

Inspiring Writers!

# Topic Sentence vs. the HOOK

Storymaker and beyond!

Read well. Write well. Think well.



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agine you are a dog. What would you look for in a friend?  
nt to be his friend?

here us

Hook: It's tricky to imagine being a dog!

but  
^

IF I WAS A DOG, I WOULD LOOK FOR A PERSON THAT WAS A QUICK THINKER.

Learning to write is the

taming of an idea.

OPAL SHOWED SHE WAS A QUICK THINKER WHEN SHE HAD TO COME UP WITH A NAME FOR ~~W~~<sup>her</sup> ~~idea~~<sup>idea</sup>

I WOULD ALSO LOOK FOR SOME ONE WHO WAS LOVING. OPAL SHOWED SHE WAS LOVING WHEN SHE SAVED HIM FROM

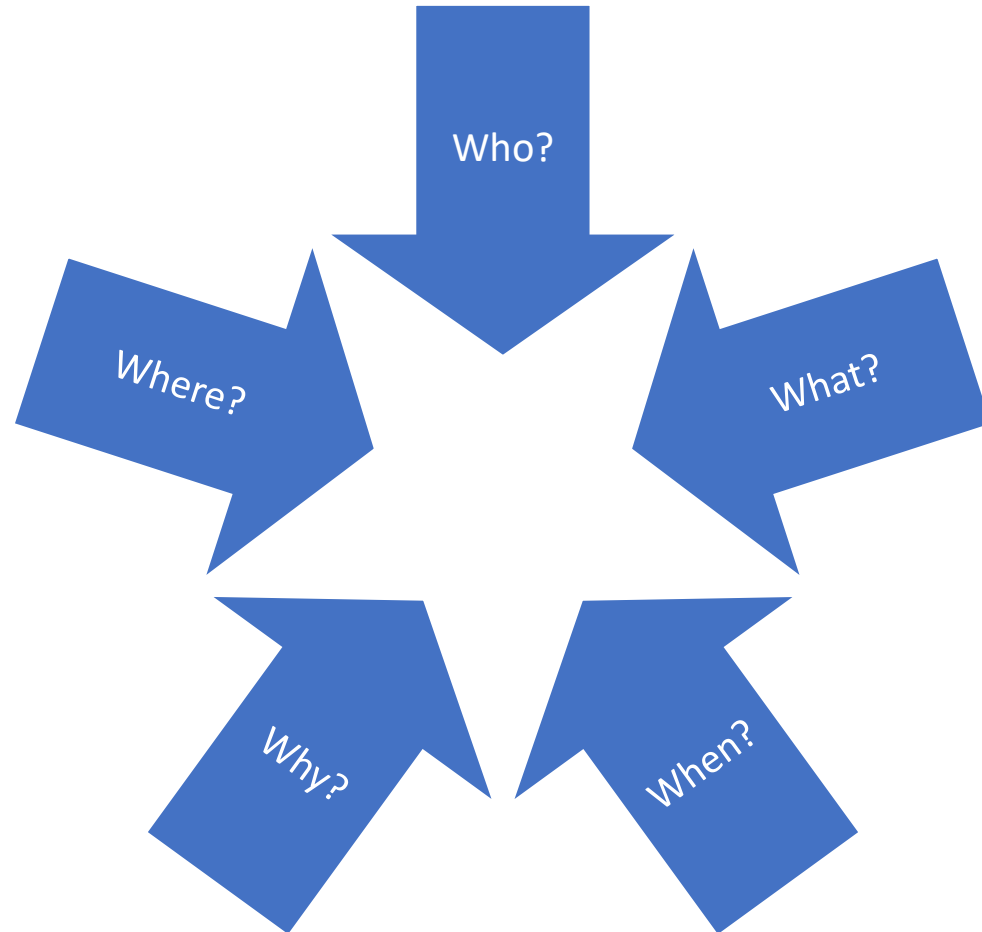
# Topic Sentence vs. the HOOK

Great writing always begins with an  
IDEA!


We all know about the “topic  
sentence”— the sentence that sets  
the stage for the idea at hand.

