Realistic Fiction
Grades 4 and 6

Background Information:
Realistic fiction is a narrative genre in which real characters operate in a true-to-life world. This unit of study shows students how to construct a story that is fictional, but could happen in real life. Students’ story ideas spring from the lives of well-developed characters who have the attributes and concerns of real people.

This unit focuses on one plot structure common to many realistic fiction narratives: a story in which the central character is faced with a conflict and struggles to bring it to resolution by the end of the story. Although realistic fiction can encompass other kinds of plot structures, all of the texts suggested for use as models in this unit have some form of problem/solution structure. By studying many of these stories, students will learn how authors create different variations on this basic plot. (See Appendix for recommended texts.)

The second focus of the unit is on character development. Students will learn how to create a multi-dimensional main character – one with both inner and outer character traits. Students are encouraged to let the plot originate from the character they create in order to let the character’s motives drive the story. When this is the case, the main character is active in solving the problem presented by the plot. Although the main character may have help, he or she is instrumental in determining the outcome. After struggling with the problem, the character is changed in some way, even if the situation is not perfectly resolved.

Another feature of this unit of study is that it builds on the work students have done in the memoir unit of study. Both are studies of narrative form, and as such, encourage the student writer to consider both structure and craft.
NCEE Standards

The NCEE standards included in this document offer the teacher guidance with curriculum, instruction, and assessment. The standards provide a way to bridge daily instruction with what the students should be able to understand and produce at the conclusion of the unit.

The following standards represent the expectations for students when working on a narrative account:

**Grade 4:**
- Engages the reader by establishing a context, creating a persona, and otherwise developing reader interest;
- Establishes a situation, plot, point of view, setting, and conflict (and for autobiography, the significance of events)
- Creates an organized structure
- Includes sensory details and concrete language to develop plot and character.
- Excludes extraneous details and inconsistencies
- Develops complex characters
- Uses a range of appropriate strategies, such as dialogue and tension, or suspense;
- Provides a sense of closure to the writing

**Grade 6:**
- Engages the reader by establishing a context, creating a persona, and otherwise developing reader interest;
- Establishes a situation, plot, point of view, setting, and conflict (and for autobiography, the significance of events and of conclusions that can be drawn from those events).
- Creates an organized structure
- Includes sensory details and concrete language to develop plot and character.
- Excludes extraneous details and concrete language to develop plot and character
- Develops complex characters
- Uses a range of appropriate strategies, such as dialogue, tension or suspense, naming, and specific narrative actions, e.g. movement, gestures, expressions
- Provides a sense of closure to the writing.

The Structure of a Genre Study

This packet describes a genre study. All genre studies follow a similar structure in which the students are engaged in two strands of work.

**Immersion**
One strand of a genre study is an immersion in literature, in this case, an immersion in realistic-fiction stories. During early lessons, the teacher and the students build a definition of realistic fiction from carefully chosen texts. These include picture books and selections from anthologies of short stories. These are texts that the teacher is reading aloud to students as well as texts that the students are reading independently.
These stories should first be read to students in a read-aloud time during which they experience the texts as readers. This allows them to make personal connections, understand the context and events of the story, relate this text to others they know, etc. Students return to the books during Writer’s Workshop to read or listen to them as writers, noticing the features of realistic fiction and the elements of writer’s craft the authors use. From these noticings, the students and teacher will build a definition of the kind of realistic-fiction stories the students will write. This is followed by students sifting and sorting through the texts the class has read. Those that do not match the definition of realistic fiction created by the class are sifted out. The texts that remain are examined more deeply. A few are selected by the teacher as class touchstones for the unit. Each student chooses a mentor text when he or she begins drafting.

Student Writing
The other strand of a genre study is the student writing. In this unit of study students will discover a variety of strategies to help them generate story ideas and create multi-dimensional characters. By the end of the first phase of the study, students will have a number of character sketches and story ideas in their writer’s notebooks.

After choosing their character’s story problem and gathering more writing around that seed idea, students draft and revise their pieces. Students will edit their final drafts for spelling, grammar, punctuation, etc. The editing phase of the writing-process cycle reinforces the skills lessons taught outside of the Writer’s Workshop.

Big Ideas of the Weeks of the Study

The following time frames are suggestions. The teacher should adjust the pacing for the needs of the students.

Best-guess Gathering
Before the unit of study formally begins, best-guess gathering is a period of time for informal talk about the upcoming unit of study as the class ends the previous unit. During this time the teacher will be using read-alouds of carefully chosen texts to help students begin building an understanding of realistic fiction. Although there will not be specific lessons addressing structure until later, the teacher should be sure to include books that model the structure s/he wants the students to use. Students will discuss texts from their independent reading that they think might be realistic fiction.

A note on reflection
We are encouraging students to be reflective learners. In order to emphasize this habit of mind, the teacher introduces reflection by asking students at this early stage to write what they think realistic fiction is, their questions about the genre, and what they think they might learn. The class will return to this reflection on the genre midway through the unit as well as at the end.
Writer’s Workshop - Weeks 1 and 2:

During the first two weeks of the unit of study, some days will be spent on immersion in the literature, examining the features and structure of realistic fiction. Other days are devoted to the students building a well of realistic-fiction ideas in their writer’s notebooks. The teacher should alternate between these two strands as the two weeks unfold. A common definition of realistic fiction is created by the teacher and the class.

Week 3
Based on their definition of realistic fiction, the class sifts through books to find the best examples to study further. The teacher chooses seven to ten texts that will become touchstone stories to use throughout the rest of the unit. Students return to character and story ideas in their notebooks to choose the one they will develop. They begin to gather more writing around that idea in folders devoted to their realistic-fiction story.

Weeks 4 and 5
Students envision their writing from different points of view. After deciding whether the first-person or third-person point of view best serves their story, they choose a mentor text and write an initial draft and then revise subsequent drafts.

Week 6
Students edit, publish, and celebrate their writing by sharing it with others. Finally, they reflect on the unit of study, naming what they have learned and setting goals for their growth as writers.

Reader’s Workshop
Teachers can precede or overlap a genre study in the Writer’s Workshop with work in the same genre in their Reader’s Workshop. During independent reading time, guided reading-group instruction can be focused on the elements of realistic fiction (character, plot, setting, point of view, etc.), while students in book clubs and partnerships are reading realistic-fiction novels or short stories. Some teachers combine their best-guess gathering phase with interactive read-alouds followed by specific work for students in their reading-response logs.
**Writer’s Workshop**

This template shows the flow of any genre study in the Writer’s Workshop. The arrow indicates that on some days the work is from the immersion strand of the study and that on other days the work will be from the student writing side.

