

# PREFACE

Writing well is an on-going process. While students can learn the “basics” of writing in school, self-sufficiency is truly the goal of education. A process-driven approach will serve these emergent writers well since they can learn the processes “real” writers use in order to be effective communicators. Writers of all ages continually notice and incorporate effective strategies into their own writing process and products.

Becoming a writer is a life-long process. No one ever has learned enough, even authors like James Patterson who has published more than 14 million books. He’s always reading and learning more about the world and his craft. He knows that reading is the key to being a good writer.

Get the picture? Writers read and read and read. They internalize the structure of effective stories. They learn great new vocabulary words. They become sensitive to well-chosen words and effective phrases. They notice powerful sentences which stand alone or are a part of amazing paragraphs. They analyze why certain words, phrases, and sentences have power. Then, writers write and write and write. Like James Patterson, for example, who has just published *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X*. This novel is perfect for middle grade

students, especially those who may not be particularly motivated or skilled at reading. The book begins with a “sure-to-suck-you-in” hook called “True Confessions” which ends with instructions to “turn the page (p. 4).” How can you not? The chapters are short—only two or three pages. Patterson, master of suspense that he is, makes it hard to stop reading—especially when the chapters are so short. Readers just keep thinking, “Okay. One more chapter and then I have to ...” Before they know it, the book is finished!

Why use *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X* in classrooms? As noted, it’s a compelling read. Students will find it hard to put down. Girls and guys alike will love it. (To be a writer, first, you have to be a reader.) Secondly, it’s just published, a contemporary novel with which students will be able to relate. The examples of effective use of language embedded within this creative writing unit are from this book—not from some dead and buried author—but living, breathing authors. (Writers—especially student writers—learn best from other writers.) When students “learn to listen through an author’s words to the story, they learn a way of listening that is essential to writing” (Calkins, 1994, p. 256).

What other features make this text such a great read? They are highlighted in the 10-day unit on creative writing which follows this preface and provides a framework for encouraging young writers, particularly sixth through eighth graders, to look carefully at their own writing process and emerging product—a short story. Students are more likely to be engaged in writing if they are encouraged to use contemporary texts to support their learning. *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X* might be called the “touchstone text” (Calkins, 1994, p. 365), or the mentor text (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007, p. 3), as it has also been called, for this two-week writing unit. Both terms refer to books to which readers return, time after time, to notice how writers use words to create meaning. As Calkins writes, “If one text can be used as an exemplar of many qualities of good writing, we can take the time to read it together for all the wondrous ways in which it affects us, and only then return to it in order to examine the

ways in which it embodies particular qualities of writing” (p. 278). It is to this text that the lesson plans will refer—although it is not critical that students read the text while working through the unit. It is, however, preferable, so that students can see how the selected key features support the whole.

A focus is highlighted for each of the ten days, based on a typical schedule of 45 minute periods. While minutes are not suggested for each part of a day’s lesson, each day includes at least three parts: only a discussion of the lesson’s focus—the mini-lesson—which supports students’ creative writing, time for independent writing or sustained silent writing—which should be at least 20 minutes—and some kind of sharing or opportunity to confer about their emerging drafts. Depending on the day, the mini-lesson may be 5 minutes or 20—depending on how much conversation it engenders. On days with longer mini-lessons, the sharing will be shorter; on days with shorter mini-lessons, more in-depth conversations can occur about the emerging drafts.

Please note that while this unit is structured toward students writing a short story, the mini-lessons about creating strong prose would support most genres of writing. Additionally, when students are writing, you are encouraged to write, too. Your writing validates the assignment; if you’re doing the writing, too, it can’t just be another “school assignment.” Further, your own writing will give you “real” text to use for other mini-lessons that your particular students might need. When your students see you writing, they see a “writer-in-process,” one who has created some fantastic lines and not-as-fantastic lines. When you share a passage and ask for advice, by example, you are helping them understand that writers write and confer with other writers to get their text “right.” You show them that while you know how to “talk the talk,” more importantly, you know how to “walk the walk.” Together, you create a community of writers.

