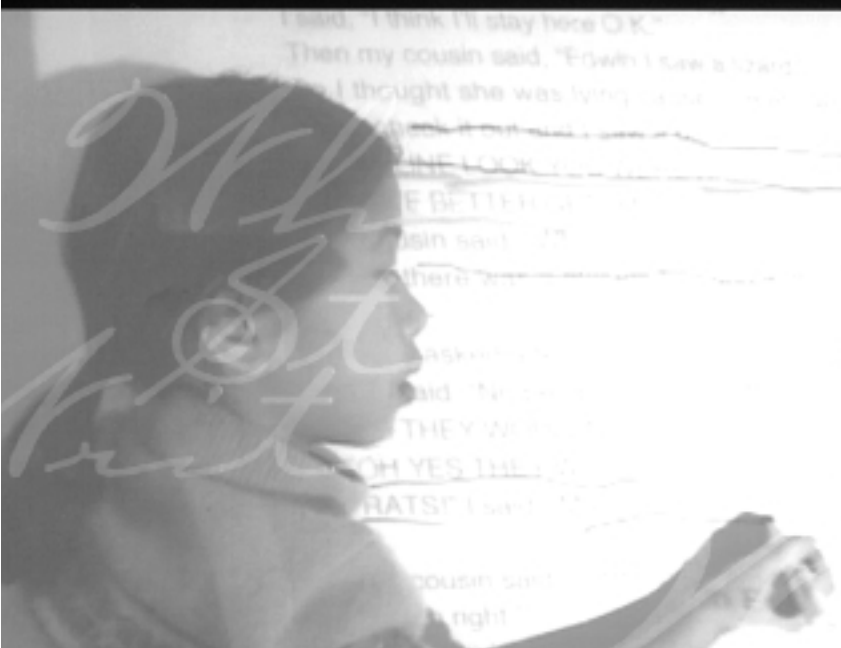


WHEN STUDENTS WRITE

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Nonfiction Craft Lessons

VIEWING GUIDE



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Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K–8 and Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K–8 by Ralph Fletcher and JoAnn Portalupi are available at www.stenhouse.com.

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Introduction

Welcome to *When Students Write*. We (JoAnn and Ralph) are glad to be able to contribute to the ongoing conversation of how we can best teach students to write. For many teachers, writing instruction is the most challenging part of the school day. It's possible to read books on this subject, set up the right routines, and so on, yet still find that something is missing, something intangible that needs to be uncovered to allow the writing to really flourish. In these tapes we try to get at those intangibles and flesh them out with real kids, teachers, and classrooms.

A Few Words About Where These Tapes Were Filmed

Bailey's Elementary School for the Arts and Sciences is located in eastern Falls Church, Virginia. It has a student body of approximately 900, over 70 percent of whom are second language learners. Over 40 nations and 20 languages are represented, with the predominant languages being Spanish, Vietnamese, Cambodian, and English. Bailey's is both enriched and challenged by the needs that come with second language learners and a student mobility rate of around 30 percent.

To read more about Bailey's Elementary School visit their web site at: www.fcps.edu/DEA/schoolprof/elementary/BaileysES.html.

How to Use *When Students Write*

We have been involved in teacher education for more than twenty years. Our work often includes demonstration teaching where we conduct a writing or reading workshop and invite teachers to observe, take notes, and later, "debrief" on what they saw. In this sort of demonstration, it's common for different viewers to notice different aspects of the classroom dynamic that unfolds before them. One viewer might notice a teacher's tone, another might be struck by the amount of student talk, still another by the physical environment. Again and again we find that when we provide enough time for teachers to share their observations it broadens everyone's perspective.

Our belief in the power of professional dialogue lies at the heart of this viewing guide. We hope to invite viewers to participate in the ongoing exploration of crucial issues related to nurturing strong writers. In this spirit, it is important to give viewers time to talk. As you share these tapes with teachers, administrators, or parents, develop the habit of asking, What do you notice?

We recognize that these tapes will be used in many different settings and that facilitators will adjust the viewing to the needs of the group. If time allows, we suggest initially viewing each tape from start to finish without interruptions. During a second viewing, the facilitator might strategically pause the tape every so often to open up discussion around a particular issue.

