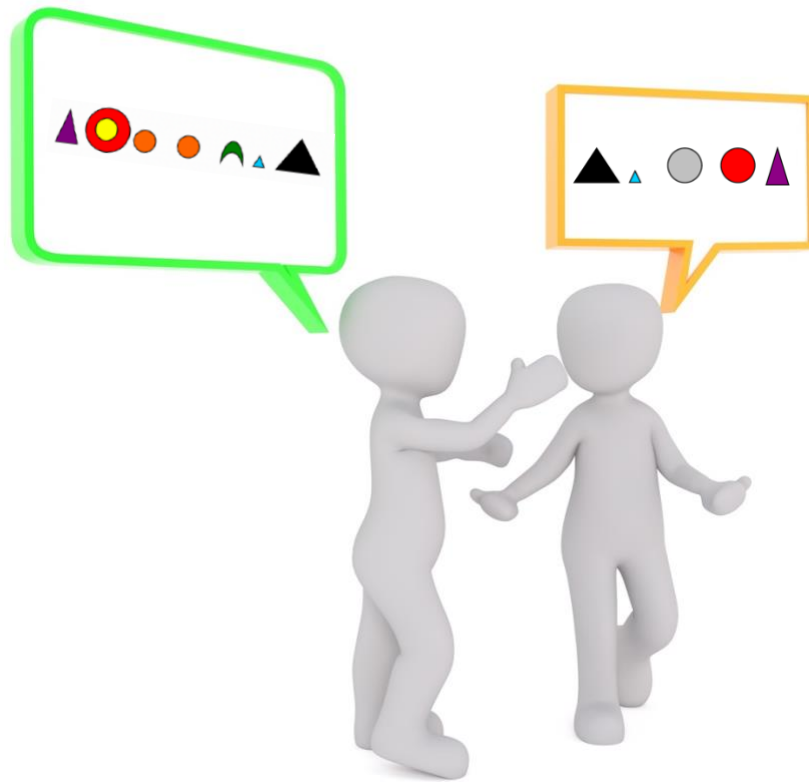


# For the **Love of Language!** evidence-based literacy lessons for upper elementary classrooms



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**Second Edition**

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# For the Love of Language!

## Evidence-Based Practices in Literacy

### Introduction

Children’s Readiness – Academically Responsive Teaching	1
Children’s Learning Strengths – Culturally Responsive Teaching	2
The Science of Reading	3
The Simple View of Reading	3
Scarborough’s Reading Rope	4
Supplemental Programs and Materials – A Brief Cautionary Note	4
Writing Leads to Reading	5
Writing and Grammar	
Writing and Follow-ups	
Journaling	
A Few Words about Read-Alouds	6
A Few Words about Free Reading	7
A Few Words about Book Groups	8
Organization of This Album	9

## Part I: Scarborough’s Reading Rope in E-II

### Word Recognition

<b>Phonological Skills (Auditory Skills)</b>	<b>10</b>
The Significance of Phonological Skills	
Games to Assess Phonological Skills	
<b>Decoding (Associating a Grapheme with a Phoneme)</b>	<b>14</b>
The Significance of Decoding	
Decoding Fluency (Reading Fluency)	
Assessing Decoding Fluency	
Remediating Deficits in Decoding Fluency	
Decoding Instruction in Upper Elementary (for all students)	
Pre-Spelling Lessons (Syllabication)	
Phonics-Based Approaches to Teaching Spelling	
Word Study and Spelling	
<i>Prefixes Change Meaning</i>	
<i>Suffixes Change Function</i>	
Handwriting	
<b>Sight Recognition</b>	<b>24</b>

### Language Comprehension

<b>Background Knowledge</b>	<b>25</b>
The Significance of Background Knowledge	
Background Knowledge in Montessori	

Note-Taking to Support Building Background Knowledge  
Presentation One: Read the Question First  
Presentation Two: Two-Column Note Taking from Text (Main Idea Provided)  
Presentation Three: Creating 2-Column Notes from Text  
Presentation Four: Two-Column Note Taking in a Lesson (Main Idea Provided)  
Background Knowledge and Equity

## **Vocabulary**

**33**

The Significance of Vocabulary  
Building Vocabulary  
Vocabulary Learned from a Literacy-Rich Environment  
Self-Taught Vocabulary  
Activity One: Word Detective  
Reading at Home  
Vocabulary Building through Direct Instruction and Activities  
Vocabulary Study Guides  
Activity One: Retirement Party for Tired, Old Words  
Building a Vocabulary of Emotions and Feelings  
Activity One: Explore Feelings that Come from Emotions  
Activity Two: Identifying Feelings  
Activity Three: Feelings Charades  
Activity Four: Tell a Popcorn Story  
Activity Five: 3-Step Process to Help a Child Self-Regulate  
Activity Six: Vocabulary Games in the Classroom  
Vocabulary and Equity

## **Language Structure**

**50**

The Significance of Language Structure  
Language Structure – Instructional Trends in Mainstream Education  
Language Structure in Montessori  
Explicit Instruction in Grammar  
Explicit Instruction in Structured Writing – Complete Sentences  
Explicit Instruction in Structured Writing – More Elegant Sentences  
Activity One: Improve my Sentence!  
Activity Two: Ticket to Go!  
Language Structure, Equity, and Inclusivity

## **Verbal Reasoning**

**56**

The Significance of Verbal Reasoning  
Inference  
Activity One: Inferring Meaning from Gestures (Feelings)  
Activity Two: Inferring Meaning from Photos  
Activity Three: Inferring Meaning from the Settings of Stories  
Building Inference Skills through Cultural Studies (Who Am I? at the E-II level)  
A Slight Digression: Fact vs. Opinion  
Literary Devices: Analogies, Metaphors, and Similes  
Activity One: Complete the Analogy

Using Similes and Metaphors to Express Analogies	
Activity Two: Evaluating Similes and Metaphors	
Activity Three: Turning Analogies into Similes or Metaphors	
Literary Devices: Onomatopoeia and Alliteration (Assonance and Consonance)	
Literary Device: Hyperbole	
Literary Device: Idioms	
Activity One: Playing with Idioms	
<b>Literacy Knowledge</b>	<b>67</b>
The Significance of Literacy Knowledge	
Genres of Literature – The Big Picture	
The Sentence Level	68
Presentations as Needed: Lessons with Classic Montessori Materials	
Sentence Writing Activities (short, repeatable, and fun)	
Prose (A Sidebar for Guides)	
Writing Around the Curriculum	
Expository vs. Narrative Writing	
Elements of Expository and Narrative Writing- Conventions/Grammars	
The Paragraph Level and Beyond	72
The Basic Paragraph	73
Presentation One: A Paragraph is a Team of Sentences	
The Descriptive Paragraph	75
Presentation One: Waking Up Dormant Senses	
Presentation Two: Descriptions that Combine Underutilized Senses	
Presentation Three: Show! Don't Tell!	
The Expository Paragraph	83
Presentation One: The Body: Topic Sentences Specify the Number of Main Points	
Presentation Two: The Body: Topic Sentences Suggest a Sequence of Events	
Presentation Three: Main Ideas and Supporting Details (The Toppings)	
<i>First Passage: Adding Supporting Details, Main Ideas are Provided</i>	
<i>Second Passage: Organizers for Mapping Ideas and Supporting Details</i>	
<i>Third Passage: Using Organizers to Write a Paragraph</i>	
Presentation Four: Topic and Concluding Sentences (Just the Buns)	
Presentation Five: Transition Words (The Gourmet Burger)	
Presentation Six: Planning and Writing an Awesome Expository Paragraph	
The Multi-Paragraph/Essay Level	106
Presentation One: The Structure of a Multi-Paragraph Essay	
<i>Writing a 5-Paragraph Essay from a Provided Plan</i>	
<i>Planning and Writing a 5-Paragraph Essay</i>	
Presentation Two: Reading Multi-Paragraph Pieces	
Presentation Three: The Formal Research Paper.	
<i>Brainstorm, Choose a Topic, Gather Resources</i>	
<i>Plan the Big Ideas and Create a Bibliography</i>	
<i>Research Facts</i>	
<i>Organize - Sort Facts Into and Within Paragraphs</i>	
<i>Rough and Final Drafts</i>	

Narratives	129
Narrative Genres for Reading and Writing	
Presentation One: Characters in Narratives	
Narrative Writing Lessons and Applications	
Presentation Two: Basic Story Elements – the Story-Planner Sentence	
Presentation Three: Story Grammars	
<i>Defining and Diagramming Story Grammars</i>	
<i>Beginning, Middle and Especially The End</i>	
<i>Rising Action- The Middle</i>	
<i>Setting</i>	
<i>Writing Lab – Planning the Beginning</i>	
<i>Writing Lab – Writing the Beginning</i>	
<i>Writing Lab – Diagramming and Writing the Rest of the Story</i>	
<i>Writing Lab Extension: Rotating Stories</i>	
Presentation Four: Dialog	
Drama	157
Readers’ Theater and Plays	
Poetry	158
Presentation One: Defining and Reading Poetry	
<i>Continuing the Practice of Reading Poetry</i>	
<i>Poetry, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Inclusivity</i>	
Presentation Two: Writing Poetry	
<i>Acrostic Poetry</i>	
<i>Concrete Poetry</i>	
<i>Haiku</i>	
<i>Cinquain</i>	
<i>Diamante</i>	
<i>Rhymed Verse</i>	
<i>Free Verse</i>	

## **Part II: Lessons with Traditional Montessori Materials**

<b>Grammar Preface and Roadmap</b>	<b>183</b>
<b>Level I: 9 Basic Parts of Speech &amp; Sentence Analysis</b>	
<b>Assessing and Remediating Prior Learning</b>	<b>185</b>
Verb Family Review	
Noun Family Review	
<b>Complete Sentences</b>	<b>197</b>
Explaining Complete Sentences	
Presentation One: Simple, Simple Sentences	
Presentation Two: Incorporating Noun and Verb Families into Complete Sentences	
Presentation Three: Run-ons and Fragments	
<b>Sentence Analysis Review</b>	<b>208</b>

<b>Preliminary Studies</b>	<b>216</b>
<b>Preliminary Study of Phrases and Clauses</b>	<b>218</b>
Defining <i>Phrase</i> and <i>Clause</i>	
Types of Clauses	
Types of Phrases	
<b>Preliminary Verb Family Study</b>	<b>225</b>
Verb Tense (Simple Tenses)	
Personal Pronouns: Person and Number	
Personal Pronouns as Objects, Pronoun Choice	
Verb Conjugation, Simple Indicative Mood - The Little Red Verb Box	
Verb Types: Transitive and Intransitive	
Indirect Object (Select Sentences with Transitive Verbs)	
Types of Simple Adverbs: Time, Place, Manner	
More types of Simple Adverbs: Degree, Number, Doubt, Negative, Affirmative	
<b>Preliminary Noun Family Study</b>	<b>254</b>
Formation of Plural Nouns	
Noun types: Common/Concrete vs. Abstract	
Noun types: Collective and Proper	
Types of Adjectives:	
- Limiting Adjectives: Demonstrative, Possessive, Numerical, Interrogative	
- Descriptive Adjectives: Opinion, Size, Age, Shape, Color, Material, Purpose (and Comma Rules for Adjectives in Series)	
Adjective Sequence <u>in English</u>	
Pronoun Confusion	
<b>Preliminary Preposition Study</b>	<b>275</b>
Simple Prepositional Phrases	
Applied Prepositional Phrases (Adverbial Modifiers)	
Tricky Distinctions: adverbs vs. prepositions	
<b>Preliminary Conjunction Study</b>	<b>283</b>
Coordinating Conjunctions & Subordinating Conjunctions	
Types of Sentences	
<b>Interjections</b>	<b>291</b>
<b>Culmination, Level I: The Necessary Nine and the Fab Five</b>	<b>292</b>
Review: The 9 Basic Parts of Speech and the 5 Core Elements of Sentences	

## Level II: Refinements and Advanced Grammar

<b>Secondary Verb Family Study</b>	<b>295</b>
Review of Transitive and Intransitive verbs	
Transitive Verbs and Object Complements	
Transitive Verb Voice: Active, Passive, Reflexive Voices	
Intransitive Verb Types: Complete and Linking	
Yet More Adverb Types: Interrogative & Conjunctive Adverbs	
Adverb Usage	

