The Writing Rope and

Reading & Writing Connections Joan Sedita

To contact Joan: info@keystoliteracy.com

Keys to Literacy free resources related to this workshop:

https://keystoliteracy.com/free-resources/

- Assorted articles, templates and printables
- Recorded webinar: "Stages of the Writing Process"
- Recorded webinar: "Two-Column Notes A Powerful Tool for Comprehension & Writing
- Recorded webinar: "Reading and Writing from Text Sources" (3 parts)
- Recorded webinar: "Writing in the Content Areas Grades 4-12

International Dyslexia Association Free Webinar Series:

- Joan Sedita "Supporting Comprehension Through Writing About Reading"
- https://dyslexiaida.org/webinars/

Joan's monthly blog post: https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/



The Writing Rope: The Strands That Are Woven Into Skilled Writing (Sedita, 2019)

SKILLED WRITING

Handwriting, keyboarding Awareness of task, audience, Spelling Literary devices ■ Word choice ■ Punctuation Sentence elaboration Patterns of organization Paragraph structure Narrative, informational, opinion structures Grammar and syntactic Writing process: organizing, Generating ideas, gathering information EXT STRUCTURE RANSCRIPTION awareness drafting, writing, revising (description, sequence, cause/ effect, compare/contrast, purpose Linking and transition words problem/solution) RITING CRAFT

Research Reports:

Graham, S., Bollinger, A., Booth Olson, C., D'Aoust, C., MacArthur, C., McCutchen, D., & Olinghouse, N. (2012). *Teaching elementary school students to be effective writers: A practice guide* (NCEE 2012- 4058). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Graham, S., Bruch, J., Fitzgerald, J., Friedrich, L., Furgeson, J., Greene, K., Kim, J., Lyskawa, J., Olson, C.B., & Smither Wulsin, C. (2016). Teaching secondary students to write effectively (NCEE 2017-4002). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (NCEE), Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education.

Graham, S., & Perin, D. (2007). Writing next: Effective strategies to improve the writing of adolescents in middle and high schools – A report to Carnegie Corporation of New York. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

Graham, S.. and Hebert, M.A. (2010). Writing to read: Evidence for how writing can improve reading. A Carnegie Corporation Time to Act Report. Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education.

The Process Writing Routine

Think

Identify audience and purpose Brainstorm the topic Gather information Take notes

Plan

Organize ideas
Use a planning guide

Write

Follow the guide Translate ideas into sentences and paragraphs

Revise

Review the content Proofread for conventions Rewrite

Guiding Questions

THINK

Identify Audience and Purpose

- What is the writing task, the purpose, and the audience for the writing piece?
- Which type of writing should I use: informational, narrative, opinion/argument, or a combination?

Brainstorm the Topic

- What do I already know about this topic?
- What sources might I use to learn more about this topic?
- What kinds of information do I need to gather about this topic?

Gather Information, Take Notes

- What strategies should I use to understand the sources?
- How should I set up notes to gather information?
- What ideas and information do I want to include in my writing piece?
 - For informational writing: What are the topics and subtopics?
 - For narrative writing: Who are the characters? What is the setting(s)? Is there a problem and solution? What are the events?
 - For opinion/argument: What is my position? What are the reasons and evidence supporting my position? What is a possible counterclaim and my rebuttal?

PLAN

Organize Ideas

- How long should the writing piece be?
- What is the best structure for the writing piece?

Use a Planning Guide

- How should I set up a graphic organizer to plan the structure?
 - Have I included an introduction and conclusion?
 - How should I organize the body of the writing piece?

WRITE

Follow the Guide

Have I followed the plan from my graphic organizer?

Translate into Sentences and Paragraphs

- Have I written clear, concise and complete sentences?
- Have I included key vocabulary?
- Have I organized my paragraphs around main ideas and sentences with supporting detail?
- Have I included transition words and phrases to connect ideas between my sentences and paragraphs?

REVISE

Review the Content

- Are the introduction and conclusion clear and do they serve their purposes?
- Is the body of my writing piece organized?
- Should I add headings?
- Have I met the requirements of the writing task?
- Is there something I should add or delete?
- Do I need to go back to the *Think* stage to gather more information?

Proofread for Conventions

- Have I included correct capitalization and punctuation?
- Have I checked my spelling?

Rewrite

• Can I just make some changes to the first draft, or do I need to rewrite the piece?

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	Description/Explanation	
Topic sentence:		
First:		
In addition:		
Also:		
Concluding sentence:		

Examples: Writing Templates

First:		
Next:		
Finally:		
Concluding sentence: _	 	

Example: Peer Feedback/Editing Checklist

(access at Keys to Literacy free resources: https://keystoliteracy.com/free-resources/

Peer of What I like about this writing piece:	or Self-Feedback Checklist	
	YES	NO
Is there a good introduction?		
When you read the piece out loud, does it sound good to you?		<u>Underline</u> any parts that are confusing.
Are the ideas in the writing clear?		Put <u>a ? mark</u> next to spots that are not clear and make suggestions.
Is the piece organized?	Provide a specific, positive comment about how the piece was organized.	Put the letter 0 in places that are disorganized and make suggestions.
Is there enough information?		Write INFO in spots that need more and make suggestions.
Is there enough interesting and varied vocabulary?	Put a * star in places where strong vocabulary was used.	Put the letter V with suggested vocabulary in places where the word choice could be improved
Were transitions used to make connections?	Circle transition words or phrases that were used effectively.	Put the letter T in places where a transition would be helpful.
Is there a good conclusion?		
Other:		
Additional Comments or Suggestions	:	

Example: Teacher Information Writing Feedback Checklist

(access at Keys to Literacy free resources: https://keystoliteracy.com/free-resources/

