

Writing Units

Writing is taught via Writers Workshop using the *Units of Study for Primary Writing: A Yearlong Curriculum*, otherwise known as the Lucy Calkins series. Here writing is divided into month-long units of study. Each unit is devised with lessons that help build a student's instructional level for writing. The writing curriculum is tied into the literacy portion of our curriculum to help enrich student writing. Throughout the units students will see themselves as writers using their everyday experiences as starting points for their stories. Structures and routines are established for students to choose topics, plan for writing and draft their stories.

Unit 1: The Arc of the Story: Writing Realistic Fiction

Fourth grade is an inflection point: students should be able to write stories that feel real, with believable characters, conflict, resolution, and emotional stakes. In *The Arc of the Story: Writing Realistic Fiction*, students move from telling a string of events to crafting stories with narrative shape, character motivation, and meaning. This unit emphasizes that the lenses and moves students use as readers can also guide them as writers — in other words, writers become self-aware of the narrative choices that make stories compelling. By the end of the unit, students see themselves as narrative artists: able to shape stories that feel alive, come from meaningful experience, and evoke readers' emotional investment. This unit is designed to help students gradually shift from "telling" to "showing," from flat events to layered scenes, from summary to moment-by-moment narrative.

Unit 2: Boxes and Bullets: Personal and Persuasive Essays

Boxes and Bullets is the unit where fourth graders begin to internalize more academic essay writing structures. In this unit, writers learn that good essays are both well organized and deeply personal when appropriate. They gather ideas, choose topics that matter, write "to learn," and then structure essays (personal or persuasive) using the "boxes and bullets" frame: big ideas (boxes) and supporting details (bullets). The progression pushes them from informal reflection toward argumentation grounded in evidence and craft. By the end of this unit, students understand that essays are not just "school writing" — they are tools for thinking and persuasion. They become comfortable using an essay frame (boxes and bullets) while simultaneously allowing their voice and reasoning to grow more sophisticated. This unit builds a bridge from narrative and personal writing into the more formal genres students will use in higher grades (argument, research, literary essay).

Unit 3: Bringing History to Life (Informational / Historical Writing)

In *Bringing History to Life*, writers shift into historically grounded nonfiction. They gather evidence, research, and compose texts that not only inform but also animate people, events, and eras from the past. This unit is about turning research into storytelling — using facts and details to bring history alive for readers, with clear structure, narrative flow, and explanatory insight. By the end of this unit, students see themselves as historian-writers: able to transform research into coherent, vivid, and engaging texts. They not only report facts, but also help readers understand significance, context, and causality in history. This unit nudges students toward becoming more academic writers, readying them for research-based writing in upper grades.

Unit 4: The Literary Essay: Writing About Fiction

The Literary Essay is the culminating unit in the grade-level writing arc. It pulls together the interpretive, analytical, and writing skills students have built — asking them to write about fiction with increasing sophistication, nuance, and textual grounding. In this unit, students deepen their capacity to think like literary critics and write as such: discerning themes, analyzing character development, structure, and author's craft, and supporting interpretations with evidence. By the end of the unit, students see themselves as thoughtful interpreters of literature. They have moved beyond surface impressions to writing that grapples with what texts mean, how meaning is made, and inviting readers into their thinking.

Reading Units

Reading is taught through the Reading Workshop Structure consisting of whole group teacher directed mini-lessons, individual and small group work, independent daily reading opportunities, partnership reading opportunities and whole group share time. Lessons are both teacher and student directed. The shared philosophy of Readers Workshop provides daily read alouds, assessment based instruction tailored to students' strengths and needs, opportunities for students to talk and write about their reading experiences, reading high interest, accessible books at the student's level of choosing, opportunities for long stretches of reading time, as well as having teachers who demonstrate a love of reading.

Unit 1: Interpreting Characters: The Heart of the Story

This unit centers on deepening students' understanding of character as the driving force behind meaningful stories. Fourth graders move beyond surface-level comprehension to explore how characters' traits, motivations, and changes create the emotional core and meaning in fiction. Readers learn to interpret characters through evidence from the text and to think critically about how character

shapes plot, theme, and reader experience. By the end of this unit, students read with empathy and insight, recognizing that characters are the “heart” that drive stories and help readers find meaning.

Unit 2: Reading the Weather, Reading the World

This unit invites students to expand their reading identities by exploring nonfiction texts about weather, climate, and the natural world. It’s designed to develop reading skills specific to informational texts — such as interpreting diagrams, understanding cause and effect, and synthesizing information — while connecting to real-world phenomena that spark curiosity and wonder. By the end of this unit, students become more confident readers of nonfiction who can navigate complex texts to understand and explain natural phenomena.

Unit 3: Reading History: The American Revolution

In this unit, students immerse themselves in historical nonfiction focused on the American Revolution. The goal is to build students’ ability to comprehend and analyze historical texts, recognize cause and effect, sequence events, and understand different perspectives. Through close reading and discussion, students develop critical thinking about how history is constructed and conveyed. By the end of this unit, students read history with curiosity and critical insight, able to synthesize information and understand the complexity of past events.

Unit 4: Historical Fiction Clubs

This unit brings together historical fiction reading and book club collaboration to deepen students’ engagement with history and literature. By reading historical fiction novels in small groups, students develop both comprehension and analytical skills, learning to interpret characters, settings, and events within historical contexts. Book clubs encourage discussion, collaborative interpretation, and a love of reading. By the end of the unit, students appreciate the power of historical fiction to bring history alive, and they are confident readers and thinkers who can navigate complex texts collaboratively.