### WRITING: GENRE STUDY OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>IMMERSION IN TEXT</th>
<th>STUDENT WRITING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Best-guess gathering</td>
<td><em>From the previous unit of study:</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Building a definition of the genre</td>
<td>• Collecting entries in the writer’s notebooks (or writer’s folders for K-1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sifting and sorting through texts</td>
<td>• Rereading to choose a seed idea/topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(students)</td>
<td>• Gathering around the seed/topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Selecting class touchstone texts</td>
<td>• Drafting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(teacher)</td>
<td>• Revision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Selecting individual mentor texts</td>
<td>• Editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(students)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>For the next unit of study:</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Best-guess gathering</td>
<td>• Publishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Celebration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Reflection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Launching the unit of study in Realistic Fiction in the Writer’s Workshop:
Sequence of Mini-lessons

The following sequence of lessons is listed in sections. However, this does not mean that all of the lessons listed in a section are to be completed before all of those in another section. Depending on the needs of the class, the teacher may spend several days on one section, doing a series of mini-lessons within that strand. At other points, the teacher may switch between the two strands over a period of days, moving between a focus on looking at books (immersion) and developing the students’ writing, for example.

Section One: Immersion

Reading Like a Writer: Investigating Elements of Realistic Fiction Stories

Mini-lesson: Charting the elements of realistic fiction

Preparation: Prior to this lesson, students will have read or listened to the texts they will investigate on this day.

When students come to the meeting area they need to sit next to their writing partner or together in a small work group.

Texts suggested for this lesson were chosen because the basic realistic-fiction elements in them can be identified easily. The texts cover a range of reading levels.

- Fireflies! by Julie Brickloe
- Strong to the Hoop by John Coy
- “In the Shower with Andy” by Andy Griffiths (in More Funny Stories, chosen by Roger McGough)
- “Soledad” by Francisco Jimenez (from The Circuit)
- My Dog is Lost! by Ezra Jack Keats
- Mama’s Way by Helen Ketteman
- Ruler of the Courtyard by Rukhsana Khan
- The Honest-to-Goodness Truth by Patricia Mckissack
- Chicken Sunday by Patricia Polacco
- “Mother’s Clothes” by Gary Soto (from Petty Crimes)
- Too Many Tamales by Gary Soto
- Suki’s Kimono by Chieri Uegaki
- Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber

Mini-lesson:

Connect: “You have been reading and listening to a number of stories involving believable characters set in the real world.”

Teach: “Today we are going to return to some of those stories and read them as writers, investigating how their authors put the elements of the story together. I’m going to show you how I investigate the story Brave Irene, by William Steig. I’m thinking about what makes a good story, the kind that keeps my interest and involves me in caring about what
happens in the story. In *Brave Irene*, the first thing that comes to my mind is the main character, the character mentioned in the title, Irene. The stories that hold my interest are those that have characters I can get to know and usually have characters that I am rooting for.”

“I’ve prepared a chart to write down the things that I am noticing about what William Steig included in his story. I am going to be looking for these four elements: main character, situation, character’s problem, and resolution.”

### REALISTIC FICTION ELEMENTS

*Brave Irene* by William Steig

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN CHARACTER</th>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>MAIN CHARACTER’S PROBLEM OR PREDICAMENT</th>
<th>RESOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irene, a girl of about 8-11 years old. She is very loving to her mother. She won’t give up, no matter what.</td>
<td>Information about the characters’ world that we need to know to understand the story. Includes time and place.</td>
<td>How the main character changes and how his or her problem turns out at the end.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**MAIN CHARACTER**

“I’m going to write down the most important character traits about Irene. I could write a lot more about her, but I’ll just write a couple of the most important character traits on the chart today.”

**SITUATION**

“An important feature of realistic fiction is what many writers call the situation. Authors include three things when they lay out the situation of the story:

1. information the reader needs to know in order to fully understand the story that is unfolding
2. the time period in which the story happens
3. the place where the story happens

We have been noticing the time and the place of stories and calling that the setting. Realistic-fiction writers usually give information about the time and the place of the story near the beginning. The author also lays out the situation for us and the story develops out of it. The situation establishes the context for the problem or predicament facing the main character. The situation alone is NOT the story. Let me show you what I mean.”

The teacher writes on the chart as s/he explains the following:
“In *Brave Irene*, William Steig sets his story in the country. We know about the place because he mentions Irene walking through the woods, not on a road. The time is sometime in the past, before electric heaters (Irene puts more wood in the stove before she leaves), and in a time when there were no cars—which we know because the characters ride in a horse-drawn sleigh.

“ Irene is an only child living alone with her mother. Her mother makes a living for them as a dressmaker. She has just completed a gown for the duchess to wear at the ball that night. This is the situation—not much of a story yet. However, we need to know this information to help us understand the next part of the story: the problem.”

**PROBLEM or PREDICAMENT**

“This is the point in the story where the author sets up a problem that becomes a struggle for the main character. Without this struggle, the story isn’t as interesting. If Irene’s mother just called up a delivery service to drive up and take the dress over to the duchess’s palace, we wouldn’t have a story. The information in the situation is important. Since William Steig wanted to write a story about a loving girl braving her way through a snowstorm, he had to set up a situation in which the girl and her mother don’t have any other choices. He has to set up a situation with no phones, or cars, or money to hire a delivery service. He set up the situation so that there aren’t any other people in the family who could help.

“ In *Brave Irene* two things establish the main character’s problem: her mother is sick and there is a fierce snowstorm beginning. The story takes off when Irene decides she will deliver the gown. Now we have a story. Now we want to know what will happen to Irene.”

**RESOLUTION**

“The last part of the story I am going to note on my chart is the resolution—how the story turns out in the end. In this story Irene keeps going through the snowstorm even when the gown blows away. When she manages to deliver it to the duchess, Irene is proud of herself. Her mother is relieved and proud as well.”

**REALISTIC FICTION ELEMENTS**

*Brave Irene* by William Steig

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN CHARACTER</th>
<th>SITUATION</th>
<th>MAIN CHARACTER’S PROBLEM OR PREDICAMENT</th>
<th>RESOLUTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irene, a girl of about 8-11 years old. She is very loving to her mother. She won’t give up, no matter what.</td>
<td>Place: in the country</td>
<td>Irene’s mother is too sick to deliver the gown. Irene offers to deliver it, but a dangerous snowstorm is raging.</td>
<td>Irene keeps going through the snowstorm, even when the gown blows away. She finds the gown and delivers it. The duchess is</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mother who is a dressmaker. The mother has made a gown for a duchess to be worn at a ball that night.

grateful. Irene feels proud of herself. Irene’s mother is relieved and proud, too.

Note: It is important that students recognize that an understanding of the resolution includes not only what happened, but how the characters feel.

Active Involvement: The teacher reminds students of texts they have been reading during the immersion in realistic fiction. S/he asks them to work with their writing partner(s) to choose a book they would like to investigate. They will be looking for the elements of the story noted in the think-aloud about Brave Irene.

Note: the teacher may assign texts to students to match them to reading levels.

Link: The teacher distributes blank copies of the Realistic Fiction Elements chart (see Appendix) to each group and sends them off to review the text they chose and note the elements on the chart.

