

then or later, or ideally, I may reteach the point and have the students make their own corrections.

If I don't have time to capture all the good things a student has done, I hand out a sentence strip and a marker and ask the student to write the sentence on the strip. I can make an impromptu bulletin board titled *The Power of Punctuation*.

Of course, by processing these texts, students are going to see other valuable writer's craft techniques besides punctuation: alliteration, repetition, dialogue, and so on. That is a problem I am willing to live with in a longer lesson. I know that learning occurs at many levels in a weblike fashion, that new learning traces over itself and back again in new situations. Hearing dialogue, I may focus on the voice of it one time, and on another occasion, I may focus on the punctuation marks. Each new learning continually traces and retraces, firming up the mesh of what makes effective writing. Students literally soak up more than punctuation, and that's what I want: kids soaking up punctuation in the context of effective writing, their own and that of others.

For example, Simmy's hair story became a bit more focused with revision. She worked on correcting her spelling errors and tried to use punctuation to tell her story and break it up into chunks. She used an ellipsis to build humor and a pause at the end. She added dialogue marks when prompted by the wall chart and a re-reading of *Bedhead* (see Figure 3.3).

If you like to ride the wave of student interest, and they want more about hair, the next day you might want to continue with adding to the freewrites. For example, read *Hairs* (1997) by Sandra Cisneros. It uses sensory detail and similes with abandon in simple, elegant ways. Have students go back to their freewrites and add this kind of detail, or simply have them freewrite about their families' hair. What special effects did they create in their writing? Students can go back and add to their freewrites as many times as it's effective. In fact, they often find seeds for longer pieces.

The Writer's Eye (I): Lists of Things I Can Write About

The "Writer's Eye (I)" section of the writer's notebook serves dual purposes:

1. Students write about the life they've observed with their own eyes, writer's eyes.
2. Students start a collection of the people, places, games, hobbies, interests, and so forth that they know well.

Hair

My hair is so easy to put up, but I kind of got tired of my hair being so good. So, last year, when it was a hot day, I wore my black hat that said, "Not another bad hair day," and for the hair part, I teased it so it will look like I woke up on the wrong side of the bed. I went to school; all the guys were waiting for me. Everybody was in their favorite hats. I went over. "Yo, Simmy. What happened to your hair?" the guys said.

"Read my hat stooges!"

Not another bad hair day.

I took off the hat, and a piece of hair was sticking up and the teased part started expanding all of a sudden. One, two, three of them started laughing. I told them I did it to make them laugh. But most of them did not believe me, even if it was true . . . or was it?

