

Let's Talk Elementary & Middle School Writing Genres

Read well. Write well. Think well.



blackbird & company

E D U C A T I O N A L P R E S S



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Writing Ideas Across Genres

3rd through 8th Grade CORE



Each week students WRITE an original idea tied to a specific section of the reading. This means that over the course of a single school year students SIX BOOKS will compose 24 expanded paragraphs across many genres!

Why is this significant?

- 1) Writing across genres—using different forms—expands and strengthens the student's verbal reasoning.
- 2) Constraining an idea to a specific genre, helps young writers consider readers while developing a unique voice.
- 3) Exploring possibility of various types of writing fosters creativity.



Learning to write is the

taming of an idea.

What is meant by the phrase: *writing genre*?

The simple definition of the word genre as it relates to writing = a category that tells the reader what to expect.

The word genre can be exchanged for the word *type*—writing type.

Genre is simply the form the writer uses to shelter the idea.

Writing is NOT Calculus

When we teach a student calculus, we are teaching them to attend to small parts of a larger form. The word calculus comes from the Latin, meaning *small pebble*.

When teaching our students to write, we should begin by teaching them writing is an **art form!**

So why have we turned the art of writing into a calculus?

Easier to teach skills than...

Nurturing an idea takes a different kind. ANSWER. Great writing never begins with collecting a basket of capitalization, punctuation, or grammar!

Great writing always begins with an IDEA!

Form Follows Function

Writers must focus first on the *function* or purpose of writing—the idea.

Who, when asked to write a sentence about an apple, will begin like this: “I will need an interesting adjective, an adverbial phrase, plus a dependent and independent clause,” with a deep dive into grammar and mechanics and rhetoric?

NO!

You will pick up your pencil and you will *write your idea*! Once you get an idea on paper, you will, as time permits, reread and polish that idea—improving word choice here and there, possibly rearranging phrases, correcting spelling and capitalization and so on. Writing, like all art forms, requires that the writer engage in a process.



Form Follows Function

To clarify, we are NOT saying *don't teach capitalization, punctuation, or grammar.*

We are simply saying that primarily focusing on mechanics over and above actually constructing ideas will never produce exceptional writing.


The best way to learn to write is to WRITE.



More... Form Follows Function

Once the idea is drafted in rough form, the writer digs back in (**re-reads with a red pen!**) to polish—corrects misspelling, capitalization, punctuation, embellishes word choice, improves syntax, and so on.

Writing is a process.



So where do writing genres fit into the process?

Blackbird & Company ELA curriculum provides student writers with weekly prompts tied to great stories that will enable them to write across many genres each year.

Utilizing our CORE units, students will compose 24 expanded paragraphs each school year—each idea sheltered in a different genre.

FIVE Common
Genres
Encountered
in CORE for
Elementary
& Middle
School

- 1) Descriptive
- 2) Informative
- 3) Narrative
- 4) Observational
- 5) Persuasive





Descriptive Writing

This genre of writing paints a picture with words.

Using vivid language to describe the idea at hand, the goal of this genre is to create a sensory experience for the reader.

Descriptive writing is found in fictional stories, in essays, in poetry, in lyrics, and even in exceptionally crafted non-fiction writing.

Tips for Descriptive Writing

1) Use concrete details that SHOW vs. tell.

Instead of: *The kitten is sleepy.*

Try: After bouncing around the living room with the bright blue ball of wool yarn, the kitten curled up on the couch in a ball, tucked its head into the corner cushion and let its eyes droop closed.

2) Use sensory words and phrases— appeal to the five senses.

Instead of: *The dinner was delicious.*

Try: Before I even sat down at the table, the smell of tomato soup and fresh baked sourdough bread wafted through the house. When the ladle dove in, clanked the pot, and poured streams of hot soup into the bowls, my taste buds began a countdown to goodness!

3) Use simple figurative language — metaphor, simile, personification.

Instead of: *Today the sky is blue.*

Try: *Today the blue of sky is a lake above my head.* (metaphor)

Today the sky is blue like Van Gogh's iris painting. (simile)

Today the sky's eyes are winking blue. (personification)





Informative Writing

This genre of writing explains or informs by presenting information clearly and concisely.

Also called *expository writing*, this genre is typically non-fiction—news articles, informational books like encyclopedias.

Informative writing is always neutral, never opinionated.

Tips for Informative Writing

1) Use concrete details that SHOW vs. tell.

Instead of: *The Moon makes ocean tides.*

Try: *The Moon's gravitational pull is the main cause of Earth's ocean tides.*

2) Use detailed facts.