Brave Irene is an example of one type of story structure. As students examine a wide range of texts, they will encounter variations on the way story elements are used by authors:

- Some stories begin with the problem, and the situation is filled in later as the story unfolds.
- The problem is presented near the end of the story (example: Fireflies!).
- Sometimes information about story elements must be inferred.

One strategy that helps students make a distinction between the situation and the onset of the story problem is to begin the inquiry by pinpointing the beginning of the problem.

Share: The teacher chooses a few groups to share their charts, highlighting the variety among the texts.

Note: The teacher collects the Realistic Fiction Elements charts and posts them or re-writes them on bigger charts, or in some other way saves them and makes them available for all class members to use as the unit of study unfolds.
Section Two: Student Writing
Listing Story Ideas

Mini-lesson: Strategies for gathering ideas

Preparation: The Elements of Realistic Fiction chart created in a previous lesson.

Connect: “Yesterday we began building our idea of what realistic fiction is by looking closely at the elements of some of the stories we know. We will continue to examine how authors write realistic fiction, but at the same time we’ll begin doing what those authors do. We’ll use our writer’s notebooks to collect ideas that will make a good realistic-fiction story.”

Teach: “When I am thinking about ideas for a good story, I can use the charts we worked with yesterday to remind me of elements I want to include.”

“The first column is ‘main character.’ I can think about characters who are interesting people. Some writers say that all good fiction starts with the characters. The writer William Noble says, ‘Characters – people – are what give a story life.’

“Other writers say that the most important part of a story is the problem. Marion Dane Bauer (the author of On My Honor and other books) says, ‘A story, any story, is about someone struggling. The main character must have a problem he (or she) has to struggle to solve, or he must want something he has to struggle to get. If there is no struggle, there is no story.’

“I’ve jotted down some story ideas in my writer’s notebook. I kept in mind that I needed a character that could be real and a problem that could really happen.”

The teacher may copy the ideas on large chart paper or show them on a transparency; however, s/he should show the students the original page in his/her notebook.

“Here are three of my story ideas:

1. A boy who is very short for his age wins a writing contest for a chance to play in a special, exhibition-charity basketball game with a famous player. When the boys in his class find out, they tease him and tell him not to do it because he is too short and would be embarrassed. One boy offers him $50 for the winner’s letter. The boy struggles to decide what to do.

2. A big sister is pushing her baby sister in a stroller. She doesn’t like babysitting. She decides to have some fun. She goes to a park and tries to ride the back of the stroller down a steep hill. The stroller crashes, hurting the baby. The big sister struggles to decide whether to make up a story or tell her parents the truth about what happened.”
3. A getting-lost story. A character gets lost in a woods, at a huge hotel, or a mall, or the subway, or amusement park, etc. The character struggles with the real danger of being lost as well as being afraid.”

“Notice I wrote what the main character struggles with in each story. You don’t have to use that word, but remember what Marion Dane Bauer says – no struggle, no story.”

“Let me share some strategies I used to come up with these ideas. The first idea about the basketball player started when I was watching some boys playing basketball on a court near the park where I walk my dog. So one place to find ideas is to look for them in the world around you.”

The teacher starts a chart: “Strategies for Thinking of Story Ideas” and adds to it as s/he talks.

“The second idea came from an entry in my notebook. I’ve circled a part of it. (Teacher shows his/her notebook.) This entry is a memory about knocking my mom’s shiny new coffeepot off a table when I was playing with my brother and sister. The coffeepot had a huge, ugly dent in it. I turned the coffeepot around so the dent wouldn’t show. I tried to lie about it when she asked, but my mom knew right away, and I got in trouble for lying. This entry gave me an idea for a story about a character who hurts or breaks something and lies about it. So another place to find ideas is to look in your writer’s notebook.” (Add to strategy chart.)

“The last idea is not as developed as the other two, but I wrote it down because it interests me and I know I can think more about it. This idea came from reading Brave Irene. I don’t want to write a version of Brave Irene. William Steig already wrote that story. But it reminded me of stories in which characters are in real, physical danger. I thought a story about a character getting lost might give me the chance to play with that idea. So another strategy for getting ideas is from things you have read.” (Add to strategy chart.)

Note: For third-grade students, the teacher may want to introduce one or two strategies at a time over a few days.

Active Involvement: Students think about where they might find their first story idea. They turn and tell a partner how they are going to begin.

The teacher listens in to some of the ideas and shares one or two.

Link: “Start a list in your notebook of realistic-fiction story ideas. Put as many ideas down as you can. However, remember to include a character with a problem or a strong need and a way the character struggles with the problem. Try different strategies for getting ideas, and if you come up with new strategies, we’ll add them to our chart.”

At this point in the unit the teacher should encourage students to list many different ideas that fall within the realm of realistic fiction. Sometimes students fall in love with an idea
and want to write the whole story. Ask those students to jot down enough to remember the story later, but remind them that for now we are collecting a lot of ideas.

**Share:** The teacher can choose a few students to share some ideas and the strategies they used to generate their ideas. If new strategies for generating ideas are named, add them to the chart.

**Additional lessons for generating story ideas**

We want students to be engaged in gathering story ideas in their writer’s notebooks. The teacher can use student work or his/her own work to model ways to get ideas. Any of the strategies below can be taught as a mini-lesson. New strategies should be added to the class chart.

1. Re-read your writer’s notebook, circling ideas for characters and plots. Move them into fiction by changing something. Memories, overheard conversations, observations, and descriptions of people and places are good types of entries to encourage during this time.

2. Go out on an idea-gathering field trip. Or walk around the school. The teacher models how to use things noticed on a walk to generate and list story ideas in his/her own notebook – people, places, signs, animals, senses, etc. Then students do the same for homework, looking for ideas at play, at home, place of worship, sports, shopping, in the neighborhood, etc.

3. Add more observations of people to your writer’s notebook. Characters drive the story. Try to capture people by what they say, what they do, as well as how they look.

4. Bring in artifacts – objects, photographs, etc. Model using these to get story ideas.

5. Try saying, “What if…?” to come up with characters in interesting predicaments.

6. Feelings: think about times when you felt scared, worried, disappointed, etc. Also think about times when you were excited, happy, or proud. Use strong emotional situations to get story ideas.

7. One idea generates others. Put one of your favorite story ideas in the center of the page. Change the characters, the situation, or the problem to turn that idea into a new one. For example, a writer might have an idea for a story about a new girl in school who is struggling to hide the fact that she has a sprained ankle and cannot play jump rope. With a change of situation, this could become a story about a new girl in school who lies, telling everyone she has a sprained ankle so that she can cover up the fact that she doesn’t know the jump-rope games the other girls do. With a change of main character, this could become a story about a girl who teases and pushes a new girl into jumping rope, only to discover that she may have caused harm to the new girl because she has a sprained ankle.
Mini-lesson: Realistic Fiction–Building a Definition

Preparation: The teacher creates a chart with the words “Realistic Fiction” printed at the top.

Connect: “We’ve been reading books and discussing some of the elements that can be included in a realistic-fiction story.”