<b>Verbals</b>	<b>310</b>
The Infinitive	
The Participle	
The Gerund	
Verbal Usage	
<b>Secondary Noun Family Study</b>	<b>319</b>
Appositives (a.k.a. Nouns in apposition).	
Adjectival Appositives and Complements of Specification	
Types of Pronouns: Personal (review), Demonstrative and Indefinite	
Types of Pronouns: Possessives	
Less-Used Types of Pronouns: Interrogative, Numerical, Reflexive, Reciprocal	
<b>Secondary Preposition Study</b>	<b>334</b>
Types of Prepositions: Simple, Compound, and Phrasal	
<b>Secondary Conjunction Study</b>	
Types of Subordinating Conjunctions	
Relative Conjunctions (Conjunctive Pronouns)	
<b>Secondary Phrases and Clauses</b>	<b>343</b>
Review of Phrase and Clause Types	
Degrees of Subordination	
Restrictive and Nonrestrictive Clauses (who vs. whom, that vs. which)	
Parallelism	

### **Level III: Advanced Verb Conjugation**

<b>Tertiary Verb Family Study</b>	<b>357</b>
Moods	
Indicative Mood, Active Voice, Simple Tense Conjugation (Review)	
Compound Tenses	
Subsequent Presentations: Subjunctive and Imperative Moods, Passive Voice	

### **Grammar Appendix**

<b>25 Most Important Grammar Mistakes</b>	<b>382</b>
<b>Punctuation Rules</b>	
Comma Conventions	
Semicolon Conventions	
Colon Conventions	
<b>Miscellaneous Lessons of Historical Significance</b>	
<i>These lessons have traditionally been included in Montessori language albums. Because language often reflects societal trends, these lessons are less relevant today than they once were for native English speakers. It is possible that one or more of them may be helpful for multi-language learners, so they have been included in the album in this appendix.</i>	
Noun Family Study: Article types	
Noun Family Study: Adjective formation -- Three Degrees of Comparison	
Noun Family Study: Gender (Masculine & Feminine)	
Noun Family Study: Gender (Common Gender)	
Noun Family Study: Gender (Neutral Gender)	

## **Evidence-Based Practices in Literacy Introduction**

Language instruction in upper elementary involves building on the foundational skills that were established in early childhood and lower elementary classrooms. Lessons and activities help students to develop more advanced reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. The focus shifts from individual words and simple sentences to larger passages of text, such as paragraphs, essays, and books. Writing and reading instruction extends literal comprehension to include inferred meaning. These goals are universal – every educational pedagogy agrees with these objectives.

There are two things that set Montessori language instruction apart from more traditional methods: our philosophy of Cosmic Education and our amazing didactic materials.

Cosmic education is a core component of our method. It dictates that we provide students with a holistic and interconnected view of the world. In the Montessori upper elementary classroom, the goals of literacy instruction do not stand alone; they are interwoven with those of cultural studies to create a cohesive and meaningful curriculum. In application, that means that literacy is not a stand-alone program that we bring out each day and then put back on the shelf. We teach literacy concepts in isolation (often through mini-lessons) and then apply them throughout the curriculum.

The primary didactic Montessori materials used in upper elementary are grammar symbols for parts of speech and circles/arrows for syntax. (Most upper elementary classrooms forgo the grammar boxes. Developmentally, children get the most from these materials in lower elementary.) Some materials continue to use tickets for sorting activities. However, the majority of these tickets are used for demonstrations in lessons. There will sometimes be tickets for independent use in advanced word study, but upper elementary classrooms usually do not have the giant word towers that are found in many lower elementary classrooms.

### **Children’s Readiness – Academically Responsive Teaching**

Children come to upper elementary with a wide variety of skills. Some will have mastered the process of writing simple sentences, and some will not. Some will have a fairly good handle on all nine parts of the basic speech and others will still be working on noun and verb family members. Some will be reading at the middle school level (or even higher), while others will still be developing their decoding skills. How do we meet such diverse language needs? Through preparation and flexibility.

The Montessori curriculum provides for both. The curriculum allows us to be prepared with lessons for children at both ends of the writing, grammar, and reading spectra. We assess children’s abilities and needs and meet them with group lessons and individual coaching that meets them where they are and keeps them progressing. Because of this, some lessons in the upper elementary album are quite remedial for many fourth-year children and some are a stretch for most sixth years. No child will receive all of the lessons in this album! Some of the most remedial lessons may never be needed in one upper elementary classroom, while some of the most advanced lessons may never see the light of day in another. So do not fret that there is curriculum in the album that you have not covered as long as you are meeting the needs of your students, because in Montessori, we teach the child who is in front of us.



## Children's Learning Strengths - Culturally Responsive Teaching

Language is a powerful expression of culture. So, too, are the mechanisms by which we learn. In *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain*<sup>1</sup>, Zaretta Hammond discusses two common cultural archetypes that have widespread implications for how we interact with one another, including how we learn: collectivism and individualism. According to Hammond, these archetypes “reflect fundamentally different ways the brain organizes itself.” Individualism focuses on independence and individual achievement; learning happens through independent, individual study and reading. Collectivism focuses on interdependence and group success; learning happens through interaction and dialogue. These archetypes are end-members of a continuum – individuals fall somewhere between the two.

The implication for guides is that we need to use a range of instructional strategies including opportunities for individual work, group discussion / brainstorming, and collaboration. These strategies, as well as appropriate use of technological tools should also be part of children's follow-up work.

We also want to be aware that our students are busily developing their sense of self and where they fit in the classroom, local, and global communities. This elevates the importance of using text that authentically reflects the local culture and that of the global majority, to provide a voice to those who have historically gone unheard. And as educators for peace, we also want to provide content that promotes cultural understanding and inclusivity and promotes social justice. The nonprofit group Teaching for Change has created a guide for selecting anti-bias children's books: <https://socialjusticebooks.org/guide-for-selecting-anti-bias-childrens-books/>. This website provides not only pre-screened titles, but also a discussion around how to systematically check books that may already be in your library.

- the illustrations for stereotypes, tokenism, and invisibility.
- Check the story line for how it handles power relationships.
- Look at messages about different lifestyles.
- Consider the effect of the story line on children's self- and social-identities.
- And more.

The University of Arizona has created a similar guide with some ideas that overlap the resource from Teaching for Change and others that are unique and valuable.

<https://wowlit.org/links/evaluating-global-literature/10-quick-ways-to-analyze-childrens-books-for-racism-and-sexism/>

Throughout this album, passages are provided to illustrate different concepts. They were chosen to be culturally respectful and at least somewhat diverse. More work could (and will) be done in this area. If you have access to passages that you find more culturally diverse or more pertinent to the students in your classroom, by all means substitute your passages for the ones included here. If you want to verify that a passage does illustrate a given concept, or to nominate alternate passages for future editions of this album, please write to me at [lockhartlearning@gmail.com](mailto:lockhartlearning@gmail.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Hammond, Zaretta. *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* Corwin, a SAGE Company, Thousand Oaks, CA, 2015, pp. 25–27.

## The Science of Reading

The process of teaching children to read and write is complex. It has been the subject of innumerable studies and a plethora of reading and writing programs. Many older studies on reading instruction were based on anecdotal evidence and/or had limited sample sizes. Techniques deemed to be “best practices” changed every few years.

Contrast this with recent research conducted under the umbrella term “The Science of Reading”, an interdisciplinary field that draws on cognitive psychology, neuroscience, linguistics, and education to understand how humans learn to read, and how best to teach reading. This research has provided insights into specific cognitive processes involved in reading and has identified evidence – based instructional practices that are effective for teaching these skills.

The 2023 publication *Powerful Literacy in the Montessori Classroom: Aligning Reading Research and Practice*<sup>2</sup> makes a strong argument that Montessori pedagogy, including lessons and materials, fit wholly and naturally with The Science of Reading. The authors draw upon Scarborough’s Reading Rope model to show this alignment. Many of the examples of Montessori lessons and materials that are cited in this publication are from early childhood or lower elementary classrooms, but there are implications for upper elementary classrooms as well. These are addressed throughout this album.

The Reading Rope model was developed in 2001 by Hollis Scarborough, a cognitive scientist and reading researcher. She built her model upon one that was designed by Gough and Turner in 1986, aptly called The Simple View of Reading. This earlier study suggested that reading comprehension is the product of two components: word recognition and language comprehension. The interesting part of this research was the suggestion that the benefits of having skills in both of these areas could best be represented as a multiplicative process:



Mastery of a process in this model is indicated by the number 1, while having no skills in the process is represented by the number 0. This mathematical model was a way for researchers to represent their findings: that a total lack of decoding skills, coupled with mastery of language comprehension, resulted in no reading comprehension ( $0 \times 1 = 0$ ).

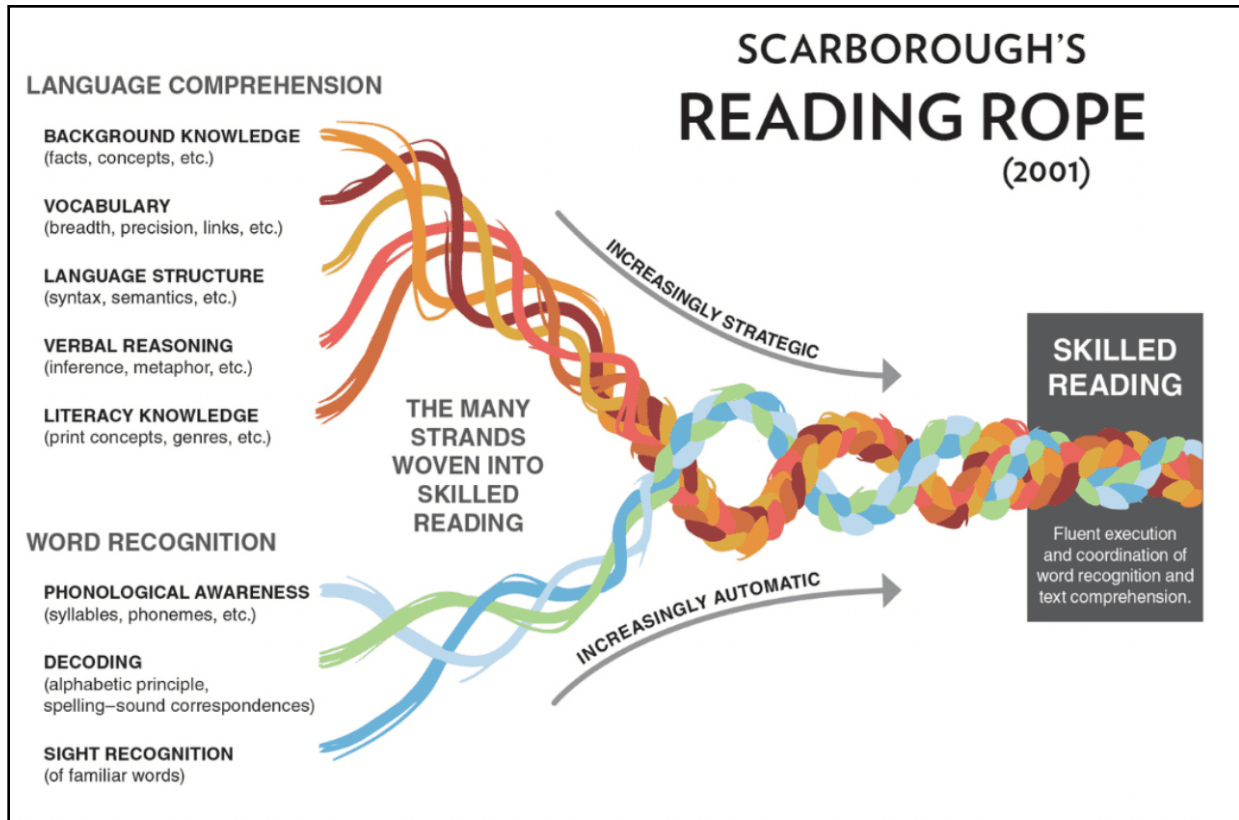
Similarly, having mastery of decoding with no language comprehension skills also resulted in no reading comprehension ( $1 \times 0 = 0$ ).

Partial mastery of both components resulted in poor reading comprehension ( $\frac{1}{2} \times \frac{1}{2} = \frac{1}{4}$ ).

Scarborough’s work is a more detailed and nuanced view of the complex cognitive processes involved in reading. She found that both decoding and language comprehension are each made up of multiple sub-skills that are interconnected and interactive. She depicted this complex of processes as a rope, with individual strands representing the sub-skills involved in reading.

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<sup>2</sup> Zoll, Susan, et al. *Powerful Literacy in the Montessori Classroom: Aligning Reading Research and Practice*. Teachers College Press, 2023.



