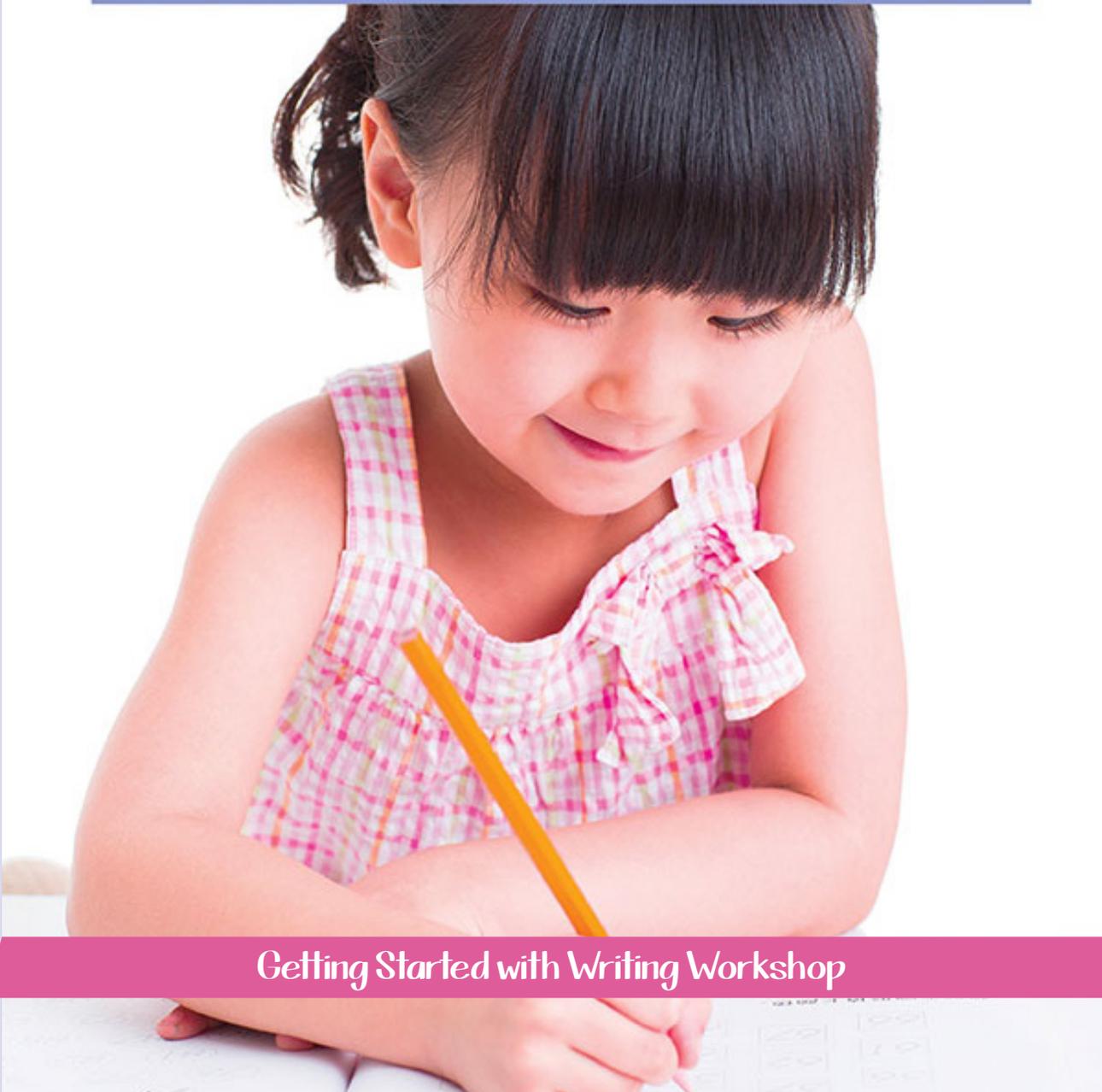


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Marvelous Minilessons for Teaching Nonfiction Writing K-3



Getting Started with Writing Workshop

Chapter 2 Let's Get Started! Day 1 and Beyond

It's the first week of school and already time to launch our Writing Workshop. So, where do we start?

We have two priorities during the first weeks of Writing Workshop: to encourage our students to get their ideas down on paper—even if it's drawing and scribble writing (sometimes called “driting”); and to establish the classroom routines and procedures that will build independence and self-regulation for the rest of the year. As we discussed in Chapter 1, one of the great things about Writing Workshop is that everyone can participate at his or her own level. Not to mention the fact that we don't need a lot of elaborate materials—just something to write on and something to write with. These are all great reasons why Writing Workshop should be one of those first-week-of-school routines!

