

The Seven Elements of a Differentiated Writing Lesson

Look over this exemplar narrative (descriptive) writing lesson with your colleagues. **Discuss:** “Which of the following three elements stood out as being integrated into the lesson the most thoughtfully?”

The lesson’s **mentor text** is cleverly used to inspire an idea, a structure, or a writing skill from student writers.

The lesson’s tools are clearly focused on teaching a **specific trait-based writing skill** to writers.

The lesson provides many opportunities for students to **talk about their own writing process**.

The **graphic/advance organizer** would definitely help students craft a better rough draft.

Students are guided to discuss **student or teacher models** at an *analyze* or *evaluate* level of Bloom’s taxonomy.

Students could be allowed or guided to make **personal choices** about topics or steps in the writing process, which would invest them better in the writing they’re asked to do.

The lesson’s **revision tools** push students to think critically about their own writing and how they might improve it.

Also discuss: “What adaptations to parts of this lesson would you need to make in order to help all your students find success with the writing the lesson asks them to do?”

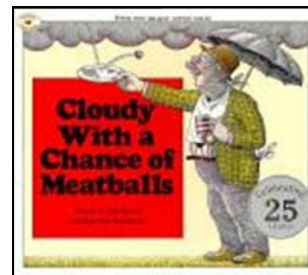
Three-Meal Weather

an exemplar **fictional narrative** writing lesson for third grade

Authorship credit: This lesson was posted at the NNWP’s WritingFix resource website after being proposed by Nevada teacher **Kaycee Goman** during a lesson-design workshop for teachers in 2005.

Overview of this lesson: Inspired by Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs, the writer will brainstorm adjectives that center around food that might fall from the sky. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner foods will be brainstormed. Writers will then compose a three-part piece of writing that describes (with great adjectives) an entire day of raining food.

Trait/Skill focus for this lesson: The focus trait in this writing assignment is **organization**; ask writers to create purposeful story paragraphs as they create a descriptive story with, at least, three parts. The support trait in this assignment is **word choice**; writers brainstorm strong adjectives (and verbs) long before writing.



Step one (sharing the mentor text): Cloudy With a Chance of Meatballs, written by Judi Barrett and illustrated by Ron Barrett, is the amusing story of the town Chewandswallow. This is no ordinary town with any ordinary weather. Three times a day the weather in this tiny town turns extraordinary. At lunch frankfurters may **blow in** from the northwest with **mustard clouds** and **drizzles of soda**. Judi Barrett creatively describes the intriguing weather in this small town throughout the story.

Celebrate the powerful words (especially the adjectives) as you read the book aloud with your students. Inform students they will be writing a narrative (descriptive) story about an original place where strange things fall from the sky whenever it rains.

Step two (introducing models of writing): Throughout this lesson, have students work in pairs or small groups to read and respond to any or all of the student models that come with this lesson. The groups should certainly talk about the **organization**, since that's the focus of this lesson, but you might also prompt your students to talk about the **word choice** in the writing too.

Start by sharing the following first and second grade samples with this prompt: "These are really good samples for first and second grade, but you're all third graders now and might know more about good writing now than you did in first and second grade. As third graders, how would your story be even better than these two samples?"

Cloudy with a Chance of Strawberries

by Megan, first grade writer



In the town of Food, clouds are made of cotton candy and the sun is made of lemons. It does not rain raindrops. Food falls from the sky three times a day!

For breakfast, there is a tornado of great donuts that are deep fried and sticky pancakes with gooey syrup. Bagels with icy water fall from the sky in an ice storm. I love breakfast! Breakfast is my favorite meal of the day.

For lunch, there is a thunderstorm of delicious macaroni with milk and curly chicken noodle soup, and fresh ripe strawberries. Yummy! I love strawberries!

For dinner, there is a snowstorm of skinny spaghetti with parmesan cheese and a salad with ranch dressing and small vegetables and milk. Mmmmmm! So yummy!

