

Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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Tip #27: Writing Personal Narratives

The last few email tips have been focusing on reading. Let's go back and take a look at writing.

The Write Traits kits by Vicki Spandel arrived just after Christmas. I hope they have provided you well developed lessons for the teaching of those traits. Giving students lots of fluency practice in writing will allow them to put those traits to work. Those traits can look different depending on the kind of writing you are working on. For example, you wouldn't use the same voice in a business letter as you would use in a thank you note. Your word choice for the lead of a persuasive essay is going to be very different than your word choice in a descriptive paragraph.

The Inside Writing units that also arrived after Christmas are an excellent resource for ensuring that you have adequately covered the four genres of writing this year: expository, narrative, descriptive, and persuasive. It is not uncommon to have a heavy focus on expository writing. Because you operate as a team and try to tie subject areas together, expository writing is a natural fit. However, it is important to look back and make sure your students have had instruction in each mode of writing.

A popular mode of writing for middle school students is the personal narrative because this is the stage in their development when the whole world revolves around them. You can

certainly use the stand alone units in the Inside Writing curriculum at your site to teach this. The 6th grade unit (teal) focuses on writing a memory of a person, the 7th grade unit (purple) focuses on learning from an experience, and the 8th grade unit (red) focuses on writing a phase autobiography. The pacing guide for each of these is two weeks.

A less structured unit can be found in the Write Source 2000 student handbook, and your Language Program Guide has supporting blackline masters for your grade level. (Yes, those were delivered to you after Christmas, too!) Look at pp. 153 - 159 for sample student papers and skill lessons for writing successful narratives. In this resource, the authors focus on writing an autobiography and also address the phase autobiography.

No matter which unit you choose to follow, it is important to follow the writing process. Immerse students in prewriting opportunities. If you don't, you will either get blank stares or comments like, "Nothing interesting has ever happened to me. I have nothing to write about." Our students think too big. They believe good writing stems from big memories like going on some exotic vacation. This is so far from the truth. Some of the best writing comes from the smallest kernel of an idea, those ordinary things that happen to us every day.



A fun prewriting activity to support narrative writing is to [create student life maps](#). Students take an inventory of the highs and lows in their lives and map them artistically on graph paper. There is a sample color life map on p. 52 of the Write Source 2000 student handbook. Mock up one of your own life to demonstrate to your students the steps. (For most of us, this will require intervals more than one year apart in order to fit on a sheet of graph paper!) If students are willing to share these, they make a great bulletin board display at this time of year since you have successfully built a community on your team.

Another twist on this life map idea is in Linda Rief's book called Vision & Voice: Extending the Literacy Curriculum. She asks students to make a list of loves and hates. From that list they draw an illustrated, graduated bar graph of loves and hates, being as specific as possible. [Attached is a student sample](#).

Both the life map and the love/hate bar graph give students an opportunity to retrieve memories for personal narrative writing. Once they have selected a personal memory to write about, they should tell theirs to someone else in the classroom. Repeat this prewriting strategy a couple of more times changing partners. As you monitor this partner work, listen to see if the retellings get more specific.