The HOOK is a topic sentence that  
makes the reader want to read on.

Great HOOKS reel readers into the action!




# So how do we move students from writing simple topic sentences to crafting engaging HOOKS?

- 1) Remind them that writing is an artform: review the stages of the writing process.
  - 2) Teach them that the HOOK is either **discovered** or **crafted** during the Read & Revise stage.
  - 3) Create a tradition of Unpacking the HOOKS encountered in great stories.
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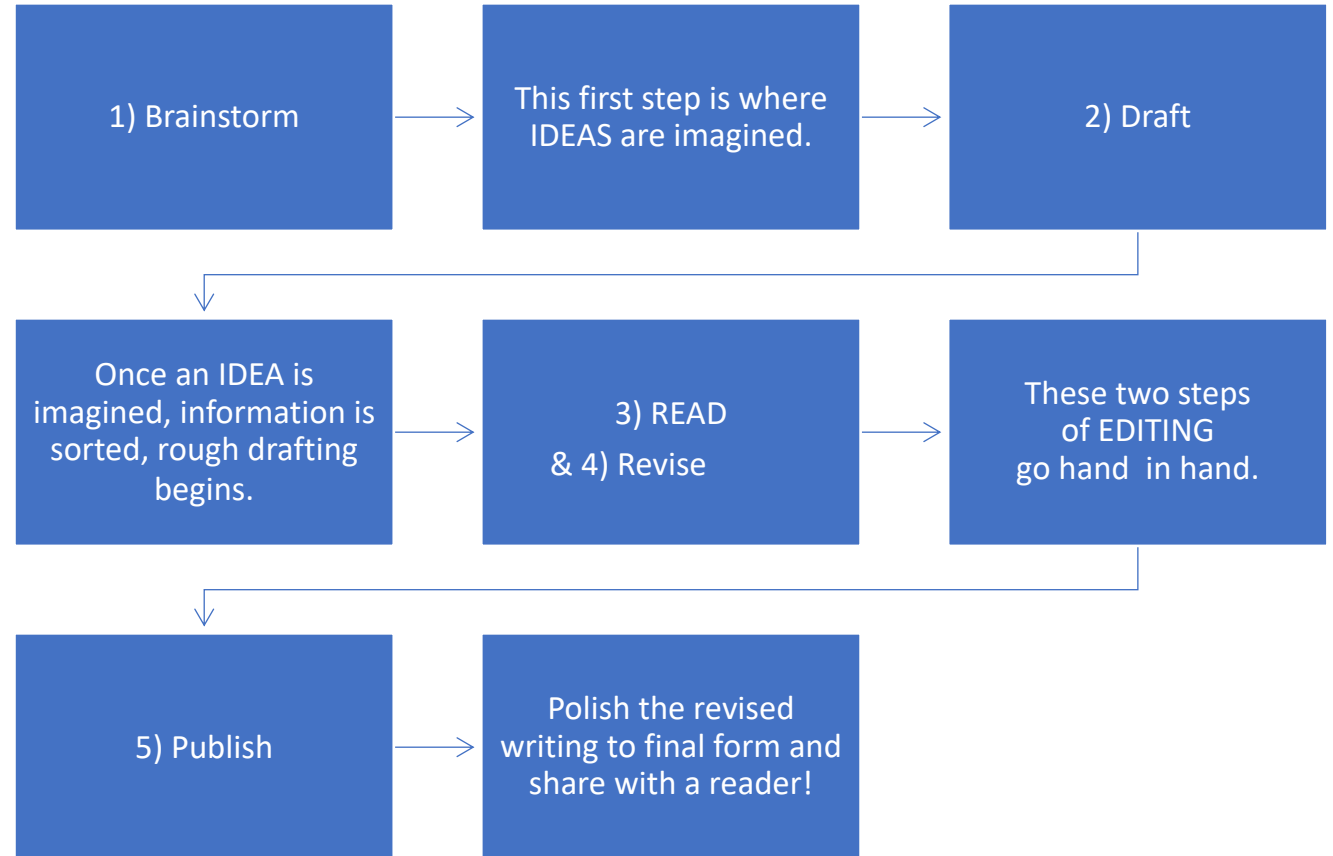


ONE



Writing  
is a process  
that begins  
with an IDEA.