Teach: The teacher reads aloud a portion of a familiar text, modeling the way s/he is reading as a writer, noticing elements of the story. The teacher writes a few features on the definition chart.

Active Involvement: The teacher asks the students to share with a partner what they noticed about realistic fiction from the story. The teacher adds to the chart a few of the things the students notice.

The definition chart is ongoing. As the class moves through the unit, students will add additional noticings to this definition chart. When completed, the chart will include these elements:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Realistic Fiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A story that is not true, but could happen in real life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Characters are not real people, but they could be</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is usually one main character who has a problem or a need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main character is well developed with inner and outer character traits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The character struggles actively to solve the problem or get what s/he needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a resolution in which the character is changed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The resolution is true to life, not always perfect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The features on the list above are those elements that are common to all problem/solution realistic-fiction stories and belong on this definition chart. The students may bring up other things they notice which the teacher may recognize as craft features (such as a repeated line or the use of dialogue). When this happens, the class can discuss whether all realistic fiction would have that particular feature. If the class determines that the noticing is not true to all realistic fiction, then it can be jotted on a sticky note for continuing investigation. This can be something the students will look for in their work time. These sticky notes can become the beginning of an ongoing craft-noticings chart.

Work time: Students work with texts the teacher has selected, some of which may have been used when they were looking for the elements of realistic fiction, as well as others.
Students mark them with sticky notes when they find examples of elements already on the definition chart as well as any new noticings.

**Share:** Groups share and add to the class chart.

---

**Section Four: Immersion**

**Plot development from problem to resolution**

**Mini-lesson: Story structure**

**Preparation:** The teacher should use a previously read text the students have discussed.

**Connect:** “We have talked about how engaging stories are when they involve the reader in rooting for the success of the main character as he or she struggles with a problem.”

**Teach:** “Today I’m going to look back at a story we’ve read before, *Ruler of the Courtyard* by Rukhsana Khan.”

**Note:** Any book with a clear problem and a multi-step solution process would be good to use for this lesson (e.g., *Brave Irene* by William Steig or *Chicken Sunday* by Patricia Polacco). It is important that in the story selected, the main character is active in solving the problem.

“I’m going to examine what Rukhsana Khan has done to structure her story, how she develops her plot.” The teacher thinks aloud about how the author has written the story so that the main character is involved in a series of actions that help her solve her problem.

“Often writers plan out their stories. Let’s look at what Rukhsana Khan might have had in her notebook before writing *Ruler of the Courtyard*. We’re going to use a chart that has many of the same parts as our chart, The Elements of Realistic Fiction. However, this chart is more like a map of the way the story flows.”

The teacher has filled in the following on chart paper, using information that the students have already discussed during the immersion phase. (See Appendix for a copy of this template, Realistic Fiction Story Structure.)
REALISTIC FICTION STORY STRUCTURE

TITLE: Ruler of the Courtyard  AUTHOR: Rukhsana Khan

MAIN CHARACTER(S): Saba, a girl about 8-10 years old

SITUATION:
1. Time and place: present time, a farm in Pakistan, the courtyard where the chickens are kept
2. Other information the reader needs in order to understand the problem that will unfold:
   Saba is terrorized by the chickens that run loose in the courtyard. Her fear keeps her cooped up in the house.

PROBLEM:
Saba sees a snake coiled by the door in the bathhouse.

CHARACTERS’ ACTIONS IN THE STRUGGLE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM
(These boxes can include both successes and failures.)

RESOLUTION:
When she battles the snake alone, Saba discovers how courageous she can be. Afterward, Saba goes out into the courtyard laughing and chasing the chickens. She is no longer afraid of them.
“Now I’m going to reread part of the book to fill in the rest of this chart – what happens in the plot that leads to the resolution.” The teacher thinks aloud about how Rukhsana Khan takes her main character, Saba, from the situation in which she was afraid of the chickens to the resolution in which Saba is no longer afraid of the chickens. “The author gives her character this problem, confronting a dangerous snake. I think this is especially interesting in this story, because the author doesn’t actually have her main character involved in a problem with the chickens themselves.”

The teacher reads passages of the book, filling in the key events in the boxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHARACTERS’ ACTIONS IN THE STRUGGLE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(These boxes can include both successes and failures.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saba doesn’t scream because she doesn’t want Nani to come in the door and get bitten by the snake.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saba gets a long stick to attack the snake, but she is too afraid to do it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She tries to trap it under a bucket. She misses.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saba slams the bucket over the snake a second time. When she lifts it up to see if the snake is dead, she discovers that it is not a snake, but a string.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**RESOLUTION:**

When she battles the snake alone, Saba discovers how courageous she can be. Afterward, Saba goes out into the courtyard laughing and chasing the chickens. She is no longer afraid of them.

“I notice that the author does not have another character help her solve Saba’s problem. She struggles with it herself. That’s how she gets more courageous. Irene struggled with her problem herself in Brave Irene.”

**Note:** If the class has read Chicken Sunday, it can be used as another example in which the children do the work themselves to get Mr. Kodinski to trust them and to make the money to buy Miss Eula the hat.
“Notice, too, how quickly all this happens. It is probably not more than half an hour. Your stories don’t have to happen in half an hour, but when you think about all the books we’ve been studying, most of them happen in a short period of time—a few hours to a few days.”

**Link:** The teacher distributes a copy of the Realistic Fiction Story Structure template (see Appendix) to partners or small work groups. Students return to the book they worked on earlier or pick a new book from stacks of familiar realistic-fiction texts the teacher has selected for this work.

**Share:** The teacher picks two or three groups to share their charts. One point that the teacher makes as the students discuss the charts is that even though the structure of the plots is similar, within that structure there are hundreds of possibilities.

### Section Five: Character development

Creating characters with the attributes and motivation of real people is important when writing realistic fiction. Generally students create flat characters—without an inner life, without flaws and contradictions, and without strong needs. Often these characters are stereotypes borrowed from video games, television shows, and other popular culture sources.

In the next phase of this unit students choose and develop a character that will be the main character (the protagonist) of their story. After the character is developed, students will plot their stories. When students let their story ideas spring from a multi-dimensional character, the character’s motivation will drive the development of the plot.

**Mini-lesson: Choosing a character**

In this lesson, the teacher models using his/her notebook to choose a character that will become the main character in the story s/he will write. The teacher rereads his/her list of story ideas, observations of people, etc., thinking aloud about character choice.

The teacher models the importance of starting by creating a believable character. It is not necessary to write only about yourself, thinly disguised, or about people you know. But your own problems, needs, and wishes might give you the understanding to write about a character with similar problems, needs, and wishes. The people you know might give you insight into a fictional character with similarities to your friends, neighbors, schoolmates or relatives. For example, a person who was disappointed when she lost a talent show competition might have the understanding to write about a boy who loses a big race. The writer might know about racing from an older brother who runs track in school.