For every grade level, I like to start the year with personal narrative writing—stories about students' own lives and experiences. This is the easiest kind of writing because the topics and details are right there in the students' background knowledge. And while the students are writing, I can focus on introducing or reinforcing the routines of Writing Workshop.

Although the foundations of Writing Workshop are the same from Kindergarten to college (i.e., Teaching Time, Writing Time, Sharing Time), the launch of the Writing Workshop looks a little different in Kindergarten compared to the upper grades. In this chapter, you'll find some suggested routines for the first few weeks of school along with some foundational minilessons to get your students writing. The minilesson titles are in bold print throughout the chapter, with the lessons themselves following at the end of the chapter.

Topic and Details

LEARNING GOAL: Students will be able to choose their own topics and add related details in writing.

I DO: Remind students that a **topic** is what we write about and **details** are the information about that topic. You might wish to revisit a simple picture book to distinguish the concepts of topic and details.

*Each time writers start a piece of writing, they have to choose a **topic** to write about. Here are three things to think about when choosing a topic:*

- *Is the topic interesting to me?*
- *Do I know enough about the topic to write about it?*
- *Will a reader be interested in reading about this topic?*

You might like to write about things you have done or things you can do, such as scoring a goal in hockey or visiting Grandma. But those aren't the only things you can write about. Anything can be a topic for writing, if you make it interesting to yourself and to your reader. You do that by adding interesting details.

Shel Silverstein's poems can be an example of making ordinary topics interesting by adding rich details. Consider his poem "Hat" from *Where the Sidewalk Ends*. Silverstein took a boring topic—a toilet plunger—and made it interesting to a reader by using a "surprising" detail about the boy putting it on his head, thinking it was a hat.

WE DO: Use a sheet of chart paper to introduce an ongoing Topic List to be posted in the classroom for students to reference if they need help with a topic. Together, talk about discussions or experiences they've already had in the classroom together that might be topics for writing, such as: "Interesting facts about snails"; or "What's the difference between a triangle and a circle?" or "What to do if someone 'butts' you in line." This list should be ongoing and you and your students can add to it every day. When the chart paper is full, cut the paper into topic strips and add these strips to the **Big Ideas Bag** (see page 15).

YOU DO: Tell students that they will be expected to think of their own topics for writing, just as grown-up writers do. Anything can be a topic for writing, as long as writers use interesting details. Any time students can't think of a topic, they can look at the Topic List posted in the classroom for ideas or draw a topic from the Big Ideas Bag. Give students a few minutes to talk to a partner about what topic they're going to write about today and what details they might include.

Topic and Details

A **topic** is what we write about and **details** are the information we provide about that topic. Make your details interesting!

Sticky Dot Details

LEARNING GOAL: Students will be able to generate more than one detail about a topic.

I DO: Link this minilesson to your students' understanding of topics and details. Tell them that today they will be adding more than one detail to a topic. *You have become very good at picking a topic to write about and adding a detail. But good writers can usually think of more than one detail about a topic. In fact, sometimes they have lots of details! For example, if my topic is "popcorn," I might add two details like: "It is my favorite snack, and it is white and fluffy like little clouds."*

Place two sticky dots on the back of your hand. Model telling your details before you write them. Tell the students that these dots will help you remember to write one detail for each dot.

I've got lots of ideas for topics in my head right now, but today I'm going to write about the topic "What I did on my summer holidays." Now I need two details. My first detail is "I went camping in the mountains." My second detail is "I saw a bear."

Pre-tell, then write, the first detail. Put one of your sticky dots at the end of the sentence (to signal one detail). Then pre-tell and write the second detail and place the other sticky dot at the end of the sentence, signaling a second detail.

WE DO: Invite students to suggest other details you might add to your writing. Model this strategy by writing one or two additional details and adding sticky dots at the end of each new detail.

YOU DO: Tell students that now it is their turn to choose a topic and write two details about it. Ask them to TTYN (Talk To Your Neighbor) about what two details they're going to write. When they can pre-tell what they are going to write, and it is clear that they understand the concept of two details, give them two sticky dots on the back of their hands. Note that many of your students will pre-tell their details in complete sentences while others will not. For example, a child who chooses a topic such as "My Favorite Foods" might write his/her ideas in a list, such as "pepperoni pizza," "chocolate chip cookies," etc. Others might write: "I went camping. In the mountains. Last summer." Technically, these are each individual details that tell what, where, and when. Both details are acceptable at this point. The objective of this lesson is to generate details, not write complete sentences. Gradually, students can be guided to write complete sentences and replace the dots with periods.

As you circulate around the room and ask each writer to read what he or she has written, ask a few questions and invite each student to tell you more. If the student can add another detail, offer to hand out one more sticky dot!