# TEN-DAY UNIT ON CREATIVE WRITING, A.K.A. STORYTELLING

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## DAY ONE

**Highlight the reading/writing connection  
and review the writing process.**

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Tell students that they are going to have a chance to write a short story over the course of the next two weeks, assuring them that you will be supporting them every step of the way. Remind them that being a writer is a life-long process. You might want to share with them Patterson's success as a writer. Reinforce that writers are first readers.

Explain that by reading, readers internalize the structure of effective stories, learn great new vocabulary words, become sensitive to well-chosen words and effective phrases, and take note of powerful sentences. Then, writers write—a lot, and regularly.

Further, explain that writers take note of interesting things in life and their reading and jot them down in a writer's notebook (or on any piece of available paper—napkins work well) so the idea isn't lost:

- The newspaper wrapper flapping in the breeze at the end of the delivery slot—which looks like a wagging dog's tongue.
- A fence completely encased in ice—a glass fence, an oxymoron
- The name of a dress shop, “Cinderella's”—fairy tale fans get the connection immediately!
- The word cashmere—from a newspaper article because it sounds as rich as its meaning
- The idea of having a prologue to a story—like in Jerry Spinelli's Newbery-winning novel *Maniac Magee*

Share with students that when it's time to write then, these writers already have some ideas that might spawn other thoughts. In essence, they never have a “blank page” staring at them because they are always thinking like writers, gathering words. When it's time to get started, these writers are ready.

Review the writing process with students. Help students recognize that when they summon their life's experiences, putting hand to paper or keyboard and begin writing, jotting down ideas—they are actually prewriting, which often takes the form of lists or webs or outlines or even drawings. Let them know that prewriting can look a lot like a first draft. No problem! All writers have to find their own best way to get started. The most important part? Beginning. Writers write. It's that simple—and difficult, since writers who have a particular vision for a particular piece of writing do a lot of writing, also called drafting.

Drafting involves writing one version of a piece and then revising it so that the meaning is increasingly clear; an important piece may have many drafts while a “quickwrite,” as its name indicates, is a “one-version” kind of writing. Revising is the heart of the writing process because this is how writers share their ideas; they work diligently with their text so that it says exactly what they want it to say. Once that is accomplished, then editing comes into play. Editing requires the writer to make sure that punctuation, capitalization, and spelling are all correct. Obviously, a writer always tries to punctuate, capitalize, and spell well, but these aren't critically important until the writer has captured the meaning. Focusing on editing issues before meaning has been obtained can be deadly to the writing process. Who wants to read about a “dog” just because the writer couldn't spell “Chihuahua” or Saint Bernard? First things first. Students need the freedom to start by focusing on getting the story right. Then, they refine spelling and other presentation issues. Ultimately, most writers hope to publish or share their work. Unless someone else reads and appreciates our work, why bother? Calkins (1994) says that even though publishing looks like the “last” step in the writing process, it's actually the impetus as it's what motivates writers to keep writing; now that they have been “insiders” in the process, they are forever changed.

Begin then, by reading aloud “True Confessions,” from *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X*, pages 3 and 4. Ask students if they are interested in “hearing more.” Ask them why. They are likely to comment on Daniel's voice, noticing that it really sounds like a 15-year-old is speaking directly to them, as in “Why should you read it?” They will also probably remember that he states that they have a “right” to the information he intends to share in his story. Students will perhaps remember the descriptive language Daniel uses to describe the aliens. They will love the fact that he gives them a “choice” as to whether or not they continue reading. They might also note that it's great to read a book with a main character who is about their age, that they can relate to him.

So, it's now clear that Daniel will be battling aliens. For all students,

having heard this page read aloud operates like a pre-writing strategy for it is likely to get ideas flowing. For students who intend to write a short story which is fantasy, this is perfect since the description of various aliens might suggest a character or two upon which the student can build. Other students, who might want to write historical fiction or a realistic contemporary story might be inspired by Daniel's voice or the book's overall style.