The teacher should also comment on characters s/he will not choose because s/he doesn’t understand enough about a person in that situation. For example, a young teacher who has lived in a city all her life probably wouldn’t choose to write about an elderly farmer in Iowa struggling to keep a sick cow alive.
Students spend their work time rereading their notebooks, choosing a character and beginning to list, web, or jot some thoughts about their character. At this point the students begin writing on pieces of paper that will be kept in their writing folders for the rest of this unit of study.

**Mini-lesson: Character traits**

In this lesson the teacher engages the students in creating a list of character traits of one of the characters from a text the students have been studying (e.g., *Brave Irene* by William Steig or *Picnic at Mudsock Meadow* by Patricia Polacco).

Readers can learn about a character in the following four ways:
- what the character does
- what the character thinks
- what the character says
- from a description of the character by the author

The teacher reads aloud selected passages of the text using the four ways characters are revealed. The character traits are charted. Then the students discuss which traits are the external attributes of the character (name, age, appearance, hair color, etc.) and what are the inner characteristics. The teacher explains that it is the inner character traits—the personality, the inner thoughts and feelings of the character—that bring that character to life for the reader and make us care about whether the character solves his or her problem.

Over the next several days students continue to develop their characters. These are possible topics for lists to help guide students:

1. External – gender, name, age, appearance, special physical features (example: very poor eyesight, lost without his glasses) This is a place where details from notebook observations can be used. Students can draw and then write.
2. Family members, background
3. School situation, friends
4. What the character likes
5. Who the character loves
6. What the character dislikes
7. Worries, fears of the character
8. What the character wants, dreams of
9. Things the character always says, always does
10. Places the character spends time
11. Things that make the character different from other people
12. The history of the character (example: nearly drowned when she was six)

Note: Initially the teacher should model one or two of these list ideas as mini-lessons and then brainstorm other possible lists with the students. In addition, students can reread
their notebooks, using some of their entries (e.g., observations, overheard conversations, descriptions of family and friends) to help develop authentic characters.

Emphasize to students that not all of this detail will end up in the finished story, but that the more they know about their character, that is, the more real this person is to them, the more real they will be able to make that person for their readers.

**Mini-lesson: Interviewing your character**

One technique used by many fiction writers is the character interview. The writer asks the character questions and then answers them as the character. The teacher can model creating questions that would bring out interesting information from the character the teacher is developing and then role-playing the question-and-answer interview for the students.

During work time students can do the following:
- write a series of interview questions and answer them on paper
- write the questions and a partner can ask them, recording the writer’s responses
- the class as a whole can create the interview questions with everyone answering the same questions
- the class creates many possible questions and students select some from the list

Note: The best questions go beyond basic facts avoiding the possibility for yes or no answers. Examples:

Tell about a time when you were really scared.
If you could change one thing about yourself, what would you change? Why?

Students may need to be reminded that they are answering as their characters, not as themselves.

**Creating a class character (for third-grade students):**

An option for character-development lessons the teacher can choose is to have students develop a class character as they create their own. Together the class generates lists of character traits for the class character, imagines scenarios for the character, and interviews the character with many students providing possible answers to interview questions. This option provides a common experience to refer to, in addition to the teacher’s modeling of his or her process in creating a story.
Section Six: Choosing a story idea for your character

Preparation: Students bring their writer’s notebooks and writing folders to the meeting area.

Connect: “For several days we have been working on a character for our realistic-fiction stories. We have been trying to imagine our characters as real people—people with good traits and bad, with hopes and disappointments, with likes and dislikes, with families and friends. We know our character’s inner thoughts. We know our characters well enough now to tell their stories.”

Teach: “I am going to show you how I might take all my writing about my character and use it with what I know about the structure of a realistic-fiction story. I have with me my character work from my folder and my writer’s notebook, in which I’ve been jotting story ideas.”

The teacher thinks aloud about the character s/he has been working on. The focus is on starting with character and envisioning scenarios in which the character struggles with a problem or a strong need that must be met. Ideas for the struggle can come from:
- A story idea collected previously in the notebook
- Material that emerged in the character-development phase
- Fresh ideas occurring to the writer today

The teacher writes the character’s name in the middle of a piece of chart paper and writes 3 – 5 story ideas around the name, thinking aloud about how s/he envisions this character in the story. The teacher includes one story idea in which the main character is not active in solving his or her own problem. S/he makes explicit the following considerations:

Choosing a story idea:
- The problem comes from character and from the situation.
- There isn’t a story without a struggle.
- There are steps in the struggle.
- The resolution comes from the efforts of the main character (who can have help).
- The ending isn’t necessarily perfect.

From the 3 – 5 story ideas on the chart, the teacher eliminates the one deliberately included to model excluding a story idea in which the character does not resolve his or her own problem. Frequently student writers put their characters into story problems in which the resolution comes from outside. For example, a boy needs money to buy his mother a birthday gift and finds a $20 bill on the sidewalk. A girl is constantly fighting with her older brother; then he goes away to college, stopping the fights.

The teacher chooses one idea that meets the criteria for a strong realistic-fiction story. S/he gives a brief oral synopsis of the story s/he envisions.

Active Involvement: Students write their character’s name in the center of a blank piece of paper from their writing folders. They put one story idea on the sheet. The teacher
observes what students are writing, chooses one or two to share with the group, commenting on ways those ideas meet the criteria for a strong realistic-fiction story.

**Link**: As the students go to work, the teacher reminds them to look through their writer’s notebooks and folders.

**Share**: Students share orally with a partner or small group a brief synopsis of the story idea they have chosen. Listeners can ask clarifying questions to draw out more thinking from the writer.

Additional mini-lesson: The teacher can model strategies for turning a weak idea into a stronger one. For example, in the story situation in which the boy needs money to buy a gift, the teacher writes the problem (no money) at the top of the page and the resolution (has money, buys Mom a gift) at the bottom of the page. In between, s/he brainstorms a list of all the ways the character could get from problem to resolution, based on who the character is and the life that has been imagined for him in all the character-development work. Then s/he circles ones in which the boy is active in getting money instead of having the money come from out of the blue.

**Mini-lesson: Completing a Realistic Fiction Story Structure map**

In this lesson the teacher models completing a story structure map for his or her story idea told orally in the previous lesson. Students are given blank copies of the same templates they have used to map the touchstone texts. (See Appendix for Realistic Fiction Story Structure template.) Students now use them to outline their own story—the one they told the day before. One focus of the lesson can be to remind students to add failures as well as successes to the struggle section of the story.

**Section Seven: Point of view try-its**

**Mini-lessons (two days): First-person and third-person point of view**

The final step before drafting is choosing the point of view from which the story will be told. The teacher models trying out the beginning or a key scene from his/her story as if the main character is telling it in the first person and then in the third person (i.e., using the character’s name and “he” or “she”). Students choose which point of view they want to try on the first day.

Note: They are not writing the entire story. Students work over a period of two days trying a piece of their stories from each point of view.