Teacher Checklist: Information Writing

Introduction	Excellent	Getting There	Not Yet
Is there a lead that engages the reader?			
Does the introduction identify the topic clearly?			
Does the introduction preview what is to follow?			
Development of Ideas			
Are the topics and subtopics presented in a logical, organized way?			
Is there sufficient detail and elaboration?			
Are the ideas and information clear and focused?			
Is evidence from sources integrated effectively?			
Are transitions used to create cohesion?			
Is the style, tone, and language appropriate to the audience, task, and purpose?			
Content			
Are the content requirements met?			
Is the content explained sufficiently?			
Does the writing demonstrate understanding of content?			
Is the information accurate and relevant?			
Does the piece include precise language and subject-specific vocabulary?			
Conclusion			
Does the conclusion highlight and support the key points?			
Does the conclusion create closure to the piece?			
Sources			
If sources were used, were they credible?			
Was the information properly cited?			
Conventions		Yes	No
Is there a systematic pattern of errors?			
Are there any capitalization or punctuation mistakes?			
Are there any spelling mistakes?			
Are the sentences grammatically correct?			

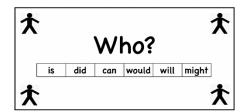
Example: Summarizing Template

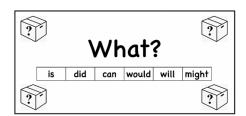
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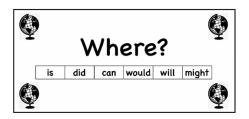
	Summary Template
1.	List the main ideas in phrase form.
•	
•	
•	
•	
2.	Write an introductory sentence that states the topic of the summary.
3.	Turn the main ideas into sentences using your own words. You can combine some of the main ideas into one sentence.
4.	Add transition words from the list below or from the transition poster. first, next, finally, before, after, during, later, also, another, in addition, in conclusion, to sum up, similarly, however, on the contrary, most important, for example, as a result, therefore
5.	Proofread and edit your summary.

Elaborating Sentences

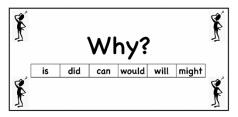
Using Questions

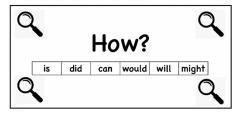












Expanded Kernel Sentences

- Elaborate the subject. (add articles, adjectives)
- Elaborate the predicate. (add verbs)
- Add a phrase.
- Compound the subject.
- Compound the predicate.
- Add a dependent clause to make a complex sentence.
- Combine two sentences into a compound sentence.

Example: Transition Words and Phrases

(access at Keys to Literacy free resources: https://keystoliteracy.com/free-resources/

Transition Words and Phrases

To indicate a time relationship	after, afterward, after that, at first, at this time, before, beginning with, beyond, during, earlier, ending with, eventually, finally, following, from then on, in the meantime, last, later, meanwhile, next, now, since, soon, then, until, while
To indicate spatial placement	below, beside, between, beyond, farther on, here, next to, parallel with
To list or present a series of ideas	after, after that, finally, first, lastly, next, second, third
To add information or continue a line of thought	also, another, besides, further, furthermore, in addition, likewise, moreover, similarly
To summarize or show conclusion	accordingly, finally, in conclusion, in other words, in short, to conclude, to sum up, to summarize
To show comparison	by comparison, compared to, in like manner, likewise, similarly
To show contrast	although, but, however, in contrast, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, unlike
To repeat information or stress a point	above all, in fact, in other words, most important, once again, to repeat
To provide an example or illustrate a point	for example, for instance, such as, to illustrate, that is
To show cause and effect	as a result, because, because of, caused by, consequently, for that reason, that is why, therefore, thus
To state the obvious	certainly, granted that, in fact, most certainly, naturally, obviously, of course, surely, undoubtedly, without a doubt
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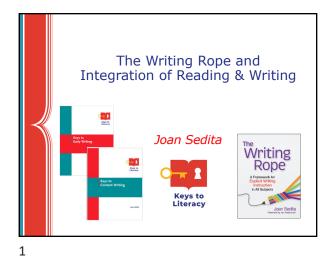
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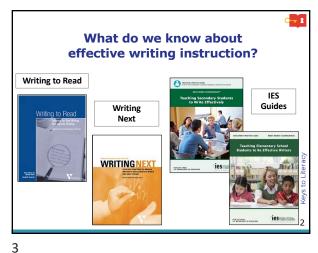
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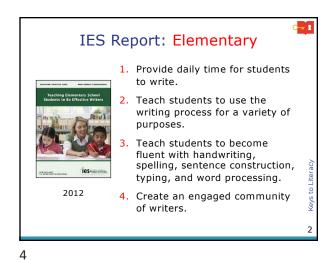
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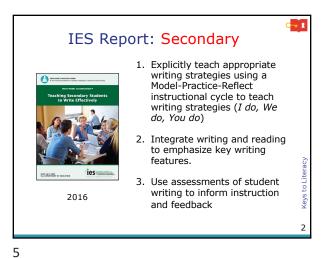




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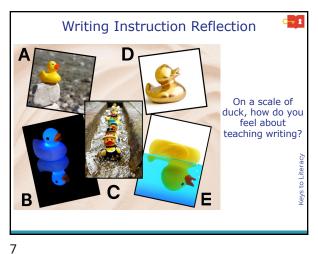