Figure 3.3 Simmy's "Hairror" Story

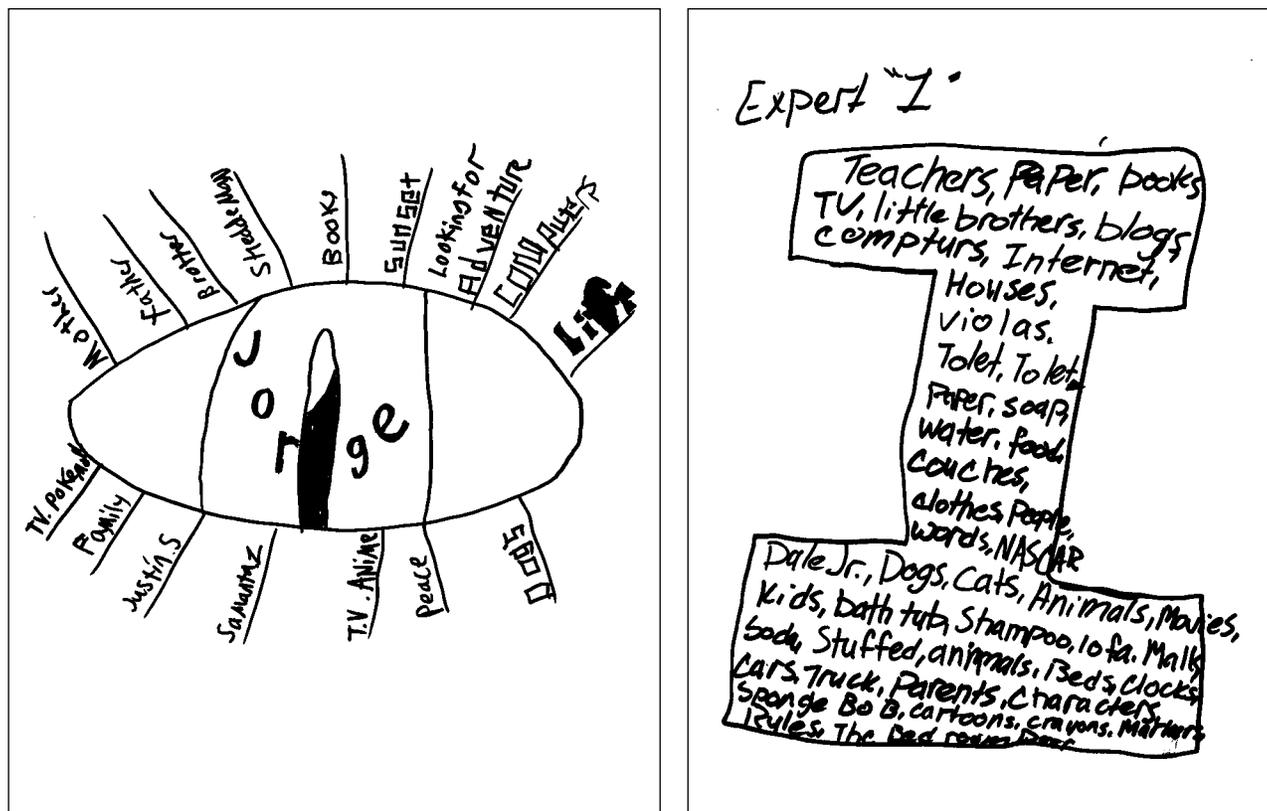


Figure 3.4 Student Writer's Eye and Writer's I Examples

This is the space where I want to let the students know I value who they are, where they come from, and what they know. Tanesha may know a lot about her brother Roshon because she sees him every day. Roshon is part of Tanesha's life, the "I" and the "eye." So Roshon is someone who could go in Tanesha's Writer's Eye (I) list. When we tell kids to use their writer's eye, we are referring both to their noticing capabilities as well as to their personal experiences.

On the first page of the Writer's Eye (I) section of their writer's notebooks, I give students two choices of how to decorate it with words. I model both. "This graphic organizer will take up one page. You are going to list all the things in this world that you know well. This list is going to be called your Writer's Eye or Writer's I."

I show an overhead of each graphic organizer. Both have the possessive *Writer's* across the top of the page, but the *Eye* has a big eye drawn and each of the lashes act as a line off a web, while the *I* has a huge letter I with a fat center, providing writing space in the middle for a list (see Figure 3.4). I allow students to be creative here as long as they leave space for their lists—that's nonnegotiable.

Students draw the eye or *I* figure. I remind them again, “Make sure it takes up the whole page. You need space to write in it or around it.”

Students begin the list of all the things they know: *The Simpsons*, Sony PlayStation 2, hobbies, interests, family members, friends, how to get in trouble, Math, and so on. Whether it’s things at school or at home, students should list all the things they know and see most every day. Periodically, I direct students to review this list, adding and deleting as they see fit.

Craft/Mechanics Connections Through the Writer’s Eye (I)

When I Was Little is my answer to all students who say, “I don’t have anything to write about.”

“Oh, really,” I reply. *When I Was Little: A Four-Year-Old’s Memoir of Her Youth* (1993) by Jamie Lee Curtis is a lively picture book that sparks memories by reflecting on eating Cheetos, naptime, floaties, and time-outs. The text follows an easy-to-imitate pattern. I read it aloud.

Afterward, I ask, “What phrase is repeated again and again?”

“When I was little,” returns a chorus of voices.

“Take out your writer’s notebook and turn to The Writer’s Eye (I) section. Is everybody in the Writer’s Eye section? Now, I want you to turn to the first empty page after your first Writer’s Eye (I) list.

“On the top of the first line, I want you to write today’s date. Then, skip a line and write *When I Was Little List* as the title. (I model each step on the overhead as I explain.)

“We are going to make a list of memories that all start with four words. Guess what they are?”

As the class chants, “*When I was little*,” I write the words to start my list on the overhead: *When I was little, I fell into the toilet*. “I am brainstorming by starting off every thing on my list with *When I was little*.”

“Does anyone notice something else I did that we will all need to do each time on our lists?”

“You put something after it,” Damien offers.

“Yes, Damien, what did I put after it?”

“That you fell in the toilet.”

“Right, I put what happened when I was little. Anything else, class?” I tap on the overhead very near the comma.

“You put a comma after *little*.”

“That’s right. We put a comma after *little*.” (We’ll follow up with why at the end of the lesson because we need to get listing.)

“Now it’s your turn. Brainstorm a list and start every memory with *When I was little*. Don’t forget your comma. List as many as you can! You have four minutes—go.” I continue listing on the overhead for two more entries; then

I turn off the overhead and circulate. As long as almost everybody is listing, I extend the time.

“Now tell a person near you what’s on your list. You have five minutes.”