This viewing guide provides a few overarching questions for viewers to keep in mind the first time they watch each tape. We follow these questions with more detailed points about specific sections of the tape. Sometimes we point to specific classroom scenes on the video (such as teacher conferences, mini-lessons, and so on) and suggest stopping the tape to allow time for teachers to react, muse, disagree, reflect, or synthesize what they are watching. In a few places we couldn't resist adding our own commentary on important points we suggest you consider.

We also provide a number of questions to spark discussion. You might think of these questions as dishes on a buffet line—lots to choose from, though you probably won't sample every single one. Be selective. Ask questions before the segment is played. Classrooms are noisy, busy places. There are literally dozens of different components of each segment that participants might choose to focus on—nonverbal behaviors, a student-to-student dialogue, and so on. If you're using these tapes in a workshop setting and don't ask a focus question before the segment begins, you're likely to get awkward silence when you try to start a discussion later.

If You're Viewing the Videotapes in a Workshop Setting

Using videotapes in a workshop setting presents special challenges. Most people's experience with watching television is passive. Instructors need to work extra hard to prepare participants for a more active role in looking at these videotapes. Here are a couple of ways to prepare before watching the tapes:

1. *Check out the equipment and sound in advance.* Make sure the videotape segments are cued to the right spot in each tape. After you begin running any segment, walk to the back of the room and listen to the tape. The goal is to have the sound as low as possible but still loud enough so participants in the back can hear. The most common error instructors make in using videotapes is playing them with the audio too loud.
2. *Ask participants to keep notes as they view the segment.* Double-entry journals work well to help participants focus on what they are viewing. To make a double-entry journal, ask participants to draw a line down the center of a piece of paper and add the column headings "What I See" and "What It Makes Me Think About." These generic headings can generate all kinds of interesting observations for small-group discussions. Without the written notes to narrow down the focus of viewers, conversation can become fragmented.

Suggested Viewing Sequence

We strongly suggest you begin with Tape 1: Building a Writing Community first. From there you might view Tape 2: Teaching Writing Skills in Context, or you might go straight to Tape 3: Literature That Supports Writing, which was designed to be viewed before Tape 4: Craft Lessons to Stretch Young Writers.



Tape 1:

Building a Writing Community

Summary

Students need to assimilate a daunting number of skills as they become competent writers and that doesn't happen overnight. Writing teachers need to create the kind of community where students can live as writers, find their voices, and take risks that allow them to develop competence as writers. In Tape 1, the teachers and principal at Bailey's Elementary School show how they create this atmosphere. Their

environment is rooted in the ongoing professional development that is an integral part of the school. The tape explores some of the key elements of a learning community: high expectations, supportive tone, clear routines, respectful response, and involving students in writing for authentic purposes.

Overarching Questions

What are some of the ways teachers go about creating community in a classroom?
How does a supportive tone impact students' work in a personal and potentially vulnerable area such as writing?

Establishing a Writing Community

- In a strong community, students know one another's interests and see each person's unique strengths. Early in the school year, what are some specific ways you get to know students and help them get to know each other?
- Learning to write happens best when students take charge of their learning, act independently, and regularly set new challenges for themselves. This requires a supportive environment that values risk-taking. What routines do you put in place to create a safe and nurturing environment for students to learn to write?
- In Lynn's third-grade class, Monica shares her idea for how student writers can ask skilled peer illustrators to help publish their work. Teachers can be open to students initiating routines and procedures during writing time. What are some ways you invite students to participate in the ongoing and evolving life of the writing classroom?
- Kathleen offers ways to help students get to know one another. Her willingness to share her own thoughts and ideas sets the tone for this process. When we share our histories, stories, and life passions with students, we model what it means to fully bring oneself into the life of the classroom, and later, into our lives as writers. How much have you shared with your students about yourself? What are some strategies you've found for doing this? What impact has it had on the community in the classroom?

Building a Teaching Community

- At Bailey's Elementary teachers meet regularly to talk about their teaching—in grade-level meetings, new teacher workshops, teacher-researcher or reading discussion groups. What opportunities for professional development are available within your school? If few opportunities currently exist, how can you create these for yourself and your colleagues? How else might you continue your professional learning (i.e., conferences, professional reading, learning alongside a colleague)?
- In her role as a reading teacher, Kathleen works with students in a way that invites teachers to learn as well. Kathleen confers with a student while Carolyn looks on and takes notes. How might you build in time to be learning alongside a colleague in your classroom? What are some alternative ways to learn from demonstrations (i.e., visits to colleagues' classrooms, discussing videotapes of your or another's teaching, and so on)?

