
Craft Lessons 3–4  
Craft Lessons 5–8  
Questions and Answers  
Appendixes  
Children’s Books  
Qualities of Writing Index  
References

### Featured Book:



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### Featured Video:



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# WORKSHOP 1



In this workshop participants create and share a piece of writing.

## Knowing Ourselves as Writers

### Materials Needed

You will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Craft Lessons* by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi for yourself and each workshop participant
- ✓ Blank paper for each participant, both unruled and ruled paper

Participants will need:

- ✓ *Craft Lessons*

### Getting Started

40 minutes

This first activity is a simple, unthreatening writing activity that moves participants from images, to memories, to writing. (Note: it is important that you do this activity along with the participants.)

Pass out blank paper and ask participants to sketch the floor plan of a house from their youth that holds fond memories for them. It might be their own home, or the home of a grandparent, or the house down the street where their best friend lived. Tell them to include basic room layouts and placement of furniture. (10 minutes)

After they have quickly sketched their plans, ask them to use the margins of the diagram to write in words associated with the memories evoked as they sketched. For example, the kitchen portion of the sketch might include certain smells they associated with the house; the living room, recollections of evening activities; the dining room, snatches of mealtime conversations. You might put your own sketch on the overhead, along with the words you've placed in the margins. (10 minutes)

Ask each participant to choose one word or phrase from their page and begin writing on a new sheet of lined paper about the memory evoked. (Write your own draft too.) Give them the following advice about their writing:

- Keep writing even if you get stuck. Just write "I'm stuck"—keep the pen moving.
- Don't worry about crafting the writing at this point—your goal is simply to get something down on the page.
- Try to fill at least a page with your recollections.

### Working in Groups

30 minutes

Have participants break into groups of 3 to share their writing. Tell them they can read their entire work aloud, or they might read just a favorite section, or they might just summarize their work to the group. (Groups of 3 work better than pairs because if one person chooses not to write or share, it won't ruin the group.) (10–15 minutes)

Next, discuss as a whole group the experience of writing the piece and sharing it in the group. Use these questions as prompt discussions:

What did they like best about the experience? What did they like least? What surprised them?

What connections do they make to their own writing instruction in the classroom? (10–15 minutes)

Tell participants that they will be working from these drafts at the next workshop session. They can choose to bring the draft as is or, if they prefer, they can complete a new draft before the next meeting.

← OPTIONAL BREAK →

## Reading the Excerpt

20 minutes

Have participants silently read the Introduction and Chapter 1, “Setting the Table for Craft,” in *Craft Lessons*.

## Working in Groups

25 minutes

Divide participants into small groups of 3 to 5, by grade level. In each group, have participants keep two running lists as they answer the following questions:

1. What are the greatest strengths of students at this age in writing?
2. What are their greatest needs?

After 15 minutes, have the group come together and discuss their findings. Compile a master list of strengths and needs for the whole group.

## Putting the Ideas into Practice

Tell participants that after they leave this workshop they are to try one of the craft lessons in *Craft Lessons* with their students, either with the whole class or with a small group. They can talk with their colleagues about which lesson seems most appealing to try. They must complete the lesson, and their notes on the success or failure of this teaching experience, before the next workshop session.

## Follow-Up Between Workshop Sessions

Four days before the next workshop, remind participants that they need to bring their notes from the craft lesson they attempted to the next workshop session, as well as the draft of their own writing that they are working on. They also, of course, need to bring their copies of *Craft Lessons*.

### *What Participants Need to Bring to the Next Workshop*

*Craft Lessons*

Draft of “Memories of Home” writing

Observational notes from craft lesson they attempt



# WORKSHOP 2



In this workshop participants analyze the effectiveness of a craft lesson attempted with students and continue to revise their own writing.

## Crafting Memories of Home

### Materials Needed

You will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Craft Lessons* by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi
- ✓ Page of your draft to display or distribute

Participants will need:

- ✓ *Craft Lessons*
- ✓ Draft of “Memories of Home” writing
- ✓ Observational notes from craft lesson they attempted

### Getting Started

Before the workshop, transfer a page of your own draft to be displayed on an overhead projector, or make copies to distribute to the group.

This workshop begins with a short craft lesson, linked to the “Memories of Home” draft. The craft lesson you will present to the group is “Focusing on a Slice of the Pie.” Here is the explanation from page 68 in *Craft Lessons*.

#### **Focusing on a Slice of the Pie**

##### DISCUSSION

Students are famous for trying to write about humongous topics: “My Life,” “School,” or “My Hobbies.” No wonder they quickly run out of things to write about! Without guidance, students will often choose topics that are huge and unfocused. Such topics usually lead to a list of ideas where the writing never goes beneath the surface. Here’s one way of modeling for students how to narrow down a large topic.