Encourage students to talk about directions they might go with their stories. Remind or review with students the key components of short fiction: setting—including time and place; characters; plot; and theme. You might want to suggest that students talk about what direction they might go in with their story with a partner or a small group for four to six minutes, depending on the size of the group. Then, have a few students quickly share their ideas with the whole class.

Once students have shared, invite all who have some ideas to start jotting them down—the beginning of the sustained silent writing part of the class. Ask students who aren't ready to write yet to meet with you in a small group. While most of the class is writing, meet with this group to brainstorm more ideas. As soon as a student has a direction he or she wants to pursue, send him or her off to join classmates and write independently. Encourage students first to record the basics, naming the setting, list of characters, basic plot, and possible theme. Then, ask them to go back and add as much detail as they know about each. Be sure students have at least 20 minutes for sustained silent writing as they are working on pre-writing, and time permitting, might even begin drafting. The important part about the day's lesson is that students begin to generate ideas for their stories.

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## DAY TWO

### Flesh out characters.

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As you begin the lesson today, ask students, “So, who is your story about? What do you know about your main character?” From *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X*, read aloud the description of Ergent Seth on page 69. Then, in a whole class discussion, ask them to think about that character, providing three “Fast Facts” about that character in these categories: favorite movie, favorite color, and favorite dessert or ice cream flavor. See what responses students provide. If they need a little prompting, ask them: Is Ergent Seth's favorite movie *Aliens* or *The Sound of Music*? Is his favorite color bright red or pale green? Is his favorite dessert Devil's Food cake or strawberry ice cream? Ask them which response is more likely and to explain why.

Then, ask for a volunteer or two to name their main character and decide on that character's favorite movie, color, and dessert or ice cream flavor. Next, ask them to defend their answers. Finally, pass out 3 x 5 index cards and ask all students to do the same thing with their main character—although they don't have to write down “why” these three items named are appropriate. Students who have already shared can jot down their answers for another character and or continue to write descriptive comments about their main character. Ask students to keep their “character” cards in their writing folder.

Once students have finished, ask for a few more volunteers, asking them verbally to defend their choices. Ask students how they “knew” these things about their character. Ask students if they feel they know

their characters a bit better by thinking about them this way—and why. At least one student will feel compelled to ask if they have to use these “answers” in their story. Of course, the answer is “no,” but understanding their characters and being able to write about them in a consistent way is an important skill for a writer.

Students need to consciously realize that readers expect characters to be believable, even a made-up character like Patterson’s Ergent Seth. Throughout the novel, Seth consistently behaves just as we expect him to: abysmally. He is just plain evil. He holds true to his character. The same is true with Daniel. He doesn’t behave like Seth. Daniel behaves like a 15-year-old. When he meets Sophie, he’s taken with her willowy beauty. He’s nervous being in her presence. He’s afraid he’ll say the wrong thing. Sound familiar? But behaving believably doesn’t mean that they are totally predictable. For example, Daniel loves to cook—and he’s pretty good at it. Most teenage guys don’t know about fresh pasta and don’t make their own spaghetti sauce with fresh basil. That’s okay. What’s important is that Daniel likes to cook throughout the whole novel. It’s simply part of who he is.

So, encourage students to continue thinking about their main character and then more about other characters in their story, jotting down any ideas they have that they want to remember. Then, provide time for sustained silent writing. End the day’s lesson with a special kind of whole group sharing. Near the end of the period, ask students to review the writing they have done and to select their favorite word, phrase, or sentence written that day. Invite everyone to read; the sharing is done in quick succession without comment or applause, usually in some kind of structured fashion such as up and down rows or around clusters of desks in a clockwise direction. Even when everyone shares—including the teacher, it takes only a few minutes. The beauty of this strategy? Every student’s voice is heard—and students’ interests are piqued by their classmates’ words. They want to know more—and their classmates are motivated to oblige.

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## DAY THREE

### Confirm point of view.

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Begin the class by revealing to students that one of the hardest decisions writers make is how to tell their story, that is, figuring out from whose point of view the story should be told. Ask students which point of view they think is easiest. They will probably say first person, or “I.” When you ask them why, they’ll probably tell you it’s because it’s natural, that we all see the world most readily from our own perspective.