<https://braintrusttutors.com/what-is-the-reading-rope/>

Notice that as the various skills in word recognition are practiced to fluency, reading becomes increasingly *automatic*. As the skills that contribute to language comprehension grow, reading becomes increasingly *strategic*.

### Supplemental Programs and Materials – A Brief Cautionary Note

In recent decades, many traditional and Montessori schools came to rely on literacy programs to supplement or replace their language curriculum. In light of The Science of Reading, some of the most popular programs are now seen to be deficient in one or more areas. It is wise for those who are using a literacy program to critically evaluate whether the program addresses all of the strands of the Reading Rope model; missing elements have a very deleterious effect on Total Reading.

On a similar note, it is wise to carefully examine language materials that we are considering purchasing for the classroom. Some are a quick and affordable way to bring in extra practice on things like word study without the use of workbooks. It is important to know two things:

- Many of these materials have been designed by people without Montessori training. The processes that they use may not be consistent with our lessons. Sometimes the differences are minor. Sometimes they preclude deep understanding and inhibit indirect aims of the lesson.
- The text on older materials can be Eurocentric and male-centric. Some of these go even further – to the point of being culturally offensive.

For these reasons, it is wise to preview the text before purchasing any supplemental materials. If that is not possible, it may be possible to learn how recently the text was written, or to order materials with the intent to return them if the text proves to be unsuitable for the classroom.

## Writing Leads to Reading

Dr. Montessori said that writing leads to reading. In early childhood classrooms, children use moveable alphabets to encode their thoughts before they decode someone else's thoughts. Writing continues to be a means of improving reading fluency and comprehension well into the upper elementary years. A child who has studied compound-complex sentences in grammar and used that understanding to combine sentences in their writing will know how to appropriately chunk a compound-complex sentence when they encounter it in reading. This is why writing lessons feature so prominently in Montessori curriculum.

Writing is also part-and-parcel of grammar lessons. Each lesson has follow-up suggestions at three levels: analyze, synthesize, and utilize. These levels parallel the periods of a classic 3-period lesson:

1<sup>st</sup> Period - Analyze. This level of follow-up has the student replicate the work done in the lesson. It is intended for the child who showed confusion or uncertainty during the lesson. They need to repeat the isolated difficulty just as it was shown. They may also benefit from having a more experienced friend sit in, to ensure that the concept is being properly understood.

2<sup>nd</sup> Period – Synthesize This level of follow-up has the student integrate the new learning with prior learning. It may also lead the student to generalize a pattern. The new difficulty is practiced for its own sake.

3<sup>rd</sup> Period – Utilize This level of follow-up has the child apply the new difficulty in their own writing. It requires that the student have a solid understanding of the new concept.

Guides are encouraged to tailor the follow-up based on students' response to the lesson. In Montessori, we generally strive for follow-up work to be second period work. However, it is highly likely that many students will be able to utilize the new concept in their writing quite quickly. Guides should feel free to mix and match the follow-up suggestions as needed!

In addition to writing lessons and grammar lessons, there are many other opportunities for children to write during the course of the day/week. Responses to cultural or reading lessons spring quickly to mind. Suggestions for these follow-up activities are sprinkled liberally throughout the album.

In addition to academic writing, children benefit from written self-reflection. One way to accomplish this is by having children keep a journal.

Some journal entries can be event-triggered:

- lessons that emphasize social/emotional skills
- group problem-solving sessions
- goal setting,
- celebrating milestones.

Some journal entries can be spontaneous:

- free-writing (stories, poems, dreams, and more).
- conflicts that have been or need to be resolved.

Some journal entries can be scheduled:

- reflect on and wrap up the week.
- set goals for the coming week.

While we may read children's journal entries, we do not edit or correct them. Inventive spelling and free-association writing are completely ok. This is writing that the child does for their own sake.

*English from the Roots Up* is a collection of words sorted according to Latin and Greek roots. It can be used to teach spelling by morphemes (roots + affixes), tackling 1-3 root words per week. In the process, both spelling and vocabulary building are addressed.

*Project READ* is a structured literacy intervention program. It includes phonics, reading, and writing. It weaves in various elements of Scarborough's Reading Rope. It requires training to take full advantage of the materials. <https://www.projectread.com/>

### Word Study and Spelling

*Word Study* work that emphasizes phonics, syllabication, word families, root words and affixes is important not only for building decoding proficiency, but also for expanding children's working vocabulary. There are many commercial products available for word study, but it is equally possible to explicitly teach elements of word study through activities in the classroom.

#### **Activity: Word Families**

Timeframe: weekly day-starter as interest permits

Time to complete discussion: 5 min.

Materials: Flip chart paper

Context: This simple activity creates awareness of root words and affixes.

1. Post a root on a piece of flipchart paper or dedicated white board and ask children to add words that use that root word throughout the day.
2. At the end of the day, review all the words the children came up with, with appreciation for the most esoteric uses of the word.
  - earth: earthquake, unearthly, earthen...
  - argue: argument, arguing, unarguably...
  - close: closure, disclose, closet, closeness...

#### **Activity: Morphology – Prefixes Change Meaning**

Timeframe: day-starter after Word Families runs its course

Time to complete: 5 min.

Materials: Flip chart paper

Lists of prefixes for teacher reference (see following pages)

1. Choose a group of 3-4 prefixes that have similar meaning (i.e. 3-4 of The Contrarians)
2. Post the prefixes on a piece of flipchart paper and, as before, challenge children to add words that use one of the listed prefixes through the day.
3. At the end of the day, review all the words the children came up with, with appreciation for the most esoteric uses of the word.
4. If there are more prefixes with the same meaning, repeat the process with 3-4 more prefixes the next day.
5. When all of the prefixes with common meanings have been addressed, pause the activity until the next week.

Ultimately, the way to increase children's self-taught vocabulary is by having them read. A lot. For purpose and for pleasure. Fiction and nonfiction. At school and at home.

### Reading at home

Parents often ask what they can do at home to help their children be more successful. When we say that reading at home is important, it can come across as a flip answer or a trivial activity because it doesn't seem intentional enough, or sufficiently directive, or glamorous enough. Sometimes parents are reluctant because they are afraid they won't get it right. Sometimes they are hoping for something that they can have their children do independently while they are preparing dinner, to keep the child gainfully occupied for long enough for the adult to accomplish their tasks. To overcome this reluctance, we need to be sure that parents understand the importance of getting children to read outside the classroom.

Good news: often a little parent education can be quite inspiring and motivating. Parents' ears often prick up when they learn that the elementary years are "prime time" for vocabulary building. Children need to build their vocabulary by 2000-3000 words per year during their elementary years – far more than can be taught through direct instruction (36 weeks of school x 10 assigned vocabulary words per week = 360 words). This makes the importance of vocabulary building through reading and daily activity self-evident. We can also share research with parents about how working vocabulary builds upon itself — the more words a child has in their working-vocabulary toolbox, the easier and faster new words are added. This enhanced vocabulary correlates to greater academic success and higher GPA. Perhaps most importantly, we must give parents enough strategies that they can find one that fits their family. Here are a few:

- Read to your child. Children well into middle school still love to be read to, especially if it is a book that interests them and is a bit above their reading level. Listening to a parent read aloud, they can become totally engrossed in the story and gain much of the vocabulary-building benefit with less cognitive effort.
- Read with your child. If your child is reading a novel for school, ask your child if you can read it too. If your child seems to find the reading challenging (or even if they don't) offer to read a paragraph or a chapter aloud now and then. "Can I read this chapter aloud to you? After that, I need to get started on dinner, so you could read the next chapter aloud to me, or you could read it silently and then tell me what happens in the story, so I stay caught up."
- Listen to your child read aloud. Ask them to read directions for assembly, or for a board game, or for a recipe, or anything else. Ask them to read a book to a younger child or even to a pet. (Dogs are *generally* more receptive to being read to than cats...)
- Model reading for information (newspaper/magazine) and for pleasure. Some families dedicate one hour per night to family reading. All of the electronics are turned off and everyone settles in with a good book (and maybe a treat like popcorn or a warm beverage).
- Play board games. Some families set aside one evening per week for game night. Many board games involve reading to retrieve information. Some games also build vocabulary. (Can you explain what a monopoly is?) Even those with little or no overt reading involve symbolic or strategic thinking, which are other important skills.
- Going to an activity outside the home? Watch for ways to encourage your child to read.
  - o "What does the sign say about hours for parking?"
  - o "Where does the placard say that the red panda comes from?"
  - o "Can you see any vegetarian options on the menu?"

When parents engage their children in reading, everyone benefits. Children see reading as a useful, desirable, and practical skill. Yet in our zeal to inspire love of reading, we need to be careful to avoid turning parents into the reading police. We want parents to encourage and inspire their children to love reading. We do not want to set parents up with situations where they require their children to read and then verify that the reading is done. And we certainly don't want reading to become a condition or a punishment. "When you have read a chapter of your school novel, you can have an hour of electronics."

### **Vocabulary Building through Direct Instruction and Activities**

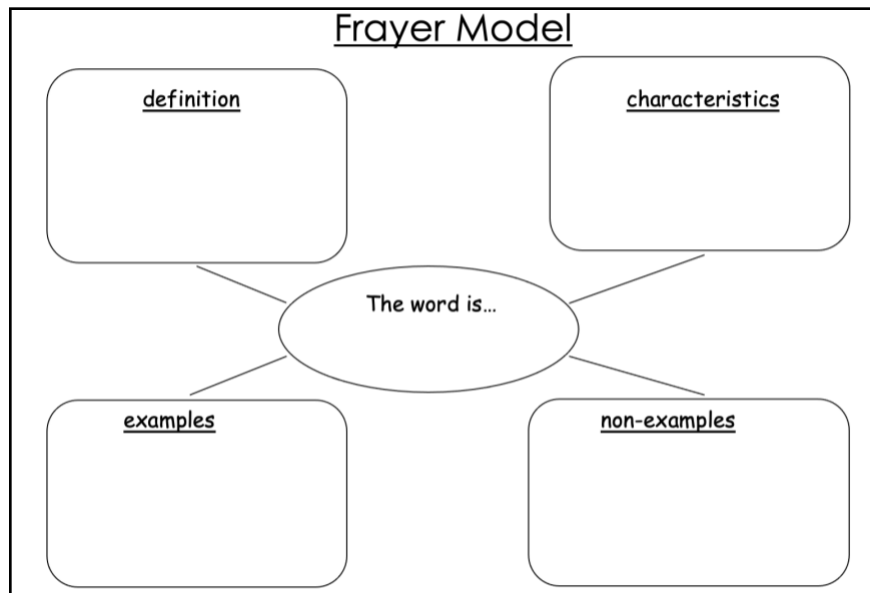
When we think of building vocabulary through direct instruction in the classroom, we may think first of the traditional vocabulary workbooks and quizzes. That is perhaps the least effective way to teach vocabulary. Remember that for a word to be mapped into the brain, it needs to be encountered 4-30 times in context. Looking up dictionary definitions and multiple choice (multiple guess) worksheets do little to provide context. And they generally do not provide the repetition necessary for the word to be internalized. Weekly lists and quizzes teach children to memorize-today and forget-tomorrow. Within an already crowded academic week, how do we include direct instruction on vocabulary building? By making it part of everything we do!

