Young Authors Unit: Six Lessons for Grades 3-5

Grades 3 to 5 · Writing and illustrating a picture book

The same six lessons as the K-2 unit, with more writing and more craft: a character who wants something, a problem that builds, dialogue, and pacing a story across 12 to 20 pages. Students can write for themselves or as buddy authors for a younger class. The unit takes two to four weeks, about 9 to 12 class periods of 45 to 60 minutes.

The app isn't out yet; this is how it works when it opens. The app is optional. Every child keeps a finished paper book. Families who want a hardcover scan the pages at home with the I Wrote That Book app, under their own account and their own consent, and order it themselves. You never upload student work, and there are no student accounts.

At a glance

- **Lesson 1. How picture books work.** 1 period.
- **Lesson 2. Plan the story arc.** 1 period.
- **Lesson 3. Storyboard and draw.** 3 to 4 periods.
- **Lesson 4. Write the words.** 2 to 3 periods.
- **Lesson 5. Workshop and revise.** 1 to 2 periods.
- **Lesson 6. Publish and present.** 1 period, then the party.

Standards are listed by their Common Core (CCSS) English language arts codes. Many states use their own versions of these standards, often with the same or similar wording under their own codes: look up the matching standard in your state's ELA standards.

Lesson 1. How picture books work

Time: 1 class period (45 to 60 minutes)

Standards (CCSS): RL.3.7 (how the illustrations add to the words); RL.4.7 (connect the text to its visual presentation); RL.5.7 (how visual elements add to meaning and tone); SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1 (discuss together).

Goal: Students study how words and pictures share the work in a picture book.

Materials: Two or three picture books (one for each small group, or one read aloud); chart paper.

1. Read a picture book aloud. Then reread a few spreads and ask: what do the pictures show that the words don't say?
2. Groups study one book each and chart: how many words on a page, where the page turns build suspense, and how the pictures show feelings.
3. Share the charts. Name the moves: the page turn, the picture that says more than the words, the repeated line.
4. Each student lists three story ideas and stars one. Buddy authors: think about what a younger reader would love.

Check for understanding: Students can name two ways the pictures and words work together.

Lesson 2. Plan the story arc

Time: 1 class period

Standards (CCSS): W.3.3a, W.4.3a, W.5.3a (establish a situation, introduce a narrator or characters, and organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally); W.3.5, W.4.5, W.5.5 (plan with guidance).

Goal: Each student plans a character, what they want, what stands in the way, and how it ends.
Materials: The story planner; scrap paper.

1. Model the arc with a made-up example: Ana wants to win the kite contest (beginning), the wind snaps her string (problem), and she finishes with a kite she fixed herself (ending).
2. In each planner box, students sketch and write a sentence or two. Push the middle: what does the character try, and what goes wrong again?
3. Partners retell each other's plan in one breath: "It's about ___ who wants ___, but ___, so ___."
4. Buddy authors: check that the words and the problem fit a K-2 reader.

Check for understanding: The plan has a character who wants something, a problem that builds, and an ending that solves it.

Lesson 3. Storyboard and draw

Time: 3 to 4 class periods
Standards (CCSS): W.3.3, W.4.3, W.5.3 (narrative with descriptive details and a clear event sequence); SL.3.5, SL.4.5, SL.5.5 (visual displays that add to a story or presentation).
Goal: Students pace the story across 12 to 20 pages and draw each one.
Materials: The drawing sheets; a page of 12 to 20 small boxes for the storyboard; colored pencils or markers.

1. Storyboard first: one small box per page, a quick sketch and a few words. Decide where the page turns go: the moment before a surprise is a good place for one.
2. Show the drawing sheet: two book pages, a fold in the middle, and the drawing inside the corner marks (they help the app straighten the page, so leave them clear).
3. Teach one illustration move each period: a close-up for a feeling, a wide view for a new place, and the same character looking the same on every page.
4. Leave room on each page for the words, inside the corner marks. Early finishers design the cover: the title and "by" with their first name.

Check for understanding: The storyboard and the pages match, and the pacing slows down at the big moment.

Lesson 4. Write the words

Time: 2 to 3 class periods
Standards (CCSS): W.3.3b-d, W.4.3b-e, W.5.3b-e (dialogue, description, transitional words and a conclusion); L.3.2, L.4.2, L.5.2 (capitals, punctuation including quotation marks, spelling).
Goal: Students write the text for each page, letting the pictures carry some of the story.
Materials: The pages and storyboard; a mentor picture book.

1. Draft the words on the storyboard first, one to four sentences a page.
2. Mini-lessons: dialogue with quotation marks; a strong first line; words like "meanwhile" and "at last"; an ending that echoes the beginning.
3. Cut words the picture already says. If the drawing shows the rain, the words can say how it feels.
4. Copy the final words onto each page, neatly and large enough to read.

Check for understanding: Each page has words that add to its picture, and the story uses dialogue or a transition at least once.

Lesson 5. Workshop and revise

Time: 1 to 2 class periods

Standards (CCSS): W.3.5, W.4.5, W.5.5 (revise and edit with peers and adults); SL.3.1, SL.4.1, SL.5.1 (follow agreed rules for discussion and build on others' ideas).

Goal: Students give and use specific feedback, then edit.

Materials: Sticky notes; an editing checklist (capitals, punctuation, spelling, page order).

1. Model feedback that helps: "I liked ___ because ___. I wondered ___."
2. Small groups: each author reads aloud while the group follows the pictures. Each listener leaves one "liked" and one "wondered" note.
3. Authors choose one change that answers a "wondered": a page added, a line of dialogue, a clearer picture.
4. Edit with the checklist, then trade with a partner for a second look.

Check for understanding: Each author can show one revision and explain why they made it.

Lesson 6. Publish and present

Time: 1 class period, then the publishing party

Standards (CCSS): W.3.6, W.4.6, W.5.6 (with some guidance, use technology to produce and publish writing); W.3.4, W.4.4, W.5.4 (writing suited to its task, purpose and audience); SL.3.4, SL.4.4, SL.5.4 (tell a story clearly at an understandable pace).

Goal: Books are finished, go home, and are read aloud to an audience.

Materials: Stapler; the parent letter (with your class code if you have one); the publishing-party kit: certificates, the author's chair sign and the invitations.

1. Fold and staple each book. The paper booklet is a finished book.
2. Send each book home with the parent letter. Families who want a hardcover scan the pages at home with the app and order. The app isn't out yet; this is how it works when it opens.
3. Practice reading aloud: pause at the page turns, show the pictures, read the dialogue in the characters' voices.
4. At the party, authors read from the author's chair, to the class or to their younger buddy class, and receive their certificates.

Check for understanding: Every student has a finished book and has read it to an audience.

Supporting every writer

- **Buddy books.** Pair with a K-2 class: older students interview a younger buddy, write a book for them, and read it at a joint party.
- **English learners.** Students can draft in their home language, write a bilingual book, or label the pictures in both languages. The parent letter comes in English and Spanish.
- **Writers who need support.** Shorter text per page, sentence starters, or dictation for the first draft. A book of 8 pages is a whole book.
- **Families without a phone or the app.** The paper booklet is the finished book. Nobody needs to order.