

Writing Curricular Calendar, Second Grade, 2010-2011



Second Grade Writing Curriculum Overview

Second grade teachers have some special challenges in the teaching of writing. Howard Gardner describes second grade as youngsters entering into “the age of competence,” suggesting that during the next three years, children need to develop the competence and the confidence to weather the self-critical, self-consciousness of the upcoming years. Of course, in many school systems, standardized tests rain down on children even when they are in third grade—so second grade is often also the last reprieve for kids. It’s a window of time in which children can grow in leaps and bounds—if only those of us around them are willing to urge them on!

This means, of course, that as teachers of second graders, you need to be sure your teaching does not repeat but instead stands on the shoulders of the previous year, and that it takes children as far as they can go. And they can go far—especially if you rise to the challenge of the second semester. Second graders come in like first graders and leave like upperclassmen!

As always, these units are provided as suggestions for you to study with your colleagues. We would never imagine that any of you would use these or any other resources blindly; instead we are certain you will sometimes add, sometimes subtract as you devise teaching that meets your state standards and supports your growing writers. This curricular calendar, as all of our curricular calendars, has been adjusted to be in sync with the Common Core Standards, and we have a document available that details the alignment. As you adapt and breathe life into this resource, you’ll want to rely on the *Units of Study for Primary Writing* series, published by Heinemann. You will find that once your children have grown through a kindergarten and first grade writing workshop, they will need you to ramp up that series, and *A Quick Guide to Teaching Second-Grade Writers with Units of Study*, a little book that is part of Heinemann's Workshop Help Desk series sold for only \$8.00, will help you make the adaptations necessary for your second graders. You’ll also want to secure Sarah Picard Taylor’s book, *A Quick Guide to Teaching Persuasive Writing*. These books are all available at unitsofstudy.com, a website designed by Heinemann.

For those of you who worked with the TCRWP’s curricular calendar from 2009-2010, we have made some important changes, but also kept a lot from last year. You will see that we continue to recommend you teach two units on personal narrative writing, with the second aimed towards lifting the level of writing, followed by a unit on fiction writing. Then, before the winter holiday, we hope you have time for a unit on nonfiction writing, aligned to a unit on nonfiction reading. This was added in recognition of the Common Core State Standards' increasing emphasis on academic literacy. It is a good thing that we have worked with fairy tale writing for a number of years because they are front and center in the core standards, and we moved that unit later in the

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year so that students could be reading fairy tales and folk tales at the same time.

In January, we recommend you give children support writing persuasively (a perfect ramp up to the essays they'll write in third grade) and so we suggest a unit on persuasive reviews and letters. We return to narrative writing in February writing gripping stories. The nonfiction unit that follows in March highlights reading and writing connections. We continue to support writing in the content area in May. You will be amazed to see that we have taken the radical step of moving poetry to June. In many states, including New York State, poetry is part of the third grade high stakes tests so we wanted the unit to be within reach of third grade, and we also felt it would revive June and send children off to the summer with extra energy.

Before releasing any suggested curriculum for second graders, it is important to recognize that second graders are an especially diverse group—there will be some who are still fledgling writers, and others who are ready for anything you put before them. Your teaching will need to be assessment-based and designed to support diversity. I encourage you to skim the documents written for first and third graders because those will help you understand ways you can support both your struggling and your strongest writers.

An Overview of the Year

September	<i>Launching with Small Moments</i>
October	<i>Authors as Mentors (and Writing for Readers)</i>
November	<i>Writing and Revising Realistic Fiction</i>
December	<i>Expert Projects Nonfiction Writing</i>
January	<i>Persuasive Writing Reviews and Letters</i>
February	<i>Write Gripping Stories with Meaning and Significance and Write Our Own Series Books</i>
March	<i>Climbing Inside of Nonfiction to Discover Reading and Writing Connections</i>
April	<i>Writing Adaptations of Familiar Fairy Tales and Folktales, and Perhaps Writing Original Fantasy Stories as Well</i>
May	<i>Expert Projects in a Content Area: Writing to Learn and to Teach About Science</i>
June	<i>Poetry: Powerful Thoughts in Tiny Packages</i>

Special Words of Advice

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We have three suggestions for how TCRWP second grade teachers might lift the level of writing workshops in the year ahead. First, remember that early next year your children will generally be expected to write about one notebook page of writing during one day's writing workshop, and another full page of writing at home each night. You should hope that at the start of second grade, during one day's writing workshop most of your children write at least a bunch of sentences on a page and fill booklets that contain five pages. Your goal will be that most of your children will enter third grade able to produce at least three-quarters of a page of writing, and often a full page, during each day's writing workshop. This means that you will need to give children paper with many more lines, smaller spaces between lines, and only a tiny box for a quick sketch. You will want to be sure that children are increasing the number of sentences they write in a text, and that the lion's share of writing time is spent actually writing!