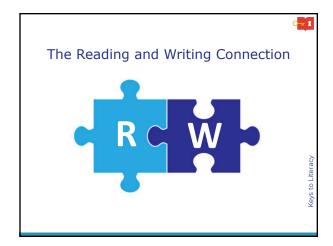






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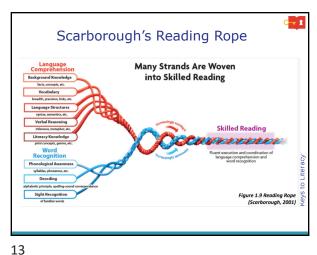
Writing to Read · Have students write about the texts they read. - Personal reactions to text - Summaries - Notes - Answering, creating questions about text • Teach students the writing skills and processes that go into creating text. · Increase how much students write. 2010 2

(eys to Literacy James Britton, 1970

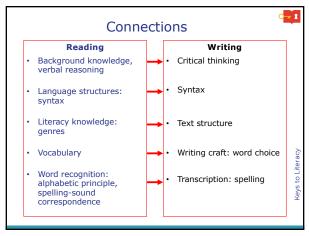
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Integrating Reading-Writing • Reading & writing share cognitive processes and an oral language base. • A shared knowledge model: reading & writing are 2 buckets drawing water from a common well.

Reading Supports Writing Writing Supports Reading Reading like a writer: Writing about material attending to features of read enhances reading abilities, including comprehension. text helps students write similar types of text Reading supports knowledge of text Writers gain insight about reading by structure, organization, creating their own texts, Keys to Literacy grammar & syntactic awareness, spelling, use leading to better comprehension of texts of literary devices. produced by others.

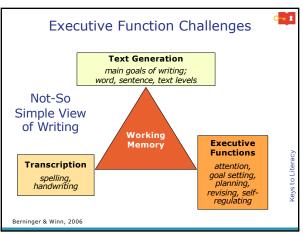




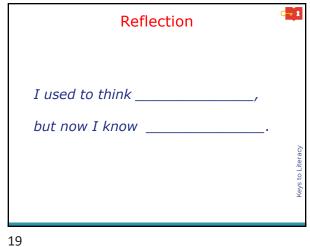


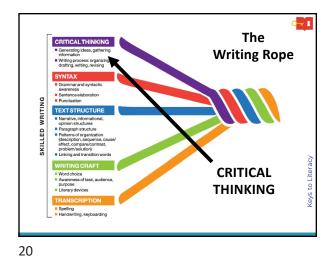
The Challenge of Writing "While negotiating the rules and mechanics for writing, the writer must maintain focus on factors such as organization, form and features, purposes and goals, audience needs and perspectives, and evaluation of the communication between author and reader. Selfregulation of the writing process is critical; the writer must be goal oriented, resourceful, and reflective... For skilled authors, writing is a flexible, goal-directed activity, scaffolded by a rich source of cognitive processes and strategies for planning, text production, Keys to Literacy and revision." Harris, Schmidt, Graham

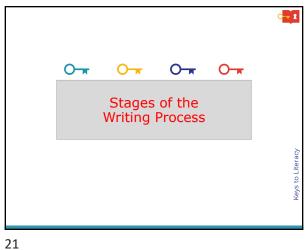
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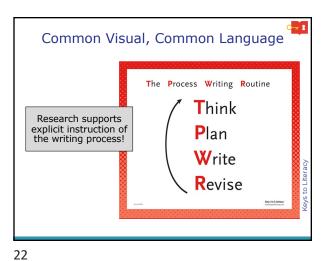


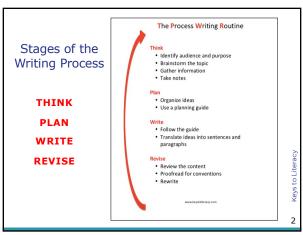
Writing Difficulty: Common Issues 1. Often lack critical reading skills 2. Tend to lack understanding of grammar concepts Have a difficult time editing their own writing and/or the writing of others Typically have a hard time identifying or creating a logical sequence of ideas 5. Often lack a strong vocabulary Don't effectively use pre-writing strategies. Alternatively, they may have great difficulty in starting a piece of writing. What issues do you see in the writing of your students who have difficulty writing?



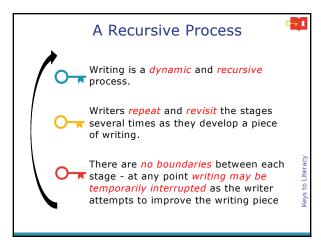


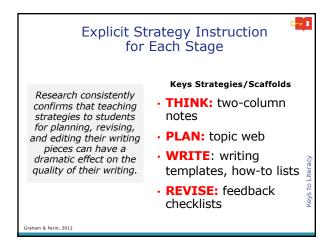




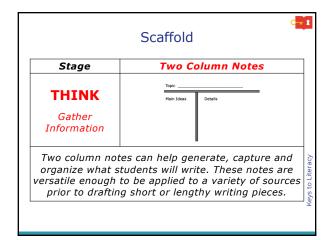


Time: 40/20/40 Students assume they should spend the bulk of their time writing the first draft. However, they should... • ...spend 40% of their time planning, reading, gathering, note-taking (THINK, PLAN) • ...spend 20% of their time draft writing (WRITE) • ...spend 40% of their time rewriting and revising, including editing (REVISE)





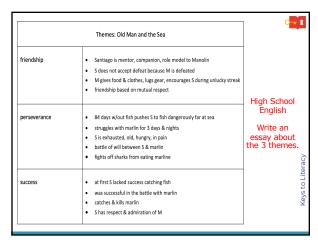
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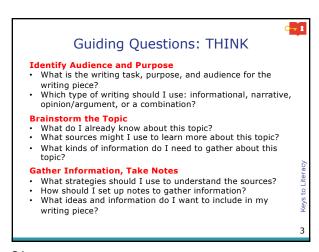


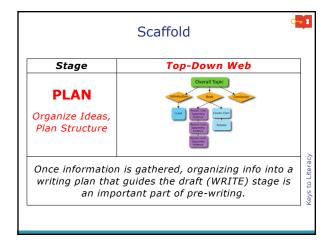
The Four Seasons **Basic** Winter cold weather bare trees Example coats, gloves ice hockey Spring warm weather trees have buds light jackets basketball Summer hot weather full leaves on trees shirts and shorts baseball Write a brief description of cool weather leaves fall from trees Fall the four seasons.

