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Please enjoy this complimentary excerpt from *Write From the Beginning, Grades K-5*.

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WHEN I WAS YOUNG IN . . .

Using a common or shared experience can serve as a catalyst for strong writing. In this lesson, students focus on a shared experience or time period in their lives (e.g., *When I Was Young in First Grade*) to write about their personal experiences. Because of the shared nature of the experience, many students can find encouragement and confidence by writing about experiences that are shared and valued by their peers.

Focus Genre: Personal Narrative

Target Grade Level: K–5

Standards

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective techniques, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Anchor Texts

When I Was Young in the Mountains by Cynthia Rylant

We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past by Jacqueline Woodson

Momma, Where Are You From? by Marie Bradby

The Memory String by Eve Bunting

Our Class Is a Family by Shannon Olsen

Materials

- Anchor chart paper
- Sticky notes
- Paint strips

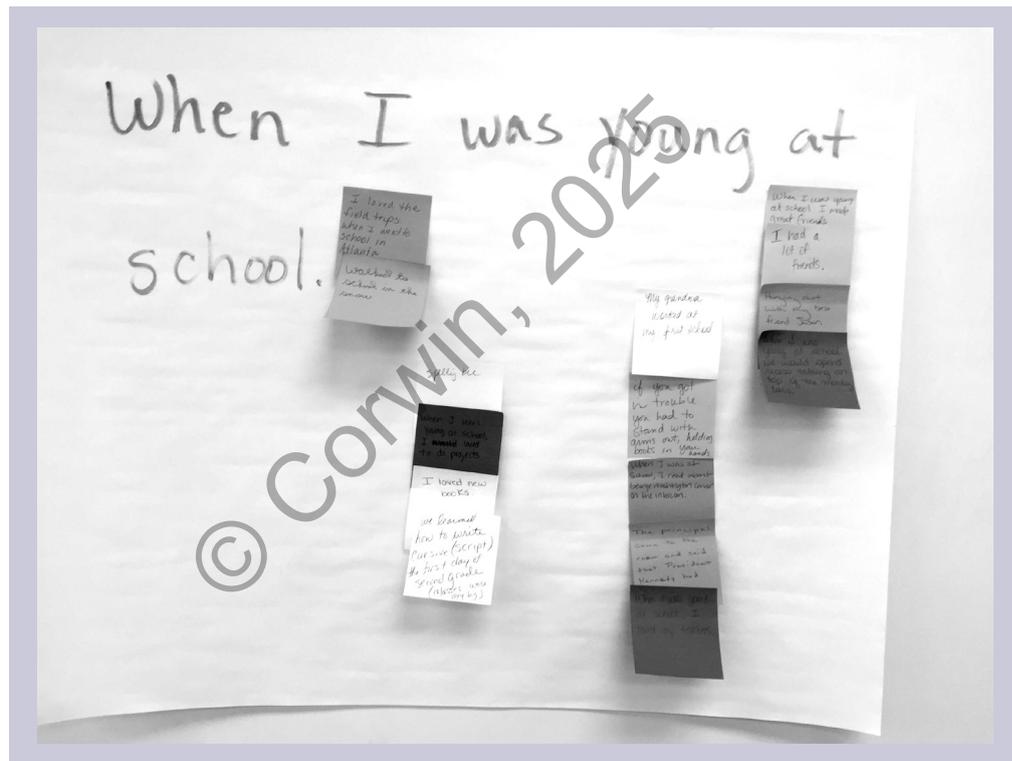
Teach It

1. Begin by reading *When I Was Young in the Mountains* by Cynthia Rylant.
2. Ask students to share how the character described her experiences with life in the mountains. Make note of how Rylant never clarifies if the events occurred over multiple visits to her grandparents' house or if everything occurred during one particular visit.

Quick Tip!

You don't absolutely have to start with this book, but I believe it is the best fit for this writing lesson.

3. Have students brainstorm as a class places or things that they experience in their current grade level. (e.g., “When I was young in kindergarten, I . . .”)
4. Make a list of the things students share (e.g., “When I was young in kindergarten, I played on the playground.”).
5. From that list, determine which ones should be the focus of the writing. Condense them down to 5 to 7 examples.
6. Record each of those examples on a sheet of large anchor chart paper, one idea per sheet of chart paper.
7. Post the chart paper in different places in the classroom.



⚡ Quick Tip!

Words or pictures can work here. If students draw pictures, when you share them with the class, write the words on the sticky notes next to the pictures that were drawn.

8. Give students sticky notes to record their own thoughts and ideas as they read the anchor charts.
9. Have students circulate around the room with their sticky notes and pencils. Instruct students to record their ideas for each of the anchor chart topics on sticky notes and then place them on the appropriate anchor chart.