# Review: FIVE Stages of the Writing Process



Writing is never accomplished by skipping steps!

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Crafting the **HOOK** is *not* always part of the first draft.

Sometimes an amazing **HOOK** is discovered somewhere in the middle of the first-draft paragraph. But often, the **HOOK** is written after the first draft of the paragraph is completed, during the “read & revise” stage.





HOOK from  
*The Cat in  
the Hat,*  
by Dr. Seuss

**The sun did not shine, it was too wet to play, so we sat in the house all that cold, cold wet day.**

This story could certainly introduce the situation in a much more mundane way:

*My brother and I stayed inside the house because it was a rainy day.*

*There is nothing wrong with this sentence, but it is not a HOOK!*

**Let's unpack the HOOK:**

- 1. The Dr. Seuss HOOK has gorgeous rhythm (clap it out) and rhyme:**

ba BUM ba ba BUM, ba ba BUM ba ba BUM, ba ba BUM ba ba

The sun did not shine, it was too wet to play, so we sat in the

BUM ba ba BUM, ba ba BUM.

house all that cold, cold wet day.

- 2. The HOOK sets the action into motion right away and the consequent tension experienced by Sally and her brother due to the bad weather.**

HOOK from  
*Charlotte's  
Web,*  
by E.B. White

**“Where’s Papa going with that axe?” said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.**

What if Charlotte’s Web started like this?

*Fern’s father was going to kill the runt pig.*

*There is nothing wrong with this sentence, but it is not a HOOK!*

**Let’s unpack the HOOK:**

“Where’s Papa going with that axe?” said Fern to her mother as they were setting the table for breakfast.

It’s, of course, a rhetorical question! Fern knows in her heart what is happening, and we readers know too! In one fell swoop we are on the farm, Fern and her mother and her father are present, and something unthinkable must be stopped! The ax, side by side with the act of setting the breakfast table makes for a suspenseful HOOK!

Hook from  
*The Hobbit*,  
by J.R.R.  
Tolkien

**In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit.**

This simple HOOK could have been written with boring complexity that moves the reader immediately into past tense:

*Bilbo Baggins was a 4'1' hobbit who lived in a house his dad made.*

*There is nothing wrong with this sentence, but it is not a HOOK!*

**Let's unpack the HOOK:**

(In a hole) (in the ground) there lived a hobbit.

Ten simple words—count them. The sentence begins with two prepositional phrases in a row: 1. in a hole; and 2. in the ground.

The verb here, *lived*, is ambiguous, is not completely past tense, but allows the reader to enter into that fantastical hole in the ground to discover the hobbit, who, of course, is Bilbo Baggins.

HOOK from  
*The Voyage  
of the Dawn  
Treader,*  
by C.S. Lewis

**There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb,  
and he almost deserved it.**

What if the story began like this:

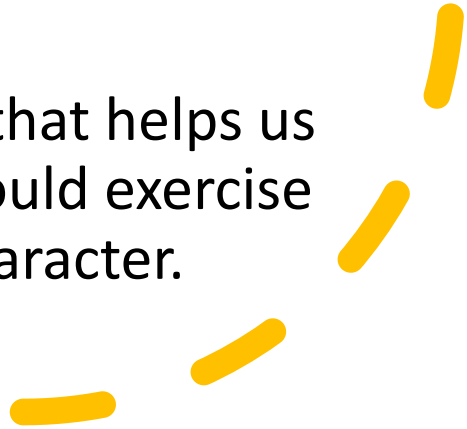
*Eustace is arrogant and unfriendly.*

*There is nothing wrong with this sentence, but it is not a HOOK!*

**Let's unpack the HOOK:**

There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and  
he almost deserved it.

What a name! What an amazing HOOK that helps us  
readers know from the start that we should exercise  
as much empathy as possible for this character.



# HOOK from *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton

When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home.

What if the story began like this?