A Day Full of Food

by Niko, second grade writer



In the town of Chew and Swallow, food falls from the sky for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

At breakfast, the pancakes were sticky. The scrambled eggs were hot and cheesy with pepper. Also, melted strawberry strudels fell from the sky.

At lunch, squishy peanut butter sandwiches fell from the sky. Smokin' hot dogs steamed the town. Yellow juicy apples tumbled on the roofs.

Later that night, sweet cheesy hamburgers fell on each door, and they had little hands that rang the doorbell and said, "Food is here!" The stinky fish fell onto people's plates. Mac and cheese dropped only to the children because they liked it.

For dessert, chocolate covered strawberries dropped into people's mouths. I wonder what food is for tomorrow.

Step five (revising based on evaluative thinking) If you didn't rush through pre-writing, each student's rough draft should have its own strengths and its own areas that could be improved upon; there is no revision formula that will work with every child. With the revision step of the writing process, it is crucial that students be taught (through modeling and monitoring) to analyze their own use of writing skills so that they can self-select one or two specific skills to focus on during revision.

Attached in the appendix are two sheets of response/revision, Post-it-sized notes that work well with this lesson. The first is the organization Post-it (at right). The important thing to note on this tool is that it asks for students to *rank* the skills in their own (or a partner's) writing, not *rate* the skills. When you rate skills, you can assign the same score to different skills; you could, for example, give all the skills a score of '4,' which many kids end up doing because that's an easy way to fill out the Post-it Note. *Ranking* requires the students to decide on their absolute strongest skill from the five, and to give that skill a '5'; the next strongest skill receives a '4,' then a '3,' etc. *Ranking* is harder to do because it requires the students to apply their knowledge of these skills to their writing, then to analyze them by comparing them to each other.

Our Common Core Standards require us to start pushing our students to *evaluate* reading and writing, and these Post-its are a small tool that—when modeled well and monitored strictly during the first few uses—can help your students learn to independently create revision plans that match their own drafts' strengths and weaknesses.

When using the Post-its for response and revision, most students claim that *ranking* the skills in someone else's writing instead of their own is easier, so it might be a good exercise to have them work with partners to *rank* the skills in one of the student models that comes with this lesson. Your struggling learners can practice with one or the other Post-it, but your advanced learners can and should certainly practice with both Post-its.

If you wish to adapt these Post-its to better fit the trait-specific language you use in your classroom, we invite you to contact Corbett Harrison (charrison@washoe.k12.nv.us) and ask him to send you a blank template.

Step six (editing as a community) First, before students edit their revised drafts, put them away for a while. Students need a little space between drafting and revising, and they need a little more space between revising and editing. Before having them edit, do a mini-lesson on the importance of correctness when sharing your writing publicly, including sharing it on a bulletin board inside or outside a classroom.

Organization Post-It

Rank these five skills against each other, from 5 (highest) 1 (lowest):

- _____ My introduction "hooks" the reader in an interesting way.
- _____ All my ideas are presented in a logical sequence.
- _____ The transitions show my reader where my ideas move forward.
- _____ The organization of the whole piece feels natural, not forced.
- _____ My conclusion leaves the reader satisfied.

Word Choice Post-It

Rank these five skills against each other, from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest):

- _____ My adjectives are thoughtful and fit my descriptions.
- _____ I chose verbs that both *show* and *tell* my reader information.
- _____ My specific use of nouns make the details more memorable.
- _____ Figurative language (similes, metaphors, etc.) feels natural.
- _____ I take risks with words; I don't just use predictable ones.

Conventions Post-It

Have your five editors initial next to what they edited your draft for:

- _____ I checked this draft for spelling mistakes.
- _____ I checked this draft for periods and end punctuation.
- _____ I checked this draft for verb tense and grammar problems.
- _____ I checked this draft for apostrophes and capital letters.
- _____ I checked this draft for commas and dialogue punctuation.

If you haven't ever created a community of editors to make use of on days when the whole class edits revised drafts, it's a fairly easy process. It requires that the teacher know enough about students' conventional writing skills to place them into any of the following groups: strong spellers, strong end punctuation users, strong past tense verb users, strong capitalizers, strong apostrophe users, strong homonym users, etc.

