

My Fun Story

OR:

**From Across the Parking Lot
and Up the Elevator to
My Fun Story**

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Warm Up Activity: Challenge your children *to say in less than one breath* what some common stories are about: e.g., Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, any *Star Wars* movie, any *Fairly Odd Parents* cartoon show, The Cat and the Hat, etc. Guide the children to use fewer and fewer words. This will take some guidance and examples. Once they demonstrate a basic capacity to summarize a story in one breath, tell them this *main idea* also could be called the “Big Set Up”.

Next, ask the children to imagine finding a story that would love to read. In a dream or a crystal ball or a vision, they see the book in their hands. This story would be just the kind of funny or scary or exciting story that they would like to read about. Now ask them to imagine that they look at the story and it is written by them! Their name is on it! They can’t wait to open it, but before their eyes delight upon the first words, they must learn the parts of a story.

Write: Ask the children to **imagine** that they accidentally see a famous movie producer across a parking lot. The producer looks up at their hopeful eyes and guesses, “You have a story you think would be a great movie, right? OK, what is it about?” Remember, it has to be IN ONE BREATH. What do they yell? Have your children **write** that down.

As they are writing, remind them that this is the “Big Set Up” and Main Idea.

Next: **Imagine** : Luck is with them. The next day they get into an elevator and hit number 23 when the same producers steps in and hits 22. He recognizes you and says, “That was a good story idea. You have until the elevator lets me off to tell me more.”

Activity: Children pair up and **tell** their partner the expanded story for sixty seconds. **Listeners** can ask questions to help story-tellers elaborate or clarify. After both partners have talked their story, then each child illustrates at least one picture in their own story (yes, **pictures**

first is fine, indeed; many students will love the opportunity to **Draw first**). Three to five minutes deadlines. Student pairs explain their picture(s) to their partner for one minute each.

Write: The Elevator Version of your story. Encourage continued partner corroboration, partner sharing, adding, questioning. Fifteen minute deadline.

As your students write, give them the following condition of engagement: NO ERASURES! If they mess up or don't like something, they draw ~~a single line through it~~, but keep it and keep going. Tell them this is what writers often do. Developing this technique will spare many frustrations, and help the students **keep it moving**. One of my fellows and friends, Dan Alderson, says to his students, "One word and then another word and another. One word at a time." Keep it moving... As they write, encourage them to write, not think... "think aloud, that is, write aloud".

After the time is up, share, praise, and inquire. Tell them to put their writings and drawings in their writing binder for later. For **Homework**, they are to read their one-minute-story writing aloud to an elder. Elaboration and input from elders should be **written down** along with any further elaborations (or re-writes!).

CLASS GAME: WHERE AM I? Setting Set-Up

Write: The Teacher passes out 3x5 cards and asks the children to name a place on one side, like “bus stop” or “lunchroom” or “my room”, (then write their name), and on the other side neatly write at least two things they see there. Thirty seconds later, ask them to name a sound they might hear; fifteen seconds later, smells or sensations (at least four entries altogether).

Draw a face on the board and, then ask for volunteers to give examples of their sensory descriptions. As they do so, point to the facial correlative (I use the cheek for “touch”) and indicate the sensations/senses they are including.

After they write down their clues, the cards are collected and redistributed, **clues side up** (no peaking on the other side). Students are selected to read the clues and guess the place (others can guess/concur afterwards). Kudos will be given to the student who *wrote* the excellent clues.

Tell the children they just learned one of the basics for the foundational lesson of writing: Setting. Tell them there are only a few parts to learn to make a great story and if you learn the parts of a story, it is easy to build one.

Teach Setting only and then the writing process itself: Sketch, Write, Improve, Rewrite, and Show— **all for the Setting only**. This way the weaker writers are not overwhelmed with writing and rewriting and rewriting. Simply take the two to four sentences they have constructed for SetUp and Setting through the writing process. This will be an abbreviated and easy form of the writing process. But it communicates clearly one key lesson about writing: it is a *process*; “writing *is* re-writing”.

The children will write their imagined story, using their “Big Set-Up”/main idea and Setting. Remind them that they will be writing the story that they would love to hear. (Later, you will talk about “audience”.)

Tell the children that after the **Big Set Up**, there are three big parts of a story to learn: the **Setting**, the **Characters** and the **Plot**. It's good to start with **Setting** to let your reader visualize and feel the story. There are many ingredients even to a Setting, so let's start with the basics.

Tell the children that when they can imagine a story and answer the questions below, that's called a pre-write and pre-writes are how you begin to sketch out a story.

Set-Up and Setting

(PreWrite)

1) **Parking Lot Yell/Main Idea/Big Set-up:**

What is your story about — can you say it in one breath? (Could be the Title of the Story and a one line description.)