*After the Paul Newman movie, I needed a ride home.*

*There is nothing wrong with this sentence, but it is not a HOOK!*

## Let's unpack the HOOK:

When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home.

Walking into light from darkness is not only gorgeous imagery, but also symbolic of epiphany.

The HOOK introduces the reader to the "I" narrator (Ponyboy Curtis), and sets the Point of View as first person.



# TOOLS

- 1) Storymaker (2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade)
- 2) Four Types of Sentences
- 3) Poetry
- 4) Discover and Rearrange
- 5) Leave It / Write It

# Begin Here: Storymaker



# Tool #1 Storymaker

One True Sentence | Storymaker

Examples:

1.

Hook starter  
Once there was... +

Character in a situation card  
An astronaut on a horse +

Setting card  
In an art museum =

Story hook  
"Once there was an astronaut on a horse in an art museum."

2.

Hook starter  
Back then... +

Object  
[Airplane icon] +

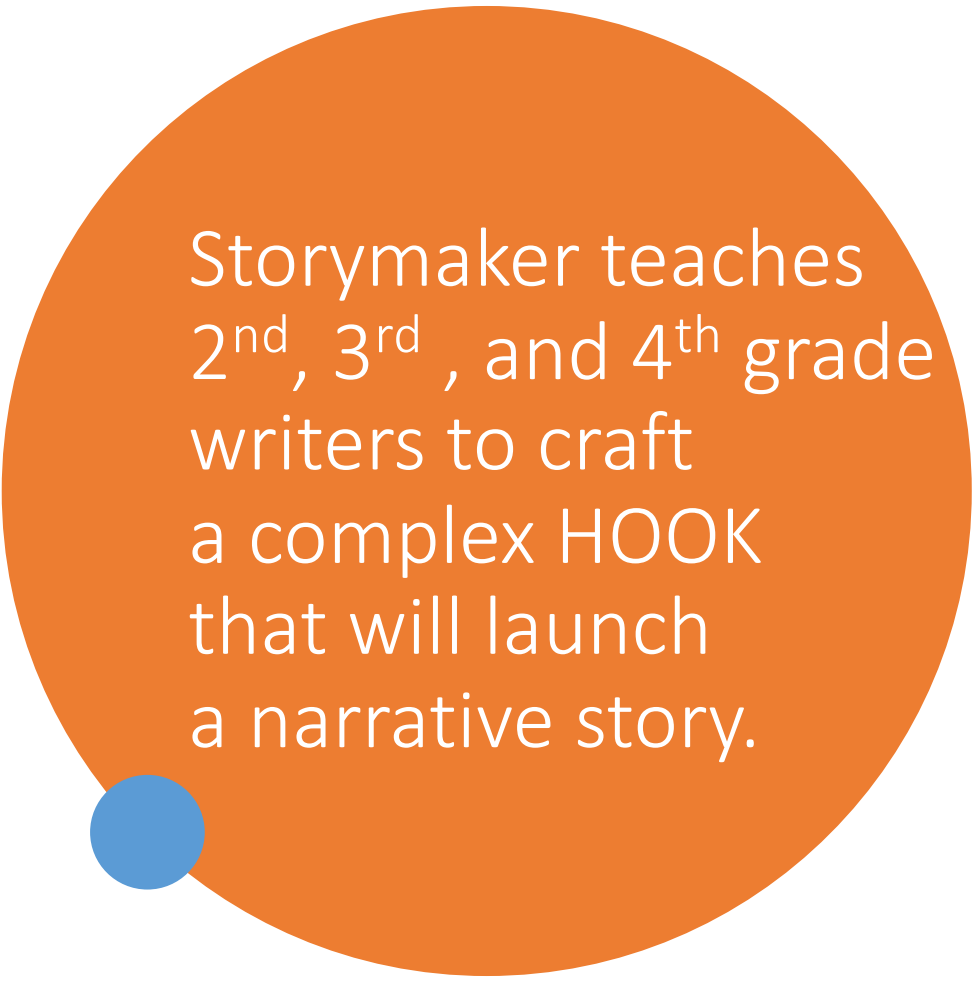
Character in a situation card  
Coyote wandering alone +

Setting card  
In a grocery store =


Story hook  
"Back then an airplane was wandering alone in a grocery store."