Setting High Expectations

- Mentioning high expectations on a tape about building community might seem jarring. Are the ideas incompatible? How can you convey your belief in students' abilities to succeed as writers and, at the same time, create a supportive tone for young writers?

Setting the Tone

- Take a careful look at Suzanne as she confers with a student. What do you notice her doing in this conference that helps establish a tone of respect? How much depends on the tone of her words, her body language, her decisions when to listen and when to speak?

Establishing Routines

- Children learn to write by writing. They need classrooms where they have ample time to move through the process of writing. Clearly established classroom routines allow students to work on individualized writing projects in an orderly fashion. What routines might you put in place to allow this to happen in your classroom?
- Christine comments that in any given year students have much to do with the routines that get established in her classroom. How can you best involve students in identifying necessary routines? In what ways might this year's class need routines that are different than those needed by last year's class?

Giving and Getting Response

- Learning to write requires that students, as well as teachers, take on the role of listening and responding to each other's writing. What routines might you put in place to help students confer with each other? If you acknowledge that student conferences will not sound like teacher conferences, what realistic expectations might you have for student conferences?

Teacher as Writer

- JoAnn, Christine, Suzanne, and Peggy all talk about the importance of putting themselves into the same process students go through. This includes keeping a notebook, choosing a topic, drafting, sharing during author's circle, and getting response. Talk about ways in which the idea of teacher-as-writer makes sense. In what ways is the concept intimidating?

Going Public

- What struck you about the coffeehouse poetry celebration? How can you provide opportunities to showcase student writing?

- While splashy writing celebrations can be fun and exciting, students also need simpler ways to experience what happens when they send their written words out into the world. What are some of the ways you can help individual students find their natural audience for particular pieces of writing?



Tape 2:

Teaching Writing Skills in Context

Summary

Although writing encompasses a bundle of skills, it could be roughly divided into two main branches—composing (craft) and editing (mechanics). In Tape 2 we explore how skilled writing teachers teach mechanics, such as contractions and spelling. At Bailey’s the teachers demonstrate how skills can be taught in the context of an ongoing writing workshop. You will see what management tools they devised to assess students’ needs in skills instruction and how they situate skills teaching in a larger, real-world context.

Overarching Questions

What do you notice about the way teachers talk about the difference between revising and editing?

How does teaching writing skills in a writing context differ from a traditional approach to teaching writing skills?

How do teachers go about deciding which skills to teach?

The Importance of Writing

- Discuss the distinction that Ralph makes between crafting writing and editing writing. What can you do to help students understand this distinction?
- In order to get into their stride as writers, students need ample opportunities to write throughout the day and for many different purposes. When and how can you provide opportunities for students to write throughout the curriculum?

Teaching the Conventions of Language

- One unique feature of Emelie’s role as the “writing boost” teacher is that while she works with students in a self-contained setting for six weeks at a time, she spends the last week working with students alongside their teacher in the regular classroom. Strong communication between the teacher and Emelie ensures that the supporting help is consistent with the instruction taking place in the classroom. How could resource teachers like Emelie Parker support the ongoing work in writing that is happening in your classroom?
- How do you reconcile Emelie’s point about the need for individualized skill instruction with the tendency in schools to teach the same skill lesson to the whole class at the same time? Discuss the obstacles—scarcity of time, standardized curriculum—that often get in the way of individualized instruction.

- Discuss Emelie’s conference with a student, and JoAnn’s commentary about this conference. What does Emelie do well? Notice that Emelie:
 - identifies a problem
 - attunes the boy to audience (“If I’m confused, they will be, too.”)
 - gives him a concrete strategy for making the writing clearer
 - uses literature to model the conventional form of dialogue.
- Peggy’s students share a number of different strategies for finding the correct spelling of a word. What strategies do your students currently use when confronted with a spelling question? How might you broaden their repertoire?
- When kids write a lot and teachers look at their writing diagnostically, they can use what they see to plan their skills instruction. Peggy uses what she notices about student writing to enrich her language lessons outside the writing workshop (i.e., morning message, spelling work, and so on). In what ways do you use student writing to inform your skills teaching?
- As Emelie demonstrated in an earlier conference, Lynn focuses a student’s attention on meaning, which leads him to see the need for correct punctuation. Discuss the difference between this collaborative model and a more traditional approach where the teacher simply corrects the writing.