Ask them what other points of view they know. Hopefully they will know first person, the perspective from which *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X* is told. They know this because “he” told us on the opening page, “My name is Daniel, and this is the first volume of my life story, which, hopefully, will be a long and distinguished one” (p. 3), and on the next page gives us “concrete” evidence when he refers to himself as “I.” “Maybe I should stop talking, though, before I get too far ahead of myself” (p. 4). Readers know what they know because Daniel tells us. If he doesn’t know something, neither do we. Finally, remind students that stories can be told from a third person omniscient point of view, when readers know what every character is thinking or knows—although the characters don’t necessarily know what every character is thinking or knows. Or, stories can be told from a third person limited point of view, when the reader knows only what one character or a few characters think and know.

Ask them to think about from what point of view they intend to tell their story. Will they tell it as the narrator, an “I,” like Daniel? From an all-

knowing perspective? Or, will they write it from a particular character's point of view? Ask them to think about the differences. In small groups, ask students to fill out a chart that records their ideas about the benefits and challenges of using each point of view. The chart might look like this, although with additional space for student writing:

Point of View	Benefits	Challenges	Examples
First Person			
Third Person Omniscient			
Third Person Limited			

After students have worked together and seem to have written down all they can think of, ask students to brainstorm for a few more minutes and see if they can think of any books they have read that are examples of each point of view. If they are stuck, ask them to pull out their free choice novels and decide which point of view it is written from. Conduct a class poll. Which point of view is used more frequently? Make predictions why.

Then, encourage students to make a conscious choice for the point of view they will use in their story and give them time for sustained silent writing. Today, end with a partner sharing of "their favorite part," giving them the last five minutes of class to accomplish this.

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## DAY FOUR

### Plot the action.

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By the fourth day, students hopefully have some characters pretty well established in their heads and have decided from which point of view they will write. At this point in time then, asking students to outline the action would work well.

Ask students to define "plot." They probably know that it is the action in the story—what happens. Perhaps give them a 3" x 5" index card or a quarter sheet of paper. The size matters. What you want students to do is write the highlights of their plot—not the whole story! You want them to think globally—not specifically. Honestly, some students will have great difficulty doing this. They will tell you that they don't know, that they won't know until they keep drafting and their characters "tell" them. Believe them. They don't. Published authors will often say the same thing, a kind of "I didn't know that's what was going to happen until my pencil/pen/keyboard wrote it." If we are trying to nurture "real" writers, we have to give our students the same freedom published authors have. For these students, ask them to write down the highlights of the action they know so far—and then just let them continue writing their drafts. You will have supported these students as writers in just the way they needed support.

However, other students, like other published authors, will truly need to map out their whole story before they can continue writing. For these students, asking them to list the main events will be invaluable to their progress as writers; these informal outlines/lists of events will

keep them on task and energized because they know their destination. Are students allowed to change their minds as they write? Absolutely. While the strategies suggested in this unit will help most students, they are not to be handcuffs for students who clearly have their own writing tools which enable them to be successful. Your knowledge of your students and attention to their needs is paramount to this unit's success.

This day would be a particularly good one for students to have lots of time to write—maybe even at the expense of sharing. When students are getting into the rhythm of their prose, it's best to interfere as little as possible. If students seem restless near the end of the period though, sharing would be the best way to end the session. Ask for a volunteer (or two if time permits) to share their writing with the whole class. Ask students what each writer did well. Save the suggestions for improvement for another time.

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## DAY FIVE

### Focus on cohesiveness.

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Begin today's discussion about why cohesion within a story is essential to its success. Hopefully, they appreciate already that the story line has to be seamless, pulling the reader along through the credibility of its characters, the believability of its situations, and the power of its language. All stories have suspense, but readers of mysteries and adventures expect suspense in even greater degrees. How does a writer create suspense?

One way is the use of “hooks” which keep readers “sitting on the edge of their seats.” These writers literally keep readers reading because they have to know what's going to happen. Writers do this by including phrases and sentences that cause the reader to think, “So, what does he mean by that?”—and keeps reading to find out.

