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ABSTRACT

This "weekend news" writing activity gives students the opportunity to recall personal events and write about them. The writing is done in a nonthreatening environment, which helps students develop writing fluency and apply what they already know about spelling and other language conventions. Students create a set of criteria with which to self-assess their writing. During a weekly session, students will: apply their knowledge of writing in a nonthreatening environment; apply their knowledge of spelling to their writing; apply their knowledge of sentence structure and punctuation; self-assess and edit their own writing; and share their writing with their peers. The instructional plan, lists of resources, student assessment/reflection activities, and a list of National Council of Teachers of English/International Reading Association (NCTE/IRA) Standards addressed in the lesson are included. A sample chart is attached. (PM)

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Get Writing With "Weekend News!"

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Grade Band

K-2

Estimated Lesson Time

Forty minutes every Monday

Overview

Each Monday, students are asked to write about their weekend. They apply what they already know about writing and what has been taught to them through minilessons. They can use temporary or invented spelling for words they do not know how to spell, but should correctly spell words that they know. Each writing session begins with a minilesson. Students then write for approximately 20 minutes (depending on the grade level), self-assess their writing, and share their "weekend news" with the class. Writing is kept together in a student portfolio and is used to plan the next minilesson and assess students' writing development throughout the year. Once a month, students use the online Stapleless Book interactive to create a book about their favorite weekend that month.

From Theory to Practice

Sipe, L.R. (2001). Invention, convention, and intervention: Invented spelling and the teacher's role. *The Reading Teacher*, 55, 264-273.

- It is important to recognize that teachers' activities during the drafting stage of writing, when children are first getting down ideas, must not inhibit children's willingness and desire to write.
- In interactive writing, students are actively engaged each time they write using what they already know about writing and spelling.
- Interactions between the student and an "expert other" are crucial for scaffolding understanding with a variety of instructional techniques.

Fraser, J., & Skolnick D. (1994). *On their way: Celebrating second graders as they read and write*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

- Once a week students write about their personal experiences using a "weekend news" format.
- Students generate a list of criteria for evaluating high-quality weekend news and then evaluate their own writing each week.

Student Objectives

Students will:

- Apply their knowledge of writing in a nonthreatening environment

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- Apply their knowledge of spelling to their writing
- Apply their knowledge of sentence structure and punctuation
- Self-assess and edit their own writing
- Share their writing with their peers

Resources

- "[What Makes a 4?](#)" sample chart
- [FlaRE Center](#): Emergent Literacy article
- Interactive [Stapleless Book](#)
- Notebook or construction paper booklet with 3–5 sheets of lined paper
- Overhead to model minilesson
- Word wall or word list

Instructional Plan

Preparation

1. Read the research article published on the [FlaRE Center](#) website. To access the article, open the website and click "Research" on the left. Scroll down to "FlaRE Research documents" and click on "Emergent Literacy doc.pdf." This article is included as a resource because it explains how writing can be used as a tool to learn and explores the many uses and functions of written language.
2. Decide which writing skill or strategy your students need to learn and prepare a minilesson to use before beginning the "weekend news" writing activity. The minilesson should not exceed 10 minutes and can be done using an overhead or the board.
3. Prepare the writing booklet, which students will use to keep their "weekend news" writing. A spiral notebook would be appropriate, or you can fold a large sheet of construction paper and insert three to five pieces of notebook paper (one set for each month).

Instruction and Activities

Minilesson

Explicitly state and model the minilesson. In this case, the minilesson encourages students to correctly spell words that they already know using a word wall or word list as a reference, and to stretch the sounds out loud in words they do not know and write the sounds they hear. Model how to begin thinking and writing on the overhead.

"What am I going to write about today? Let me think about what I did this past weekend. I'm going to write about something I know a lot about. I know I went to the beach. I can write about that. I will draw my picture first so I can get ideas. I'm going to put some detail into my picture too."

Begin drawing your picture as you think aloud. Then begin writing by saying, "Now I'm going to write

about my picture. I wonder how I should start?"