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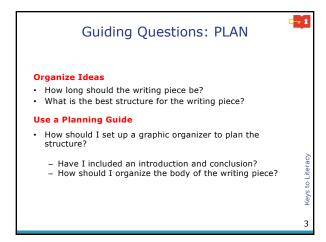
	What Blood Cells Do	
red cells	have hemoglobin-picks up oxygen when you breathe	
	red cells carry oxygen around body	
	1 drop = 5 mil.	Gr: 5:
	cells made in the bone marrow	Explain the
white cells	made in the bone marrow	role of human
WIIILO COIIS	larger than red cells	blood cells.
	fewer of them (1 for every 700 red)	
	defend body against infection from germs, viruses, bacteria	
	travel to infected areas	
	body produces more white cells to fight disease	
	can even destroy cancer	
platelets	like tiny disks	
	make chemicals to help blood clot	
	clotting makes blood thicken to stop bleeding	
	platelets stick together to clot	
	white cells then fight bacteria that enters wound	
plasma	liquid part of blood, has no cells	
	80% water	
	50-60% of blood	
	carries nutrients and waste products	

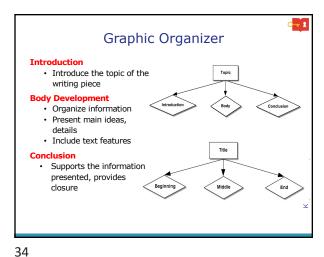




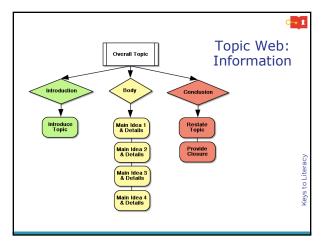


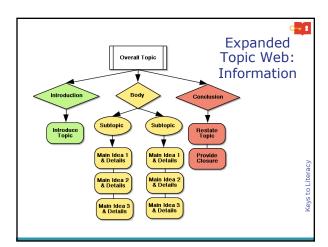
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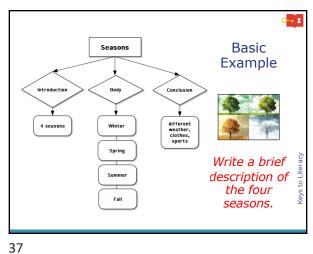


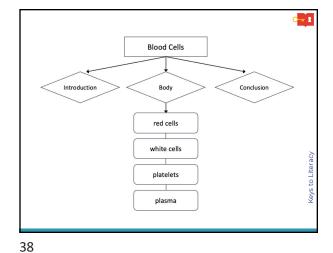


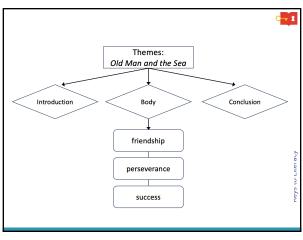
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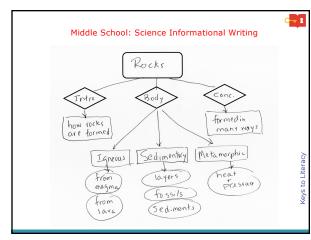


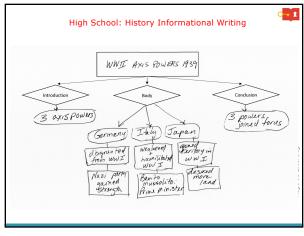


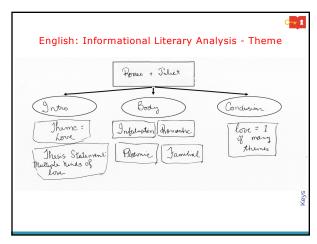


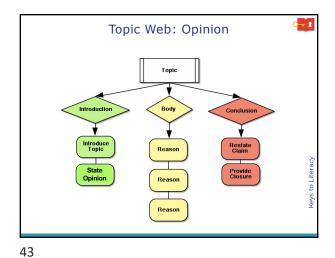


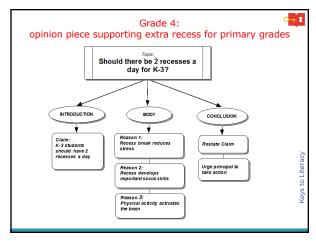




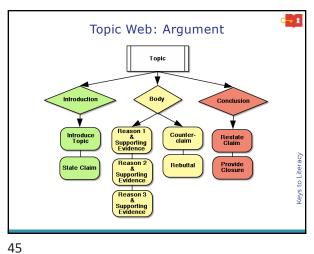


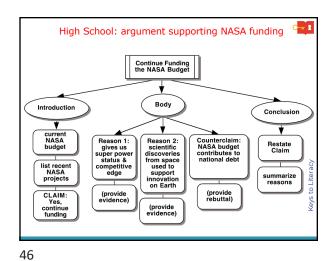


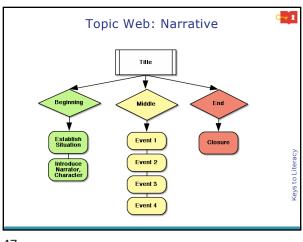


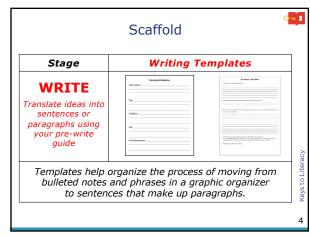


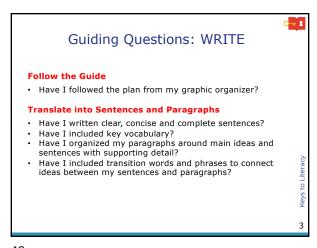
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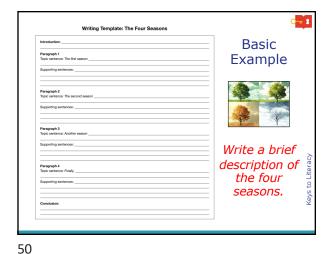