As students practice the art of constructing the HOOK and building a story upon it, they will not only develop writing skills, confidence, and creativity which will carryover into all writing endeavors.





Storymaker teaches  
2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> grade  
writers to craft  
a complex HOOK  
that will launch  
a narrative story.



Here's how:

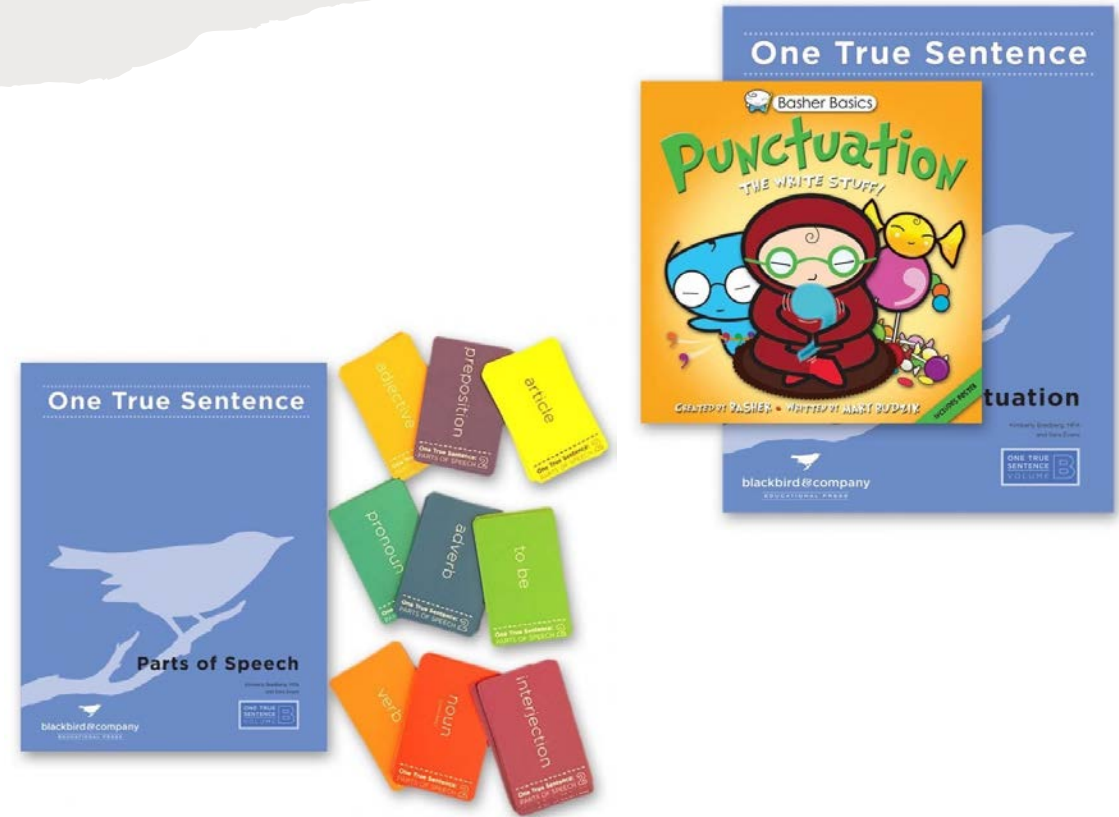
- 1) Choose a HOOK starter from the list in the student journal.
- 2) Choose a “Character in Situation” card from the deck and/or a thematic object from the tin.
- 3) Choose a “Setting” card from the deck.

Storymaker is designed to help students in 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grade craft a HOOK to launch a narrative story.

# Tool #2 Four Types of Sentences

Great HOOKS can be **STATEMENTS** or **COMMANDS** or **EXCLAMATIONS** or **QUESTIONS!**

Elementary students will explore the grammar and mechanics of sentences. Great HOOKS are composed of words used well, punctuated so that readers will be able to navigate the student's IDEA.