2) **Where** does the story take place? _____

(Your room? On your neighborhood streets? The moons of Jupiter? A dream?)

3) **What time of day** or night is it? _____

(Dawn? Lunchtime? Afterschool? After bedtime?)

4) **What time of the year** is it? _____

(Springtime? Holidays? Dark Winter?)

5) What 2-3 things can be see?

(Wind on the trees? Sunlight on the water? People doing what?)

6) What sounds do can be heard? _____

7) What smells or tastes are there? _____

8) What feelings are there? _____

Chart 1: Set Up and Setting

Write: Take the answers from your pre-write and write your notes into complete sentences, checking for capitalization, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement. This first writing is called a “draft” or a sloppy copy. “Draft” means a “pretend (or preliminary) version” so don’t worry about mistakes or spelling or anything really, just put down one word at a time, making as good sentences as you can write quickly. Read it all to yourself, checking for big mistakes, then, if you can, read it aloud to someone.

Now the bad news: you have to do it again. Here comes the first big skill:

blending the sentences. Blend the sentences as best as you can, don’t worry about getting it “right” or “finished”. For instance, you would not write: *It was my happiest day. I was at the beach. It was sunset. It was summer. I saw waves, clouds, and people playing frisbee. I heard the waves, birds, and people yelling. I smelled bar-b-que. I felt hungry and happy.*

First Blend: *It was sunset on the beach, one happy summer day. I saw waves and heard them. Birds chirped and flew through the smell of bar-b-ques. People were yelling and I was hungry and excited.*

Now a really hard part for some people: *don’t write any more than this*. No, “then a shark or a man jumped out of the water”, or “there was a party we wanted to go to”, no “I met this fun person who...”. Nothing else. We’ll work on just this “Setting” introduction and make it great. By keeping it short, we only have to work with 2-4 sentences.

Introduce the **Writing Process**. Use the following forms to show them ideas that they could do.

WRITING PROCESS

Part One: Prewrite

Name: _____ Date: _____

Project: _____
(Here you can fill out prewrites on Setting, Character, and Plot as well as IDEA webs or trees,
or just make notes; randomly or in order.)

WRITING PROCESS

Part Two: DRAFT

Name: _____ Date: _____

Project: _____

(Also called a “Sloppy Copy” ‘cause you don’t have to care about spelling or neatness: just write one word after another about your ideas into rough sentences. Make mistakes!)

WRITING PROCESS

Part Three: REVISING

Name: _____ Date: _____

Project: _____

(Make it Better! Add adjectives to nouns, adverbs to verbs, use similes and metaphors. Make sure you have some simple, clear and plain sentences, some descriptive Silver sentences.)

WRITING PROCESS

Part Four: PROOFREADING

Name: _____ Date: _____

Project: _____

(Move towards your very best with everything correct. Use the editorial marks.

Polish some sentences into "Gold" with metaphors, personifications, hyperbole, and word sounds, like alliteration.)

WRITING PROCESS

Part FIVE: PUBLISH!

Name: _____ Date: _____

Project: _____

Write: After your first draft, **improve it simply**. The first and easiest thing to do is to add adjectives and adverbs. Find all your nouns and see if there's an adjective that would work, then find all your verbs and see if they could use any adverb or adverbial phrase.

It was just before sunset on the city beach, one warm summer day. I saw and heard big waves crashing loudly, while nearby birds chirped loudly and flew fast through the smokes of supper bar-b-ques that made me hungry. People were yelling loudly and I was very happy.

Just this little decorating and our paragraph is already pretty good.

Another easy way to improve a paragraph is to use a Thesaurus. Find overused words like “big” or “loud”, “very” or any word that is used more than once.

It was just before sunset on the beach, one warm summer day. I saw huge waves crashing and heard their thunderous roar, while nearby birds chirped sharply and flew quickly through the smell of supper bar-b-ques. That made me hungry! People were yelling with excitement and I was rushing with happiness.

Don't ask for too much now. Let three re-writes be enough to publish. Praise profusely. Approve each one and tell them they are ready to “Publish”.

PUBLISH

Ceremoniously reveal some 11" x 17" paper. Fold it in half, left-to-right, open it back up and tell the children to rewrite their words in their best handwriting anywhere on the open sheet. They can write their words on one side, top or bottom, or across the whole bottom, that's up to them. But first, they must draw a picture of what the words are saying, stick figures are fine. No exceptions. Yes, full-tilt coloration is also permitted, but there is a time limit in the writing class. Later in free or art time, they may work on their illustrations, if they so choose. When they are done, they will have the first page of their book. Post them all, so they can be read while up on the bulletin board.