On your assigned *Community of Editors* day, students all bring a complete working draft of writing. Once placed in one of the *strong skill* groups, students seek out four other students who must come from the other four skill groups. When paired with a student in a different skill group, they serve as an editor for the other student's writing for just the skill they have been identified as a strong user of.

Students quickly read over each other's drafts, lightly circling or high-lighting suspected errors just in the skill group they are assigned to. After both read and circle, they have a two- or three-minute clarification conversation, where they explain why they circled or highlighted anything in the other's paper.

Then they meet with another student from another *strong skill group* and repeat the process. Once they have met with four editors, they are finished. They should be allowed to ask verification questions of each other or of the teacher (or of the dictionary) before beginning a final draft.

For those students who completely lack any conventional skills, you do have two options: 1) those students can meet with the teacher in a small, focused group while the rest of the class edits one another's papers; 2) the teacher can invent a *sentence fluency skill checker* group as a sixth group. Having conventionally-challenged students circle just the first word in other students' sentences, or having them count and record the number of words in each sentence from the draft (in the margin) can prompt students receiving this information to remember to use a *variety of sentence beginnings* and/or a *variety of sentence lengths* in their final drafts. It requires little conventional skill to circle first words on another student's draft or to count another student's words per sentence.

Step seven (celebrate published stories in ways that motivate) It's so very important to find special ways to celebrate students who truly honored the entire writing process while creating this story. This special recognition will inspire students who haphazardly pre-wrote or drafted or revised or edited to honor those steps of the process a little more the next time writing is assigned. You can:

- Allow those students to share their writing using the class microphone;
- Place those stories in a special class book that honors the entire writing process;
- Publish those stories on a classroom bulletin board or website;
- Submit them at the online, WritingFix version of this lesson;
- Or...?

Three-Meal Weather Narrative Lesson

Resources for Teaching this Lesson

- **Three third grade student samples** to have your students analyze and discuss before, during, and after they have written their own rough drafts. **A Teaching Challenge:** How can you push your students to discuss these samples at the *analyze* or *evaluate* level of Bloom's taxonomy?
- **Three Graphic Organizers** to use with this lesson during pre-writing. The great author/ and writing teacher, Donald Graves, once wrote that—when teaching the writing process well and helping students *like* what they write—up to 85% of a students' time could be spent during prewriting . **A Teaching Challenge:** How can you balance modeling, collaboration and independent brainstorming while using these graphic organizers so that students spend more time pre-writing and have a better chance of liking the story they ultimately draft?
- **Three Trait-Focused Post-its** designed to help students use skill-specific vocabulary when responding, revising, and editing. **A Teaching Challenge:** How do you help students truly understand the meaning of the skills listed on the Post-its, and how do you model using the Post-its so that students use them to improve their own writing?

Discussing Third-Grade Samples: These two third graders worked especially hard on improving their **organization** and **word choice** when they revised their rough drafts to create these final drafts.

In each story, what is the best skill each writer shows with **organization** and **word choice**? Talk this question over with a partner and be prepared to share with the whole class.

What piece of advice might you offer both writers if they wanted to make their **organization** and **word choice** even stronger?

Leaving Chew and Swallow

by Sonia, third grade writer

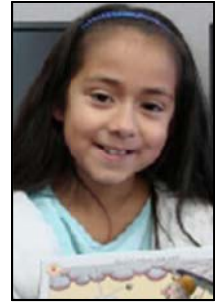
In the town of Chew and Swallow, everyday everybody woke up, grabbed their plates, cups, forks and spoons. They went outside and saw their breakfast falling from the sky. They had toast with strawberry jam, soft pancakes and some hot coffee.

Then it was lunchtime. They had nachos with cheese and for a drink – hot chocolate. The nachos fell loudly because they were in a bucket.

An hour later, it was dinner time and they had delicious cheesy pizza. For dessert they had yummy chocolate, but they had to eat it fast or else it would melt because it was very hot there.