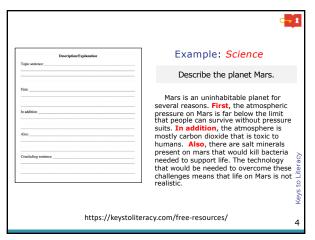


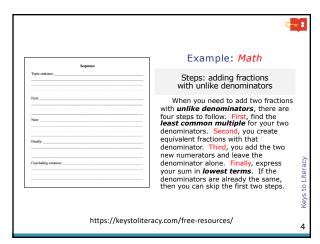




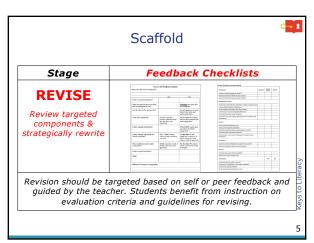


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About Revision

A sequence of changes to writing: ideas, words, phrases, sentences, paragraphs are added, deleted, moved, changed

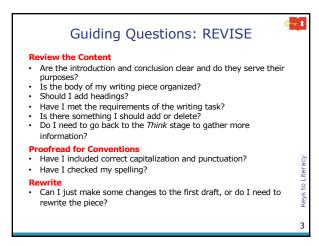
An important aspect of the writing process used extensively by successful writers

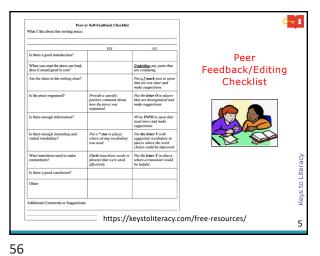
Provides opportunity to improve a writing piece, but also to improve future writing

Includes revising content, AND editing for conventions (spelling, capitalization, punctuation, grammar)

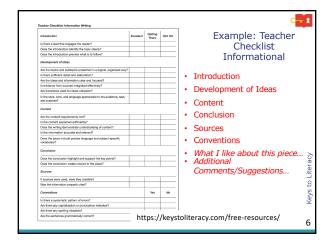
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Reflection

Strategies for Stages of the Writing Process

An "aha!" for me...

A takeaway for me...

Overall reaction/comment

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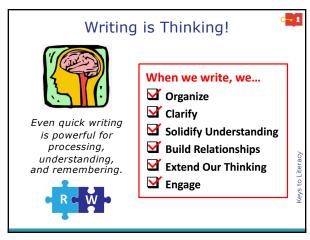
Writing to Read
Have students write about the texts they read.

Personal reactions to text
Summaries
Notes
Answering, creating questions about text

Teach students the writing skills and processes that go into creating text.
Increase how much students write.

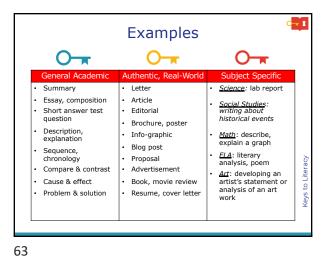
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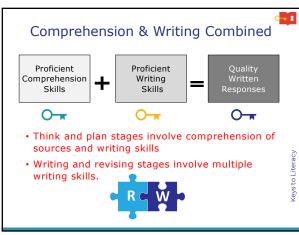


Writing to Learn Skills Annotating text sources · Gathering information, evidence into notes · Planning, organizing information Turning notes and plan into sentences, paragraphs Knowledge of text structure, text features · Revising and editing skills

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Writing from Sources · Students engage in critical thinking when writing is based on sources. · Source writing tasks typically use informational or opinion/argument writing. • Several types of writing-fromsources tasks - e.g., extended research reports, journal responses based on personal responses to text



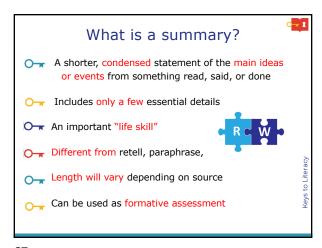
Summary Writing

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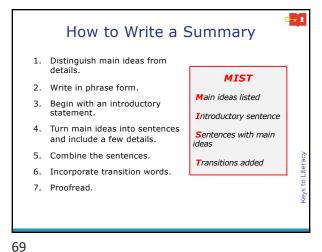
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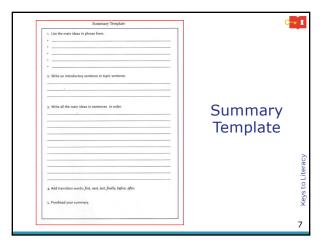


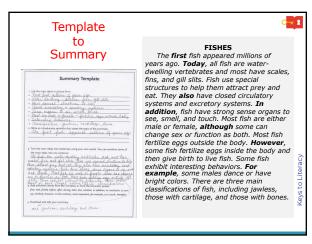
How To Teach Summarizing · Teach students: what a summary is and is not how to identify main idea skills - how a summary is different from other writing tasks how to generate summaries from non-text and text how to use scaffolds to support summary writing · Model and use think aloud • I, We, You · Provide scaffolds