Whenever new vocabulary is introduced in a lesson, present it and its definition visually as well as auditorily. (Prepared tickets preserve the flow of the lesson better than writing real-time on a white board.) This is the first orthographic mapping of the new word. It also makes the vocabulary more accessible for multi-language learners and for those with slower auditory processing:

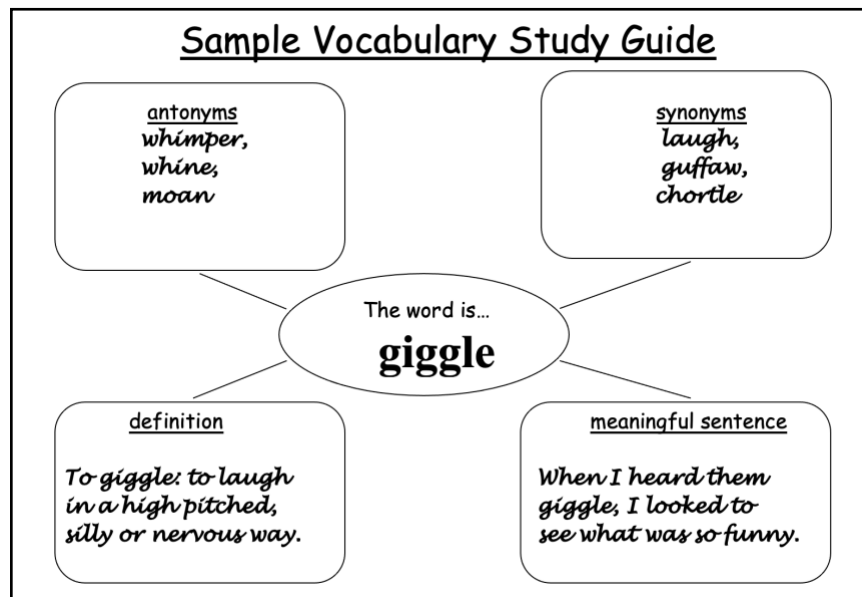
- Break the word down morphologically, into root and affixes. "The word *variable* has a root word, *vary*, and a suffix *-able*. Notice how the *-y* changes to an *-i* when the suffix is added. *Vary* means *change*. When used together, *variable* means *able to vary, change, or fluctuate*."
- Explain the meaning of the new term and give examples. If the word has more than one meaning, compare and contrast the meanings. ("In Algebra, a *variable* is a letter that stands in for a number: in the expression  $6-x$ ,  $x$  is a *variable*. Because  $x$  represents any number, its value can *vary*. In the scientific method, *variable* means any condition that changes. A well-designed experiment has only one *variable*. Everything else is held constant. Who has an idea about what it means when the weather forecast talks about "*variable winds*?")
- Use the new vocabulary as much as possible in the lesson. Avoid pronouns when it isn't awkward. ("Placental mammals are warm-blooded," is more helpful than, "They are warm-blooded."). Each use in context works towards retention.
- Include the etymology of new words. This can aid in remembering meaning. ("*Isosceles* comes from the Greek words *isos* and *skelos*. *Isos* means equal; *skelos* means legs. So an isosceles triangle has 2 equal legs just like we humans have 2 equal legs.")
- Pre-teach new vocabulary that children will encounter in a reading passage. This lessens the cognitive load of reading the passage, converting what would be decoding into an encounter with the new words in context.
- Include vocabulary work with follow-up options for lessons. There are many ways to practice new vocabulary. Giving children a choice makes routine work more intrinsically motivating.

The following vocabulary study guides can be used for technical or descriptive vocabulary.

A time-tested method for working with new vocabulary is the Frayer model. Juxtaposing what the word is and what it is not links the new word to prior learning and anchors the new word in memory. The “examples” and “non-examples” portion of the model can be tricky to use, especially with nouns.



The Frayer Model can be adapted to focus on different attributes of a word. For example, here is a version that emphasizes synonyms and antonyms. (Child’s work is shown in a cursive font.)



The fourth bubble on chart above, *meaningful sentence*, is an interesting one. A sentence is deemed meaningful if a reader could infer the meaning of the new vocabulary word directly from the sentence. In this case, “When I heard them giggle, I looked to see what was so funny,” allows the reader to infer that giggle is a sound that indicates that something is funny. Asking children to write a meaningful sentence accomplishes two things: it applies the new vocabulary in context; and it is reverse-engineering the process of inferring from context. Remember, writing leads to reading. Having children write meaningful sentences helps build a skill that they can use when inferring the meaning of unfamiliar words.



## Expository vs. Narrative Writing

One way to broadly classify prose is as expository or narrative writing. Expository pieces explain; they illuminate and expound upon facts and opinions. Narratives tell a story.

Most any topic can be handled with either style of writing. Here are two examples with a common subject: adding two addends to produce a sum.

*Expository prose has paragraphs with a topic sentence, a body, and a conclusion.*

Adding two three-digit numbers together abstractly is something everyone should know how to do. First, copy the problem onto graph paper. Be sure to line up the numbers correctly. Put the units of the second addend under the units of the first addend. Next, begin adding, starting with the units. Add the two units digits together and record the sum below the line. If you don't know your addition facts, use a finger-chart. If the sum of the units is greater than 9, exchange ten of the units for a ten. On paper, that means carrying the ten into the tens column. Third, repeat the process for tens and for hundreds, carrying when necessary. Finally, circle the sum. Following these simple steps will guarantee your success in adding two three-digit numbers.

*Narratives have characters, a setting and action. They have a beginning, middle, and end.*

I remember the first time my bratty 6 year-old brother, Sammy, added two three-digit digit numbers on paper. You would think that he had invented a new flavor of ice cream! My mom fussed over him for hours.

Sammy began by bugging me to write a problem for him. "Please! Please! Please! Write me a problem. A big one!"

"You are a problem," I retorted under my breath.

"On the squares-paper," Sammy begged. The little twerp knows it annoys me when he says "squares paper". How hard is it to learn to call it graph paper?

"Say it right or I'll never write problems for you again," I hissed.

"Graph paper. NOW write me a problem?" It was more of a question than a demand.

"Oh, all right," I sighed. I grabbed the graph paper and wrote 
$$\begin{array}{r} 27 \\ + 75 \\ \hline \end{array}$$
 carefully lining

up the units of the second addend under the units of the first addend. *No point having him screw it up and get it wrong. If he screws it up, I'll never get back to my book!*

"NO! Bigger!" Sammy demanded.

I added a hundreds digit to each of the two numbers and tossed the pad across the table at him. "Here, hotshot."

I watched while he painstakingly added each column of numbers, exchanging all the way. When he finished, he pushed the pad towards me, raising one eyebrow as if to say, "What do you think?"

I saw in a glance that he had the right answer. "Congratulations genius. It's right." I pushed the pad disinterestedly back at him. But I couldn't help but smile when he went screaming through the house looking for Mom. Who knows, maybe he is a genius after all. But don't tell Sammy that I said so.

## Elements of Writing

Expository writing and narrative writing are both composed of paragraphs, but each has its own conventions (sometimes called grammars). We teach these conventions through an isolated difficulty of an element or a convention.

### Expository Elements

Topic Sentence  
Main points  
Supporting details or examples  
Transition words / phrases  
Concluding or Transition sentences

### Narrative Elements

Setting  
Characters  
Conflict  
Events  
Climax  
Resolution

Whether composing an expository piece or a narrative, writing is a process. As Montessorians, this is where we place our focus, confident that if the process is sound, the product will be as well. We teach elements of prewriting, writing (rough draft), editing, revising, and publishing.

Probably the most underutilized part of the writing process is pre-writing. We are in such a hurry to get started producing a product! Making effective use of pre-writing strategies reduces the cognitive load of the writing process and it builds good writing habits for a lifetime. This is our best opportunity to set children up for success (and our best opportunity to help them edit or revise their writing). The specific mechanisms for pre-writing vary depending upon whether the writing is expository or narrative. But in both cases, pre-writing strategies that better ensure a child's success with written expression.

### Expository Strategies

research  
organizing  
outlining

### Both

sketching  
discussion  
brainstorming  
observing

### Narrative Strategies

story boarding  
story diagramming  
acting it out  
story starters

After children complete their writing process, creating a rough draft, they will sometimes edit their work through a lens that focuses on content, voice, audience, or purpose. We can make use of peer editing 1-on-1, or by using an "Author's Chair" where a child reads what they have written to the class and asks for what people appreciated about the writing and suggestions for improvement. (This is usually moderated by an adult, who ensures that there is at least a 3:1 ratio of appreciations to suggestions.) Additional coaching is done by adults on a 1-on-1 basis.

After making revisions based on suggestions, children will sometimes rewrite a piece, taking it to publication quality. The work might be published in a class book, anthology, or newspaper, or it might be added to the child's personal portfolio, posted on a classroom wall for peers to read,

We do not expect that children will do all of the steps in the process in a single sitting or on every work. Sometimes, prewriting is enough. Sometimes we take a previously written or previously planned piece and revise it to add the next isolated difficulty. We will occasionally invite children to choose a recent writing sample and take it through the editing, revising and publication stages. And sometimes we want children to just write without worrying about conventions. All of these are valuable experiences that build the child's skills and their confidence.

### **The Paragraph Level and Beyond**

A great deal of time is spent on the expected structure of a paragraph. We teach children to *plan* their paragraphs according to these expected structures.

There are many benefits to teaching children to plan paragraphs before writing them. Plans help children:

- increase the meatiness of their paragraphs by ensuring that each paragraph makes at least a couple of significant points.
- eliminate stream-of-consciousness, never ending, or pointless paragraphs.
- decrease run-on sentences.
- decrease plagiarism when taking notes from text.
- increase the children's ability to make a logical argument on any given point.
- distinguish between a substantial concept and supporting facts.

All of these enable children to present their ideas more clearly – a true-life skill! But more than that, it teaches children the specific structures to expect when reading, increasing reading fluency and thus, reading comprehension.

The first 2 lessons on paragraphs, *A Paragraph is a Team of Sentences* and *Descriptive Paragraphs* can be applied equally to expository writing and narrative writing. Following those, lessons begin to include elements that are more directly related to expository writing. Lessons on writing narratives follow the section on expository writing.

The sequence in this album is not meant to indicate that we teach children to master expository writing before beginning narratives! Once children have had the first two lessons on what a paragraph is, the guide can jump to narratives, circling back to further explore the internal structure of expository paragraphs later in the year.

Following all of these lessons on writing prose are lessons on poetry. Poetry is a powerful way to develop children's love of words – their textured meaning, rhythm, sound, and meaning. They sometimes exercise analogy and other verbal reasoning skills. Poetry has such an economy of words that poets tend to be very intentional in their word choice. It is also a form of written communication that invites exploration of feelings and emotions. For all of these reasons and more, it can be very beneficial to sprinkle poetry throughout the year. These ideas will be explored more fully in that upcoming section.

## **The Basic Paragraph**

In the early weeks, when the focus is on writing beautiful sentences, it is ok to ask children to write a paragraph as long as we comment **ONLY** on the content and the beautiful, complete sentences. If the issue is the internal organization of the paragraph, let that go for now. But if there are issues at the sentence level, we intervene, with as much kindness and humor as possible.

“Kaylon, you have some awesome ideas in this paragraph! Can you help me with one thing? Will you read your paragraph to me? Take a really deep breath before you start because you can’t take another breath until you get to a punctuation mark. Ready? Go.”

Children will not learn to write beautifully constructed paragraphs just by reading beautifully constructed paragraphs. We provide direct instruction of isolated difficulties using multiple models of paragraph structure, progressing from the very simple to the sophisticated.

### **Presentation One: A Paragraph is a Team of Sentences**

Materials: copies of the two following paragraphs OR a means of projecting the paragraphs.

Tickets for paragraph sorting (make several sets– one set for every 2-3 students)

- Choose a well-written 2-3 paragraph text from a classroom or online resource.

BONUS: choose paragraphs that relate to a current cultural study

- Create tickets that each have one sentence from the paragraphs.
- Mix all the tickets together from both (all?) of the paragraphs.

1. A paragraph is a team of sentences that works together to present an idea. If the group of sentences is a team, you will be able to identify the one main idea.
2. Invite the children to read and compare these two paragraphs:

People have lived along the Nile for a very long time. The fertile floodplains of the Nile allowed people to begin farming. By the 10<sup>th</sup> millennium BC, the people in Egypt had begun growing cereal grains like wheat and barley. Because they were farming, they settled in one place. Because they were settled, society became more complex and involved. This was an important step in the history of human civilization.\*

There was no real money in Ancient Egypt, so people paid each other with goods or work using a *barter system*. The person who watched the tax collection was called the *scribe*. Each person paid for whatever they needed to live their lives by what they could provide from the work that they did: craftsmen paid in goods, hunters and fishermen paid with food. Every single household in the country had to pay a labor tax every year by helping with work for the country like mining or for canals. Every tax collector in Egypt had to tell the scribe every day how many taxes they had collected. A lot of rich Egyptians paid poorer people to do their service work for them.\*

Adapted from “Ancient Egypt – Simple English Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia.” *Wikipedia*. N.p., n.d. Web. 15 Mar. 2011. < [http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient\\_Egypt](http://simple.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ancient_Egypt) >.

3. In the discussion, guide children to identify what idea is being developed in each of the two paragraphs. (The main idea of the first paragraph is that living along the Nile allowed Ancient Egyptians to develop a complex society. The second paragraph seems to be about two things – Ancient Egyptians using a barter system and the collection of taxes.)

4. Collaborate with the children to split the sentences in the second paragraph – those that describe the barter system and those that discuss taxes, creating two paragraphs in the process. Discuss the effect of splitting the paragraph into two pieces would have on a reader.