On the second day, students can look at samples from the touchstone texts to note ways that authors craft the flow of the story from each point of view.
The share each day is a process share. The class discusses and charts what is easy and what is difficult about telling a story from each point of view.

In guiding students’ understanding of point of view, teachers may want to have in mind the following advantages and disadvantages of using each point of view (adapted from What’s Your Story? by Marion Dane Bauer):

**First-person point of view**

**Disadvantages**
1. It is awkward to identify and describe the main character when the main character is narrating the flow of events.
2. It is tempting to tell, not show, events when the main character is narrating the story.
3. It seems artificial for the narrator to describe the setting when it is a place that is familiar to him or her. It is only natural for the narrator to comment on a setting when it is a place that is new to the character. In those situations, it is natural for a person to look around and note things.
4. The writer has to be careful about where the first-person narrator is in time. Is the story happening as the narrator is telling it? Is the narrator looking back? If the story problem is already solved at the time of the telling it can lose emotion or urgency.

**Advantages**
1. There is an intimacy and believability to a first-person story. Readers feel someone is talking directly to them.
2. It is easy to reveal thoughts and emotions of the main character in first person.
3. Students are familiar with telling oral first-person stories from their own lives.

**Third-person point of view**

**Disadvantage**
1. It is difficult to move inside a character to reveal thoughts and feelings.

**Advantages**
1. It is a traditional way to tell a written story. Readers (and writers!) know what to expect.
2. It is easier for writers to dramatize the action of the story – show not tell.

See the Appendix for suggested realistic fiction texts told in the first person and those told in third person.
Section Eight: Drafting

Students decide which point of view best suits their story, choose a mentor text written from that point of view, and begin to draft. By this point in the process they should have a rich familiarity with their character, a strong plot idea, and a skeletal outline of the way the plot unfolds. Students should draft quickly over a couple of days to get the sweep of the whole story down on paper.

One strategy a teacher can model for beginning to draft is to reread the leads of a number of the realistic-fiction touchstone texts and notice what the writer does to begin the story—a lead with dialogue; description of setting, character, or action; a mysterious statement; a question, etc. The writer Phyllis Whitney advises to begin a story by showing “a character with a problem doing something interesting.” Choose a lead type and begin. This kind of examination of lead types should be familiar to students from their work in the memoir unit of study.

There is a tension at this point in the writing between a planned plot outline and spontaneity. When asked “Do you know from the start how a book is going to end?” the writer Lois Lowry said, “I usually know the beginning and the ending, but not the middle until I sit down to write it. There are surprises along the way.” Share this quote from Lois Lowry and encourage students to use their plan, but to be open to the surprises along the way.

Section Nine: Revision

The following is a list of possible revision strategies especially useful in a realistic-fiction study. After reading students’ drafts, the teacher should select the revision strategies that best meet the students’ needs.

Mini-lesson: Show, don’t tell

Preparation: Students bring their drafts to the meeting area. The teacher provides sticky notes for the students.

Connect: “Now that we’ve written a first draft of our stories, we are ready to move to the next phase of the writing cycle – revision.

Teach: “The writer Robert Newton Peck says:

Readers want a picture … a picture made out of words. An amateur writer tells a story. A pro shows the story, creates a picture to look at instead of just words to read.

A good author writes with a camera, not with a pen.

The amateur writes: “Bill was nervous.”

The pro writes: “Bill sat in a dentist’s waiting room, peeling the skin at the edge of his thumb, until the raw, red
flesh began to show. Biting the torn cuticle, he ripped it away, and sucked at the warm sweetness of his own blood.

The difference is obvious. A reader can’t see nervous. So make a picture. Instead of telling me that Bill is nervous, show me Bill’s thumb.

All good writers show us, not just tell us. There are passages in the realistic-fiction books we’ve been studying that create very specific pictures or movies in your mind. One that is especially vivid for me is the opening scene of Bedhead, by Margie Palatini.”

The teacher places this passage or another from a text students are familiar with on a transparency for students to examine as s/he reads.

“As I read, raise your hand when you hear or see words or sentences that show, not tell. I’ll mark them and then we’ll name some of the things Margie Palatini is doing in her writing to create a movie in our minds.”

Shuffle-schlump. Shuffle-schlump. Shuffle-schlump, schlumped bleary-eyed Oliver out of bed, down the hall, and into the bathroom.

He yawned.
He yanked.
Splashed some water.
Swished some mouthwash.
Gave his front teeth a passable brushing.
And then…
In a gunkless corner of the soapy silver soap dish…in a fogless smidgen of his father’s foggy shaving mirror…right there on the hot water faucet, for heaven’s sake…he saw it!

It was BIG.
It was BAD.
It was…
BEDHEAD!
Oliver’s hair was out of control
Way out of control.
There was hair going this way. Hair going that way. Hair going up. Down. Around and around. And there was one teeny tiny clump of hair way at the back of his head that looked just like a cat’s coughed up fur ball.”

(See Appendix for a copy of this excerpt.)

The teacher charts the things the students may notice:

- Onomatopoeia (shuffle-schlump) bringing sound into the action
- Strong and specific verbs (yawned, yanked, swished, etc.)
- Detailed description (gunkless corner of the soapy silver soap dish)
- Repetition that brings the reader’s attention to things the writer wants us to dwell on
- Figurative language (a clump of hair that looked just like a cat’s coughed up fur ball)

**Active Involvement:** Students look through their drafts and put a sticky note on one or more places to bring the action to life instead of just telling about what happened.

**Link:** “When you are revising your drafts today, remember to show, not tell. Choose places in your story where something important is going on, something you really want your readers to be able to see in their minds.”

**Share:** An author’s chair share is used on this day. The teacher selects a few students to read their “before” and “after” selections, using the show-not tell strategy in the same way Robert Newton Peck did with “Bill was nervous.”

**Additional mini-lesson:**
Frequently students need help in pinpointing where to apply a show-not tell strategy. It is usually most effective during the first appearance of the problem, during a scene or two of the struggle, and at the climax of the story in which the problem is resolved.

The teacher should model ways to find those places in his/her writing in which a show-not tell strategy can improve the story. The following lists two common places for this revision strategy:
- when describing the qualities of a character (e.g., He was nervous. She acted mean.)
- when there isn’t enough writing to help the reader envision what is happening

A strategy to teach students (or remind them of) is to have them close their eyes and see the movie in their minds. Remind them to turn up the sound on the movie! Ask them to write down what they see, hear, touch, smell, taste – whichever senses are appropriate.

**Mini-lesson: Inner thoughts and feelings of the main character**

Note: Students learned about including the inner thoughts, feelings, and experiences of a character in the “Internal Story” lesson in the memoir unit of study. Students can be reminded of those techniques. The following is an additional mini-lesson about the inner experiences of characters.

**Connect:** “We have been noticing that one way authors engage us in caring about the characters in realistic fiction is by telling us what is going on inside the character.”
Teach: The teacher shows students an overhead transparency containing the following passage from the short story “Mother’s Clothes” from the book *Petty Crimes* by Gary Soto. S/he asks the students to notice the different ways Gary Soto lets us know what the main character, Alma, is thinking and feeling. (*Brave Irene* by William Steig is another good model for this lesson.)