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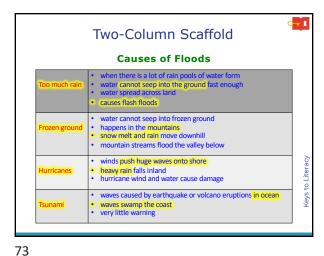


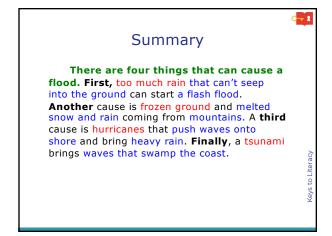
5 transitional words 20pt topic sent. +4 detail sent. 40 4 rocab words 40pts First, the phoenicians were an important Medditerranean civilization Second, purple Ancient Greec's Religious Beliefs due made from snails and cedar wood helped them goin wealth through polythe istic civilization (First) they be lieved in a trade. Next, they were a great sea power and even explored into the Atlanta ocean. Then they developed Olympians. En addition, the gods were immortals a System of writing with zz meaning they had forever. They resided on Mount consonents, an alphabet, which Olympus with Zeus as the roler of the gods helped them record trope. After, and all humanity (Also) to honor Zeus, they held the phoenicians extablished many the alympic games every four years, leople also went to anders to get ad vire. In the ananicians spread civilization conclusion, the Anciett Greeks religious belefs in the cincient weoditerranean are explained in myths.





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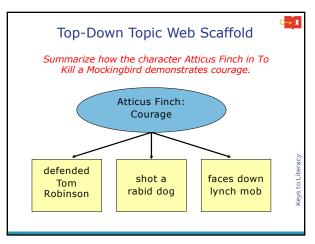




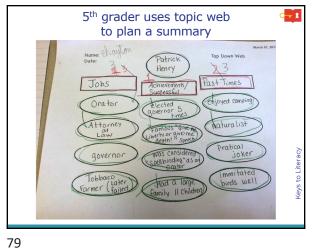


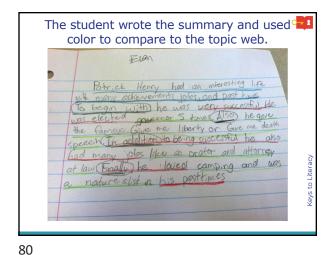
Summary The Colonists revolted for several reasons. Tensions began to build as colonists were taxed more and more without representation. For example, the Sugar Act and the Tea Act imposed new taxes on Colonists without giving them a say. Therefore, many colonists began to boycott, protest and make threats to show their anger. For example, colonists began tarring and feathering tax collectors. Finally, war was on the horizon once King George rejected the Olive Branch Petition. This set the stage for the start of Keys to the revolution with the "shot heard round the world".

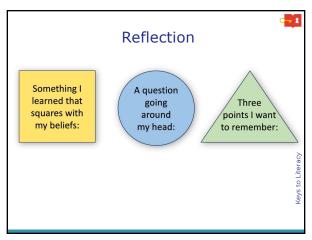
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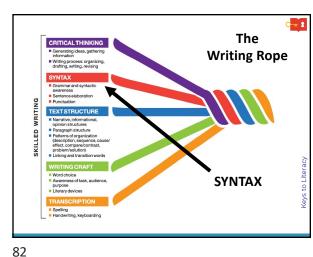


Sample Summary Throughout To Kill a Mockingbird, Atticus Finch demonstrates that he is a courageous man. For instance, he was willing to face criticism and threats of violence to defend Tom Robinson, a black man who was on trial during the Jim Crow era. Atticus **also** shows his courage by shooting a rabid dog that was running wildly in the streets even though he could have been bit. Finally, Atticus protects Tom by facing down a mob that is trying to lynch him.

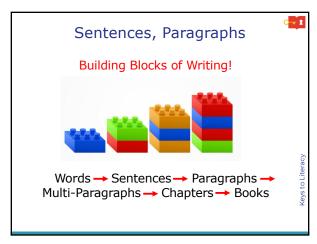








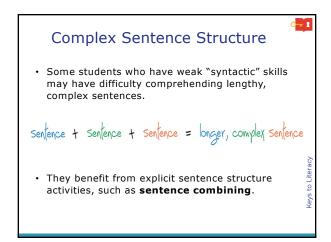
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Syntax: Sentence Structure • One by one, sentences (oral or written) communicate ideas that add up to make meaning. Encourage students to think about what makes a sentence "strong." Syntax: the system and arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses that make up a developing sentence "sentence sense" Syntactic Awareness: understanding grammar

86

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"Of the many difficulties writers encounter when engaged in the complex act of writing, crafting sentences that accurately convey the intended meaning is particularly challenging... manipulating sentences is both effortful and critical."

Sentence Instruction Goals

• Develop fluency for writing sentences so focus can be on composing

• Help students write longer, elaborated, more complex sentences

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Developing Syntactic Awareness

Goal: provide multiple opportunities for students to practice manipulating parts of sentences

Sentence Scrambles

Fragment or Complete

Sentence Combining

Sentence Elaboration

Sentence Elaboration

Sentence Structure
Part 2

Literacy Lines Blog https://keystoliteracy.com/blog/

Sentence Combining

Manipulate & rearrange basic sentences into more syntactically mature and varied forms.

Developed in 1960's

Consistent findings: effective evidence-based method for improving comprehension and writing skills

For grades K-college level

More effective than traditional grammar instruction (i.e., labeling parts of speech, correcting grammar in student writing)

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Simple Examples

The book was good. The movie was good.

The book and the movie were good.

The girl drank lemonade. The girl was thirsty.

The thirsty girl drank lemonade.

The weather was perfect. The girls were playing soccer.

The weather was perfect, and the girls were playing soccer.