Resources for Teaching Skills

- Lynn talks about her flipchart as a way of keeping track of and assessing her students’ writing skills. What systems could you devise to record and assess the needs of your students?
- Emelie talks about the importance of classroom resources. What classroom resources do you have in place to support students as they proofread and edit their own work?
- Both Ralph and JoAnn mention using editing checklists as an important tool for young writers. What might an editing checklist look like for the students in your classroom?

Real Writing for the Real World

- Suzanne makes the point that editing matters when kids are writing for authentic reasons/purposes. How might you help students aim their writing to real audiences so they understand the reason for editing in the first place?
- Suzanne’s conference with a girl about her poetry is not focused on editing. Instead, Suzanne listens as the student decides what direction she wants her writing to take. Eventually, as this student works her way toward publication, Suzanne will turn her attention to the critical phase of editing for correctness. When you listen well to students at every step of the process, you give them a preliminary view of the audience, and encourage them to “stay in the game” until the very end. The quality of listening may be the most essential resource teachers have. As you talk about this conference, pay particular attention to Suzanne’s listening and how it encourages and influences the writer.



Summary

The writing in a classroom can only be as good as the literature that surrounds and sustains it. Tape 3 focuses on the reading-writing connection. Teachers at Bailey’s continually draw on a variety of literature—poems, picture books, chapter books—to nourish their students. Literature can be used to spark writing ideas but at Bailey’s the teachers go a step further: in many classrooms a kind of “deep reading” takes place where teachers and students delve into a text to study an author’s technique. Deep reading helps students get a feel for the structures and rhythms of written language and learn how texts are crafted from the inside out.

Overarching Questions

What are some of the ways teachers tap literature for the purposes of writing?

How do the role of writing teacher influence the way a teacher interacts with students around reading?

Relevant Readings

Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K–8, pp. 10–13 (Stenhouse 1998).

Nonfiction Craft Lessons: Teaching Information Writing K–8, pp. 13–17 (Stenhouse 2001).

Connecting with Literature

- Early in the school year teachers share literature as a way to get to know the students. What are some of your favorite books for inviting students to bring their own stories into the classroom?
- Peggy invites students to use both talk and writing to make connections between their experiences and the books the class reads. In this way, students often discover material they might write about at a later time. How can you build in regular time for students to make these connections?

Choosing Literature

- Emelie lists her criteria for book selection. She chooses from a variety of genres and picks the books she loves and thinks her students will love. She also looks for books with strong writing that have the potential to stretch her writers. What criteria do you use in making book selections to support student writing? What are some of your tried-and-true favorite books? How have you used them?
- Ralph talks about the gap between reading and writing that occurs when students begin to read longer novels. You may have to give students shorter, more manageable texts that can mentor them as writers. How might you better use picture books to nurture your upper-grade writers?
- How can you do a better job of “marinating” young writers in literature they can learn from?

Connecting Reading and Writing

- JoAnn talks about the reading-writing connection. What are you doing in your classroom to encourage students to make internal connections between what they read and what they write?
- Christine confers with two boys who are reading the same chapter book. Notice that in drawing their attention to the technique the writer uses, she also coaches them in how to read as writers. Talk about what she is doing well. Are there opportunities in your teaching to coach students in this kind of reading?
- In the sequence with Christine, you see how she makes deliberate choices about which books to share. You watch her prepare students for the read-aloud by letting them know why she's reading a particular book. This gives students a way to listen and focuses the discussion that follows. What do you think of her expectation that not all students will use this idea in their writing for that day?

(Re)Reading for Craft

- In the opening scenes, Carolyn and Peggy suggest the important role talk plays in inviting students to enter a text for a second, third, or even fourth reading. What are some ways you can build in time to surround reading with rich talk?
- Like Christine earlier on this tape, Lynn follows a predictable routine as she reads a book to her students:
 - she alerts them to pay attention to how the author develops characters in the book
 - she reads the book out loud
 - she invites students to respond and discuss the issue (developing character) she mentioned earlier
 - she refers back to the text to find evidence of the points made by her students.Discuss your reaction to Lynn's routine.
- Christine reflects on how her students came up with their own use of the overhead. She points out that her students are revisiting a lesson she taught earlier in the year and using the overhead in this way helps the lesson to gel in their minds. The students are having a “close encounter with texts”—in this case, their own writing. What strikes you about this section? How might you give students opportunities to take control of the lessons, to revisit and put the lessons into their own words, and keep them alive until students are ready to use them?