#### Children's Activity in the Lesson: A Paragraph is a Team of Sentences

- Group the children into teams of 2-3 students. Each group receives a set of the tickets described above.
- Challenge the students to separate the tickets into 2 or 3 groups where each group has a single theme or central idea. Each group, then, is a collection of sentences that could make a paragraph.
- Children can compare their results to the original paragraphs to see which sentences the author grouped together. Be sure that the children understand that this is not a control of error. Their grouping of sentences may be equally valid or even better than the original.

#### Other Curricular Writing

At this point, it is quite useful to begin identifying what specific format written work should take: a list, complete sentences, or a paragraph. Since the only thing children know about paragraphs is that they are a collection of sentences that work together for a common purpose, that is all that we expect from their product.

If the work comes in using the wrong format, it is a candidate for correction, but be careful to not let this overwhelm the student. If they are a reluctant writer and they turned in a list when complete sentences were requested, allow them to dictate complete-sentence answers to an adult or an older student. Remember that we are process people!

It is also true that if the format for written responses is stipulated in the directions, it is good training! Children need to learn to read the directions to complete their work successfully on the first try through trial and error!

There are commercially available products that have children sort 1-sentence tickets into a reasonable sequence to create a paragraph. There do not seem (at the time of this writing) to be sets of sentences on the same topic to be sorted into 2-3 topics like the ones created for this lesson. Creating these might be a good project for a parent volunteer.

## **The Descriptive Paragraph**

Many associate descriptive passages with narratives, but they are just as essential to expository writing. Whether the writer is describing an Ancient Egyptian cultural practice or “a dark and stormy night”, descriptions are crucial to the reader’s understanding and enjoyment. Lessons on descriptive paragraphs, then, can fit into an expository sequence or a narrative sequence.

Most novice writers’ descriptive passages are overly reliant on how something looks. In point of fact, the best way to make a reader feel connected to a passage is to weave in sensory details from all five senses.

### **Presentation One: Waking Up Dormant Senses (a Lesson with Optional Extensions)**

Materials:

Half-dozen aromatic items in sealed containers (fresh ground coffee, vinegar, cotton candy, motor oil, hyacinths, fresh-popped popcorn, Ivory or Irish Spring soap...)

Be aware if any children have allergies to artificial scents!

1. Lead the children in a discussion of our 5 senses. Ask them all which sense they think they rely upon most. One way to think about this is to consider what difficulties they would encounter if they lost sight, hearing, taste, touch, or smell. Each presents some potential hazards and inconveniences. Another way to think about it is which senses produce the most joy. Often, our strongest memories are associated with smell.
2. Today’s lesson isolates the sense of smell. Explain and then conduct the activity:
  - The class will be broken up into teams. Each team receives an aromatic item. They separate in the classroom as much as possible to avoid mingling scents AND to avoid overhearing the other groups’ discussions. (Or give this lesson outside)
  - Each team member takes a turn smelling their team’s item. (If they can guess what the item is just from smell, without looking at the contents, that is great! If not, they can look at the contents.)
  - Each team quietly brainstorms words or phrases that describe how their item smells, without naming the item or giving ANY hints about its appearance or use. (Use flipchart paper, if possible).
  - All aromatic items are resealed, and the class reconvenes.
  - The first team presents their descriptive words and phrases without revealing what their item was.
  - The other teams quietly confer and as a team, write their guess on a small marker board.
  - All the guesses are revealed.
  - The moderator (probably the Guide) asks the first team if any of the guesses are correct.
  - If guess is correct, the team reveals their item, and wins the admiration of all for their successful description. If not, they hand their item over to the moderator without identifying it to the class!
  - The process is repeated for each team.
  - When all teams have presented their descriptions and all guesses have been made, if there are items that have not been identified, the moderator sets those items out in a random order. The teams have a minute or two to decide which description matches each item.
  - Then the moderator reveals the match-ups. Huzzah!
3. When done, invite children to discuss what was particularly interesting or challenging about describing the aroma without naming/identifying the item.

Extensions:

This lesson is an experience with no particular follow-up. However, if children enjoyed it, there are three extensions that can be done on different days. This is leading up to the next lesson where children will write descriptions of items in the classroom. Consider doing one sense per day at some opportune time for the days leading up to the next lesson.

Materials:

Sound – journals and pencil (Optional: music – see description below)

Taste – Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, 1 large chocolate bar to share

Touch – Mystery bags with items with different textures, densities, composition

**SOUND** Take the children outside and have them create a sound journal, writing only those things that they hear - no sight details! If the children are more advanced writers, ask them to add analogies to enhance their description. They could write that an unseen creature is *chirping quickly, as if he had too much coffee*.

Alternatively (or additionally), play an evocative piece of music like Mussorgsky's Night on Bald Mountain and ask children to write about the quality of the sounds and the moods that the music suggests. (They will be tempted to describe the visual images that the music created!)

**TASTE** In Charlie and the Chocolate Factory read Roald Dahl's description of Charlie's experience with allowing a tiny corner of a chocolate bar melt in his mouth. If permitted by the school, after reading the section through once, give each child who wishes to participate a tiny corner of a chocolate bar to place on their tongue as you read the section again.

Then ask the children to write a description of the taste (and texture) of their favorite food other than chocolate. For extra fun, anyone who describes a taste without naming it can read it to the group and ask friends to guess which food was described!

**TOUCH** This is perhaps the trickiest one of all. Ask children what makes them aware of their sense of touch. Mostly, we tap into the touch sense through our fingertips when we manipulate objects. Our sense of touch can be helpful when walking around in the dark. We are sometimes aware of touch that irritates us, like a scratchy label in a shirt.

Present the children with a variety of mystery bags with objects of different textures in each bag. The children can describe how the object feels but must not name it!

## Presentation Two: Descriptions that Combine Underutilized Senses

Materials: none

Context: Having awakened the dormant senses, it is now time to integrate them. Authors' subtle integration of sensory images tickles all of the lobes of the brain and makes us feel in some ways like we are part of the story!

It's the subtlety that is the tricky part. If we ask children to write a paragraph that contains elements of all five senses, they will typically oblige us by creating a well-intentioned, clumsy, heavy-handed 5-sentence paragraph in which each sentence talks about one of the five senses in turn. For this lesson, we want to model weaving different senses together. We will have more sentences on some senses than others to help provide a more natural flow.

1. Invite children to recall the sensory awakening experiences of the past week.
2. Today's lesson begins with another guessing game. I have chosen something in the classroom. I am going to describe it as if I were exploring it blindfolded. I am going to give as many sensory hints as possible, using the four underutilized senses: scent, sound, taste, and touch. After each sentence in the description, you will take up to 3 guesses, and then you will give another sentence.
3. Describe the item one sentence at a time, stopping for 2-3 guesses after each sentence or two.

Example:

- I am able to pick it up with one hand, although I can't close my hand around it. I can sense that it stretches out on both sides of my hand. (size and weight)
- At first, it feels unbalanced – it is heavier on one side than the other until I slide my hand down a bit. (weight distribution)
- As I run my fingers over it, I realize that it is kind of soft to the touch, but also ribbed.
- When I hold it close to my face it smells a bit dusty. I don't think I want to taste it.
- It slips out of my hand and falls to the floor, but I barely hear it.
- When I crouch down, I find that it has spread out – it is now kind of a lumpy pile.
- I can tug on the edges and smooth it out so that it lays flat on the floor.
- Once it is flattened, I feel along the edges. It has straight edges and four corners.

Hopefully, someone will have guessed by now that it is a work rug.

### Children's Activity in the Lesson: Write a 4-Senses Description of an Item

Children choose a secret item. They write a sequence of sentences like those modeled in the lesson, describing how they might explore an item if they were blindfolded. It is like a sensory story. There are two rules:

- No similes. ("It smells *like* chocolate." Vs. "It smells sweet and chocolatey")
- The sentences describe what the child does (in their imagination) to explore the item and what they experience because of their action. We don't want children to write only what an item smells, sounds, tastes, and feels like! (It smells flowery. It sounds bubbly. It tastes sweet. It feels fuzzy. Ug!)

As children finish, they trade papers with another child and take turns guessing their friend's item.

### Extension

This is a great time to introduce onomatopoeia, words that name a thing or action by imitating the sound it makes. Of course, if there are card sets in the classroom, children can be invited to work with them. But this can also be used as a dismissal game or a waiting game. Vocalize a word that sounds like what it is describing ("swish") and children something that makes that sound OR does that action. There is no one right answer. How many can they think of?



**Presentation Three: Show! Don't Tell!****Materials:**

The ability to project A Chance Encounter onto a screen or white board.

Copies of a graphic organizer like the one shown on the next page (full page or ½ size).

Context: Children have had some experience with writing using sensory imagery in sound, scent, taste, and touch. It is time to let sensory experiences with sight get a little exercise too.

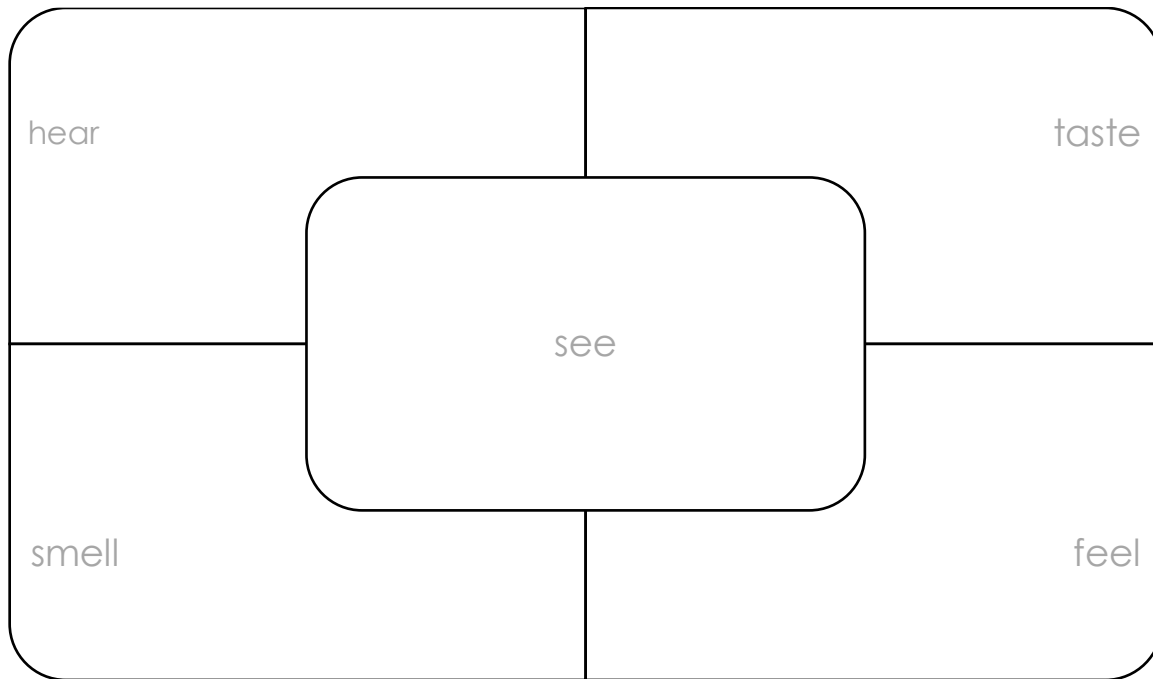
1. Invite children to close their eyes as you read a sensory-rich passage to the children (sample follows). Invite them to make a special kind of movie in their mind of what you are reading to them. Not only can they see and hear what the paragraph describes, they can smell, taste, and feel it too!

A Chance Encounter

The counter was set with military precision. In front of each cherry red vinyl stool, a napkin, fork, and spoon were set in perfect alignment with shiny white coffee cups and saucers. The stainless-steel cases gleamed like the sun. In the display cases, even the peaks of the whipped cream that topped the pies stood at attention. The air was filled with sweet, sugary scents mingling with the dark, pungent aroma of fresh coffee. At the end of the counter sat a woman that contrasted in every manner with her surroundings. In the glare of the neon lights, her face was almost indistinguishable from the jumble of grey and brown threadbare scarves that obscured her form. She extracted a dime from an unseen pocket and began to scratch, scratch, scratch the silver squares of a lottery ticket, keeping time with the ticking clock on the wall. A minute later her shoulders sank, and a heavy sigh escaped her cracked lips. She pushed the useless ticket to one side. Her hand disappeared into the folds of the scarves and then emerged with a second rectangular cardboard ticket. Scratch, scratch, scratch the seconds passed. Another sigh. She glanced up at me, and I was shocked to see a twinkle in her brilliant blue eyes. The corners of her lips turned up in an enigmatic smile that reminded me a bit of the Mona Lisa. I was caught up in a whirlwind of unanswered questions – who is this woman?