# TOOL #3 Poetry

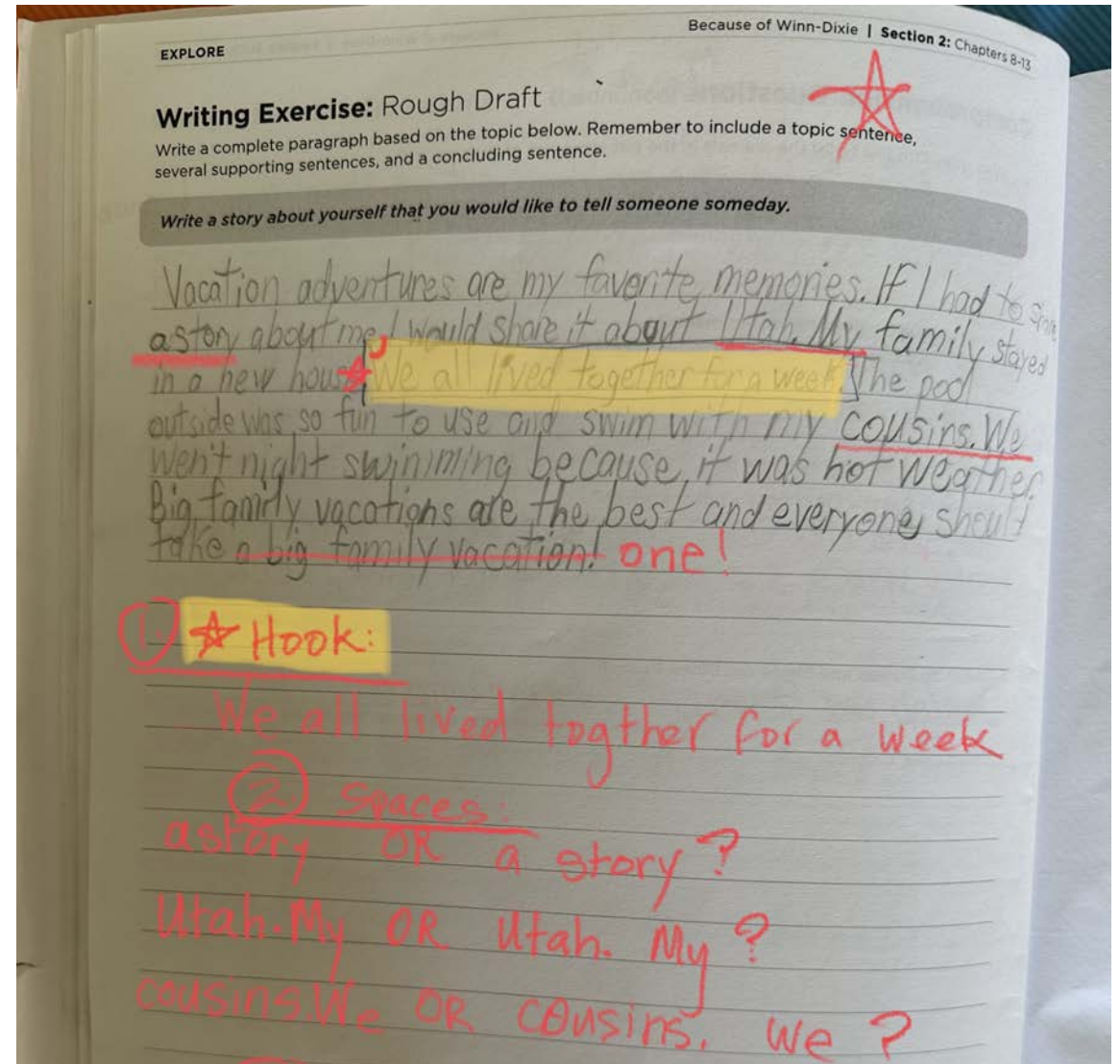
Poetry teaches middle school students how to charge their sentences with unique structure, beautiful sights, and creative sound! There is always a poetic element in the HOOK!



