

Marvelous Minilessons for Teaching Beginning Writing, K-3



Lori Jamison Rog

INTERNATIONAL
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LORI JAMISON ROG is a teacher, curriculum consultant, and staff developer. She is the author of *Early Literacy Instruction in Kindergarten* and *Guided Reading Basics* and coauthor of *The Write Genre*.

After 17 years as a classroom teacher, Lori served as K–12 Language Arts Consultant for the public school board in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada, where she was responsible for professional development and curriculum implementation in 64 schools. She has been a sessional lecturer at the University of Regina, teaching courses in writing process to preservice teachers. Most recently, Lori was appointed to the Saskatchewan Department of Education to develop a provincial reading assessment intended to guide teachers and principals in planning effective reading instruction and programming.

Lori has been an active member of her local reading council, has chaired the International Development Coordinating Committee of the International Reading Association, and has served on the Association’s Board of Directors.

Currently, Lori is a private educational consultant who writes professional materials for teachers, consults with school districts, and speaks at conferences and other professional development events. She has presented at literacy conferences from New Zealand to Nova Scotia and San Francisco to Dublin. As a speaker, she is well known for her dynamic style and practical, research-based ideas. Lori’s website is www.lorijamison.com.

Lori is the mother of one daughter, Jennifer, who is currently a university student. Her husband is Paul Kropp, the author of many novels for young people. She recently relocated from her “little house on the prairie” in Saskatchewan to an 1889 townhouse in the Cabbagetown district of Toronto, Ontario, Canada.

Author Information for Correspondence and Workshops

Please feel free to contact me with questions about this book. A link to my e-mail can be found at www.lorijamison.com.

MY DAUGHTER, JENNIFER, learned early in life that the best way to get out of trouble was to write her mom a note. That's why I have entire boxes of letters and notes that say things such as "To Mom, I love you, sorry for talking back," in a 5-year-old's print (see Figure 1). What Jennifer knew at age 5 is what we as teachers want all of our primary-grade students to know: that they have something important to say, that they can say it with writing, and that other people will listen. Our job as teachers is to provide them with the tools to achieve these goals.

Discovering How to Teach Writing

In my career as a primary-grade teacher and curriculum consultant, I have seen many changes in the way writing is taught. When I first started teaching, I taught "creative writing" as I had been taught—the once-a-week, one-draft wonder. I would assign a topic, the student would write the piece, I marked it up with corrections to spelling and conventions, the student made a "good" copy, and we would abandon it with relief on both our parts—until next week, when we started all over again with a new piece.

FIGURE 1. Jennifer's Note



A photograph of a handwritten note on a piece of paper. The text is written in black ink and is arranged in a curved, downward-sloping line. The words are: "TO MOM", "I LOVE YOU", "SORRY", "FOR", "TALKING", "BACK", "LOVE", "JENNIFER", and "R.E.". The handwriting is simple and characteristic of a young child.

In the late 1970s, the whole-language movement gave teachers a new awareness of the role of writing in literacy development. Pioneers such as Donald Graves, Nancie Atwell, Lucy Calkins, and Jane Hansen opened our eyes to the techniques “real writers” used and encouraged us to approach writing as a process rather than an event. Like many others, I welcomed the idea of writing-process instruction and writing workshop. Instead of once a week, my students began writing every day. Instead of writing single drafts, we planned, composed, and tried to revise our writing for publication. As a result of this new sense of process, my students were writing much *more*. But they weren’t necessarily writing much *better*.

It took me a while to figure out the problem. Then I realized that I had been doing a lot of *assigning* of writing, but not a lot of *teaching* how to write. As Atwell says in her revised edition of *In the Middle* (1998), now I “teach with a capital T” (p. 22). If I want my students to grow as writers, I must set goals for their learning, provide explicit instruction on the elements of good writing, and expect them to be accountable for what they have learned. This is true whether my students are fluent writers or beginning writers just starting to put scribbles on paper. Teaching makes the difference.

The Purpose of This Book

I remember hearing the renowned Australian literacy researcher Brian Cambourne speak at an International Reading Association (IRA) conference. In essence, his message was this: Our students need to know how to read so they can learn about the world. But they need to know how to write so they can *change* the world. That is why effective writing instruction is so very important.

This book is about the explicit teaching of writing. I use the term *minilesson* as Calkins (1986) does: to refer to brief instructional sessions that focus on a specific learning objective and provide opportunity for direct transfer to the student’s own writing. The 40 minilessons in this book offer suggestions for developmentally appropriate writing instruction in K–3 classrooms.

It is all too easy in the primary grades to focus on the conventions of writing—the task of taking our students from writing scribbles to letters to words to sentences. But there is much more to good writing. Even the youngest students can understand that good writing needs ideas, details, organization, crafting, revision, and editing before it is the best it can be. That is why I have chosen to group these minilessons into four areas: (1) topics and details, (2) substance and style, (3) conventions, and (4) revision.