Tape 4:

Craft Lessons to Stretch Young Writers

Summary

What exactly is a “craft lesson”? How (and when) might you teach one? How can you assess the needs of your students so you know which craft lesson to teach? Nothing energizes a classroom more than when students see their own writing getting stronger. Teachers who help students add writing strategies to their toolbox provide them with powerful skills they will use for the rest of their lives. In Tape 4

the teachers at Bailey's open up their classrooms and show the power of craft lessons to improve the quality of student writing.

Overarching Questions

How can you help students improve the quality of their writing?

How can you create a common language for craft that students can use in this important journey?

Relevant Readings

Craft Lessons: Teaching Writing K–8, pp. 8–9 (Stenhouse 1998).

Responsive Teaching

- You may think of curriculum as a fat, shiny binder produced in a district office. JoAnn, Christine, and Carolyn suggest another way to look at curriculum that is dynamic, evolving, and generative. How does this second view fit with the way you think about curriculum in your teaching?
- Before JoAnn, Christine, and Carolyn select a particular craft lesson, they spend time assessing the needs of their students. Carolyn explains how she uses anecdotal records to help inform her teaching. What information might be helpful for you to have before deciding what strategies or craft elements your student writers need to learn?
- The best assessment is based on careful observation (watching and listening to children). How do you assess students during writing time? How could you do it better?
- What do you think of the distinction that Kathleen makes between evaluating and assessing student writers?

Developing Language About Craft

- List terms you have at your school for writing (i.e., drafting, revising, editing) and the elements of craft. Define these terms and talk about the differences in your definitions. What are the common definitions? How might you negotiate differences in terms?
- In Suzanne's conference she gives a name (seesaw structure) for what a student has done in her writing. Why is it important to name a technique in this way?
- Too often the language used to talk to students about writing is stale, even clichéd. How can you create language about the craft of writing that is rich, organic, and accessible to children?

Talking About Writing

- Emelie talks about building on students' strengths, the importance of specific language, and the need to help students talk about their own writing in those ways.

What opportunities have you built into your classroom for students to talk about writing?

- Ashley talks about ways she coaches kids to give effective responses to what other students have written. What are some of the ways that you've been able to help students make more effective comments in response to their peers' writing?
- In this sequence you see three avenues for student talk about writing: teacher-student talk, whole-group response to one student, and peer-to-peer response. What are the advantages (or disadvantages) of each one?

Teaching Craft

- Christine asks her kids this critical question: What does this author do well? This may be the single most important question for teachers to ask as students explore the craft of writing. But too often teachers are the only ones who ask (and answer) this question. How can you encourage students to internalize this question themselves as they read literature and as they reread their own writing?
- What struck you about Suzanne's mini-lesson about the recurring line in the picture book *Grandpa Never Lies*?

Conferring

- One of the major challenges in a writing conference is how to offer a suggestion without writing the piece for the student. How does Kathleen navigate this issue when she confers with a student? Reflect on your own conferences with your students. Where do you fall in this balancing act? Do you tend to make too many suggestions, or not enough?
- Note the difference between Kathleen's conference with a student about a piece of unfinished writing and Suzanne's conference with another student on a finished piece of writing. How does Suzanne's conference address her goal of teaching the writer? Are you making enough time to confer with students on their finished work?
- What do you think about the way Christine challenges the student in the conference? What classroom conditions have already been created by Christine to allow her to issue this challenge in a conference?

Using Craft Lessons

- After watching Tape 4, read and discuss one of the following lessons from *Craft Lessons*:
 - “Cracking Open” General Words, p. 50
 - Using Stronger Verbs, p. 51
 - Unpacking a “Heavy Sentence,” p. 52
- How can books like *Craft Lessons* and *Nonfiction Craft Lessons* help you deepen your knowledge as a writing teacher?
- What other resources (peer teachers, children's books, professional books, magazines for writers, conferences) can you tap for this purpose?