# TOOL #4

## Discover and Rearrange

Sometimes the **HOOK** is discovered in the middle of the rough draft. Empower your students to rearrange during the *Read & Revise* stages of the writing process.



# TOOL #5

## Leave It OR Write It!

Had this student written something like:

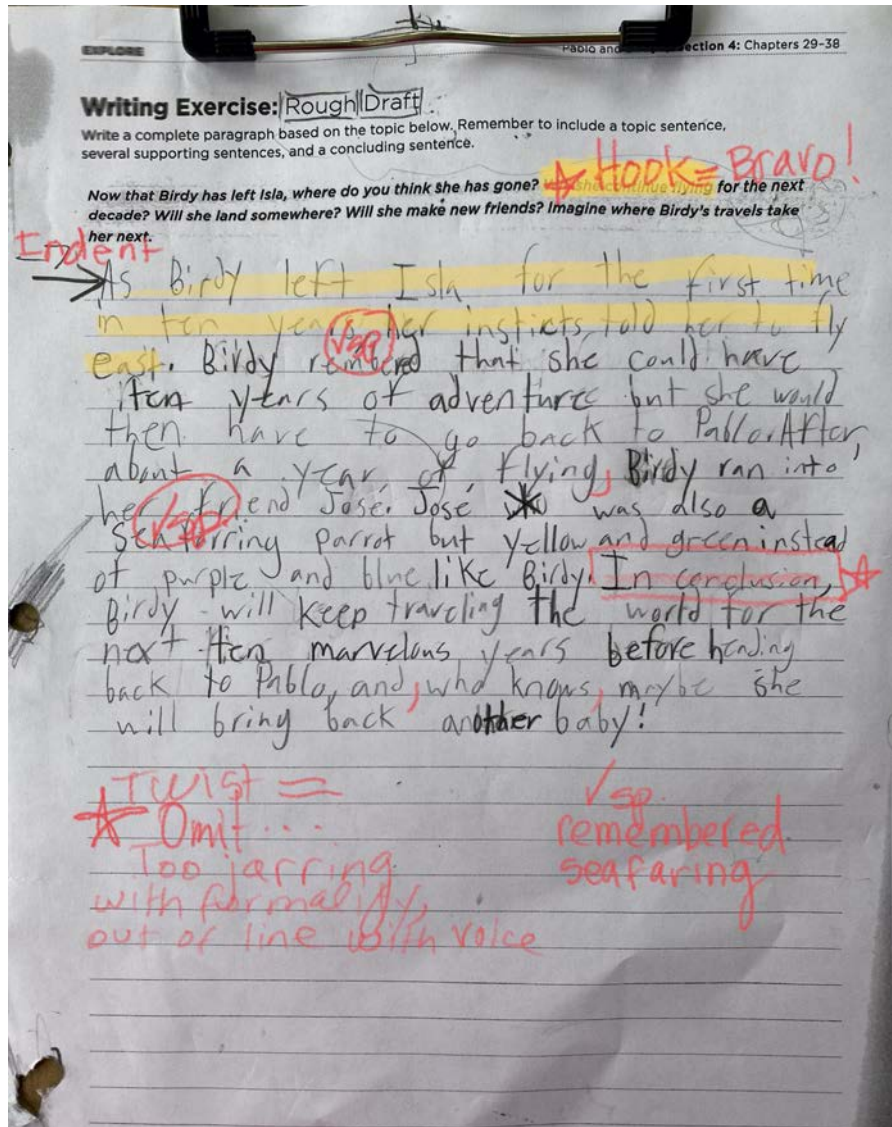
**I think Birdy went far away.**

The recommendation would have first been to see if a HOOK could be discovered further on in the first draft.

If, not, the writing mentor might encourage the student to expand the sentence with a new beginning, omitting ~~think~~. **Birdy went far away...** Why? After some discussion, the student might arrive at:

**Birdy's adventure began when she flew far, far away.**

**Remember: The HOOK should intrigue the reader to read on!**



It all  
begins  
with a  
HOOK!



Take Flight!



**blackbird & company**<sup>TM</sup>

READ WELL • WRITE WELL • THINK WELL