

Lesson Skill: Developing fluency, using drop-in words in a story

Strand Writing

SOL 6.7
7.7
8.7

Materials

- None

Lesson

This exercise works well with student writers who have difficulty with fluency.

1. Review the structure of a narrative—i.e., initiating event, rising action, climax, and resolution—and emphasize that for a short story to be a story, a conflict must be presented and must be resolved. Explain to students that they will write a short story by beginning with a given starting sentence or sentence fragment and develop a story, adding a conflict. As they write, you will interrupt them from time to time with an announced word, which they must “drop in” or include in their story in the *next* sentence. Of course, each time such a word is dropped in, it is likely to interrupt the story plan, sending it off on a tangent. Therefore, it will be a surprise where the story ends up.
2. Give students a starting sentence or sentence fragment, such as, “Yesterday afternoon I was walking to my friend’s house to listen to music, when suddenly...”. Have students use this story starter to develop a story as they add a conflict. Instruct them to include all the elements of a story—initiating event, rising action, climax, and resolution.
3. Every few minutes as students are drafting their stories, announce a drop-in word, such as *skunk*, *flood*, *candle*, *ice cream*, *secret*, or *map*. Remind students that they must include each word in the very next sentence they write.
4. Have students share their finished stories with the class. The stories may be nonsensical and comical because the drop-in words caused the plots to go in strange and completely unexpected directions. Tell the students that however ridiculous the stories may be, the drop-in words stimulated their imaginations and therefore helped them write more fluently.
5. Have students pick a favorite sentence to use as a basis for another story. You may want to give them a list of beginning sentences from which to choose or let them compose their own.

6. As students write, have them drop in words of their own choosing to assist them in writing fluently. Again, you may want to give students a fairly long list of such words from which to choose or let them make up their own.
7. After students write their first drafts, ask them to check to see whether they have included all of the elements of a story—initiating event, rising action, climax, and resolution.

Strategies for differentiation

- Have the students write their stories as a comic strip. Write the “drop-in” words on the back of index cards. Shuffle them and place them face down on the students’ desks. Have them flip a card at random intervals and add that “drop-in” word to the speech balloon in the next panel.