##### HOW TO TEACH IT

Writers often start by choosing to write on a big topic: “Summer,” “Friends,” “My Family.” You might think of a large topic like “My Family” as an extra-large pizza. (*Draw a large pizza on the chart.*)

I run into a problem if I try to write about such a big topic—too many relatives! Where should I start? I could write about the whole topic, but I might have better luck if I focus on a slice of the pie. Here’s how I’d do it. I’d ask myself, “Who is one person in my family who’s really special to me?” When I ask myself that question I know the answer: my grandfather. I could write about him. (*Draw a slice in the circle.*)

I’m starting to narrow down my topic. But the problem is that Grandpa is a big topic. So now I ask myself, “What is one special memory I have of Grandpa?” I remember the time he took me to the park. It started to rain, but we didn’t leave. We both got soaked. We loved it—we couldn’t stop laughing. That’s what I’m going to write about. See what’s happened? Now I’m taking a slice of the slice. I focused it twice. (*Show a section of the slice.*)

Think about this when you write today. Are you trying to eat the whole pizza? Have you picked a topic that's too big? Instead of writing about the whole thing, see if you can focus on a slice of the pie.

## Putting the Ideas into Practice

30 minutes

After the group has read through the craft lesson, use your own draft as an example. Put a large circle on an overhead projector or chart paper and show the group how you take a large topic from your own draft and narrow it down into smaller pieces for future drafting. Make sure you spend no more than 10 minutes on this craft lesson presentation—it's important for participants to see a model craft lesson that is short and focused.

Next, have participants silently sketch out a pie chart of topics and subtopics from their draft.

Tell the group they might choose to work from their chart in narrowing their focus. They might also just continue drafting or revising their existing draft. But everyone needs to write silently for the next 15 minutes.

## Small-Group Discussion

20 minutes

Next, have participants break into small groups of 3—the same groups as those in the last workshop. The group members are to respond to one another's drafts. Give the groups the following guidelines for responding to their peers' writing:

1. Each person should share a piece of his or her draft or pie chart and talk about the changes he or she has made in the writing.
2. The next 5 minutes should be spent responding to the group member's draft.
3. Before moving on to the next participant, the person whose work was discussed should tell the group what he or she plans to work on next with the draft.

## Whole-Group Discussion

20 minutes

Reconvene the whole group. Ask for responses to the workshop, including how participants might revise or adapt the process for use with their own students.

Tell participants they will be working from their drafts at the next workshop. They have the same option as before: they may bring the draft as is to work on next time, they can do some revision on their own, or they may start a new piece if they are unhappy with their current draft.

## Small-Group Discussion

15 minutes

Divide the workshop into small groups of 3 or 4 participants, by grade levels. Explain that the participants now should pull out their notes from the craft lesson(s) they tried in their classrooms since the last workshop. Have them discuss individually what went well and what they would do differently next time.

← OPTIONAL BREAK →

## Reading the Excerpt

10 minutes

Have everyone read silently the introductions to the grades K–2, 3–4, and 5–8 craft lessons in their books.

## Small-Group Discussion

10 minutes

Have the same small groups talk about the concept of emphasizing only a few core craft skills at their grade level. What craft skills do they value the most? (It helps to give participants a list to work from to get their thinking started. The list might include: leads/endings; dialogue; lively language; verbs; setting the scene.)

## Whole-Group Discussion

10 minutes

Bring the whole group together and have them compare the lists from the small groups. Where are the similarities and differences in craft instruction expectations?

## Moving On to New Ideas

Tell participants that the next workshop assignment is the same as the last one: they must try a new craft lesson with their students. The lesson, along with notes about the success or failure of the teaching experience, must be completed before the next workshop session. They should also bring their own writing in progress to the next workshop. Participants can bring the draft as is, or they can choose to do some additional revising before the next session.

## Follow-Up Between Workshop Sessions

Three days before the next workshop, remind participants that they need to bring their notes from the craft lesson they attempted to the next workshop session, as well as the draft of their own writing that they are working on. They also need to bring their copies of *Craft Lessons*.



### *What Participants Need to Bring to the Next Workshop*

*Craft Lessons*

Draft of “Memories of Home” writing

Observational notes from craft lesson they attempted

# Creating Drama

## WORKSHOP 3

### Materials Needed

You will need:

- ✓ Copy of *Craft Lessons* by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi
- ✓ Page of your draft to display or distribute
- ✓ A dramatic scene you've written, based on the earlier draft
- ✓ "Craft Lessons to Stretch Young Writers" from the *When Students Write* video series and a videoplayer

Participants will need:

- ✓ *Craft Lessons*
- ✓ Draft of "Memories of Home" writing
- ✓ Observational notes from craft lesson they attempted

### Getting Started

Before the workshop, transfer a page of your own draft to be displayed on an overhead projector, or make copies to distribute to the group. In addition, you should have written a dramatic scene based on that page (see below).

