



You know, we love stories and we love narrative; we love to get lost in an author's world. Jeff Bezos

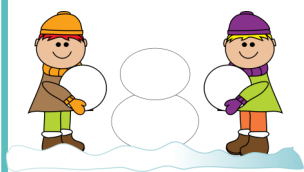
Often the shortest month of the calendar year feels like the longest month of teaching. For some reason, February always seems to create a sense of the doldrums. The routines that we have worked so diligently to put in place now feel like a rut. For many of us, the prospect of state testing is creating a sense of foreboding—will my students be ready, what have I not taught, how can I prepare my students?

The spark your classroom may need to ignite is simple—write a story! After all the time we have spent on expository writing, children greet the idea of writing a story with unbridled exuberance. Finally, they get to write that story they have been waiting to tell!

In spite of their excitement, young students' narratives are often painful to read. The bed-to-bed narrative arrives, listing activities the character has done during the day. Many students resort to the dreaded phrase "and then . . . and then . . ." which is painful to read at best. How can we help our students grow their love of narrative writing in a creative, yet interesting way?

Primary Students

- Prior to writing, students need to understand that narratives follow an order. Events take place in a sequence that makes sense to the reader. Find a short narrative in printed form (Check out readworks.com or superteacherworksheets.com.) Cut the story apart—making the beginning one piece, each event a separate piece, and the ending one piece. Have students work in pairs to put the story back together. Repeat this activity with other stories.



- Students need to think about events that happen in order. Provide each student a page with three connected rectangles. In the center rectangle, place a simple picture like the one on the left. Students will then draw what happened prior to the picture in the first rectangle and what happened after the picture in the rectangle to the right. Students can share their drawing and ideas. The pictures can be used as a plan for writing a simple narrative. Repeat this activity with other pictures.

Intermediate Students

- One of the greatest challenges students face is finding the significant problem in a narrative. Provide students with choices of picture books. (*Franklin the Turtle* and *The Little Critter* books work wonderfully.) Have students read the books and identify the main problem the character faces. Students should read more than one book. Discuss the problems students have identified.
- Intermediate students often resort to very basic word choice and sentence fluency when asked to write a narrative. Remind students that authors of picture books often tell the story through their illustrations. As we will not be drawing, we need to paint the pictures with our words. Put a single illustration from a wordless book (or book with limited text) under the document camera. Students must write a minimum of 3 sentences about that picture. They can not write about what happened before the picture occurred or what happens next. The show (sentence fluency and word choice) will increase in their writing.

Suggested books are: *The Snowman* by R. Briggs, *The Red Sled* by Lita Judge or *Journey* by Erin Becker.

Example:



“Hooray, it’s a snow day!” shouted Ben. Grasping his red sled, he raced across the snow. His scarf blew behind him like a kite tail. A huge grin filled his face as he anticipated his first ride down the hill!

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