Patterson is a master at creating these “hooks.” Consider this sequence of chapter endings. Read the last paragraph of Chapter 4. “Charade, I thought, nodding. What a good idea” (p. 29). But that's the end of the paragraph! What's a reader to do? Begin to read the next chapter—exactly. Read the last sentence of Chapter 5. “Daniel doesn't need to go to school anymore.” What? He's 15 and he doesn't need to go to school anymore? Why? How does a reader find out? Read on—exactly! The last three lines of Chapter 6 are: “Now you know a little more about me. Freaky, huh? You have no idea.” So, the reader thinks. If I read on, I'll have “more ideas,” right? Exactly. And so the reader does and is rewarded, at the end of Chapter 7 with the final sentence,

“I’m pretty sure I’m an alien too.” Whoa! It’s not a total surprise. The reader already knows that Daniel has some pretty amazing talents, but still—an alien, albeit a good alien. Tell me more the reader says.

Invite students to think about how they are connecting sections of their story. Is the reader ready for the progression of ideas? Are there surprises? Are they believable? Do the connections make sense? Explain to students that while this conscious awareness of phrasing is one way of enhancing the cohesiveness of the story, at this point students should be focusing on the content of their story. Comprehensive issues of style are more fruitfully addressed later, once the story content is “right,” but being aware of the need for cohesiveness—and one technique for accomplishing it—during the process can also be quite helpful overall.

Invite students to continue working on their stories by providing sustained silent writing time, asking them to consciously add one “hook,” one explicit segue from one passage to another. Then, leaving four minutes at the end for sharing, ask students to find a partner and to share the one “hook” that they added. In the final seconds before the bell, poll students about the effectiveness of this technique. Was it hard to do? Easy? Why is it important? Congratulate them on acquiring this important writing technique as the bell signals their victory.

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## DAY SIX

### Focus on language: specific nouns and verbs.

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At this point in the unit, students should have a good start on their stories in terms of characters, point of view, and plot. While students will continue to draft their stories, the mini-lessons for the next several days include suggestions which will help strengthen how the students tell their stories. Today’s focus is on precise language, the key to engaging writing. Who wants to read about a dog named Blackie or a French Poodle named Fifi. So predictable! How about a beagle named Sarah (because of her sweet eyes), or a Dachshund named Dasher (because it’s so ironic—Dachshunds cannot be speedy dogs with such short legs!)

Or provide a few specific examples from *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X*:

Not “heart attack”	but	“cardiac arrest” (p. 128)
Not “shirt”	but	“muscle shirt” (p. 131)
Not “yelled”	but	“screeched” (p. 75)
Not “said”	but	“groaned” (p. 192)

On an overhead or Smart Board, give students a grid that looks like this one, with words such as those on the left:

Don't use this word...	Use this one instead!
tree	
car	
candy	
walk	
talk	

Ask students what synonyms for the listed words might be. Hopefully, students will readily understand that if they replaced “tree” with maple, oak, or weeping willow, the reader can much more readily “see” the tree. If they replaced “car” with Chevy, Cadillac or Hummer, hopefully they understand why using such precise terminology “shows” more about their character or situations. Characters who drive Hummers are probably more affluent than those who drive a Chevy. While candy doesn’t typically show wealth, unless Godiva is the one consumed, it can readily show character quirks—one who prefers Gummi Bears to KitKats, for example.

While conventional wisdom has advocated “lots of adjectives” to make writing really descriptive, published authors and editors now firmly say, “No more!” Writers are encouraged to use precise nouns and strong verbs—using as few adjectives and adverbs as possible. Zinsser suggests, “use adjectives sparingly” (2001, p. 71), while King (2000, p. 124) states, “The adverb is not your friend.”

To begin this conversation, ask students for synonyms for “walk” and “talk.” They may come up with “saunter, stroll, strutted” and “exclaimed, stressed, and whispered.” Talk about the differences in meaning, especially the nuances between and among words like

“saunter” and “stroll” versus “strutted.” This is a great opportunity to talk about the difference between the connotation and denotation of words—and why a word should never be chosen from a thesaurus if the writer has never heard it and it just “looks” good.

