Teaching Writing Through Differentiated Instruction With Leveled Graphic Organizers

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Dedication

To my sister, Genie Stonesifer, and my brothers Anthony Kopcych, Jr., Robert Kopcych, Peter Kopcych, and especially to my brother Howard Kopcych, a noneducator who ran out and bought three copies of our first book, with love.—NLW

To my brothers, sister-in-law, and nieces (the Carew family): Bob, John, Anita, Jennifer, Meghan, Danielle, and Colleen, with love.—MCM

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our husbands and children.
Contents

Introduction .............................................................................................................. 4

The Building Blocks of Writing

Writing Paragraphs ................................................................................................. 7
Finding a Voice ......................................................................................................... 13
Using Figurative Language ..................................................................................... 19

Nonfiction Writing

Description .................................................................................................................. 25
Enumeration ............................................................................................................... 31
Persuasive Essay ....................................................................................................... 37
Compare and Contrast Essay .................................................................................... 43
Informative How-To Essay ....................................................................................... 49

Narrative and Memoir Writing

Point of View ............................................................................................................ 55
Character Development ........................................................................................... 61
Plot Development ..................................................................................................... 67
Dialogue .................................................................................................................... 73
Memoir ....................................................................................................................... 79

Important Formats for Writing

Book Reports for Fiction .......................................................................................... 86
Newspaper Article .................................................................................................... 92
Friendly and Business Letters ................................................................................... 98
Writing to Prompts on High-Stake Tests ............................................................... 107
How to Teach

Begin by writing the model paragraph on chart paper or copying it onto a transparency. Spend a few minutes examining this model with students. On a piece of chart paper, make a chart like the one on page 8, putting the main idea at the

Overview

A paragraph is a well-organized set of sentences that focuses on one “controlling,” or main, idea. A paragraph has a beginning (topic sentence), a middle (body), and an end (a closing or transition to the next paragraph). The topic sentence states what the paragraph will be about, while the sentences that follow it provide details, examples, and descriptions that explain the main idea. The final sentence is used to bring closure if the paragraph is standing alone. If the paragraph is going to lead to another one, the writer will need to make a smooth transition to the next paragraph.

Model

Camping is not for me. Last summer I went on a dreaded camping trip with my parents, my sister Katie, Aunt Anita, Uncle John, and my four cousins, Colleen, Danielle, Meghan, and Jennifer. I was the only boy. By the time we got to the campsite and struggled to set up the tents, I was eaten alive by bugs. While I scratched, Mom sprayed insect repellent, which gagged me. She continued to spray it even though it was landing on the food that was being prepared for our first campsite dinner. The food was nothing to write home about. I managed to get a burger that was burnt on the outside and raw on the inside. Mom told me not to worry. This is the same person who told me that I couldn’t bring my computer or cell phone. I had no connection with the outside world. This was particularly scary as nightfall approached. It would have been nice to have a phone because I knew there were wild animals not far away. That’s why I slept with one eye open the entire first night. The second day was pretty much a repeat of the first. By the second night, I was counting down the days until my return to civilization—video games, fast food, the mall, TV remote, and my own soft bed.
top (Why I don’t like camping) and having students help you list the details that support this main idea in the left column (bugs, food, no computer, no cell phone, wild animals). Be sure students understand that the details you listed are in this order to show the events of the writer’s day in sequence. In the right column, list how the writer elaborated each detail. Explain that you’ll take notes in the right column; you won’t use complete sentences.

Why I don’t like camping...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Details or Reasons</th>
<th>Tell Me More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bugs</td>
<td>get bitten</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>bug spray gags me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>food</td>
<td>raw hamburgers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>no contact</td>
<td>no computer (no IM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with the outside world</td>
<td>no cell phone (help/emergency)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How to Teach

Next, show students a blank two-column chart. Ask them to suggest topic ideas for a different paragraph, or provide a topic sentence such as “We love to play games outdoors.” Together, brainstorm details (list them in the left column) and then examples or descriptions they can use to explain each detail (list them in the right column). Before beginning to write, reread the list of details and talk about how to arrange them. Is there one idea that should go first? Do some ideas fit together? Would it be best to leave a particular one for the...
Paragraph Planner

Topic: ____________________________

Topic sentence:

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

How will you end your paragraph?

_______________________________________________________________________

_______________________________________________________________________

Use another piece of paper to write your paragraph.

Change your notes into complete sentences.