Secondly, as second graders find they are able to write more, sometimes both the children and their teachers think that volume alone is an indicator of success. That is not the case! The challenge is to help children write more, but without their writing becoming convoluted, confusing, or dull. Be sure that you read what your kids write, and confer and teach to lift the quality of their writing, from the fundamentals of structure to teaching children that revision is an everyday part of all writing. Often they will write a draft, revise it extensively using scissors and flaps as well as arrows, and then produce a final draft. When you confer with children, you can help them rally around the concept of writing an entirely new second draft, which is often the best way to lift the level of writing. There are samples of second grade writing from a variety of writers on The Reading and Writing Project's website, and you may want to study the array of pieces to get some sense for what your expectations might be for your second graders.

Thirdly, it is important that children work with much more independence than we sometimes see. In your minilessons you will generally remind writers of the options they have to draw upon during that day's writing workshop, and then they'll set to work planning, writing, revising, and making reading-writing connections to their hearts content. You should expect that on any given day, four kids are starting a new piece of writing, another half a dozen are using all the revision strategies they've been taught during previous years (or during a quick minilesson introducing them to the options) and revising up a storm. As you confer, most of your instruction will not match the day's minilesson but will instead help writers self-assess, generate purposes, draw on strategies they think might work, and work with ambitiousness and resourcefulness. Your minilessons are not meant to tell students exactly what they are to do that day, nor are your conferences and small groups ways to be sure everyone does the day's instructions! Instead the minilesson will add one new strategy to children's repertoire and then send them off to draw from that full repertoire. When you allow your children to take ownership of the choices they make as they write, you are following the essential principles and beliefs that inform writing workshops.

Assessing Writers at the Start of the Year

In your eagerness to get started, don't bypass the opportunity to collect baseline data. Before you rev kids up, before you remind them of all they know about narrative writing, devote one day's writing workshop to some assessment. We recommend you simply say, "Before we get started on this new year, I would love to see what you can do as writers of small moment, true stories.

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Today, I'm going to give you a booklet that you'll use to sketch and then write a story on one particular thing that you did. Make this an example of the best true-story writing you can do. I hope your writing shows me what you can do as a writer."

Give children just 45 minutes of actual writing time, and be scrupulous about not giving any reminders or assistance. You'll eventually use these stories to show them and their parents how much they have grown over the course of their time in second grade, so propping them up now will work at cross purposes. You also want to see how children do with independence. Be sure they have booklets that contain plenty of pages (at least five) and plenty of lines on each page (perhaps eight). Be sure children also know they can add more pages if they need additional space.

Once writing time is over collect the pieces, making sure that each piece contains the child's name and the date. Study their work alongside the narrative continuum on The Reading and Writing Project's website (www.readingandwritingproject.com/public/themes/rwproject/resources/assessments/writing/narrative_writing_continuum.pdf). You needn't match every single trait—just look between the piece and the touchstone texts at each level and do your best to locate the child's on-demand writing within the range of sample pieces. Then look ahead on the continuum to see the work you'll teach writers over the next few months, and note specific techniques that your writers are probably already doing that you can compliment (and teach). After two months of work in narrative writing you'll re-do this assessment, saying exactly the same things and providing the same conditions, and then you'll watch to see how much your children have grown in that time. You'll bring the September and the late-October pieces to your parent-teacher conferences and use them to discuss children's growth. Noting each child's growth, comparing what they can do on the run and without assistance, both now and after a bit of time, will help remind you that your teaching always looks towards tomorrow and towards independence. You will not want to lure kids to revise a piece of writing so completely and so extensively that you end up scaffolding children to do work that is far beyond what they will be able to soon do on their own.