

Grade 8 English

Oak Meadow Coursebook

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Item #b082110
v.061819



Table of Contents

Introduction.....v

Unit I: Looking Ahead

Baseball in April and Other Stories

Lesson 1: Finding Your Voice..... 3
Lesson 2: Past, Present, Future 7

A Wrinkle in Time

Lesson 3: Friends and Strangers..... 11
Lesson 4: Journey to the Unknown 15
Lesson 5: Fear and Courage 19
Lesson 6: The Power of Love 23

The Giver

Lesson 7: The Community 27
Lesson 8: The Receiver..... 31
Lesson 9: The Memories..... 35
Lesson 10: The Decision 39

Unit II: Looking Behind

Moon Over Manifest

Lesson 11: Universals 45
Lesson 12: Layers of Secrets..... 49
Lesson 13: Forgetting..... 53
Lesson 14: Remembering..... 57

Baseball in April and Other Stories

Lesson 15: Story Mapping	61
Lesson 16: The Craft of the Short Story	65
Lesson 17/18: Short Story Writing	69

Unit III: Listening

Leave This Song Behind

Lesson 19: Who Are You?	75
Lesson 20: Who Am I?	79

Echo

Lesson 21: Uncertainty	83
Lesson 22: A New Start	87
Lesson 23: Inseparable	91
Lesson 24: A New Hope	93
Lesson 25: Dreams	97
Lesson 26: A New Song	99

Unit IV: Looking Inside

Biography/Autobiography

Lesson 27: Reading a Biography of a Famous Person	105
Lesson 28: Reading a Biography of a Famous Person	109
Lesson 29/30: Writing a Biography of Someone You Know	111

Criss Cross

Lesson 31: The Necklace	115
Lesson 32: The Guitar	119
Lesson 33: The Friends	121
Lesson 34: Full Circle	123

Leave This Song Behind

Lesson 35: Looking In	127
Lesson 36: Looking Out	129

Appendix	131
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Lesson **1** *Baseball in April and Other Stories: Finding Your Voice*

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"

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*.



Reader's Journal

In this course, you will keep a journal about what you are reading. Many of the lessons will include journal suggestions that will help you reflect on and analyze the literature you are reading. You are also encouraged to use your journal for jotting down thoughts and questions, brainstorming ideas, and keeping track of plot twists and character relationships. Since this is a journal, the writing can be very informal. You don't have to use complete sentences or worry about grammar and style—just write!

This week, write down a phrase or sentence that caught your eye while reading one of the short stories. Copy it down in your journal, along with the book title and the page number. You'll always want to identify where a quote came from so you can find it again, and so you won't accidentally use it without giving credit.

Grammar Tip

Reading is Fundamental

You probably know that it is essential to learn the rules and usage of grammar, but you might not realize that the best way to improve your writing skills is to *read*. Many writers have never studied formal grammar, but they use language correctly because they have seen it in action countless times.

Read, read, and read some more. Read everything. Magazines, news headlines on the internet, blogs, articles, and movie reviews. And most of all, read books of every kind: novels, biographies, history and historical fiction, short stories, memoirs, and nonfiction about any topic that interests you.

Why read? By reading, you absorb writing in the real world. Published books (as opposed to many online sources) contain very few errors, and most of those are simple typos. This means that you will read page after page of words spelled correctly, punctuation applied to increase clarity, and grammar used appropriately. The beauty of reading is that you don't have to pay attention to these conventions of writing; you'll be internalizing them without even trying. Over time, your ability to recognize errors and awkward phrases will improve, and so will your writing.

Perhaps best of all, good literature has the power to ignite your imagination. As you read the words on the page, your inventive mind will create the colors, sounds, characters, and dramatic moments that the author describes. A novel presents an entire world for you to explore and interpret in your own way.

Vocabulary

Each week, you will choose a “Word of the Week.” You can find your word of the week in your reading, a dictionary, or ask an adult to come up with a word you don’t know. The only requirement for the word of the week is that it is a word that is new to you. You will use your reader’s journal to keep a list of words throughout the year. Write “Word of the Week” at the top of a page in your journal; since you don’t know how many pages this will take up, you might want to put this in the back of the journal. If you turn the journal upside down, the last page of the journal can be the first page of your word-of-the-week list.

For each word of the week, you will write down the word and define it, either using your own words or writing the dictionary definition. Then throughout the week, see how many times you can use the word in a sentence while speaking. Do your best to get others to use the word, as well. For instance, if your word of the week is *recalcitrant*, you might comment that your recalcitrant dog won’t come when you call.

At the end of the week, write down one of the sentences you said or heard that used the word of the week. If the sentence was spoken by someone else, make sure to give that person credit!