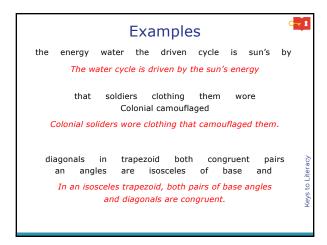
Advanced Example

Source: science text

- Wildlands are lands.
- The lands are public.
- The lands are private.
- The lands support native ecosystems.
- The lands include landscapes.
- A grazed rangeland is a landscape.
- Active timberland is a landscape.

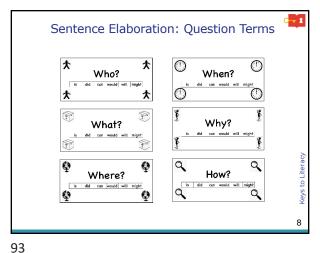
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Sentence **ELABORATION** Elaboration SENTENCE Practice Helps students write stronger, longer, more sophisticated sentences and use more complex punctuation. · Helps students incorporate more academic vocabulary. Provides an opportunity for students to integrate multiple propositions (ideas) related to subject area information they are learning. Improves students' ability to comprehend when Keys to reading complex sentences. English learners in particular benefit.

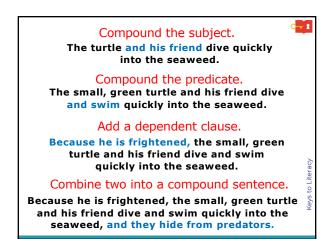
91 92



Basic "W" Elaboration The Pilgrims who, what, where, when, why The Pilgrims arrived by ship at Plymouth Rock in 1620 to live in a new land. The U.S. Constitution what, when, how, who Ratified, in 1788, the U.S. Constitution establishes a Keys to Literacy separation of powers by creating three branches of government, represented by the president, Congress, and the Supreme Court, that respond to the actions of the other branches in a system of checks and balances.

Expanded Kernel Sentences Start with a kernel sentence. Use some or all of the following: • Elaborate the subject. (add articles, adjectives) • Elaborate the predicate. (add verbs) · Add a phrase. · Compound the subject. · Compound the predicate. • Add a dependent clause to make a complex sentence. · Combine two sentences into a compound sentence. Gradually introduce each step to students. Don't expect them to do it all at first! 8

The turtle swims. Elaborate the subject: adjectives The small, green turtle swims. Elaborate the predicate: adverbs. The small, green turtle swims quickly. Add a where phrase. The small, green turtle swims quickly into the seaweed.



Secondary Example

• Kernel: cells carry out functions of life

• Elaborated & compounded subject & predicate, added phrase:

Plant and animal cells can eat, grow, move, and carry out multiple, complex functions of life as part of a multi-cellular organism.

• Added dependent clause combined with 2nd sentence:

Because they can adapt to their environment, plant and animal cells can eat, grow, move, and carry out multiple, complex functions of life as part of a multi-cellular organism; but they must live communally with other cells.

97 98

Reflection
The thing that resonates with me most about sentence writing...
One thing I can implement right away...
One comment and/or overall reaction to the activities for sentences...

CRITICALTHINKING

- Generating dess, gathering
Writing process cryanizing, drafting, writing, revising

SYNTAX

- Grammar and syntactic severences
- Particulation

TEXT STRUCTURE

- Narrative, informational, opinion structures
- Particulation

- Particulation

- Particulation

- World robotice
- Awareness of stask, audience, purpose
- Library devices

- TEXT

STRUCTURE

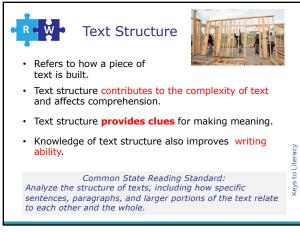
- TEXT

STRUCTURE

- STRUCTURE

- Spelling
- Handwriting, keyboarding
- Handwriting, keyboarding

99 100



Teaching Text Structure

• Students benefit from explicit instruction about text structure.

• Teach:

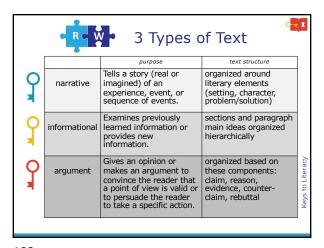
• Differences among narrative, informational, argument

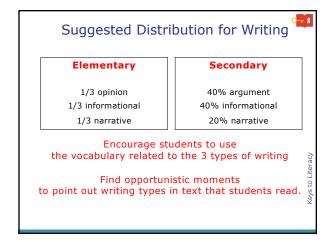
• Paragraph structure and main ideas

• Text features as clues to meaning

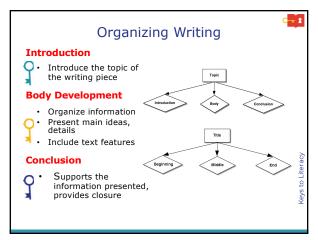
• Transition words

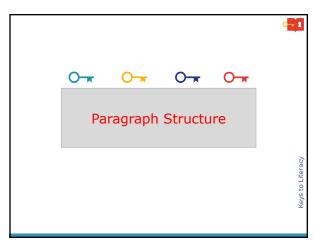
• Patterns of organization



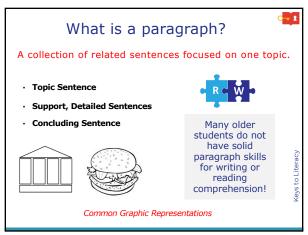


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Activities to Develop Paragraph Writing

A common problem related to paragraphs is that students do not focus on chunking paragraphs based on main ideas.