(In this story, Alma’s mother has died young, of cancer. Alma’s father has given all of her mother’s clothes away to charitable organizations, much to Alma’s dismay.)

Alma might have forgotten about the clothes, except a week later, while she was at the 7-Eleven, she saw a woman wearing her mother’s blue sweater. For a moment Alma thought it *was* her mother. The woman was the same height, and her hair was curled.

“Oh no!” she caught herself saying.

The woman stood in front of the dry cleaner’s and appeared to be waiting for someone. She was looking off in the distance, across the street. Alma followed the woman’s gaze and saw children coming home in groups of threes and fours. Then the woman suddenly smiled at her, a smile that was easy and natural. Alma turned away and saw her own face reflected in the window of the 7-Eleven. It held an expression of horror.

Since they lived in a small town with more second-hand stores than fashionable boutiques, with dozens of Saturday-morning yard sales and a grand swap meet at the drive-in, Alma imagined that her mother’s clothes were being worn everywhere in the town. She imagined women zipping into dresses, buttoning blouses, tugging legs into pants, smoothing their sweaters of wrinkles before they left the house. She imagined these women before mirrors, turning in the silvery light. She saw them shrugging into her mother’s jackets, her shoes. And she imagined the socks tumbling in dryers, or weeping gray tears from the clotheslines. …

(See Appendix for a copy of this excerpt.)

The teacher thinks aloud, noticing one or two of the following:
- **Paragraph #1**: The author writes, “Alma thought.”
- **Paragraph #2**: Alma is talking to herself when she says “Oh no!”
- **Paragraph #3**: The author has Alma catch a glimpse of herself reflected in store window so that she sees her own feeling of horror.
- **Paragraph #4**: The author tells us a long, detailed list of all that Alma imagined, the images in her mind.
Active Involvement: Students note techniques not mentioned by the teacher through which Alma’s inner thoughts and feelings are revealed.

Link: Students are reminded to look for places in their drafts to add characters’ thoughts and feelings.

Share: Students share with a partner, or the teacher selects a variety of student examples for an author’s chair.

Additional mini-lesson:
The teacher can model examining additional mentor texts to find more ways authors reveal the inner life of characters. Some are simple–using words such as thought, wondered, imagined, said to her/himself, etc. Other stories contain extended passages of inner dialogue, including self-questioning (Ruler of the Courtyard by Rukhsana Khan).

Mini-lesson: Dialogue

Preparation: The teacher has selected a number of the familiar books from the realistic-fiction touchstones. It is good to have a mix of first-person and third-person point of view and a mix of those books that rely heavily on dialogue (examples: Ira Sleeps Over by Bernard Waber and I Am Not Sleepy and I Will Not Go to Bed by Lauren Child) and those that use dialogue sparingly (examples: Fireflies! by Julie Brickloe and Brave Irene by William Steig). John Coy’s Strong to the Hoop has a balanced mix of action, interspersed with dialogue, interspersed with inner monologue.

Connect: “I’ve notice that many of you are trying what the authors of realistic fiction do–using dialogue in your stories.”

Teach: “Almost all realistic-fiction stories have dialogue. Dialogue is not the same as everyday conversation.

“Dialogue is also like the talking between people, but the difference is that a lot of the conversation that goes on in real life is boring.”

“Hello.”
“Oh, hi.”
“What are you doing?”
“Nothing.”
“Me, too.”
“Wanna go down to the mall?”
“ No, not right now.”

“The writer William Noble calls dialogue a special kind of conversation–conversation with drama. Dialogue is one of the most important tools for a realistic-fiction writer because good dialogue can help bring your story to life.”
“Authors use dialogue in a story for two purposes:
1. to move the plot forward
2. to let us know something about the character by what the character says”

The teacher has a section of dialogue from a text on a transparency and highlights a few things s/he notices about dialogue to model for students ways in which they might approach the task.

**Active Involvement:** The teacher invites students to tell a partner techniques used in some of the transparency’s text that they notice that the teacher hasn’t yet commented upon. The teacher listens in to a few partnerships and shares with the whole group. A chart of noticings about dialogue is started.

**Link:** Students work with a partner to study the author’s use of dialogue in one of the touchstone texts. They look at the overall pattern of dialogue in the text as well as at techniques within sections or lines of dialogue.

**Share:** Students quote actual lines of dialogue from a text, explaining how the dialogue moves the plot along or serves to reveal character, or both. The quotes and noticings are written on the chart.

In the mini-lesson the next day the teacher models adding, cutting, or revising dialogue from his or her story, using the chart of dialogue noticings.

**Other possible revision lessons**

1. **Endings** – Return to the lesson on reflective endings in the memoir unit to remind students of what they know about the ending of a story. Examine the realistic-fiction texts in a mini-inquiry on types of endings used in this genre. Then students revise their ending, using noticings from their inquiry.

2. **Crafting a title** – Build on lessons from previous units of study

3. **Passage of time** – Is it clear? Students can do a mini-inquiry of ways authors in the realistic fiction mentor texts indicate passage of time. Often it is explicit: use of words such as “yesterday, later that night, on Sunday, minutes passed.” Students can be encouraged to replace “then” with other, more descriptive words to indicate the passage of time. The teacher can also design a lesson using examples from realistic fiction in which the author has used more subtle ways to indicate time, such as describing a character coming downstairs to breakfast so that the reader knows it is morning.

4. **The craft of language** – Attention to memorable language, figurative language, strong verbs, word play, repetition, etc. Replacing “tired” words (good, fun, nice, etc.) with specific images.
Section Ten: Editing

Mini-lesson: Thinking about how to edit our realistic-fiction stories, alone and with a partner

Connect: “Our realistic fiction stories are drafted and revised. We are ready to share our writing with readers, but we will need to edit them the best we can, so that other people can read them.”

Teach: The teacher and students review and add to the ongoing editing chart. This chart can be the basis for an editing checklist for all to use. The teacher will have in mind what should be on this list, depending on what skills have been taught and expected from the students in the class (punctuation, grammar, spelling, capitalization, etc.). Each section of the chart can begin with a question such as, “What do we know about capitalization conventions?”

The punctuation for dialogue is one convention students will need to know in this genre.

Students may break from conventions if they are using craft elements from a mentor text. An example of this might be the deliberate use of a sentence fragment.

Discuss what students should do when they recognize words they know are misspelled, but don’t know where to find the correct spellings. The criteria should match the lessons given so far in the class. Perhaps students are responsible for words on the word wall, close approximations by sounded-out spelling, and a have-a-go with a dictionary or other spelling resource.

Depending on the time of year, there may be anywhere from seven to fifteen items on the list to start. It is better to have fewer items upon which students can concentrate than too many. This editing checklist will grow over the course of the year as new skills are learned.