After five minutes I ask, “What did you hear?” I take a few responses. “I got so many more ideas when I heard other people’s lists. Let’s add more to our lists. You have three minutes.”

After three minutes I say, “Let’s look back at our lists. Did everyone remember to use commas and to put a period at the end of each sentence? Check and fix. One minute. Go!”

“Looking over your list, do you see anything that’s connected? If so, draw lines between them.” I model on the overhead.

“Now go back and circle one sentence or a group of connected sentences on your list.” I, of course, circle *When I was little, I fell in the toilet*.

“Turn to the first section of your writer’s notebook and find the next clean page. Write today’s date above the first line. Skip a line and write the title of the list: *When I Was Little*. Skip one more line and copy down the sentence or sentences you circled in the Writer’s Eye (I) section. As soon as you have that down, continue freewriting for eight to ten minutes. You can’t do it wrong as long as you keep writing. If you run completely dry, refer back to your list and write more. Write the entire time.” Students share writing with a partner first, then a few share with the class.

I follow up with some mechanics instruction at the end of the class or first thing at the next class meeting. “So you told me I needed a comma after *When I was little*, but, at the time, I didn’t ask my irritating question: Why? Why? Why do we put the comma after the *little*?”

Finally Natalie ventures a safe answer, “Because it’s correct.”

“Yes, it is indeed correct, Natalie, but why? Listen to me read it aloud. *When I was little* [pause], *I fell in the toilet*.”

“You paused!” Matthew blurts.

“True. The comma told me to pause. There are several words that, when they are located at the beginning of a sentence, signal you to use a comma to separate the introductory phrase from the rest of the sentence. They are comma causers.”

Then, I teach students about the AA^{AW}WUBBIS. My friend, Cathy Byrd, a sixth-grade teacher at Rudder Middle School, let me in on the power of the AA^{AW}WUBBIS (As, Although, After, While, When, Unless, Because, Before, If, Since). The joy of this lesson comes with the AA^{AW}WUBBIS whoop, along the lines of a good Wahoo! AA^{AW}WUBBIS (A-WOOH-BIS)! Cathy tells her students that if they start a sentence with an AA^{AW}WUBBIS, they are almost guaranteed to have a comma in the sentence. I remind them that the comma never immediately follows the AA^{AW}WUBBIS. I tell them that they will hear or feel the pause when they read the sentence. I put the AA^{AW}WUBBIS list on the board. We practice orally. The students make up a

sentence beginning with an AAWWUBBIS and tell me where they would put the comma. Later, students include at least one AAWWUBBIS sentence in a longer piece they are working on in writer's workshop.

Later, Cathy teaches students how the AAWWUBBIS part of the sentence is a fragment without the second part of the sentence. She says students "feel very mature when they realize how easily complex sentences can be written."

Author's Word and Phrase Palette

The "Author's Word and Phrase Palette" section of the writer's notebook will be a collection. I morphed this strategy from Noden's (1999) "Artist's Image Palette." As students read, they record words or phrases that strike them for a myriad of reasons. I wanted to open this up to a collection that could be done all year. Collecting, categorizing, and marveling at words and combinations of words in their independent and assigned reading will help students develop an appreciation for the power of words. Later, students can create a piece of writing using the palette. Students may also want to look at their palettes when revising their papers for specific word choice. In this section, students collect the following:

- *Active verbs.* Writing snaps and sizzles when active, lively verbs are used. The specificity makes writing hum with voice and often creates sounds to delight in. Active verbs like *skitter* and *crackle* should fill a lot of the space in the author's palette, developing diction and increasing vocabulary.
- *Cool words.*
- *Phrases or combinations that work.* Maybe it's alliteration, maybe it's beautiful, maybe it's parallelism, such as this sentence. For whatever reason, these word combinations dance on the page or dive into our senses, allowing us to experience whatever it is the writer is expressing.
- *Contrasts/comparisons: similes, metaphors, sensory images, and others.* I ask students to look for something fresh, not stale like "faster than a speeding bullet," but new, original, and something to aspire to as a writer: [*This cake*] *tastes like vacuum cleaner fuzz* (Korman 2000, p. 2) or *Her open eye was like nearly black balsamic vinegar beading on white china* (Franzen 2001, p. 31). While reading *Birdland* by Tracy Mack (2003), I recorded these similes in my author's palette: *Her voice was rough, like a bus grinding its brakes* (p. 36) and *Leo's feet pad down the hallway like a soft drumbeat* (p. 66). While reading *The Truth About Sparrows* by Marian Hale (2004), I copied, *Sweat crawled all over me like ants* (p. 2). Whatever strikes me for whatever reason, I record it. I ask my students to do the