

# Grade 8 English

## Oak Meadow Teacher Manual

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## Lesson



# Baseball in April and Other Stories: Finding Your Voice

## ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read Section I in *The Elements of Style*.
- Read three short stories.
- Read the Grammar Tip.
- Choose and use a vocabulary word of the week.
- Summarize the plot of a short story.
- Identify the story's strengths and weaknesses.
- Connect the story to your own life.
- Complete exercises #1 and #100 in *100 Ways*.

## Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Summarize the plot of a short story.
- Identify the story's strengths and weaknesses.
- Reflect on the writing process.

## Reading

Read Section I: Elementary Rules of Usage in *The Elements of Style*.

Choose three short stories to read from *Baseball in April and Other Stories* by Gary Soto. You can scan the story titles or the first sentence of each story to help you choose, or you might choose a story at random, or simply read the stories in order. Plan to read one story a day for three days rather than reading all three stories in one sitting. Here is a list of the stories:

- Broken Chain
- Baseball in April
- Two Dreamers
- Barbie
- The No-Guitar Blues
- Seventh Grade
- Mother and Daughter
- The Karate Kid
- *La Bamba*
- The Marble Champ
- Growing Up

### Story Map

Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Author: \_\_\_\_\_

Climax: \_\_\_\_\_

Major Characters:

10. \_\_\_\_\_

9. \_\_\_\_\_

8. \_\_\_\_\_

7. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

1. \_\_\_\_\_

11. \_\_\_\_\_

12. \_\_\_\_\_

13. \_\_\_\_\_

14. \_\_\_\_\_

Conflict: \_\_\_\_\_

Resolution: \_\_\_\_\_

Setting: \_\_\_\_\_

Underlying story theme: \_\_\_\_\_

Story mapping is a way to help students gain an awareness of the key elements of a plot and the arc or shape of the story as the conflict is introduced, escalates, comes to a climax, and resolves. Every story is different, but all stories have some elements of conflict or tension as the main character is trying to achieve a goal or overcome an obstacle. If students have trouble identifying these key elements, have them retell the story. As they summarize it, they are likely to become aware of the essential plot points.

2. In *100 Ways to Improve Your Composition and Creative Writing* (which we'll refer to as *100 Ways*), read the following sections and complete the exercises listed. This may seem like a lot of writing, but several of these exercises are quite short.
  - Sentence Combining
    - Exercise #24
  - Sentence Variety
    - Exercise #27
  - Paragraph: The Building Blocks of Composition
    - Exercise #34

- Brainstorming and Outlining
  - Exercise #36
  - Exercise #37

**Exercise #24:** Students are asked to use a variety of combining strategies to link sentences in the examples. Responses will vary. The sample answers below show just one possible solution for each example.

- a. Mrs. Reyes wrote an excellent play about her family.
- b. To ensure a safe trip, a sailor should always be aware of weather conditions.
- c. The ancient volcano is about to erupt.
- d. Bradly, who is tall and thin, likes to read and play guitar.
- e. There is grass on the mountain top where the herd of elk lives.
- f. Sherman, our neighbor’s cat, is sweet. He doesn’t have a tail.
- g. You will need Indian spices, butter, and salt for that recipe.
- h. The bookstore was closed because today is a holiday.

**Exercise #27:** Students are asked to use adjectives, prepositional phrases, and dependent clauses to create sentence variety in the examples. Compare the student’s response to the original sentence. The new sentence should be more interesting and descriptive. For example, the first sentence is *The clown juggled six lemons*. This sentence can be enlivened in many ways:

- *The clown, who was wearing backward clothing and an immense rainbow-colored top hat, juggled six lemons.*
- *The clown juggled six lemons while standing on the roof of a tiny car that was spinning in circles.*
- *The goofy, sad-faced clown juggled six lemons, pretending to cry harder and harder each time he dropped one.*

**Exercise #34:** Students will identify the main topic and supporting details of one paragraph in a published essay or article, and then analyze the paragraph’s effectiveness based on organization, clarity, and variety in sentence length and structure. Students should identify specific words, phrases, and passages in their response. Ask to see the original paragraph if necessary to evaluate the exercise.

**Exercise #36:** This is a brainstorming exercise where students will write down any ideas related to one of the topics. If your student seems focused on only one aspect of the topic or seems “stuck,” it can help to brainstorm ideas aloud and then have the student write them down.

**Exercise #37:** Students will organize the ideas from Exercise #26 into an outline. They are not expected to do additional research or to write an article; this is an exercise in organization and outlining. Check that the student has identified the key (main) ideas and then organized supporting details related to each main idea. There should be at least one supporting detail for each main idea (remember, these details do not need to be researched or fact-checked at this time).



### Up for a Challenge?

Short story writing is a unique format that requires the writer to focus on the essence of the story. With very few pages to develop plot, characters, and setting, the story must use concise language and imagery. If you'd like to expand your knowledge about short story writing, pick up a book of short stories at a library or bookstore. As you read, pay attention to how the author develops the story, introducing and resolving conflict with a limited number of words.