2. Ask the children to recall the sensory images they experienced while listening to the passage.
3. Give children a 5-part graphic organizer (see next page). Explain that you will read the passage a second time so that children can record their sensory impressions, but this time you will display the paragraph for the children to read along if they wish. Children record individual words (*coffee*) or phrases (*cherry red vinyl stool*) not complete sentences. (Read a bit more slowly the second time to allow children the time to record their impressions.)

### The 5-part Graphic Organizer



4. Discuss children's results. If the paragraph is displayed on a white board, it can be nice to color code phrases according to what sense they evoke. For example, underline all auditory words and phrases in blue.
5. Prompt for deeper engagement, if necessary.
  - Did anyone include the phrase *military precision* on their chart? Some would say that it creates a visual impression of order and symmetry.
  - Did anyone have a sensory impression related to taste? Some would say that when there is a heavy scent (sweet, sugary scents and dark, pungent aroma), you can almost taste it.
  - There was a clock on the wall. How did you envision the clock? What did it look like and sound like to you? Some possibilities:
    - o a round clock with a white face and black numerals with a silvery frame and a second hand that jerks every second
    - o a black and white cat clock with a tail that wags back and forth every second and eyes that move from left to right and back.

The key idea is that when senses are alerted, we fill in more than what is on the page!

6. Explain that this paragraph *showed* the reader the chance encounter in the diner. If the paragraph were a *tell* paragraph, if it had little sensory imagery, what would it have said? Perhaps something like this:

#### *A Chance Encounter*

*The diner was very clean and organized. The cases were full of pastries. There was coffee brewing. A poor, old woman sat at the counter with some scratch tickets. She didn't win. She looked up at me and smiled. Who is this woman?*

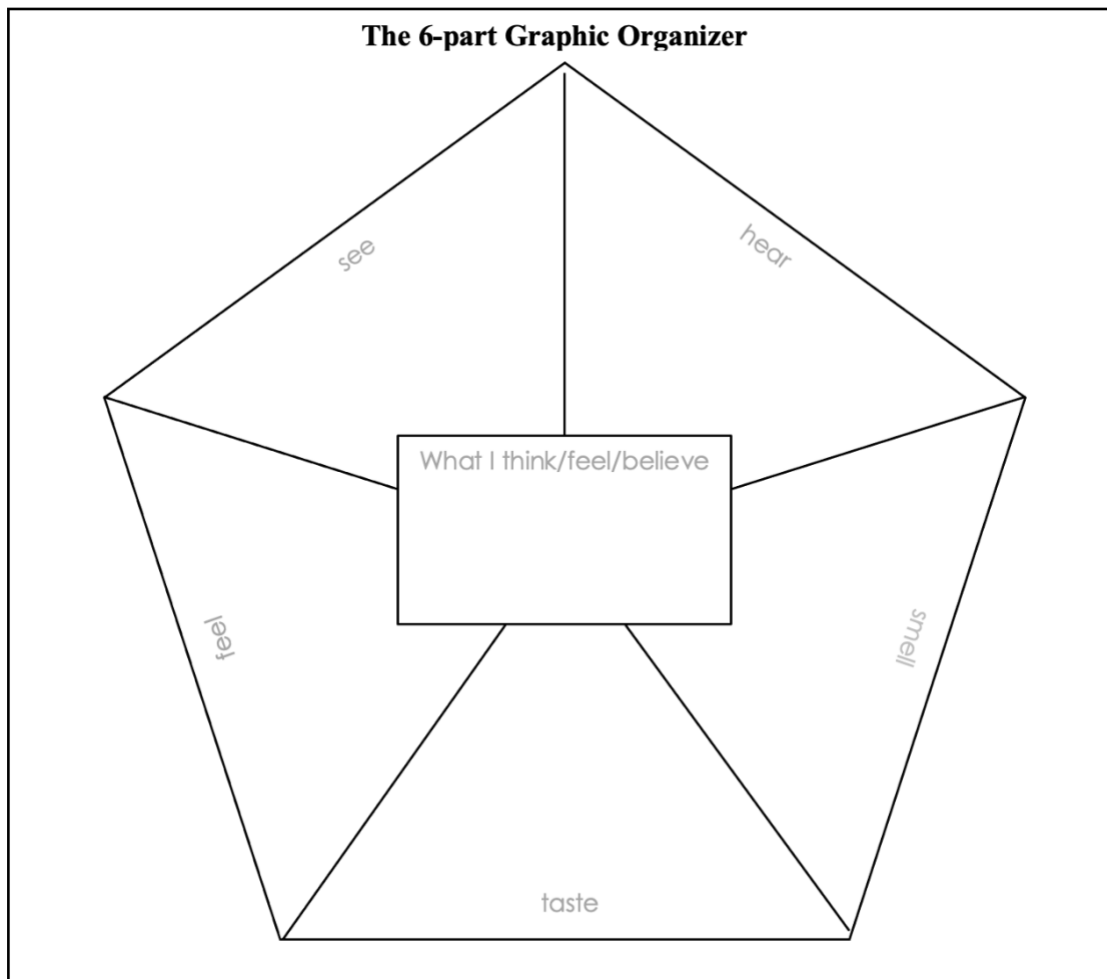
7. If desired, repeat the experience with a different passage. This passage is from the book *The Forgotten Garden* by Kate Morton, but any passage with vivid sensory imagery will work. Again, ask what sensory images children heard in the first reading and then pass out the organizer for a second reading.

This time the organizer includes a sixth category: think/believe. Children record the sensory images the author provides and what the description makes them think, feel, or believe.

from The Forgotten Garden by Kate Morton

From behind the wooden barrels, the little girl listened. She made a picture in her mind the way Papa had taught her. Men, near and far, sailors she supposed, shouted to one another. Rough, loud voices, full of the sea and its salt. In the distance: bloated ships, horns, tin whistles, splashing oars, and, far above, grey gulls cawing, wings flattened to absorb the ripening sunlight. ...

She'd been waiting a long time, so long that the sun had drifted across the sky and was now warming her knees through her new dress. She listened for the lady's skirts, swishing against the wooden deck. Her heels clipping, hurrying, always hurrying, in a way the little girls own mama never did.



8. In the discussion, prompt for deeper engagement:
- We read a lot more about what the little girl heard than about what she saw, tasted, or felt. Why might that be?
  - She has been behind the barrels for a long time, listening and waiting. What does that make you believe about the little girl? (Some might infer that she is hiding for some reason. Since she does not want to be seen, she doesn't see much beyond the barrels.)
  - One thing that the little girl is listening for is the lady's skirts "swishing against the wooden deck". What does this make you think about when and where the story is set?

### Children's Activity in or Following the Lesson

Give the children a copy of a photo or sketch of a very minimalist bedroom like the one that follows on the next page. This time, we will plan a descriptive paragraph and then write it.

We begin with a *tell* sentence: "The bedroom was a mess." Ask the children to think about what might make the bedroom a real mess. Sketch those items onto the photo of the bedroom. Be sure to include not only things that you can *see* making the room messy, but things that you can *smell* that make the room messy. If you walked into that room, might there be something messy that you could *feel* – maybe with your hands or your feet? You might even include something that you can *hear* that would contribute to a chaotic room.

Hand out a copy of the 5-part graphic organizer, and have the children list the things that contribute to the room's messiness in the appropriate section. If something makes a visual and olfactory (smell) impression, write that on the line between the two section OR in both sections.

The next part is turning the picture and graphic organizer into a *show* paragraph. Imagine that you are walking into this room for the first time. Is there anything that would tell you that the room is a mess before you even cross through the door? Begin there. Imagine that you are walking bravely across the room. Describe each thing that you encounter as you walk across the room.

Remember that this is a *show* paragraph. If the next thing in the room is a half-eaten cupcake, rather than saying, "There is a half-eaten cupcake," describe it and where it is. "A half-eaten, petrified cupcake is precariously perched on the rim of a chipped saucer under the bed." Notice how the adjectives (petrified, precariously, chipped) add vivid imagery to the sentence.

What is the next closest mess? If it is something that you can see, smell, and feel, can you combine those senses into one sentence?

Continue to "walk" across the room until you have described all or most of the mess on the drawing and graphic organizer.

If there is a final comment that you want to make or a question that you want to ask about the whole room (like "Who is this woman") add that at the end.

Invite children who want to share their paragraphs to do so. Use the pair-share technique if many children are eager to share. When all have shared, discuss how "walking" the description across the room made a more interesting piece than if they had described everything that they could see and then everything that they could smell and then everything that they could hear... (etc.)



Children’s Activity Following the Lesson OR As the Next Lesson

The children need at least one more experience with turning a *tell* sentence into a *show* paragraph, this time without the scaffolded support of having an adult talk them through the process. This can be done as a follow-up to the lesson, or it can be the next lesson: review the concepts, post some *tell* sentences, and ask the children to choose one and plan and write a new *show* paragraph.

It is wise to have children check in after they complete their planner. This is your coaching window. If you wait until they have written the paragraph, they will be resistant to coaching. Here are some *tell* sentences:

I was so excited.	The bus picked up the kids.	The science experiment was cool.
Camping is awesome.	The Greeks loved geometry.	The trash truck hit the guardrail.

### Presentation One: Defining and Reading Poetry

Materials: 3 poems representing widely divergent poetic styles

Books of poetry in the classroom for the activity and for children's free-reading

Consult the children's librarian for great anthologies and start a class wish-list!

1. Ask children to share what they know about poetry. Most of their answers will have something to do with rhyming. Of course, this only scratches the surface of what poetry has to offer.

Build upon their answers to broaden their view of this genre and spark interest and excitement for experimenting with it. Here are some ideas that may be worth exploring:

- Poetry is a form of imaginative writing. It tells a story, but it is a different kind of story than a narrative. Instead of using characters and settings and conflicts, poets tell their story by creating a word picture or a powerful feeling in the reader. Because poets tell their story with far fewer words, each word is carefully and intentionally chosen.
  - The purpose of poetry is to engage the reader. Poets want to make their readers feel something, remember something, or think something new.
  - All authors pay attention to the specific words they choose so that they convey the message that they intend. Poets pay attention not only to the meaning of the words they choose, but also to the rhythm and sound of the word. While the author of prose might find the words *ditch* and *culvert* to be interchangeable, a poet might not. If you say each of the words, they have a different feel in the mouth, a different rhythm, and different sounds.
  - The economy of words in poetry means readers have to participate, to *interpret* the poem. In prose, the writer spells out most of the details of the story. In poetry, the poet presents the images and ideas and leaves it to the reader to decide what they mean. Readers bring their own experiences and perspectives to the interpretation of the poem. If ten people read a poem, there can be ten different and completely valid opinions of what the poet wanted the reader to imagine or feel.
2. Without revealing the title, show and read aloud the first stanza *From a Railway Carriage* by Robert Louis Stephenson. This poem uses rhythm to evoke the motion of a train. Start slow and gradually build speed as you read aloud. Using some staccato in your voice can bring added meaning.

Faster than fairies, faster than witches,  
Bridges and houses, hedges and ditches;  
And charging along like troops in a battle,  
All through the meadows the horses and cattle:  
All of the sights of the hill and the plain  
Fly as thick as driving rain;  
And ever again, in the wink of an eye,  
Painted stations whistle by.

3. Ask children what they think the poem is about. Read it again if needed. Once they know that the poem is about a train, reveal the title and read the poem again.
4. Ask interpretive questions, like these:

- How old is this poem? Do use the term Railway Carriages today? (It was actually written in 1884, just before the invention of cars, and WAY before jets and rockets.)
  - The first thing that the poet talks about is speed. Faster than fairies, faster than witches. Why did he compare the speed of the train to fairies and witches? (Could it be that he was saying the speed of the train was almost unimaginable, like fairies and witches? The speed of trains at that time was considered stunning. Some even thought it might be dangerous!)
  - The rest of the stanza lists off things that he saw out of the train window. Ask questions about word choice like these:
    - o What are painted stations? Why do they “whistle by”? (Might that have something to do with a train whistling to signal its arrival?)
    - o Why does the poet say that all of the sights “fly as thick as driving rain”? (Might that suggest that the images come fast and are a little blurry?)
  - The lines are arranged in couplets (two lines at a time).
    - o Look at the ending punctuation of each line. The first line in each pair ends with a comma or no punctuation at all. The second line ends with a semicolon or colon to indicate a longer break.
    - o Each pair of lines ends in a rhyme (witches/ditches; battle/cattle; plain/rain, eye/by).
    - o Invite 4 children to each read one pair of lines, to see if changing voice affects the way that children see the poem.
  - Ask children if this poem makes them think of anything in their lives or any particular memories.
  - Finally, ask children to summarize the poem in one sentence of prose. *Answers will be something along the line of, “When you ride on a fast train, what you see is like photos blurring by.”* What does the poem do for the reader that the sentence doesn’t? What words create strong images?
5. Repeat the process with another poem. Choose a poet with a poetic style that is wildly different from Robert Louis Stephenson’s. This poem is by Shel Silverstein.