Then it started to rain sticky soda everywhere. Everybody had to wash off because everywhere was sticky. They had leftovers for between meals because they always get hungry between meals. Then one day the weather went crazy so they had to move away to be safe from the weather. They grabbed a huge slice of wheat bread that could carry everyone from the city to a different city.

It took days to find a different city, but they finally found one. It didn't have food falling from the sky. They thought it was very strange that they had to go buy food from stores instead of the sky giving it to them. They got used to it after a while. They still are wondering why they have to buy stuff instead of the sky giving it to them, and they often wonder about Chew and Swallow.



Breakfast, Lunch, and Dinner

by Marissa, third grade writer

Breakfast fell fast on the ground in the morning. The sky served delicious eggs, pancakes and a giant hash brown. Everybody in the land of Chew and Swallow ate all the food on the plate. The scrambled eggs were cheesy. The pancakes were fluffy, and the hash brown was golden and chewy. Everybody in the land of Chew and Swallow ate breakfast with their friends and family. They were full of energy...until lunch.

At lunch, the food fell silently on the sidewalk. For lunch I had a hotdog, a soda and strawberries. The hot dog was smokin'! The soda was sugary and the strawberries were fresh. Once again the whole town ate all of it. And they were all happy and full of energy...until dinner.

For dinner in the town of Chew and Swallow, they had spaghetti. It fell gushy and hard. For a beverage they had lemonade. The spaghetti was so good. No chef could make it in a thousand million years! The lemonade was like it was in an igloo for three years. This time they only ate half and saved the other half for later. They all had a good night's sleep.



A Creative (and differentiated) Approach: Third-grader Jacy, after showing she understood the basics of this writing assignment, wondered if she could take a more creative approach. Her teacher gave her permission provided that she still worked hard on her **organization** and **word choice** skills.

Where do you think Jacy showed her best **organization** and **word choice** skills in her final draft? What creative story-telling possibilities does Jacy's story inspire in your brain?

Feeding the Ant Colony

by Jacy, third grade writer



My colony was just waking up, getting ready for the day, when breakfast came. For breakfast, we had soft, buttery pancakes with juicy strawberries and thick, healthy milk. The milk poured into the colony with one pancake for each ant. In Chew-n-Swallow, you see, the meals come from the sky, so we ants don't have to hunt for food. It's pure paradise.

Later that same day, when our queen was laying her 5,000th egg, creamy, red tomato soup with a sticky jelly donut and citrusy soda fell and fed the colony.

Five hours later, our dinner came. Dinner was spicy shepherds' pie, strawberries with whipped cream and blueberry pomegranates. All three meals were fantastic!

The following day everybody waited around for breakfast, but it didn't come! Everybody was hungry. Lunch didn't come either. That whole day we didn't eat. The day after that I went for a walk. It started to rain, but it only rained water. I put my ant tongue out and it tasted terrible.

I headed back to the colony to ask everybody what went wrong. On the way there, I overheard what the news was saying, "With the weather, we had a little change. Scientists say that the sky ran out of food!"

Our ant mayor, Mister Chew-n-Swallow, had a note from our ant President saying we had to reload the sky. "I'm going to send in ships and fill the clouds with food. If you have any food you would like to put on that ship, e-mail me," announced our mayor.

I ran as fast as my six little legs could carry me, all the way back to my hungry colony. I told our messenger to tell everybody the announcement. We had our soldier ants creep into the humans' nest and take lots of food. Soon the ships set out, and a week later they had reloaded the sky.

For dinner that night, we had soft tacos and bubbly Sprite, followed by root beer floats with a lot of ice cream. I sometimes wonder what the rest of the world has, but I know Chew-N-Swallow has the most fantastic meals.

Writer's name:

Pre-writing: Three-Meal Weather

Inspired by Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs by Judi & Ron Barrett

Student Instructions: Today you will prepare to write a three-part description of food that rains from the sky during breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You will focus on using powerful adjectives as you write your three-part story.