At this point, many of your students will want to volunteer ideas for how you should begin. Tell students that it is your turn to write and think and they will get their turn soon.

To model and vocalize how writing takes a lot of hard thinking and time, do not come prepared with a script for your writing. Students should see you change your mind several times before you begin to write. Then, begin to write about your picture and vocalize your thinking by saying

"I know how to spell the word said so I'm going to make sure I spell it correctly. I'm not sure, however, how to spell the word *beach*. I'm going to stretch the sounds: /b-e-ch/. Oh, I hear a /b/, long /e/, and a /ch/ sound. /Ch/, /ch/, /ch/. I know that sound. It's like the sound in the word *chick*. I can write the two letters *ch*."

One way to show students how to stretch a word is to physically put your fists together when saying the word and separate your fists for each sound or word chunk you hear. Students familiar with this strategy will use it when they come to an unknown word.

Proceed in this manner with the minilesson, stretching out the sounds in an unknown word and writing those sounds. The mini-lesson should take approximately 10 minutes.

Writing activity

After the minilesson, engage the class in a short discussion about what they are going to write about for their "weekend news." Some students will immediately begin to write and draw. Leave your own writing on the overhead or board for students to look at if they want. In the beginning you may find some students copying your writing and for the first week this is fine. Remember to monitor these students and make sure they use their own words in the next "weekend news" writing session.

As students begin to work, circulate around the room to scope out any child who has not begun to draw or write. Briefly talk with struggling students to jog their memory about what happened over the weekend. As students are writing (approximately 20 minutes), remind them to check the word wall or word list for help with spelling. Praise students who spell difficult words by stretching out the sounds. Students need to know that they do not need to spell every word correctly. A child might ask, "Is this spelled right?" If the word is difficult and the child makes a good attempt to spell it, you might say, "I like the way you stretched the sounds in that word. You did a good job" (even if the word is not spelled correctly).

As students complete their writing, invite them to "whisper read" their writing to themselves to see if it sounds right and check for capital letters, spelling, and punctuation. Depending on the level of your students, you may or may not focus on these other writing conventions. However, the next week's minilesson could focus on capital letters or punctuation.

To enhance learning and the joy of writing, have students use the online [Stapleless Book](#) interactive once a month to create a book about their favorite weekend that month.

Self-assessment and sharing

After students become comfortable with writing (which might be a few weeks) hold a shared writing session with students to create a "What Makes a 4?" chart. Ask students, "What kinds of things do good writers do?" Some of the responses might be:

- Good writers write about a topic (i.e., all sentences need to be about the topic).
- Good writers use complete sentences.
- Good writers use correct spelling of word-wall words.

- Good writers use sensible sequencing.

At the beginning of the year, there may only be one or two skills or strategies on the "What Makes a 4?" chart. As the year progresses the list gets more sophisticated. The chart serves as a self-assessment tool for students and also as an assessment tool for you. [A [sample chart](#) is provided, indicating four as the highest score.] The chart should not be used for grading purposes.

Each week after writing, students should self-assess their writing using the "What Makes a 4?" chart. Each student can use the chart to clearly identify what he or she has done well and what needs improvement.

A very important last step is to have students share their writing with the class. We need to celebrate all students' attempts at writing.

Student Assessment/Reflections

- Observe students during the lesson and write anecdotal notes.
- Determine the next minilesson by checking students' writing to see where improvement is needed.
- Allow students to self-assess their own writing using the "[What Makes a 4?](#)" chart.
- When conferencing with parents, share the "weekend news," which students save each week in a portfolio, to show student's development and growth in writing.

IRA/NCTE Standards

6 - Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.



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What Makes a 4?

Sample chart

I need to:

- Tell about my weekend in an interesting way
 - Use lots of good details
 - Take my time with handwriting
 - Tell a lot about what I did
 - Use proper punctuation
 - Stretch the sounds in words I do not know
 - Use the word wall or word list for correct spelling
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Adapted with permission from *On Their Way: Celebrating Second Graders as They Read and Write* by Jane Fraser and Donna Skolnick. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1994.



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