Before students begin writing today, ask them to reread what they have written so far and see if they have any “common, ordinary words” which could be changed to more precise ones. Be sure that they know that sometimes the “generic” word is exactly the best word in that instance, that they don’t have to replace all the regular words with special ones—just when it would clarify meaning. Invite them to make at least two replacements.

Once students have reread and replaced two words, ask students to move into small groups and share one of their changes, sharing first their original word within its context and then their new sentence. Ask classmates to confirm that the new version is “better.” If not, encourage writers to retain their original versions—or suggest a different word. If time permits, have students share their second example, but be sure students have at least 20 minutes for sustained silent writing. (Today’s lesson calls for the sharing to be in the middle of the class session.)

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## DAY SEVEN

**Focus on language: Similes, allusions, litotes, alliteration and more, oh my!**

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Patterson and Ledwidge are masters of similes and allusions. Why are these appealing devices to an author? Because they are enormously helpful to a reader! Writers write in order to be understood and these literary devices help readers connect with the text. One way to share the examples that follow would be to write them on sentence strips (available in white or various colors at teacher supply stores), to create 8-½ x 11” “mini-posters” with a quotation typed on each one, or to project each quotation using PowerPoint. That way, students can both see and hear each example.

So, share these similes (comparisons using like or as and highlighted in italic print) with students, from *The Dangerous Days of Daniel X*:

“What can I say about Dana? She’s tall, with pin-straight blond hair that flows like a waterfall of flame down her back.” (p. 46)

“Seth began to chuckle softly. The chuckle morphed into a bloodcurdling kind of clicking sound. Like a cricket, a thousand-pound one.” (p. 87)

“I’d let Seth play me like an i-Pod Shuffle.” (p. 132)

What advantage is there to the writer by describing these things—hair, a clicking sound, a situation—through similes? Hopefully, students see that the visual or auditory image that the reader pictures becomes more vivid. Specificity is enhanced; a clearer transfer of ideas is possible.

The whole idea of writing is to exchange ideas. Allusions, references to other things, are another device that helps readers understand what the writing is trying to convey.

**Consider these:**

“Take that you little nothing! I flame-broil my meat. Like Burger King! Like Beelzebub!” (p. 16)

“By ten o’clock, completely wiped and with still no sign of civilization, I [Daniel] decided to call it a night. I stepped off the road into the dark woods, kicking myself for staying up late to watch *The Blair Witch Project* a couple nights before.” (p. 43)

“As I cooked, I listened to a concerto by a classical guitarist named Remi Boucher. The guy is not of this world, and I wondered if he was maybe another alien. I’ve had the same thought about Tiger Woods, Bono, and of course, Sanjaya Malakar.” (p. 68).

Why does Patterson “name drop?” What is the advantage? Of course, it tells the reader more. By using these references to other things, using allusions, he can say volumes in only a few words. And sometimes, it adds humor, as in the first example. The alien is like Burger King because he uses fire to extinguish his enemies. Patterson also uses a more “classic” reference, to Beelzebub, another name for the Devil, who also clearly is linked with fire.

Patterson uses the reference to the movie *The Blair Witch Project* to do two things: to show readers that Daniel watches the same films as

does a “regular” teenager and that he’s a bit scared as he’s walking alone late at night.

Patterson uses the reference to Remi Boucher to show readers that while Daniel is a “regular” guy, he also has some individual tastes, like enjoying the work of a classical guitarist who he believes has “out of this world” talent—just as Tiger Woods—a golfer, Bono—a singer, and Sanjaya Malakar—an American Idol star all do. All of these specific references or allusions extend the author’s meaning. Because each reference has both a connotation and a denotation, we learn more about a character or situation in only a few words. Name dropping works.

So does understatement. A litote does just that. A litote is an expression that uses great understatement for effect. For example, after Daniel notes that the reader has probably already noticed that his speech was “not typical for a three-year-old” (p. 8), Daniel reveals that he was building—with play dough, each of the Seven Wonders of the World. No kidding! While his speech certainly sets him apart, three-year-olds hardly know what the Seven Wonders are, let alone to have the physical dexterity to recreate them. Patterson, through the use of litote, lets us know how unusual and special Daniel is.