First, students read through their own writing carefully, out loud, changing anything they can. Then, on the same day or another day, students read their work with a partner who helps them edit their pieces.

Note: The teacher can become the final editor of these pieces, going over them after the students have had a go at it. The teacher should always include the student’s final draft (before teacher edits) in the students’ portfolios. When the teacher is the final editor, that work should be followed by an editing conference during which the teacher chooses one thing to teach the student.
Section Eleven: Celebration

When the pieces are edited and published, it is time for students to do what authors do—celebrate their effort and send their writing out into the world to be shared. Celebrations need not be elaborate. Students can read to each other, parents can be invited to hear readings of the stories, another class can partner in sharing memoirs, and students can place their work in the class library or the school library.

Section Twelve: Reflection

The teacher spends a day in Writer’s Workshop reflecting on the unit of study with the students. The teacher asks students to write a final reflection addressing what they learned about writing realistic fiction and what they want to learn more about as writers.
APPENDIX

Book list
Text excerpts:

*Bedhead*

“Mother’s Clothes”

Graphic organizers:

  - Realistic Fiction Elements
  - Realistic Fiction Story Structure
# BOOK LIST FOR A REALISTIC FICTION UNIT OF
# STUDY GRADES 3-5

## Picture Books

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>FIRST PERSON:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If Nathan Were Here</td>
<td>Bahr, Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fireflies</td>
<td>Brickloe, Julie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin Woo</td>
<td>Bunting, Eve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Bird About to Sing</td>
<td>Montenegro, Laura Nyman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Name is Yoon</td>
<td>Recorvits, Helen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Tenth Good Thing About Barney</td>
<td>Viorst, Judith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ira Sleeps Over</td>
<td>Waber, Bernard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Something Special For Me</td>
<td>Williams, Vera B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Am Not Sleepy and I Will Not Go to Bed</td>
<td>Child, Lauren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong to the Hoop</td>
<td>Coy, John</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best Friends</td>
<td>Kellogg, Steven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mama’s Way</td>
<td>Ketteman, Helen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruler of the Courtyard</td>
<td>Khan, Rukhsana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just One Flick of a Finger</td>
<td>Lorbiecki, Marybeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicken Sunday</td>
<td>Polacco, Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Rotten, Redheaded Older Brother</td>
<td>Polacco, Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Jones Family Express</td>
<td>Steptoe, Javaka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Gracie Aunt</td>
<td>Woodson, Jacqueline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>THIRD PERSON:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>Allen, Judy (out of print, get used or at libraries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Honest-to-Goodness Truth</td>
<td>McKissack, Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JoJo’s Flying Side Kick</td>
<td>Pinkney, Brian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ticky-Tacky Doll</td>
<td>Rylant, Cynthia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emma’s Rug</td>
<td>Say, Allen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too Many Tamales</td>
<td>Soto, Gary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinky Sulks</td>
<td>Steig, William</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What Mary Jo Shared</td>
<td>Udry, Janice May</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Junk Pile!</td>
<td>Borton, Lady</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tonio’s Cat (many Spanish language phrases)</td>
<td>Calhoun, Mary (available used, libraries)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-Long’s New Year</td>
<td>Gower, Catherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Luke Goes to Bat</td>
<td>Isadora, Rachel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vegetable Dreams (in English &amp; Spanish)</td>
<td>Jeffers, Dawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My Dog is Lost!</td>
<td>Keats, Ezra Jack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bedhead</td>
<td>Palatini, Margie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picnic at Mudsock Meadow</td>
<td>Polacco, Patricia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You’re Not My Best Friend Anymore</td>
<td>Pomerantz, Charlotte</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Present for Mrs. Kazinski  
The Story of the Little Black Dog  
Brave Irene  
Suki’s Kimono  
Home by Five

Reynolds, Marilynn  
Spooner, J. B.  
Steig, William  
Uegaki, Chieri  
Wallace-Brodeur, Ruth (available used, or in libraries)

### Anthologies of Short Stories

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Circuit</td>
<td>Jimenez, Francisco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Soledad”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More Funny Stories</td>
<td>(chosen by) McGough, Roger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“In the Shower with Andy”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Living Thing</td>
<td>Rylant, Cynthia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Slower Than the Rest”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baseball in April and Other Stories</td>
<td>Soto, Gary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Barbie”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The No-Guitar Blues”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“La Bamba”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Marble Champ”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty Crimes</td>
<td>Soto, Gary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Mother’s Clothes”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shuffle-schlump. Shuffle-schlump. Shuffle-schlump, schlumped bleary-eyed Oliver out of bed, down the hall, and into the bathroom.

He yawned.
He yanked.
Splashed some water.
Swished some mouthwash.
Gave his front teeth a passable brushing.
And then…
In a gunkless corner of the soapy silver soap dish…in a fogless smidgen of his father’s foggy shaving mirror…right there on the hot water faucet, for heaven’s sake…he saw it!
It was BIG.
It was BAD.
It was…
BEDHEAD!
Oliver’s hair was out of control
Way out of control.
There was hair going this way. Hair going that way. Hair going up. Down. Around and around. And there was one teeny tiny clump of hair way at the back of his head that looked just like a cat’s coughed up fur ball.

From Bedhead by Margie Palatini
Alma might have forgotten about the clothes, except a week later, while she was at the 7-Eleven, she saw a woman wearing her mother’s blue sweater. For a moment Alma thought it was her mother. The woman was the same height, and her hair was curled.

“Oh no!” she caught herself saying.

The woman stood in front of the dry cleaner’s and appeared to be waiting for someone. She was looking off in the distance, across the street. Alma followed the woman’s gaze and saw children coming home in groups of threes and fours. Then the woman suddenly smiled at her, a smile that was easy and natural. Alma turned away and saw her own face reflected in the window of the 7-Eleven. It held an expression of horror.

Since they lived in a small town with more second-hand stores than fashionable boutiques, with dozens of Saturday-morning yard sales and a grand swap meet at the drive-in, Alma imagined that her mother’s clothes were being worn everywhere in the town. She imagined women zipping into dresses, buttoning blouses, tugging legs into pants, smoothing their sweaters of wrinkles before they left the house. She imagined these women before mirrors, turning in the silvery light. She saw them shrugging into her mother’s jackets, her shoes. And she imagined the socks tumbling in dryers, or weeping gray tears from the clotheslines. …

From “Mother’s Clothes” in the collection *Petty Crimes* by Gary Soto
REALISTIC FICTION STORY STRUCTURE

TITLE: _____________________________________________________________

AUTHOR: ___________________________________________________________

MAIN CHARACTER(S): ________________________________________________

SITUATION
Time and place: ____________________________________________________

Other information the reader needs in order to understand the problem that will unfold:

_________________________________________________________________

PROBLEM:

_________________________________________________________________

CHARACTERS’ ACTIONS IN THE STRUGGLE TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM
(These boxes can include both successes and failures.)

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

RESOLUTION:

_________________________________________________________________