Tell the kids for their next page they have a **character** appear, a friend, a stranger, a magical being, a villain, that's up to them; use the accompanying pre-write to talk about ways to describe a character. Especially note the character's wants and fears.

Likewise, take these prewrites through the writing process, ending in Publish! exactly like *Setting*. Affix the Setting paragraph/illustration together with the *Character* paragraph/illustration.

Next, —focusing on what the character wants— they have something happen to interfere with their desire, or decide they must go somewhere, or need or want something. Examples are: an avalanche, rain, or they have no money, or they hear about a party....

Note: *Character* ends and *Plot* begins with **desire** (which is *then* conflicted). What do you want, what does the character want? This desire drives the story of problems and solutions, wants have conflicts and goals; want or desire is first.

Take the Plot paragraphs through three similar revisions. As the stories come to an end, affix them to the original Setting and Plot published pieces and they will have created their own illustrated booklet.

Character Prewrite

Person: _____ / _____ / _____
Gender Age Name body shape/size

Hair: Color? _____ **Cut?** _____ **Condition?** _____

Clothes: Color? _____ **Style?** _____ **Condition?** _____

Eyes Seem to be Saying: _____

Action: Is Doing _____

Saying/Body Language: _____

Wants/Desires _____ **Is Afraid of:** _____



How would they respond to:

What's up?/How's it going?

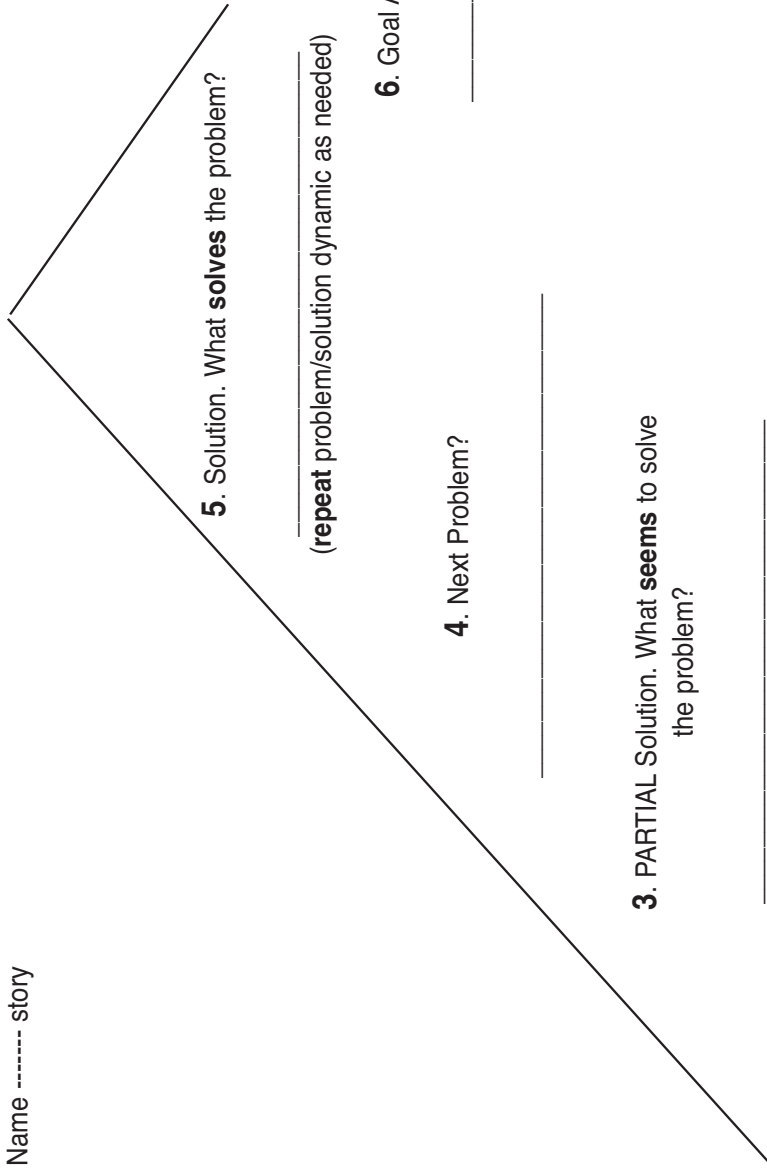
It's raining ...

Do you like _____?

Chart 2: Character Prewrite

APEX/CLIMAX

Name ----- story



6. Goal Achieved/Lesson Learned?

2. Problem/Conflict. What gets in the way?

1. DESIRE. What does the character WANT?

PLOT PREWRITE