

## Teaching the Six Traits in Informational Writing K-5

### Introduction

This is a sample of 3 lesson plans that teach the trait of *ideas* in informational writing. These lessons come from a bundle which includes 18 lessons plans that teach the six traits of writing (ideas, organization, voice, sentence fluency, word choice, and conventions) and is intended for grades K-5 within informational writing. These lesson plans were developed as a resource to support teachers in teaching the six traits using the mentor texts and lesson ideas that were expanded upon from the book The Writing Thief, by Ruth Culham, which is a trait-based strategy to assess and teach writing. All ideas and verbage from The Writing Thief are clearly cited directly back to the book. You can purchase The Writing Thief [here](#). You can purchase the entire bundle of 18 lesson plans [here](#).

### How to Use These Lessons

Each trait comes with three lesson plans for grades K-1, 2-3, 4-5. The lessons are designed for differentiation so you could use the lessons below, at or above the grade level you teach. You could teach the 'at grade level' lesson to your whole group, enrich or accelerate using the 'above grade level' lessons in small groups and use the 'below grade level' lessons for your struggling readers and writers in small groups as well.

The lessons are designed to be completed during one writer's workshop period, which is typically 45-60 minutes. Approximately 15-20 minutes of the workshop time should be devoted to a quick, teacher led mini lesson, the teaching point, "I do", while the remaining time of the workshop time should be devoted to students for active engagement and student interaction, "You do", and writing independently. In some cases, the active engagement piece may take a few Writer's Workshop sessions for students to complete. It is during that time that writing time that the most important instruction takes place: conferring with students or small groups with the same need for instruction.

## Teaching the Six Traits in Informational Writing Grades K-1: Ideas Trait- Sparking Ideas

### Connection:

Coming up with ideas of what to write is a challenge for many young writers, like yourselves. All of you have a lot to say and to write about. We will learn different forms that writers can write in. Today I will teach you that there are many writing ideas to spark your own ideas.

### Teaching Point: – “I do”

Here is a book that we will read together, **Written Anything Good Lately?** By Susan Allen and Jane Lindaman. Let’s make a list of all the writing ideas we learn as we read.

A-Autobiography	H-Haiku	O-Outline	V-Valentine Verse
B-Book report	I-Invitation	P-Play	W-Word Wall
C-Cards	J-Journal page	Q-Quiz	X-X’s and O’s for X-tra special person
D-Directions	K-Kudos (compliments)	R-Report	Y-Yearbook page
E- Essay	L-Letter	S-Speech	Z-Zigzags or zeros
F-Fable	M-Myth	T-Thank you note	
G-Greeting Card	N-Newsletter	U-User ID	

Wow! We have a list of 26 writing ideas that writers could write in. These ideas spark an idea for me to write about. I have been meaning to write a thank you note to my friend for coming to my birthday party. Watch me as I write a thank you note to my friend.

*Dear Friend,*

*Thank you for coming to my birthday party last Saturday. It meant the world to me that you came to celebrate my special day. Thank you for making my birthday even more special. I hope you had a great time!*

*Love,  
Your Friend*

Did you see how one of the ideas on the list sparked an idea for my writing? Thumbs up if you could choose 1 idea off of this list to write about!

**Active Engagement: – “You do”**

Now it's your turn. You are going to choose 1 writing idea on our list and write in that form. Hold the idea in your head and give me a thumbs up when you have your idea (a note, a letter, a card, etc) Okay, Partner 1 turn to your partner and tell your partner which idea you chose to write about today. Partner 2 you do the same after Partner 1.

**Link to Other Writing:**

Today and every day, when you are getting ready to write, think about all of the fun and expressive ideas you can write in to inform. Off you go! I can't wait to see all of the wonderful things you write!

**Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:**

Remember writers, when you get stuck and don't know what to write about, take a look at our chart. One of the 26 ideas will spark an idea for you to write about. Writers always have something to write and there are many options. Try to choose a different writing idea each day this week.

**Teaching Share:**

I am so excited about all of the different writing I see in our classroom. I see cards, notes, invitations, reports, letters, etc. Wow! I see a classroom of writers. Thanks for a great job in staying focused on sparking ideas for your writing today. Great work writers!