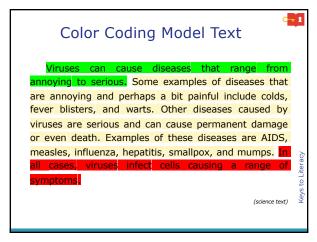
Activities to Support Paragraph Main Ideas

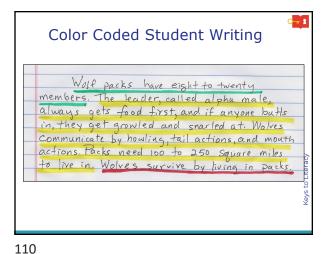
Color code parts of a paragraph.

Identify the topic sentence.

Identify the sentence that doesn't belong.

Create a topic sentence.





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Activity 1:

Identify the Topic Sentence

a. She lays two to four white eggs in the burrow.

b. She stays near the burrow for about three days, then leaves it.

c. Sea lizards hatch from eggs.

d. The female lizard digs a burrow deep in the sand.

e. The young hatch after three to four months.

Activity 2:
Identify the Sentence That Doesn't Belong

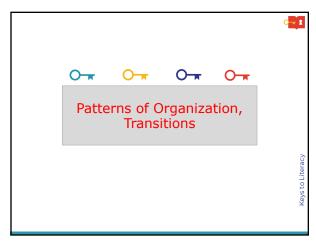
a. A baby turtle lives in a tangle of weeds.
b. The weeds are just beneath the surface of the water.
c. Just a little fish bite could rip it open but she is safely hidden in the weeds.
d. Grown up Loggerheads have a hard shell.
e. She can find tiny crabs and shrimps to eat in the weeds.

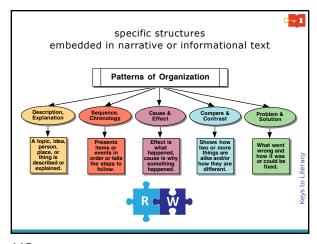
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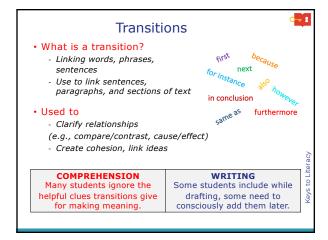
Activity 3:
Create a Topic Sentence

T.s. A whale breathes through a hole in its head.

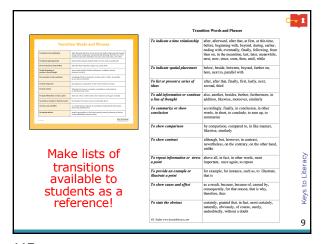
This is called a blowhole. When a whale dives, it holds its breath. When it comes up, it breathes out. A big spout of spray comes out of its blowhole. Up it goes, high in the air.







115 116



Reflection

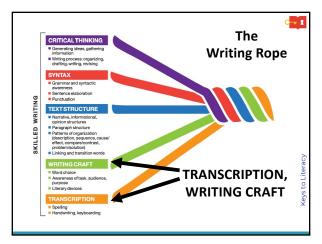
Text Structure

An "aha!" for me...

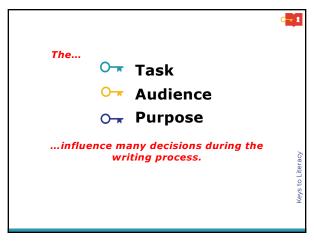
A takeaway for me...

Overall reaction/comment

117 118



Explicit Instruction is Key! If handwriting and spelling are not fluent and require considerable effort, students can't focus on higher level composing skills. Both require: explicit instruction, use of models, guided practice Transcription Skills **Composing Skills** Generating ideas Handwriting Organizing ideas Phonics/Spelling · Choosing the best words Sound-symbol recallSpelling patterns Using language to express ideas in sentences & paragraphs Awareness of TAP Punctuation Integration of comprehension & writing skills when writing from sources Capitalization Keyboarding



Writer's Craft, Writer's Moves

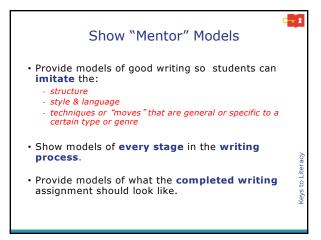
the "art" of writing, anything done on purpose to make writing look or sound a certain way

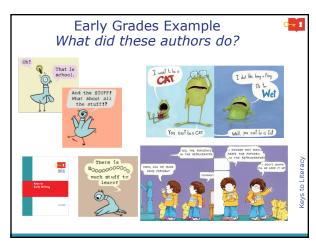
• Writer's Voice
• Writer's unique style, emotion, personality
• "writing from the heart" - making the reader feel emotion
• Achieved with choice of language

• Word Choice
• Purposeful use of specific vocabulary and word placement to create an effect on the reader
• Use of descriptive, colorful language and precise words

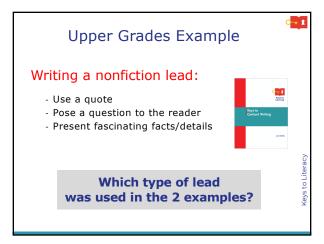
• Literary Devices:
• allegory, allusion, dialogue, figurative language (metaphor, simile, analogy), flashback, hyperbole, imagery, personification

121 122





123 124



Example 1:

Sara White is an all too typical student in Philadelphia – she stopped going to school last year, and was on her way to becoming one more dropout. "The teachers didn't care, the students didn't care," White said. "Nobody cared, so why should I?"

use a quote

Example 2:

As the season of mortarboard flinging, inspirational speeches, and \$5 billion in congratulatory gifts is once again upon us, it's worth pausing to consider that more than 1.3 million students drop out of high school each year – that's about 7,000 per day. And while America's graduation rate has been on a slow rise (it's up to 75.5 percent (as compared to 72 percent in 2001) there are still concerns that improvements are piecemeal.

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