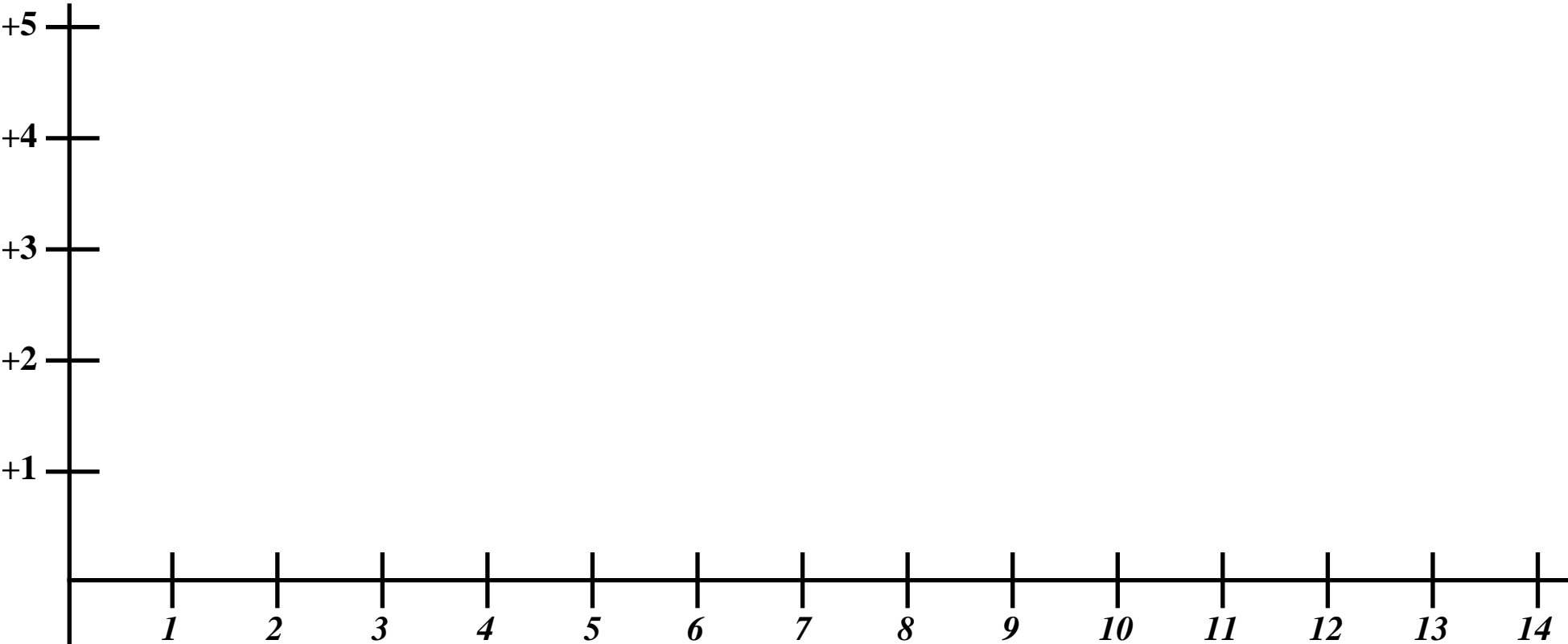
Always model as you go. The following motto helps me remember this gradual release of responsibility: ***I do it, we do it, and then you do it.*** Write a personal narrative yourself as you teach this unit. Revise with them. Let your students see you struggle and how you problem solve. During the revision process, pull in mini-lessons that address the six analytical traits to improve the writing. Let them share with peers for more feedback. Continue on with proofreading/editing and eventually final copy. Display these in a Dinah Zike shutter booklet or something similar. Pull out gel pens and let them add

artistic finishing touches to entice others to read their work. [Attached is a possible evaluation form](#) you could modify for your own instructional unit. 7th and 8th graders do have a lot to say about themselves and truly enjoy sharing when given the opportunity.

Source

Rief, Linda. Vision & Voice: Extending the Literacy Spectrum. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1999.



