Young Authors Unit: Six Lessons for K-2

Kindergarten to grade 2 · Writing and illustrating a picture book

Every student plans, draws and writes a picture book of their own, 8 to 20 pages, then reads it aloud at a publishing party. The unit takes two to four weeks, about 8 to 12 class periods of 30 to 45 minutes. Drawing comes first: in kindergarten a page can be a drawing and a few dictated words.

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. Authors and illustrators.** 1 period.
- **Lesson 2. Plan the story.** 1 period.
- **Lesson 3. Draw the pages.** 2 to 4 periods.
- **Lesson 4. Add the words.** 2 to 3 periods.
- **Lesson 5. Share and revise.** 1 period.
- **Lesson 6. Publish and celebrate.** 1 to 2 periods, 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. Authors and illustrators

Time: 1 class period (30 to 45 minutes)

Standards (CCSS): RL.K.6 (name the author and illustrator and what each does); RL.1.7 and RL.2.7 (use the pictures and words to understand characters, setting and events); SL.K.1, SL.1.1, SL.2.1 (talk together about a book).

Goal: Students see that a book has an author and an illustrator, and that they will be both.

Materials: A favorite picture book to read aloud; chart paper.

1. Read the book aloud. Show the cover and title page: who wrote it, who drew it?
2. Page through again with the words covered. What do the pictures alone tell us? Then what do the words add?
3. Tell the class: "You are going to be authors and illustrators. Each of you will make your own book."
4. Make an "ideas" chart together: things that happened to us, animals, places, made-up adventures. Each student draws a quick sketch of one idea to keep.

Check for understanding: Each student can say what an author does and what an illustrator does, and has one idea sketched.

Lesson 2. Plan the story

Time: 1 class period

Standards (CCSS): W.K.3, W.1.3, W.2.3 (narrate events in order; in kindergarten, by drawing, dictating and writing); RL.K.3, RL.1.3 (characters, setting, major events); RL.2.5 (how a beginning starts a story and an ending ends it).

Goal: Each student plans a beginning, a problem and an ending.
Materials: The story planner (one per student); crayons or colored pencils.

1. Model it: think aloud while you fill in a planner of your own with quick drawings. For example, a dog named Biscuit (beginning), who loses his ball (problem), and finds it under the slide (ending).
2. Students draw in each of the three boxes: who is in the story and where (beginning), what goes wrong or what they want (problem), how it works out (ending).
3. Students who are ready add a word or a sentence under each drawing. Others tell you, and you write a few words for them.
4. Partners tell each other their story from the planner, pointing at each box.

Check for understanding: The planner has three boxes that go in order, and the student can tell the story from it.

Lesson 3. Draw the pages

Time: 2 to 4 class periods
Standards (CCSS): W.K.3, W.1.3, W.2.3 (narrate events in order, with details); SL.K.5, SL.1.5, SL.2.5 (add drawings to describe and clarify).
Goal: Students turn the plan into 8 to 20 pages, one drawing per page.
Materials: The drawing sheets (two book pages per sheet; print plenty); crayons, markers or colored pencils; a folder for each student.

1. Show how a sheet works: two pages, a dotted fold in the middle, and the drawing goes inside the corner marks. The corner marks help the app straighten the page, so leave them clear.
2. Stretch the plan: the beginning might take two pages, the problem three or four, the ending two. Number the pages lightly on the back.
3. Teach one drawing move each day: big and bold, fill the page, show where we are, show how the character feels.
4. Students keep their pages in their folder. Early finishers draw a cover: the title and “by” with their first name.

Check for understanding: Pages are in order, and someone else can follow the story from the drawings alone.

Lesson 4. Add the words

Time: 2 to 3 class periods
Standards (CCSS): W.K.3, W.1.3, W.2.3 (tell what happened; in grades 1 and 2, use words like first, next and then, and give a sense of closure); L.K.2, L.1.2, L.2.2 (capitals, end marks, spelling).
Goal: Each page gets its words, written by the student or dictated to a grown-up.
Materials: The drawn pages; a word wall; sticky notes for dictation.

1. Model writing one sentence under a drawing, in the space inside the corner marks.
2. Kindergarten: students label, write a few words, or dictate a sentence that you or a helper write.
3. Grades 1 and 2: one to three sentences a page, with a “first, next, then, at the end” word where it helps.
4. Students who aren’t ready to write on the page can tell their words to a grown-up at home later: in the app, the child adds or checks the words on each page.

Check for understanding: Every page has words (or a dictation note), and the last page ends the story.

Lesson 5. Share and revise

Time: 1 class period

Standards (CCSS): W.K.5, W.1.5, W.2.5 (respond to questions and suggestions from peers and add details); SL.K.1, SL.1.1, SL.2.1 (take turns, listen, ask questions).

Goal: Students read their book to a partner and make one change to make it better.

Materials: The pages; two sticky notes per student.

1. Model a partner share with a student's permission, or with your own book: the reader reads, the listener says one thing they liked and asks one question.
2. Partners take turns. The listener's question becomes a sticky note on the page it is about.
3. Each author answers one question by adding a detail: a word, a sentence, or something in the drawing. Grade 2 also checks capitals, end marks and spelling.
4. Check the order: are the pages numbered and in the right place?

Check for understanding: Each student added at least one detail after the share.

Lesson 6. Publish and celebrate

Time: 1 to 2 class periods, then the publishing party

Standards (CCSS): W.K.6, W.1.6, W.2.6 (with adults' help, use digital tools to produce and publish writing); SL.K.6, SL.1.4, SL.2.4 (speak audibly and tell a story with details).

Goal: Every book is finished, goes home, and is read aloud from the author's chair.

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

1. Finish the cover, then stack each student's sheets, fold them in the middle and staple the fold. The paper booklet is a finished book.
2. Send each book home in its folder with the parent letter. Families who want a hardcover scan the pages at home with the app; the child checks the words, and a grown-up orders. The app isn't out yet; this is how it works when it opens.
3. Send the invitations home a week before the party.
4. At the party, each author reads from the author's chair, the audience tells them one thing they liked, and every author gets a certificate.
5. Put the books on a class shelf, or ask families to send them back for a day of reading.

Check for understanding: Every student has a finished book and has read it aloud.

Supporting every writer

- **Drawing first.** Children who aren't writing yet tell the story with drawings and dictation: that is how kindergarten narrative writing works (W.K.3).
- **English learners.** Students can draw and talk the story in their home language first, and write or dictate the words in either language. The parent letter comes in English and Spanish.
- **More time or less.** A short book of 8 pages is a whole book. Writers who want more can add pages; the drawing sheets are the book's exact shape.
- **Families without a phone or the app.** The paper booklet is the finished book. Nobody needs to order.