## Teaching the Six Traits in Informational Writing Grades 2-3: Ideas Trait- Getting Focused

### Connection:

Many writers have difficulty staying focused on the topic. Some ideas are just so big that it becomes too big of an idea to topic to manage. This shuts down even the best of writers. Today I will teach you how a writer narrows their idea to create a piece that's "clear, tight and manageable." (Culham, 2014)

### Teaching Point: – “I do”

Let's take a look at this sign, **Not Just Any Gum Tree**, written by the Zoological Society of San Diego, San Diego, CA (see next page for mentor text). Its *purpose is to attract visitors to the San Diego Zoo. "This sign is an example of how a writer could take complex ideas about an animal's food and habitat and make it understandable to a visitor. Isn't it amazing to learn that there are so many species of eucalyptus and that koalas know which ones they can eat and which to stay away from because they're toxic? The sign sets out to inform readers about **ONE** thing: why koalas are such picky eaters in spite of the various species of eucalyptus trees all around them. Writers can look at big ideas (watermelon idea/topic) such as, what do animals eat?" and use this text as a model for how to focus the topic to something much smaller (seed topic) and more manageable to research and use for writing.*" (Culham, 2014)

### Active Engagement: – “You do”

Now it's your turn. *"Brainstorm a list of big, watermelon topics that you are interested in writing about, like sports, World History, music, science fiction, or art. Work with your trio (group of 3 students) to come up with a list of five or six smaller (seed), more focused topics that could be used be the topic of further research and become ideas for writing. If any of the ideas sparks an interest for you, record it in your writer's notebook. You can then create your own sign about the topic you choose to inform the reader, such as the sign from the San Diego Zoo."* (Culham, 2014)

### Link to Other Writing:

Today and every day, when you are getting ready to write, especially to inform, think about narrowing big, watermelon topics to smaller, seed topics. This way your writing will be more focused and manageable to write about. Share your interests of topics with us and create writing that informs or teaches the reader. I can't wait to learn from all of you.

### Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:

Remember writers, when you get stuck on a big topic, think smaller. Seed stories are more manageable to write about. Be sure to stay away from watermelon topics.

**Teaching Share:**

I am excited to learn from all of your seed topics. Let's do a quick whip around our circle and name the seed topic you'll be writing about. Good job today writers thinking smaller to spark ideas for writing to inform.

## "Not Just Any Gum Tree" (sign)

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# NOT JUST ANY GUM TREE

**Koalas know that all eucalyptus is not the same.**

There are nearly 900 species of eucalyptus in Australia. That would be a bountiful koala buffet except for one thing—koalas are picky eaters. And that's a good thing, because seasonal growth affects levels of toxic oils in eucalyptus leaves.

Koalas choose different species of eucalyptus depending on where they live in Australia. Without healthy forests containing a variety of different eucalyptus to choose from, koalas can run out of food, even if it looks like there are still trees around them.



Author: Zoological Society of San Diego, San Diego, CA; Trait: Ideas; Key Quality: Focusing the topic

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*The Writing Thief: Using Mentor Texts to Teach the Craft of Writing* by Ruth Culham.  
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## Teaching the Six Traits in Informational Writing Grades 4-5: Ideas Trait- Choosing a Topic

### Connection:

The best writers are passionate about what they write about. When a writer has the opportunity to write about they are truly passionate about, that's when the best writing comes to life. Today I will teach you that your passion, curiosity and fascination with what truly drives you are helpful ways to find topics to write about.

### Teaching Point: – “I do”

Here is a book that we will read together, **Manfish, A Story of Jacques Cousteau** by Jennifer Berne. *“This is a biography of Cousteau’s life as a world class oceanographer. It also focuses on how he found the idea for his life by following his passion and fascination with everything about sea life, cameras, and movies. His curiosity drove him to wanting to know more, to learn more and then to teach others. The fascination that every reader and writer has with certain topics leads each of us to discover more, to read more, to write more and to wonder more”* (Culham, 2014). It's ‘wonderment’ that drives us to learn and to teach others what we learn. Your fascination and passion to learn creates an excitement within to find out more about this idea. What fascinations do you have? Make a list of student fascinations or “wonderments”.

### Active Engagement: – “You do”

Now it's your turn. You are going to choose 1 thing that occurs in life or something that you are truly fascinated with or are curious about and use it as a springboard idea for your informational writing. You will let your curiosity drive your thirst for finding out more. You will then teach others about your fascination.

To begin, let's share our fascinations with a partner. Partner 1 turn to your partner and tell your partner about your fascination. Partner 2 you do the same after Partner 1.

### Link to Other Writing:

Today and every day, when you are getting ready to write, think about what truly drives you in life. What are you fascinated with? What are you curious about? What do you want to learn more about? Then teach it to others. Write a speech, make a movie, write a newspaper article. Just get your voice out there and be heard. Share your fascinations with the world. Off you go! I can't wait to hear about all of the wonderful things you are fascinated with. I'm looking forward to learning from all of you.

### Mid-Workshop Teaching Point:

Remember writers, when you get stuck and don't know what to write about, think about what fascinates you. Writers write about what they are truly passionate about.

**Teaching Share:**

I am so excited to get to know all of you better, not only as writers, but as individuals. Today you all shared something personal and are growing as writers. Let's share the ideas that fascinate you and will be writing about. Great work writers!



## **References**

Culham, R. (2014). *The writing thief: Using mentor texts to teach the craft of writing*, Newark, DE: International Reading Association.



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