### **Frozen Dream**

I'll take the dream I had last night  
 And put it in my freezer,  
 So someday long and far away  
 When I'm an old grey geezer,  
 I'll take it out and thaw it out,  
 This lovely dream I've frozen,  
 And boil it up and sit me down  
 And dip my old cold toes in.

- from *A Light in the Attic*

6. Ask the children some interpretive questions about the poem, such as:
- Can you put a dream in the freezer? What is the poet saying by this statement?
  - Why boil the dream up? (Could it have anything to do with the sound of the line – *And boil it up and sit me down*?)
  - Why does the poet want to dip his toes in? (Could it have anything to do with the idiom about dipping one toe in the water? Do warm toes make warm memories?)
  - The only true rhyming words in the poem are freezer and geezer. But frozen and toes in also rhyme. Would you notice that if you only read the poem silently? (Maybe!)
  - o Ask children if this poem makes them think of anything in their lives. Have they ever had a dream that they wanted to save for later? Have they ever wanted to soak in a memory?
  - o Finally, ask if what language in the poem creates the strongest images (they might not all be visual images this time).
7. These two poems provide a platform for talking about the way that poems are written down.
- Line breaks are not at sentences. In fact, the Shel Silverstein poem is all one sentence. Poets make line breaks to help the reader interpret what they have written. They provide rhythm and flow. Sometimes they use punctuation at the end of lines and sometimes not. If it is there, it is there for a reason.
  - There are different rhyming schemes, some of which include having no rhyme at all!
  - Sometimes they aren't even written as lines!
8. Read one more poem, again choosing one with a very different style. (It is difficult to find who wrote this poem. It is easy to find but never has an attribution, and typically has no title!). Let the children look at this poem without reading it aloud. Ask what they think it is about.





After a time, show a more conventional presentation of the text of the poem:

A sputter, a click,  
 A whoosh to roar,  
 A shudder, a flick,  
 A push to soar,  
 The wings steady,  
 The nose held high,  
 The plane is ready,  
 To touch the sky.

Discuss what the shaped poem offers that is different from the more conventional presentation.

The rhyming pattern of the text is a point of interest. It is easy to see in the conventional presentation of the text. If the reader only had the shaped poem (concrete poem), it is harder to find. When reader does find them, they aren't always on the same part of the plane. In fact, it becomes more obvious that once the plane takes off, the reader must get involved in interpreting the poem to even know how to read it!

If children have previously studied onomatopoeia, point out the intentional use of this literary device.

Invite a child to read the poem aloud (preferably a child with a love of drama!)

9. There are over 50 different types of poems. We will look at some of these types in more detail in writing lessons, but the lovely thing about reading poetry is that you don't have to know all about a poetic type to read and enjoy the poem!

### Children's Activity in the Lesson: defining and reading poetry

This activity is usually best done with partner.

- Children choose a poem to read. One way to cut down on the selection process is to provide hard-copy page of a variety of pre-screened poems by a variety of poets. Spread them up and invite children to choose one. If children peruse anthologies or the internet to choose a poem, expect the choosing process to take much of the remaining lesson time.
- The children take turns reading the poem aloud to their partner. (Both should be able to look at the poem whether reading aloud or listening.)
- The children discuss the poem as modeled in the lesson. Here are some conversation-starters that can be posted as long as everyone understands that not all questions will apply to every poem!
  - o What the poem about on the surface – what is your 1-sentence summary of the poem?
  - o What sensory images is the poet creating? (Remember that you have 5 senses!)
  - o What is the mood of the poem? What feelings did you have as you read / listened to the poem?
  - o Are there any specific word choices that seem interesting? Is there anything that the poet is hinting at that isn't said in so-many words? Are there any metaphors or similes?
  - o Did the poem or any part of the poem remind you of something else that you have experienced or something else that you know about?

- Are there any rhyming words? Does the poem have rhythm? What do those do to contribute to the image or mood that the poet is creating?
- Is there anything else that is curious or interesting in the poem?
- What part of the poem did you like best and why?
- The children practice reading the poem with expression. Each child reads the poem aloud to their partner and asks for 3 compliments and a suggestion. Children alternate turns until each has read the poem aloud at least twice.
- The children decide how to present the poem to the group. Both must take some part in reading the poem. The division of how to share the reading should be driven by the form of the poem.
  - In the case of *From a Railway Carriage*, the punctuation of the piece suggests that the reader changes after every 2 lines.
  - In the case of *Frozen Dream*, the poem could be split in two after the fourth line. That separates what is happening in the present from what the poet hopes to do in the future. Or if they thought that the rhyming pattern was an important part of the poem, they might choose to have one person read the vast majority of the poem, with the other person reading only the rhyming words.
  - In the case of the concrete poem, they might choose to have the readers read one “plane” at a time, changing readers after each “plane”. Or perhaps one person reads the “planes” on the ground while the other person reads those that have taken off.
- The children decide 1-2 interesting things to say about the poem when they present it. They talk about any of the things they discussed in response to the prompts but should pick only the top two most interesting things they got from the poem.

Have as many teams present their poem as time permits, reading their chosen poem to the class and telling what they found to be the most interesting thing about the poem. Any children who do not get a chance to present during the lesson will present at other times in the coming week or so. (At the beginning of lunch, when returning from recess, at the end of the day while waiting for dismissal, etc.)

Note: this same activity could be done with a written response, but keep in mind that the purpose of this lesson is to inspire a love of playing with language in general and poetry in specific, as well as a willingness to experiment and take a few risks. Oral presentations are more well suited to these aims.

### Continuing the Practice of Reading Poetry

To keep poetry reading alive, consider having a 2-person weekly classroom job of *Poet*. Each week, these two children find a poem that appeals to them. By mid-week, they provide a copy of their chosen poem to the guide. This step is done for several reasons.

- It limits procrastination.
- It provides time for the children to analyze and practice the poem.
- It prevents a last-minute scramble to choose a poem that can be read without practice.
- It gives the guide a couple of days to scan the poem so it can be projected. (Or use a document camera).

On the last day of the week, at a prescribed time, the two children read the poem and tell what learned from or appreciated about the poem. (If school privacy rules permit it, consider videotaping the children’s presentation to send home to the parents of the two children presenting. This is a lovely way to connect with parents.)

# Preliminary Verb Family Study

**Presentation 1: Verb tense (Simple Tenses)**

Materials: Three charts of the simple tenses, blank chart, verb and pronoun symbols, prepared sentences on strips.

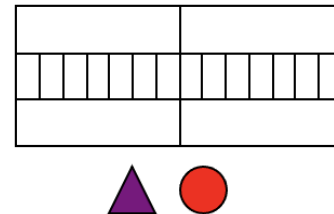
Children of upper elementary age readily understand past, present, and future time. A goal of this lesson is to help them reason through the idea that while the action may be in the past or future, the speaker or subject remains in the present. More importantly, this lesson provides much-needed direct instruction in future tense verbs requiring more than a single word to complete the verb. This will be reinforced in the lesson, *The Little Red Verb Box*.

1. Begin with a sentence in the present tense, such as

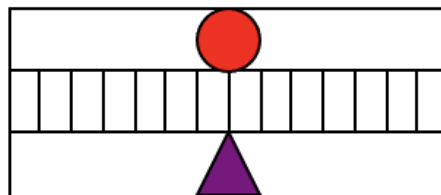
**I cook lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.**

NOTE: Use a regular verb. Save irregular verbs (to be / to have) for later!

2. Ask the children if the action in that sentence takes place in the present, the past or the future. When they agree that the action is in the present, establish that the speaker is also in the present.
3. Produce the mute chart and grammar symbols.

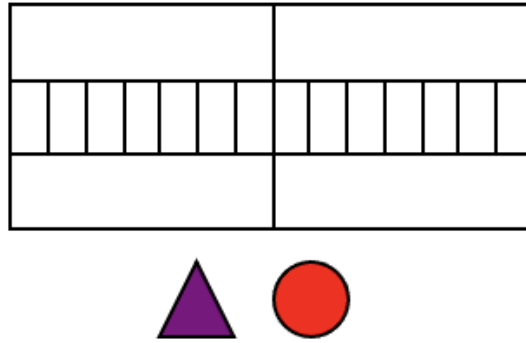


The black marks on the chart represent time. Think of it as railroad tracks going on without end into the past (to the left) and into the future (to the right). The vertical line at the center represents the present. The children decided that the action, cook, is in the present, so we put the verb symbol above the “tracks” on the vertical line. The children also decided that the speaker, *I*, is in the present, so we put the pronoun symbol below the “tracks” on the vertical line.



**I cook lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.**

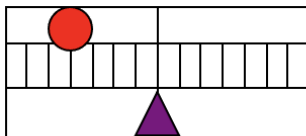
4. Replace the mute chart with the completed “Present Tense” chart, with the sentence below it. Return the mute chart and the loose grammar symbols to their place below the blank chart, as below:



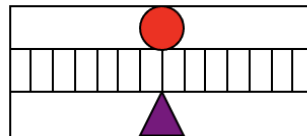
5. Next, read the same sentence in the past tense:

**I cooked lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.**

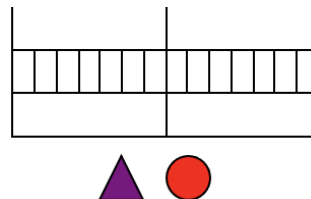
- Ask the children if the action in that sentence takes place in the present, the past or the future. When they agree that the action is in the past, ask if the pronoun is in the past with the verb. "Is *I* in the past? Did *I* time-travel back to the past to deliver the sentence?" When the children agree that the pronoun stays in the present, lay out the grammar symbols on the blank chart. Restating that the action, *cooked*, is in the past, so we put the verb symbol above the "tracks" to the left of the vertical line. The speaker, *I*, is still in the present, so we put the pronoun symbol below the "tracks" on the vertical line, as before.
- Produce the "Past Tense" chart. Place it to the left of the "Present Tense" chart with the sentence below it. Reset the grammar symbols and mute chart:



I cooked lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.



I cook lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.



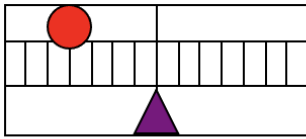
- Reinforce the concept that the verb is in the past or present tense. The pronoun has no tense.

9. Finally, read the same sentence in the future tense:

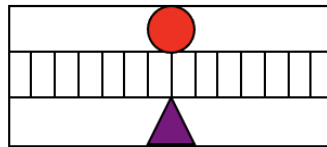
**I shall cook lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.**

10. Establish that the verb, *shall cook*, takes place in the future while the speaker, *I*, remains in the present. Place the verb and the pronoun on the blank chart while restating the conclusions drawn by the children.

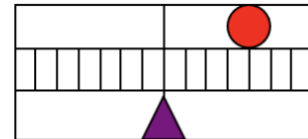
11. Produce the “Future Tense” chart. Place it above the “Present Tense” chart with the sentence below it and set the loose grammar symbols and the mute chart to one side.



I cooked lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.



I cook lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.



I shall cook lasagna for Garfield in my kitchen.

12. Reinforce the concept that the verb can be in the past, present, or future tense. The pronoun has no tense.

13. Do a three-period lesson, including asking children to orally construct sentences with the verb in the past, present, or future tense using the blank chart and loose symbols.

14. Give the children various sentences (orally) and ask them to identify the verb tense. For extra fun, ask them to change the tense! “The sentence is *I play soccer during recess*. Change the verb from present tense to past tense.” (After two changes, change to a different base sentence.)

TEACHER NOTE: Using the pronoun *I* in this lesson is a bit problematic, as the future tense of a verb with a 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun officially and formally takes the form *shall cook* rather than *will cook*, whether singular or plural (I or We). If one writes and speaks with complete grammatical accuracy, the future tense verb *will cook* is only proper for second and third person singular and plural pronouns. However, using third person singular (he, she, it, they) compromises verb conjugation as the present tense of the verb often ends in *-s*. It might seem that second person (you) would be the best choice for demonstrating tense; however, it is difficult to convince some children that the pronoun *you* remains in the present while the verb took place in the past. Few (if any) children question the use of the word *shall* and using the proper auxiliary verb sows seeds for the future. (Using proper nouns works no better – it changes the form of the present-tense verb: *Lexi plays soccer at recess*.) Harrumph... English...

