

RFE Language Arts Bulletin

February 25, 2008

 GROWING
IDEAS

 QUADRANT
WRITING
ACTIVITY



Good writing happens when you write a lot.

~Gillan Markey~

GENERATING IDEAS: Each new day opens the door to new writing possibilities. Life experience is at the heart of good writing. If you really take notice, an ordinary trip to the grocery store can make for some interesting writing. Many of our students “don’t see” the goldmine of writing opportunities in the simplicity of everyday life.

When it comes to writing, finding the *right* moment to explore is often the most challenging part of the process. We must help our students develop an eye and ear for writing possibilities and consistently provide them time to transfer these ideas into their writer’s notebooks (generating a “topic list” at the beginning of the year isn’t enough...life happens daily and so does great writing ideas). The following exercise is excellent mental gymnastics for growing potential stories.

QUADRANT WRITING ACTIVITY: The following guided-writing activity (Bernabei 2005) provides an opportunity for writers to scratch below the surface and examine possible writing ideas without an enormous investment in time.

1. Students fold a sheet of paper into four quadrants.
2. In the 1st section, students generate a “Quick List” (all ideas should be entered into their writer’s notebook) of possible topics based on teacher-initiated stems that create *small* writing (see sample that follows). Students circle 3 favorites to share and narrow to one after brief peer collaboration.
3. Next, students use the *Memory* “kernel essay” boxes (below) to generate 5 sentences about the one moment selected from the “Quick List” (1 sentence for each box =5 sentences). Give students a set amount of time for this activity-5-7minutes is plenty. *Note: the single sentence per box can be altered to a longer written format by shifting to a certain amount of time to write for each box. “Kernel essay” boxes exist for other content areas-will place in your mailbox.

Where were you?	Moment it started.	Next thing that happened.	Final moment.	What were you thinking?
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4. In the 3rd quadrant, students write a one sentence “truism” or universal lesson learned from this experience.
5. In the remaining quadrant, students write the opposite of the truth wrote in quadrant 3, which will also be true!
6. Students read their Memory kernel essay to a small peer group. Each student must decide which truism to use and where it sounds better, at the beginning or end of their 5 sentences.
7. As an entire group, share a few kernel essays out loud.
8. Finally, have students stow their kernel essay in their notebook as a possible piece to develop in the future.

*Extension: have students cut up their 5 sentences and have a peer sequence instead of reading piece. Discuss how this can help the author see revising possibilities.

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Quick List

1. **A food moment**
Eating 11 pancakes***
2. **A pet moment**
Kitten wedding in the barn
3. **A memorable moment**
My 30 minute headstand*
4. **Another memorable moment**
Using a paper bag to catch an imaginary critter
5. **A clothing memory**
Receiving a puffy purple shirt
6. **A time you learned a lesson**
Eating raw pizza dough
7. **An injury moment**
Mom "sewing" my foot
8. **A school day moment**
Teacher sitting me beside my brother
9. **A musical moment**
Singing "Nobody" to the bus driver*
10. **A proud moment**
Mom's letter

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Memory Kernel Essay

Where
were you?

I was sitting at the kitchen table eating
breakfast with my cousin Mara.

Moment it
started.

Mara dared, "Whoever eats the most
pancakes gets to decide what we're
going to play the rest of the day!"

Next thing
that
happened.

Dad was making pancakes the size of
the skillet and Mara was on pancake
number twelve!

Final
moment.

Kneeling by the toilet, I pulled my hair
back and admitted defeat.

What
were you
thinking?

I should have just agreed to play
Charlie's Angels or better yet,
waved the white flag on pancake
number three.

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Truism/Lesson Learned

Understanding your personal limitations may
prevent you from unnecessary hardships.

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Opposite Truism/Lesson Learned

Not knowing your personal limitations can cause
you some tremendous hardships.