One more special use of language is Patterson’s use of alliteration—the repetition of initial sounds, usually consonants, for effect. Even the title is an example of alliteration since the sound of “d” is repeated three times, “The Dangerous Days of Daniel X.” The effect is even strengthened because each “D” is followed by the sound of “a.” Or consider this example of assonance (internal repetition of sounds), as in “lickety-split-quick tick” (p. 10). The “ick” is repeated so the tick seems even faster as the words spill off the tongue.

Invite students to try one (or more) of these devices in their own writing. Ask them to add a simile or classical or contemporary allusion or two in their day’s drafting. Or, ask them to include an example of litote, alliteration or other kinds of rhyming. Just before the end of the class period, ask them each to share their literary techniques by simply stating it as they take turns going around the room, as they did at the end of the lesson for Day 2.

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# DAY EIGHT

## Polish prose.

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All writers want to know that they have conveyed their ideas well, that their readers understand what they have written. Students know they are supposed to write in “complete sentences.” Certainly, they are, but by the time they are middle graders, they should be invited to intentionally not use a complete sentence if it conveys the mood or style of the text more effectively. Additionally, share with students some of the other literary techniques that Patterson uses. This mini-lesson will be particularly powerful if you share the surrounding text for each of the examples listed below. Invite them to study and think about how Patterson uses structure to make his points. Ask students to:

**1. Think about using just a phrase (otherwise known as a fragment) to focus the reader:**

The police. (27).

**2. Consider atypical paragraphing to make their point:**

I stood for a moment, taking in all the peace and quiet.  
And loneliness, I thought, looking at the empty plates  
on the counter.

And fear.

And paranoia. (pp. 57-58)

**3. Use repetition to reinforce their message:**

I should have listened to my mother and father.  
I should have listened to Dana.  
I should have listened to Ergent Seth. (p. 133)

**4. Ask a rhetorical question to engage their reader:**

I'd been warned, hadn't I? (p. 133)

**5. Reflect on the various ways dashes can be used to include parenthetical information (all of these examples are from Chapter 3):**

“The sun was just coming up—well, the grayish-white smudge that passes for a sun in forever-overcast Portland—as I lumbered through my rental apartment’s front door and plopped down on the couch.” (p. 26)

“After several days of searching, I found The List—buried under mud and rocks in the rather picturesque brook that ran behind the house.” (p. 27)

“The List was on a computer—the one now before me, which is thin as a notepad and probably five hundred years in advance of anything currently offered by Apple or IBM.” (p. 27)

“I wasn’t expecting anyone—I’m never expecting anyone.” (p. 27)

**6. Think about the use of *italic* print to show a character’s thoughts (both from Chapter 45):**

“*You’re losing it, Daniel. This isn’t like you.*” (p. 124)

“*I wish I knew.*” (p. 125)

Then, encourage students to consider each of these techniques and consider using them within their story. Ask them to choose at least one and include it within their day’s writing, or by revising their previous drafts. Provide extended time for writing. Then, just before students leave, have them write the name of the stylistic device they have chosen on a sticky note, making a class chart of which techniques are used most frequently simply by posting their note on the chalkboard, whiteboard, bulletin board, or wall. (If they use more than one, ask them to write the name of the one they believe will be the most effective in their writing and then add a “plus 1 or 2” after the named technique.) Ask for volunteers to share by explaining why they chose the technique they did, especially of the lesser-used ones.

If possible, ask students to bring a completed, typed draft of their stories to class tomorrow. This way, they will have a “clean” draft for their editing conference, making for a more effective use of their time and energy.