In aggregate, it is best to stick with *I shall*. The lesson *The Little Red Verb Box* soon will reveal the will/shall issue in all its glory.

### Follow-up

This is the time to draw children's attention to verb tense in everything they are reading, both in expository and narrative writing. This not only raises their consciousness of verb tense, but also gives them closely-spaced practice if the subject comes up several times per day for a time.

- Who can read the directions for this activity for us?
- What are the verbs in the directions?
- What tense are the verbs in the directions?
- (etc.)

### Written follow-up

Analyze: Children use a blank tenses chart (just the railroad tracks), verb and pronoun symbols, and the sentences from the lesson to recreate the depictions of the three tenses. After a teacher-check to be sure that the pronoun stays in the present, while the verb moves to reflect its tense, they copy the results into their language books.

Synthesize / Utilize: Children sort teacher-provided sentences from current lit group readings and/or from the current read-aloud that have verbs illustrating the three simple tenses. For each sentence, children rewrite the sentence in each of the other two tenses. An interesting conversation can arise from this.

- What if the book was written entirely in future tense, present, or past tense? How would it feel different to the reader?
- Why do writers use a mix of tenses in their work?

## Presentation 2: Applied Prepositional Phrases (Adverbial Modifiers)

Materials: Grammar symbol stencils, colored pencils, Circles-and-Arrows Box III, advanced chart, prepared sentence strips, scissors.

TEACHER NOTE ONE: The primary aim of this lesson is the identification of prepositional phrases as adverbial modifiers (orange circles-and-arrows) through sentence analysis. Sometimes adverbial modifiers are stand-alone adverbs, but more often they are prepositional phrases. Relating grammar symbolizing to sentence analysis helps solidify children's understanding of the syntax of the English language, but also leads naturally into the lesson that follows, drawing a clear distinction between the often-confusing adverbs and prepositions.

1. Partner children up. Hand out one sentence strip to each group. Sentences should each have at least one adverbial modifier. Some adverbial modifiers should be adverbs, while others should be prepositional phrases. Some sentences should have S-P, some S-P-DO, and some S-P-IO-DO. Example:

**Yesterday, Jody saw several robins in the tree beside my driveway.**

Ask each group to collaborate to symbolize the sentence that they were given. This can be done with the plastic cut-out symbols or with colored pencils and symbolizers. If the plastic symbols are used, tape them to the paper once they are checked.

Ask each group to present their sentence and explain their choices.



**Yesterday, Jody saw several robins in the tree beside my driveway.**

2. Analyze the sample sentence with the children. Deliberately place the arrows question-side up while seeking the sentence part, flipping the arrow to the label-side once the part has been found. Many children, especially those with auditory processing difficulties, benefit from this from a modeling standpoint.

Ask, "What is the action?" Cut out the complete predicate with the symbols above each word and lay it on the large red circle.

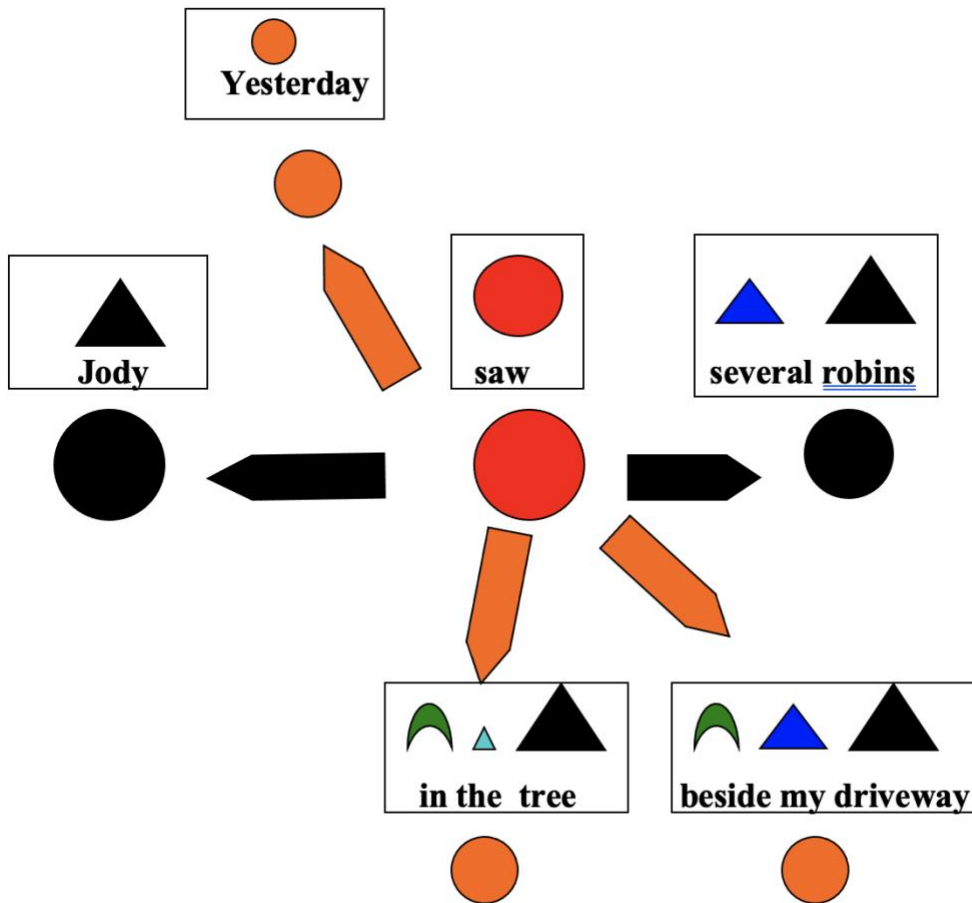
Ask, "Who or what performed the predicate?" Cut out the subject with the symbols above each word and lay it on the large black circle.

Continue by searching for a direct object and an indirect object, even if there is none in the sentence to be analyzed.

3. Express dismay over the fact that there are sentence parts left. Look at each chunk and ask the children, "What question does this word or phrase answer?" When it becomes clear that these questions are not part of the sentence analyses that have been performed so far, reveal the advanced chart, and begin looking at the orange arrows to find the question(s) needed. Place the sentence parts on the orange circle(s) and attach the corresponding arrows. Note that the orange circles-and-arrows can be placed anywhere so long as they radiate from the predicate – there is nothing to be gained by rigidly adhering to the position of particular arrows as shown on the control chart.

As much as possible, arrange the sentence parts so that they read top to bottom and left to right to reconstruct the sentence. Discuss the fact that the sentence parts (phrases or words)

placed on orange arrows are considered adverbial modifiers because they answer adverb-type questions. This is true whether the word(s) are one-word adverbs or prepositional phrases within the sentence.



4. Experiment with transposition. Discover that it is only “fair” to transpose sentence parts that are on the same color circles. That is, exchanging the subject for the object creates a silly sentence, but it is a well-constructed sentence none-the-less. Exchanging the segments on the orange circles changes the emphasis and may make the sentence more or less awkward, but it is still a fine sentence. On the other hand, exchanging the predicate and the subject causes a syntactic rift.
5. If there are enough materials available, invite each group to analyze their sentences. If not, analyze all of the sentences as a group, with each group leading the discussion of their sentence.

### Follow-up

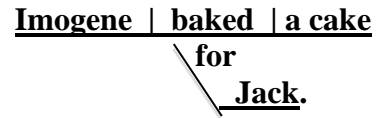
All levels: Students may now complete circles-and-arrows work on any sentence! Combining sentence analysis with grammar symbolizing like this, not only solidifies skills and produces a beautiful product, but also continues to reinforce important sentence-chunking skills. This will help with future phrases and clauses work.



**Point of interest:**

We can now say why the indirect object is so named. Remember this sentence? Let's look at the sentence using classic sentence diagramming:

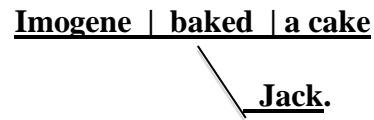
**Imogene baked a cake for Jack.**



Here, *Jack* is a member of the prepositional phrase *for Jack*. *Jack* is the object of the preposition *for*.

Reorder the sentence elements to remove the preposition:

**Imogene baked Jack a cake.**



*Jack* can no longer be the object of the preposition, as the preposition has been removed. It is now implicit. *Jack* indirectly becomes an object of the subject-predicate pair *Imogene baked*. It is an indirect object. The IO is the object of an implied preposition.

The long-lost preposition is provided in the question asked on the black indirect object arrow: *to whom?* / *for whom?* (Yet another reason to rigorously adhere to the questions on the arrows in the same format that they have been written!)

# Verbals

Verbals are powerful and frequently used parts of speech that look like a verb but function as something else. Verbs conjugate (Small Red Verb Box). Verbals do not. They include infinitives, participles, and gerunds. Prior to these lessons, if children symbolize these words as verbs, that is right enough. But now they get to see “the rest of the story”. Once children have verbals under their belt, they will be able to symbolize and analyze any text in English! Woo-hoo!

## Presentation 1: The Infinitive

Materials: Prepared sentences, labels **VERBAL** and **Infinitive**, box of grammar symbols, circles-and-arrows box III or IV.

1. Ask the children to symbolize and analyze the following sentence:

**I like classic movies.**

2. Ask the children to symbolize and analyze the following sentence:

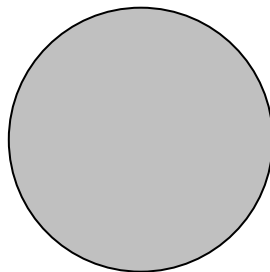
**I like to swim.**

The second sentence will prove to be the more challenging. Analyzing the sentence will not be difficult. However, the children will hopefully balk or get into a discussion about how to symbolize *to swim*.

3. Tell the children that sometimes there are words that look like verbs but act like other parts of speech, especially acting like members of the noun family. In the latter sentence, *to swim* is the direct object. By all rights, the word(s) that occupy that space should be a noun or noun family. But *to swim* is not a noun.

Words that look like verbs but act like other parts of speech are called **verbals**.

4. There are three types of verbals. The one being discussed in this lesson is called the **infinitive**. The symbol for an infinitive is a silver circle. It is the same size as the verb, which tells you something about its importance!



Infinitives take the form *to + the simple form of the verb*. In this form, it can act like a noun, an adjective, or even as an adverb!

- noun (subject or object!): **To run is a healthy habit.**  
**I love to sing.**
- adjective (modifies subject or object, *following* the noun that it modifies):  
**The way to succeed is clear.**  
**It is time to go.**
- adverb (various applications): **I read to learn.** (modifies verb)  
**He was delighted to help.** (modifies adjective)  
**They ran too fast to lose.** (modifies adverb)

Infinitives can fill more roles than any other verbals. The word *infinitive* comes from the root word *infinituus* meaning unlimited or infinite. There is only one rule about infinitives! DO NOT split *to* and *the verb*.

**The ringmaster is trained to handle wild animals easily.**

**NOT**

**The ringmaster is trained to easily handle wild animals.**

### Follow-up

Analyze: Children symbolize teacher-provided sentences, each containing infinitive(s), indicating if each infinitive is functioning as a noun, adjective, or adverb with initials in or adjacent to the silver circle and/or by drawing an arrow from the infinitive to the word that it modifies.

Children can also take a page from a current novel or from their own writing and go on an infinitive hunt. They are actually fairly common and easy to find. Highlight each infinitive. (These may be saved for future follow-ups.)

Synthesize: Children symbolize *and analyze* teacher-provided sentences (fewer sentences than those at the Analyze stage due to the extra effort for each sentence), analyzing the sentences with wooden circles-and-arrows to support identifying each verb by type (transitive, complete intransitive, or linking intransitive):

**Transitive verb: I love to skydive.**

(infinitive is the DO because it answers the question, "I love what?"; the infinitive is acting as a noun)

**Simple intransitive verb: Athletes compete to win.**

(infinitive is an adverbial modifier – orange circle -- because it answers the question, "Why?" – adverbial modifier of purpose)

**Linking intransitive verb: The goal is to win.**

(infinitive is a predicate noun because it follows a linking verb and renames the subject: goal = to win)

Utilize: Children already utilize infinitives liberally in their oral and written work. Utilization of infinitives in isolation is not especially needed.