10. Go around the room and give a debriefing of each of the anchor chart lists with the sticky note information.
11. As a class, begin writing sentences connected to each of the anchor chart topics listed. Make sure to model how to do this for the class. Demonstrate how to take the notes students have written and use them to construct complete sentences.
12. From this point on, you can continue the lesson in a variety of ways. You can construct a collaborative writing composition including material from all anchor charts that you compile into a classwide writing or you can have students choose an event that they want to write about and construct an independent sentence about their own experiences.

Try It

- Use this when you want students to write about experiences that they have in common with their classmates.
- Because this writing has a predictable starter, “When I was young in . . .,” it connects well with other works that follow a predictable series of sentences, which can be beneficial for emerging readers.
- Try this if you want to experiment with a collaborative writing engagement. Working with a partner or in groups can help students increase their confidence in writing.
- Use one of the other mentor texts and complete another writing engagement using that text as a frame. For example, when reading *We Had a Picnic This Sunday Past*, have students use that title as a frame: “We went to music this Monday past and we . . .”

Extensions

- Incorporate a family literacy component by including a take home writing assignment for parents and caregivers to write about their own experiences in that grade level.
- Have each student complete their own “When I was young in . . .” page into a class collection and whole class book sharing all of their experiences.
- Use this writing as a frame for writing about historical figures or characters from novels. Instead of using the “When I was young in . . .” frame, change it to a sentence stem that is connected to a historical character or literary character (e.g., “When I was young during the American Revolution . . .”).

Quick Tip!

This connects well with the *You Wouldn't Want to Be a . . .* books that focus on periods in history and what life was like then.

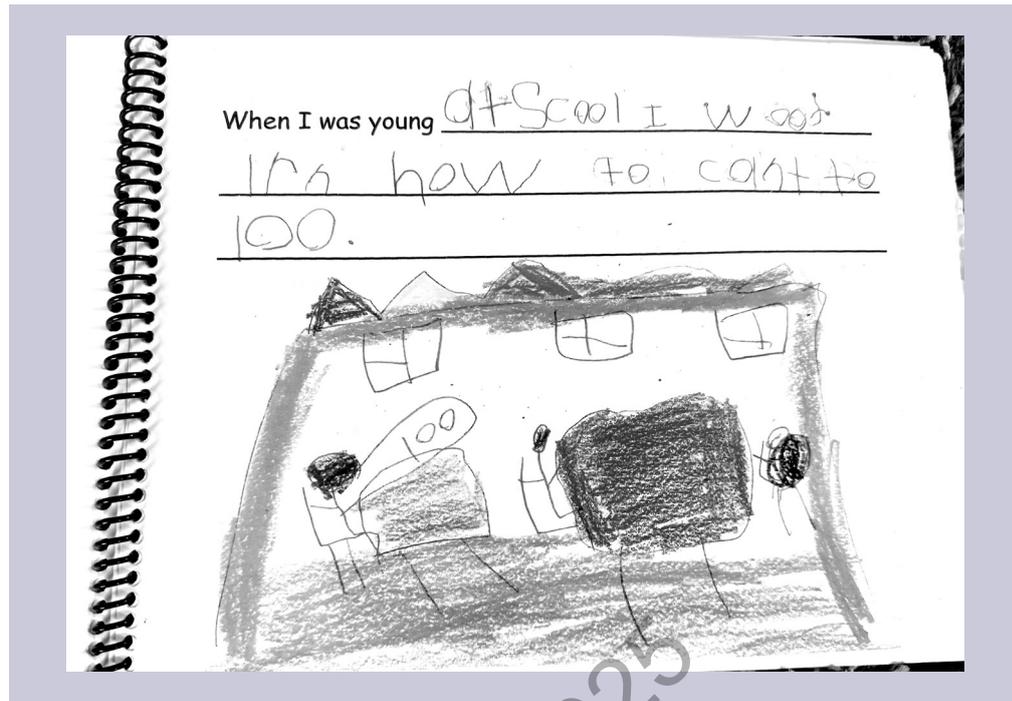


Photo by Alysha Krier Mooney

Modifications

Emerging Writers

- Create pictorial examples of their experiences. Have a classmate or the teacher dictate and label the picture.
- Collect pictorial examples from the class and create a class storyboard of the experiences.
- Use magazine images to locate pictures that show what students might do in each of the settings or places they described. Have them attach the appropriate pictures to the different anchor charts.

Proficient Writers

- Have students interview classmates, other teachers, or family members about when they were young during that time period. Have them record their findings and discuss with their classmates.
- Complete a comparison analysis of how different generations explain their experiences of the same event or occurrence.
- Conduct a collaborative project between upper elementary students and primary students. Have them write together about what they did or do in a specific grade or a particular place.

See It Sample