This final workshop on *Craft Lessons* will reinforce the concept that writing instruction flows from work on meaningful drafts in progress. You'll begin with a writer's workshop, where participants work on their own writing. You'll also share some of your writing as part of the craft lesson "Creating a Dramatic Scene." Here is the explanation from page 65 of *Craft Lessons*:

#### **Creating a Dramatic Scene**

##### DISCUSSION

Students in the upper elementary grades typically write narrative summaries of events. But there can be a sameness to this kind of writing. One way to get livelier writing is to show students how to craft a dramatic scene. Don't be surprised if some students begin to overuse this powerful tool.

##### HOW TO TEACH IT

Here's a memory I have from high school:

When I was eighteen years old, my mother told me she was three months pregnant. I was pretty shocked, since my mother was 41 at the time.

In this passage the story gets filtered through the narrator (me). I could write this in a different way. I could write a scene that puts the reader smack in the middle of the action, to let the reader see and feel exactly what I saw and felt when I found out the surprising news:

I saw my mother in the driveway. She was raking leaves, her strong worn hands clutching the wooden rake. She waved me over.

"Can I talk to you a second?" she said. She was smiling, and I noticed a twinkle in her eye I'd never seen before.



In this workshop participants demonstrate how craft lessons are an ongoing part of writer's workshop, linked to specific needs of students.

“Sure,” I said. “What’s up?”

“I’m three months pregnant,” she said. She looked at me, waiting.

“You’re hey, really?” I sputtered. “Wow! That’s good! I mean, that’s great! I mean, how do *you* feel about it?”

See the difference? In the first version I summarized what happened. In the second version the narrator doesn’t do much talking to the reader. Instead, I described the narrator talking to the mother. I used visual details to describe the driveway and the characters.

Do you have a crucial moment in your story? If you do, that might be a part you could write as a dramatic scene. Think of it as making a movie. You’ll want to describe real characters actually doing something. You’ll probably want to use dialogue. You’ll want to describe the setting. See if you can make your scene come alive.

## Putting the Ideas into Practice

30 minutes

After the group has read through the craft lesson, show the brief excerpt from your own earlier draft that you’ve chosen to expand into a dramatic scene. Read the dramatic scene you’ve written prior to the workshop, based on the portion of the draft you are highlighting.

Next, have participants silently read through their drafts, choosing three points that could be expanded or revised to create more drama.

Tell participants they might now choose to create a dramatic scene. Or they can choose to continue drafting and revising. But everyone needs to write silently for the next 15 minutes.

## Small-Group Discussion

20 minutes

Have participants break into small groups of 3—the same groups as those in the last two workshops. The group members are to respond to one another’s drafts. Give the groups the following guidelines for responding to their peers’ writing:

1. Each person should share a piece of his or her draft and talk about the changes he or she has made in the writing.
2. The next 5 minutes should be spent responding to the group member’s draft.
3. Before moving on to the next participant, the person whose work was discussed should tell the group what he or she plans to work on next with the draft.

## Whole-Group Discussion

10 minutes

Reconvene the whole group. Encourage participants to read their work to the whole workshop, and, if there are volunteers, have 2 or 3 participants share. Ask for responses to the workshop so far, including how participants might revise or adapt the process for use with their own students.

OPTIONAL BREAK →

## Viewing the Video

20 minutes

Close the workshop by viewing a video segment of a teacher presenting a craft lesson. Cue “Craft Lessons to Stretch Young Writers” to the segment in Suzanne’s class of her craft lesson from *Grandpa Never Lies*. Ask participants these focus questions before viewing the segment:

1. How is Suzanne’s teaching style in presenting the lesson similar to your own?
2. Is her lesson longer or shorter than the two lessons you’ve tried with your students? Why?
3. After viewing Suzanne’s work, how might you change your plans for future craft lesson presentations?

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This discussion ends the *Craft Lessons* RST workshops.

## Extensions

For future workshops, consult the Viewing Guide to the *When Students Write* video series for ideas, discussions, and activities tied to the video series. The Viewing Guide is available on-line at [www.stenhouse.com/pdfs/0334guid.pdf](http://www.stenhouse.com/pdfs/0334guid.pdf).

## Resources

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- Fletcher, Ralph. 2000. *Grandpa Never Lies*. New York: Clarion.
- Fletcher, Ralph, and JoAnn Portalupi. 2007. *Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K–8. Second Edition*, Portland, ME: Stenhouse.
- . 2002. *When Students Write*. Videos. Portland, ME: Stenhouse.