Each chapter includes a collection of 10 minilessons focused on each area. I have drawn this collection of minilessons from my own experience

with young writers and my observations of exemplary teachers in many primary-grade classrooms. All of the lessons are grounded in research and effective practice in literacy instruction. These lessons have been child-tested and classroom-proven. The scripts in the minilessons reflect the language I use when talking to beginning writers. The examples shown are actual samples of modeled writing. The teaching is structured to be developmentally appropriate, starting with what young writers know and stretching them to higher levels of development.

I hope many different audiences will find this book useful. The beginning or preservice teacher will find dozens of tried-and-true minilessons for teaching writing. The experienced teacher will likely find a few new tools for his or her teaching toolbox or a new twist on a familiar theme. Last, although writers in kindergarten to grade 3 are the main focus of this book, many of the book's lessons may be applied to students in grade 4 and beyond. I hope that the minilessons in this book will help you to find teaching ideas and strategies for students at all levels of development.

An Overview of This Book

Chapter 1, "Writing Instruction in K–3 Classrooms," examines the stages of writing development in the primary years. There is a great range of development in these years, from our kindergarten students, who are drawing and scribbling to "write" messages, to our fluent and proficient writers in third grade. This chapter describes the writing workshop and how it differs for students at various levels of proficiency, and it provides an overview of the powerful six-traits writing framework, including ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, and conventions.

Chapter 2, "Topics and Details: Getting Started With Writing," deals with the initial hurdles of generating and organizing writing ideas. These minilessons focus on encouraging students to find writing topics from the events in their lives, to elaborate on those topics with supporting details, and finally, to scaffold young writers in creating plans to organize those details before writing.

Chapter 3, "Substance and Style: The Writer's Craft," offers minilessons on style, focusing on precise word choice, a powerful writer's voice, and fluent sentences.

Chapter 4, "Conventions: The Nuts and Bolts of Writing," deals with topics such as "invented" spelling, punctuating dialogue, constructing contractions, and using capital letters. Writers know that writing needs certain conventions for a reader to be able to read it. These minilessons will give them tools with which to practice and perfect their editing skills.

Chapter 5, “Revision: Making Good Writing Even Better,” shares several ways for students to improve the clarity and style of a piece of writing and presents a writing rubric in “kid language” to help your students assess their own writing and the writing of others. Most teachers would agree that revision presents the greatest challenges for student writers: Many children will say, “But I like it just the way it is,”—and they do. These revision lessons will show students that revision is simply—and painlessly—a way to make good writing even better.

What Makes This Book Unique?

This book has been designed to be practical and useful for teachers in several ways:

- Introductions to chapters 2 through 5 provide an overview of the lessons in each chapter, as well as research support and rationale for the lessons. Additional teaching ideas are also integrated into the chapter introductions.
- Minilessons are linked to stages of literacy development and the traits of effective writing. A chart at the beginning of each chapter highlights what each lesson is intended to teach, which trait it is linked to, and the developmental level for which it is most suitable. Teachers can use the charts to help them make decisions about which lessons suit the learning needs and levels of their students.
- Accompanying the minilessons are opportunities for teacher reflection; teachers can use the areas provided in the margin to write notes about each minilesson, which support reflective practitioners as they consider each minilesson and how they might adapt it in future applications. If our students are to master the writing concepts in this book, we will have to teach these lessons more than once. An effective teacher learns each time he or she tries a minilesson and then reflects on what worked, what didn’t, and what should be done next time. These reflection notes also may be useful if this book is used for teacher discussion groups or professional learning teams.
- Minilessons are based on effective lesson planning. Each lesson includes a “before, during, and after” component—labeled Introduction, Instruction, and Application. The lesson introduction helps provide a link to what students already know and explains what students are going to learn in the minilesson. The instruction component is the explicit teaching aspect through modeling, demonstration, or think-aloud. The application component provides an

opportunity for students to demonstrate what they have learned. Some lessons also include extensions, which are suggestions for developing the content further or applying the lesson in another way.

- Scripted dialogue shows the language that might be used in presenting these concepts to primary-grade students. Of course, each teacher will need to modify this dialogue to suit his or her students and individual teaching style.

In addition, throughout the book, I use the words *we* and *our* as a reminder that we all work together in our quest for excellence in teaching and learning. I am proud to say I am a teacher, both in my profession and in my heart. With this book, I invite you, my readers, to learn along with me.

The lessons in this book are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive. They are a “menu” of choices from which teachers may select or adapt to meet the needs of their students and address the requirements of their curriculum. My hope is that these minilessons will be springboards for further teaching in the writing workshop, as teachers try the lessons, reflect on them, and adapt them to suit the particular teaching situation.

This practical resource provides 40 research-based, classroom-tested, and developmentally appropriate minilessons for kindergarten through grade 3 presented in the context of authentic writing experiences. You can use these lessons to teach students how to generate and organize ideas before writing, and then turn their prewriting ideas into connected text. Develop writing style by focusing on word choice, voice, and fluency. Increasingly use conventional spelling, capitalization, punctuation, and grammar to produce more readable work. Revise their writing for clarity, style, and effectiveness 40 minilessons show that even the youngest writers can learn to consider audience and purpose as they express themselves and share ideas. Year: 2015. Publisher: Pembroke Publishers. Language: english.Â

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