Literacy: It All Connects

Mini-Lessons
Mini-Lessons for Writers’ Workshop

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Lil Tompkins, from the Department of Education at Gallaudet University, explains that mini-lessons come from the teachers’ understanding of how students learn to write. These ideas begin with whatever enables them to write a lot and to develop satisfaction, confidence, and fluency. Then, as the students appear ready, teachers go on to help them develop sophistication and refinement in their writing.

Here are just a few of the many mini-lessons that teachers can work on with students.

- **Choosing topics:** Where do we get topics to write about? How do we convert our personal experience into materials for writing? These are concerns every beginning writer has. A series of
demonstrations can be done in this area.

- **Narrowing topics**: Suppose a child has chosen "dogs" as his topics—is he going to write everything he knows about dogs? How can he narrow his topic so that he can write one hard-hitting page about it?

- **Beginnings**: Where do you start? How much introducing should you do before you get on to the interesting part? How do you get readers' attention right away? Beginnings, or leads, as journalists call them, deserve several lessons.

- **Endings**: How do you stop? What kind of thoughts do you want to leave the reader with?

- **Organization**: This covers many different challenges. What should go first? What next? What after that?

- **Showing, not telling**: A child writes, "The dog was mean." The reader wants to know "How did she act," or "What did she do to make you say that he was mean?"

- **Grammar and Editing**: Helping to show how to make a sentence, how to make them put together, and including punctuation, capitalization, left out words, and the like. Each of these points is best introduced in a mini-lesson.

Mini-lessons can be introduced spontaneously, sparked by an issue that emerges in a teacher's conference with a single student. The teacher may find an issue in the student's paper—something he or she has done really well, or is obviously in need of corrections—and may decided to go over the issue with the whole class. Or the teacher may decide simply to introduce a lesson, the organization of stories for example, when it occurs to him or her that the students are ready for a new challenge.

For more information about Mini-Lessons, we suggest you read any of the books below. An asterisk indicates that the title is highly recommended.


Remember, most of the mini-lessons are based on what the teachers see in the students' writing. Most mini-lessons take 5 to 15 minutes daily, after which students should start writing. These books show some good examples, and can help you feel comfortable about teaching mini-lessons in the classroom.
The Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center is comprised of two federally mandated demonstration schools for students from birth through age 21 who are deaf. Located on the campus of Gallaudet University, these schools work in collaboration with a national network of exemplary programs and professionals to identify, research, develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative curricula, materials, educational strategies, and technologies for students who are deaf or hard of hearing. The Clerc Center also provides training and technical assistance to families and programs throughout the United States, and serves as a model individualized educational program, working in close partnership with its students and their families.

Working for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Children Throughout the United States