First, collect twenty different adjectives. Choose adjectives that might describe food. Choose only interesting adjectives (not "good" or "nice" but "delicious" and "sticky"). Spell your adjectives correctly when you place them in the grid below:

Second, choose nine different nouns. These nouns will be the food that will fall from the sky during this wacky weather pattern. Choose three foods that will fall during breakfast, three foods for lunch, and three for dinner:

Breakfast: Choose 3 foods→			
Lunch: Choose 3 foods→			
Dinner: Choose 3 foods→			

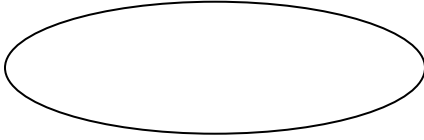
Writer's name:

Drafting Sentence Practice: Three-Meal Weather

This graphic organizer was shared with the NNWP by teacher Rivka Danziger

Student Instructions: Today you will practice building sentences about food that might appear in your Three-Meal weather story.

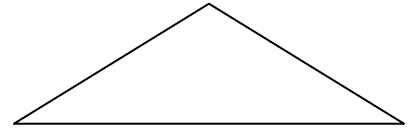
Breakfast:



food



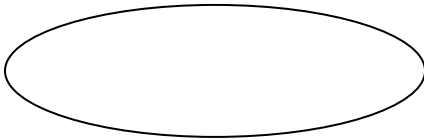
describing word



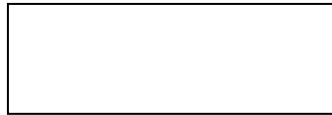
action verb

Make an exciting sentence using the words above:

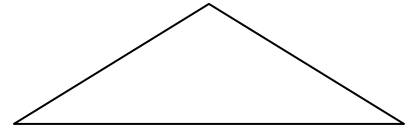
Lunch:



food



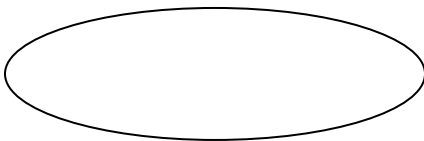
describing word



action verb

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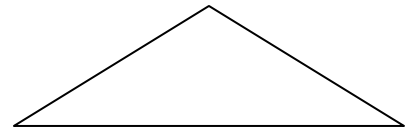
Dinner:



food



describing word



action verb

Make an exciting sentence using the words above:

Use the 29 words (20 adjectives + 9 nouns) from your pre-writing brainstorm to help plan the body of your three-part story. In the first part, describe how breakfast falls from the sky. Describe each food falling with wonderful details. Can you draft three, four, or five sentences just about breakfast falling?

In the second part, describe how lunch falls from the sky. Describe each food falling with wonderful details. Can you draft three, four, or five sentences just about lunch falling?

In the third part, describe how dinner falls from the sky. Describe each food falling with wonderful details. Can you draft three, four, or five sentences just about dinner falling?

Response, Revision, and Editing Post-its for this lesson:

Organization Post-it:

Rank these five skills against each other, from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest).

- My introduction “hooks” the reader in an interesting way.
- All of my ideas are presented in a logical sequence.
- My transitions show my reader when my ideas move forward.
- The organization of the whole piece feels natural, not forced.
- My conclusion leaves the reader satisfied.

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Word Choice Post-it:

Rank these five skills against each other, from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest).

- My adjectives are thoughtful and fit my descriptions.
- I chose verbs that both *show* and *tell* my reader information.
- My specific use of nouns makes the details more memorable.
- Figurative language (similes, metaphors, etc.) feels natural.
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Conventions Post-it:

Have your five editors initial next to what they edited your draft for:

- I checked this draft for spelling mistakes.
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Collaborate with your grade level to adapt these Post-its with your classroom trait language:

<p>Organization Post-it: Rank these five skills against each other, from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">___ My introduction “hooks” the reader in an interesting way.___ All of my ideas are presented in a logical sequence.___ My transitions show my reader when my ideas move forward.___ The organization of the whole piece feels natural, not forced.___ My conclusion leaves the reader satisfied.	<p>Organization Post-it: Rank these five skills against each other, from 5 (highest) to 1 (lowest).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">_______________
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