Instead of: *The Moon orbits the Earth.*

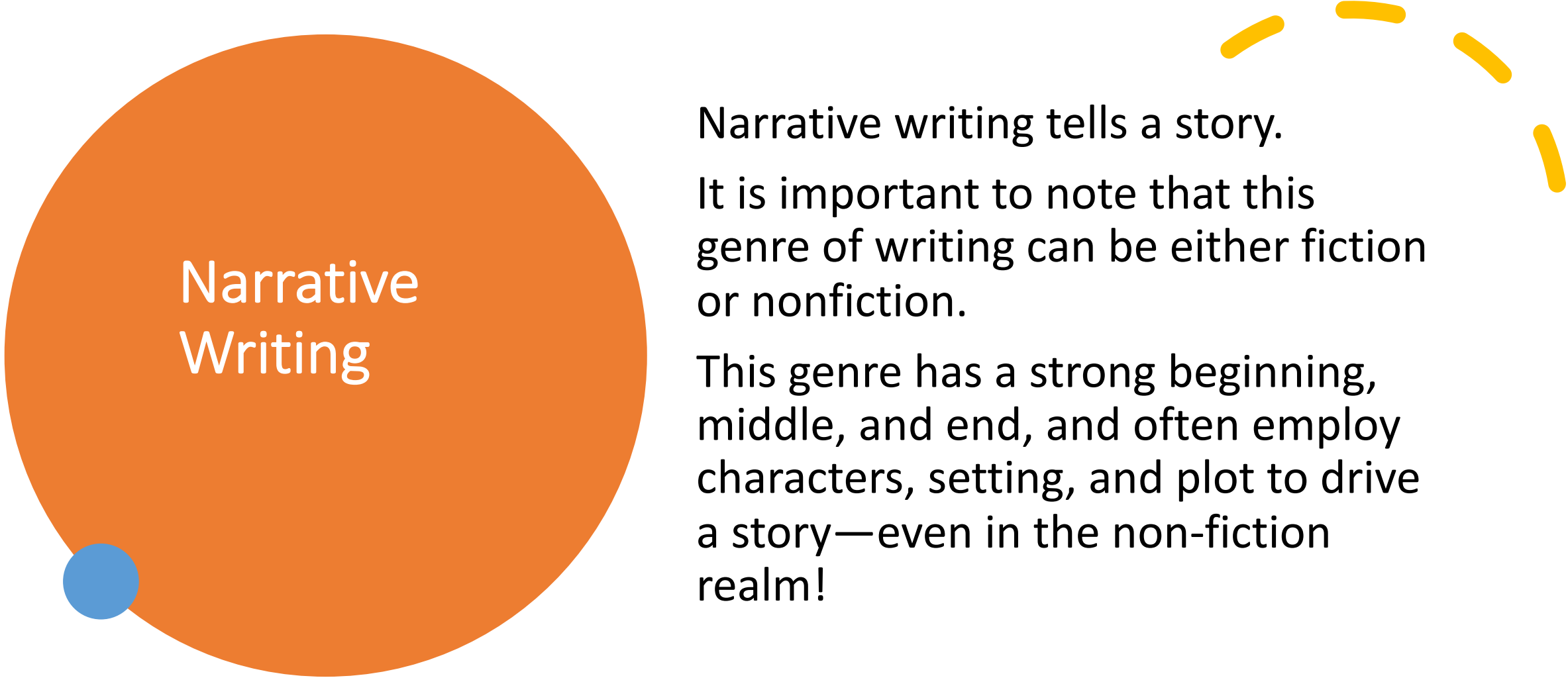
Try: *The Moon takes about one month to orbit the Earth while both are moving around the sun.*

3) Use strong definitions.

Instead of: *Gravity is an invisible pull.*

Try: *Gravity is a curve in space that pulls objects toward each other.*





Narrative Writing

Narrative writing tells a story.

It is important to note that this genre of writing can be either fiction or nonfiction.

This genre has a strong beginning, middle, and end, and often employ characters, setting, and plot to drive a story—even in the non-fiction realm!

Tips for Narrative Writing



1) Always SHOW vs. tell. Use a strong HOOK to open the narrative.

Instead of: *I will tell you about the time I went to the museum.*

Try: *The dark and gloomy weather that day had no chance against the vibrant palette of Claude Monet.*

2) Beginning to Middle to End

Showcase the topic and keep it flowing! Remember each sentence follows the previous one and, in this respect, are both singular and connected. Make each sentence count when telling a story—vary rhythm (short and medium and long sentences), build images, add sound (alliteration, consonance, assonance), and so on.

3) Follow the story arc:

Enter with exposition, up up up goes the rising action, rest on the climax pinnacle, down down down goes the falling action, until the reader rests in resolution.



Observational Writing

Observational writing engages the senses to convey specific observed details.