Students will find additional ways to work with the material in this section. These suggestions are optional and not a required part of the course. Teachers may want to offer extra credit for these activities or allow students to substitute a challenge activity for a regular assignment.

## Learning Checklist

Use this learning checklist to keep track of how your skills are progressing. Include notes about what you need to work on. Please remember that these skills continue to develop over time so you aren't expected to be able to do all of them yet.

SKILLS	Developing	Consistent	Competent	Notes
Use a new word in conversation and writing				
Identify the main conflict of a plot				
Identify key scenes in a story				
Identify the climax and resolution of a story				
Create a story map				
Recognize the main idea and supporting details of a paragraph				
Demonstrate brainstorming a topic				
Demonstrate outlining				

## Lesson



# *A Wrinkle in Time:* Friends and Strangers

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### ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read Section III in *The Elements of Style*.
- Complete an assignment about the author or the Newbery Medal.
- Begin reading *A Wrinkle in Time*.
- Complete exercises #2 and #5 in *100 Ways*.
- Choose and use a vocabulary word of the week.
- Make a list of interesting phrases or word choices in the book.

## Learning Objectives

At the end of this lesson you will be able to:

- Identify effective phrases and word choices.
- Locate relevant sources for research, and summarize research.
- Strengthen a weak piece of writing with intentional word choices.

## Reading

Read Section III: A Few Matters of Form in *The Elements of Style*.

Begin reading *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle. Read the following chapters:

- Chapter 1 Mrs. Whatsit
- Chapter 2 Mrs. Who
- Chapter 3 Mrs. Which
- Chapter 4 The Black Thing



### Reader's Journal

In your reader's journal, write down your first impressions of this story. Is there something that you like about it (or don't like about it) so far?

## Vocabulary

Choose a word of the week and find out what it means. Write the word and its definition in your reader's journal. See how many times you can use the word in conversation this week. Try to get others to use the word as well. Write down the best sentence (giving credit where credit is due!).

If you are having trouble remembering to use the word throughout the week, write it down on a piece of paper and tape it to the wall near your desk, to your bathroom mirror, to the refrigerator, or anywhere you and others in your household will see it regularly. This will help everyone remember to use the word.



### Talk About It: Discussion

Many adults remember reading *A Wrinkle in Time* when they were children. Ask your parents or other adults you know if they read the book, and if so, what they remember about it.

## Assignments

1. Consider the careful word choices made by the author of *A Wrinkle in Time*. For instance, the first chapter includes words such as *frenzied*, *wraithlike*, and *smugly*, and phrases such as *a gray fluff of kitten* and *rickety brass bed*. Locate five more instances of words or phrases in the book that you find interesting, unusual, or effective. Note the page number where each word was found. As you search for vivid language, think about how it affects the reader's experience of the story (and how you might use more dynamic language in your own writing).

This exercise will help students recognize how the author uses language intentionally to employ imagery or evoke emotion. In identifying vivid language, students may become more equipped to use it in their own writing. If a student's choices of words or phrases do not seem particularly evocative, ask the student to explain why the words were chosen.

2. Madeleine L'Engle won the Newbery Medal in 1963 for *A Wrinkle in Time*. Choose one of the following assignments and write about one page. Use your own words!

This is a minor research project, as students are asked to write a brief history or biography. Students will need to do research on their own and cite their sources. Look for writing that is informative and organized, and that stays on topic.

- a. Research the history of the Newbery Medal. Who started it? How long has it been awarded? How many past winners have you read? Write a brief history of the Newbery Medal or read a Newbery acceptance speech and summarize the key points. Cite the sources used in your research (use at least two).
  - b. Learn about Madeleine L'Engle's life and other books she has written. Has she written books for adults as well as children? Are all her books science fiction or does she write in other genres? Write a brief biography about the author, focusing on the aspects of her life that you find most interesting. Cite the sources used in your research (use at least two).
3. In *100 Ways*, read the following sections and complete the exercises listed:

- Word Choice/Exercise #2
- Prefixes, Roots, and Suffixes/Exercise #5

**Exercise #2:** Students will rewrite a paragraph by making intentional word choices that enhance and clarify the writing. There are many possible responses for this exercise. Compare your student's response to the original paragraph to see what changes have been made. Pay particular attention to the use of concise words in descriptions and check that redundancies have been eliminated.

**Exercise #5:** Students will identify at least five words that have a prefix, a suffix, or both, and then use these words in a descriptive paragraph (the words should be underlined). Look for writing that is detailed and concise. Check that the underlined words are used correctly in context.

## Learning Checklist

Use this learning checklist to track how your skills are developing over time and identify skills that need more work.

SKILLS	Developing	Consistent	Competent	Notes
Use a new word in conversation and writing				
Identify effective phrases and word choices				
Locate relevant sources for research				
Summarize research				
Strengthen a weak piece of writing with intentional word choices				