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# DAY NINE

## Edit!

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Now that students have written their stories and they have it “right,” meaning that the text says what they want it to say, it’s time to focus on editing. Editing means attention to capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. This is finally the time for students to say to one another, “I think that word is misspelled” or “That word doesn’t need to be capitalized” or “That’s a run-on. You need to put a semi-colon there.” While there may be a great deal of pointing at the paper, only the author is permitted to write on his or her paper. No one else makes a mark. Why? Explain to students that each paper is the author’s own and is sacred. While students are generally quite good at helping their classmates with their drafts, there are occasionally the overzealous few who delight at the “power” of being a teacher and create a mess of the paper, crushing a writer’s spirit. When it’s only the writer who wields the pen, this is far less likely to happen. Also, a writer does not have to take the advice of a classmate. This may be wise or not, but students need to understand that writers are entitled to make final decisions about their text. While the focus of today’s lesson is on editing, remind students that if they want to rephrase a sentence they are most welcome to do so. Until the final draft is submitted, authors always have the power to revise their ideas.

As explained, editing is done most readily on a typed draft, so hopefully, students will bring to class a typed draft. Otherwise, providing time for students to type their draft now would be great. (Of course, the

unit will then be a bit longer!) Then, request that students find a partner, preferably someone they have worked with before because then their reviewer won't be as distracted by the content of the story since they will already have knowledge of it. Ask partners to sit side-by-side with the paper between them. Then, after a quick review of editing issues as described in the previous paragraph—punctuation, capitalization, and spelling, tell students that, in turn, each will read aloud his or her story to their revising partner. The reason that the writer does the reading aloud is so that the writer might hear or see a mistake and state that he or she is going to fix it this way or that before the listener even has a chance. The listener is to make suggestions about things they notice that the reader doesn't mention.

After the first story has been read aloud, the second writer reads his or her story, mentioning issues that need to be addressed, with the partner suggesting others. This is a time-consuming process; it will probably take the entire class period. It is well worth the investment because with this practice, students are learning to be increasingly autonomous. When they learn to read their work aloud and see their own mistakes or hear a phrase which needs to be refined for clarity, they are becoming increasingly strong writers. While novelists may not read aloud their whole books, they too “read aloud” the most troublesome of passages in order to refine them. Additionally, writers don't usually have “teachers” to correct all their mistakes. Most students have a buddy with whom they could have an editing “conference,” even if it is not required for a particular class or assignment. This is a great practice for students to embrace throughout school—and beyond.

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## DAY TEN

### Publish!

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Celebrating authorship is critical to writers. There's nothing quite like the thrill of seeing the final version of a document, whether it's formally published, classroom-published, or simply printed in a “final version.” Until the story is heard by others, it's not truly published. A teacher cannot be the sole audience at school. A literate community created the text; everyone in it deserves to hear or read the final story.

So, have an author day (or two or three). If it's important that everyone's story is read aloud, in its entirety, it will take more than one class period. That's okay! Celebrating publication could take place once a week for a month; of course, that also means snacks need to appear each time stories are shared. It's a celebration, right?

If a print version, or an on-line version of all the students' stories is available, one class period to celebrate them all would also work with each student reading aloud for one minute. Since class members would have access to the entire work, students would each choose the “best” section of their story as an enticement to reading the whole story. They would each practice their section and read it aloud to the whole class; this is a particularly great option if students are not used to sharing aloud with the whole class. Thus, sharing time is at a minimum, but still, everyone shares.

For those students who fear that their story isn't “as good as everyone else's,” there is comfort in knowing that they have to read a part—not the whole thing. What these students learn is that their

writing can compete—and the only way to feel more comfortable sharing is to practice doing so. While competition is not the goal, students are human, and developmentally, middle graders tend to be competitive. This is the perfect opportunity for the teacher to help students notice that different kinds of stories have different strengths. Some are funny, some sad; some use more sophisticated language structure and vocabulary (think Hawthorne or Faulkner), while other stories are told more simply (perhaps Hemingway or Fitzgerald), but all are American masters of storytelling. While most middle graders won't know these authors, they can understand that stories are individual—and characters and setting and theme all influence the final products. The goal of publication is for students to have fully engaged in the process that produced their final text, one hopefully which fulfilled their expectations and engenders the idea of writing more and sharing again. Thus, writers are born.

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