Readers are invited by the writer to picture an experience and simultaneously relate to the subject at hand.

Observational writing is not opinionated, but it is not neutral either. This genre is descriptively informative from a unique perspective. It is often found in scientific journals, letters, personal journals, and poems.

Tips for Observational Writing

1) Before beginning, LOOK!

Take five minutes to observe. Take an object in hand, perhaps a pinecone, a shell, a feather. Think about its characteristics through the five senses. Observational writing is descriptive, but it is unique because it is an observation that is composed specifically through the mind's eye of the writer.

2) Invite the reader to observe alongside.

Instead of: *It is pumpkin season.*

Try: *I've watched this plant grow —seed to vine to flower —and finally, the tiny green bulb has matured to a full grown, sun-kissed-orange pumpkin for fall.*

3) Practice present tense.

Instead of: *The pumpkin was growing.*

Try: *The pumpkin is growing.*





Persuasive Writing

Persuasive writing is very opinionated! The goal here is to entice the reader to agree with a particular point of view.

This writing uses evidence, logic, and reasoning to support the writer's claims.

This genre is often used for essays, editorials, and speeches.

Tips for Persuasive Writing

1) Avoid harsh and abrupt language. Reach out to the reader with a bridge. Keep the tone polite.

Instead of: *Dogs are way better than cats.*

Try: *While cats certainly make wonderful pets, dogs are empathetic, loyal, and at times, comical.*

2) Engage logic. Try three Reasons.

For the next sentence to establish logic and a pathway for the a strong, but kind argument:

While cats certainly make wonderful pets, dogs are empathetic, loyal, and at times, comical. These are three reasons why I prefer dogs to cats.

3) Always restate at the end!

Cats are cool, there is no denying, but you can't beat the empathetic, loyal, sometimes comical personality of dogs. This is why I prefer dogs to cats.



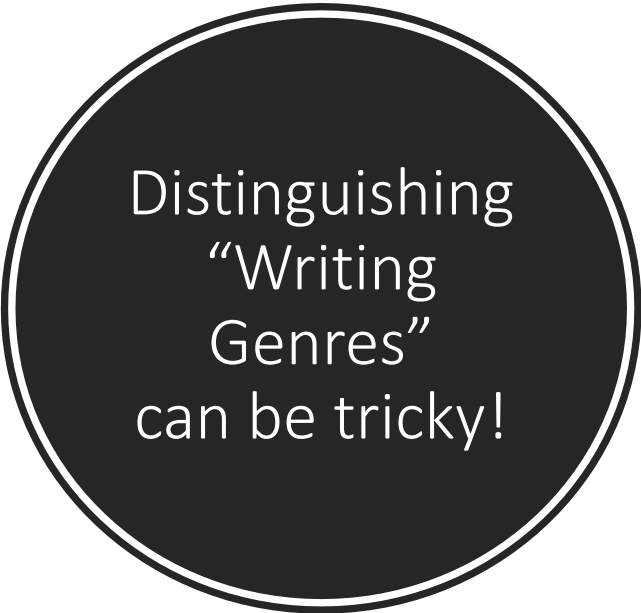
A Word on Scaffolding and Differentiation

Blackbird students, from kindergarten through 12th grade will build a rich fund of knowledge gathered from the books they read and be introduced systematically to the **building blocks of reading and writing**.

IDEAS are sparked along the way.

We provide opportunities to practice the building blocks—notetaking, vocabulary development, prompts that provide a springboard to the significant genres of writing—all this and more to help students conquer writer's block, bring shape to ideas, and to raise their voice with pride.

Within our curriculum, there is ample opportunity to utilize different modalities of presenting instruction, ample opportunity to adjust expectations for student output, but it is in the final product—the journaling, the actual writing activities, where differentiating will enable students to soar according to their ability



Distinguishing
“Writing
Genres”
can be tricky!

All writing genres basically fall into two categories:

Expository is writing that informs and offers facts. Observation, research, persuasion, and some non-fiction narration falls into this category, and even some poetry.

Non-expository writing is more narrative in nature. Think fictional stories, creative non-fiction, poetry, letters, journals.

Let's Write!

- Human beings speak, listen, read, and write. These are the four domains of language.
- Writing begins with an idea in the mind of the writer. Think of writing genres as the scaffolding that bring shape to an idea.
- Ultimately writing is an art form that generously communicates an idea and sparks intrigue and delight in the reader.

“No tears in the writer, no tears in the reader. No surprise in the writer, no surprise in the reader.” “I have never started a poem yet whose end I knew. Writing a poem is discovering.”
~Robert frost

Take Flight!



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READ WELL • WRITE WELL • THINK WELL