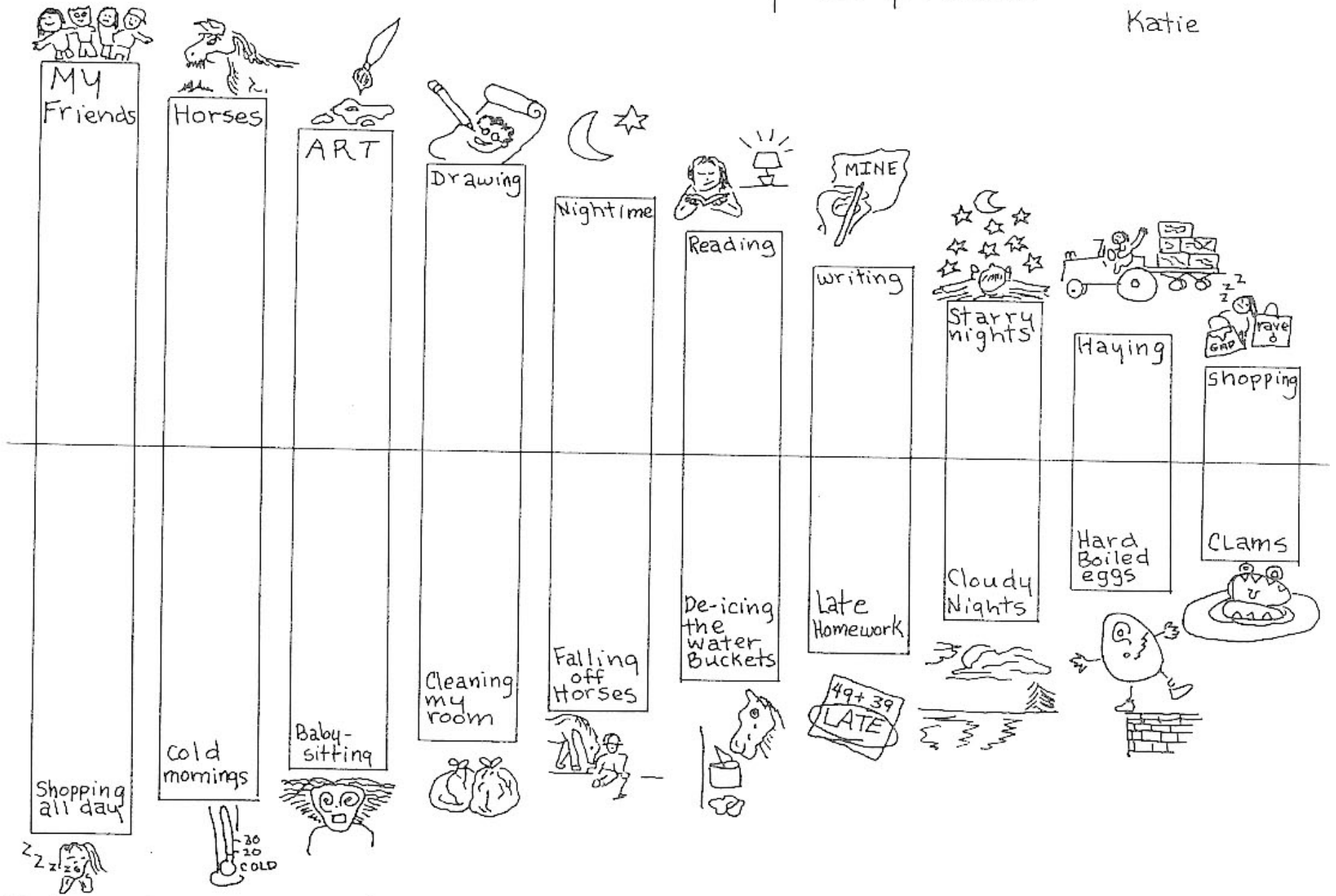


LIFELINE

Things I ♥ the Most

My ♥'s & Hates

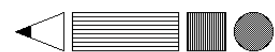
Katie



Things I hate the most



Personal Narrative Evaluation



(Your name)

1. Did you enjoy working on the emate this week? Why or why not? _____

2. Explain how your draft changed over the week. _____

3. Was your revision process different for you this time since you were working on a computer during class time? Why or why not? _____

4. The following is a list of mini-lessons that you learned throughout the week. Please let me know how well you understand each one. Use a scale of 1 (low) - 4 (high).

_____ writing effective leads
_____ writing effective closings
_____ punctuating dialogue
_____ varying speaker tags

_____ writing participial phrases
_____ knowing when to change paragraphs
_____ slowing down the "hot spots"

5. I asked you to showcase your personal narrative in a unique and creative way. Please indicate how well you accomplished this task. (You may use + and - if you are inbetween.)

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

___ exemplary
___ satisfactory
___ needs improvement

TEACHER ASSESSMENT

___ exemplary
___ satisfactory
___ needs improvement

6. Please evaluate your writing using the MOVIES traits. (left side = student, right side = teacher)

Mechanics	Organization	Voice	Ideas & Content	Effective Word Choice	Sentence Fluency

Mechanics	Organization	Voice	Ideas & Content	Effective Word Choice	Sentence Fluency

7. **FINAL PRESENTATION GRADE**

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FINAL NARRATIVE GRADE

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