Assignments

1. Choose your favorite of the three short stories you read. Write down the title and give a brief summary of the plot. A good summary includes a brief description of the main story conflict and key story events.
2. Identify one thing the author did well and one thing you think could have been improved. What did you like about the story? What didn’t you like? Explain your choices.
3. Write down one way the story reminded you of something in your own life. What aspect of the story could you relate to? Why?
4. In *100 Ways to Improve Your Composition and Creative Writing*, read the following sections and complete the exercises listed:
 - Before You Begin: Writing About Writing
 - Exercise #1
 - Write a Memoir
 - Exercise #100

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. The main goal is to be aware of which skills you need to focus on.

SKILLS	Developing	Consistent	Competent	Notes
Use a new word in conversation and writing				
Summarize a story plot				
Identify strengths or weaknesses of a story				
Make a connection between fiction and real life				
Reflect on the writing process				

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

When you have completed this lesson, continue to lesson 2. You will share your work with your Oak Meadow teacher at the end of lesson 2. If you have any questions in the meantime, please let your teacher know.

Lesson 2 *Baseball in April and Other Stories: Past, Present, Future*

Learning Objectives

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

- Identify the conflict, key scenes, climax, and resolution of a plot.
- Create a story map.
- Write an outline based on ideas generated through brainstorming.

Reading

Read Section II: Elementary Principles of Composition in *The Elements of Style*.

Choose three short stories to read from *Baseball in April*. Plan to read one story a day for three days rather than reading all three stories in one sitting.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read Section II in *The Elements of Style*.
- Read three short stories.
- Choose and use a vocabulary word of the week.
- Create a story map.
- Complete exercises #24, #27, #34, #36, and #37 in *100 Ways*.



Reader's Journal

If a catchy phrase or great description catches your eye, write it down in your reader's journal, along with the book title and page number.

Vocabulary

Choose a “Word of the Week” and see how many times you can slip it into the conversation this week. Remember, it must be a word that is new to you. In your reader's journal, write down the word, making sure to spell it correctly, and then define it. At the end of the week, write down the best sentence using the word, crediting the person who came up with it.



Talk About It: Discussion

It can be helpful to discuss your ideas before writing them down. Try it for the short story assignment below. Before you begin writing, talk to someone about the character and what happened in the story. Discuss your ideas about how the character changed in the story.

Assignments

1. Choose one of the stories you read and create a story map that shows the shape of the plot in terms of rising and falling tension. First, identify the main conflict. This conflict can come from within a character, can unfold between characters, or can involve the outside world. Sometimes the conflict is presented as a goal the character is trying to achieve. Usually this conflict is introduced in the first scene. Sometimes the conflict is presented as a goal the character is trying to achieve. Usually this conflict is introduced in the first scene.

Next, identify key scenes that show the conflict escalating (or the character facing new challenges or obstacles). Figure out where the story comes to a climax, when the character is most in danger of not accomplishing the goal or overcoming the challenge. And finally, describe how the conflict resolves as the story comes to an end. You can use a graphic, such as the one pictured below, or create your own graphic story map.

Story Map

Title: _____
Author: _____

Climax:

Major Characters:

10. _____

9. _____

8. _____

7. _____

6. _____

5. _____

4. _____

3. _____

2. _____

1. _____

Events Rising Action

Falling Action

11. _____

12. _____

13. _____

14. _____

Conflict:

Resolution:

Underlying story theme:

Setting:

Underlying story theme:

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



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.

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				

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

When you have completed this lesson, share your work from lessons 1 and 2 with your Oak Meadow teacher. If you have questions about how to submit your work, see the Parent Handbook and your teacher's welcome letter.

Lesson



A Wrinkle in Time: The Power of Love

Learning Objectives

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

- Brainstorm and organize ideas for a three-paragraph essay.
- Identify relevant story details to support ideas.
- Demonstrate skills in revising, editing, and proofreading.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read the Grammar Tip.
- Write a three-paragraph essay on how love and the intellect are portrayed in the story.
- Choose a creative project to complete.

Grammar Tip

Troubling Affects and Effects

Effect and *affect* are two very troublesome words in English, and both are often used incorrectly. Why is this? Is it because one is a verb and the other is a noun, and we get them mixed up? In fact, the situation is worse than that: *Either* word can be used as a noun *or* a verb. In a way, then, this gives us *four* meanings to disentangle.

Look up these words in your dictionary. You will find that *effect* is more common as a noun, while *affect* is almost always used as a verb. The other meanings, however, are just as valid and they have a hand in causing the confusion. Here are some sample sentences to help you keep them clear:

***affect* (verb)**

Let's go inside; the cold is starting to affect me.

His gift was generous and affected her in a peculiar way.

***affect* (noun)**

His face was unfamiliar and showed a peculiar affect.

This affect of his, of pretending to be blind, was tiresome.

effect (verb)

By lowering prices, the company hopes to effect an increase in sales.

A great many positive changes have been effected by the efforts of science.

effect (noun)

Let's go inside; the cold is having an effect on me.

The effects of this calamity are still being felt.

Overall, the distinction to remember is that *affect* is the doing, and *effect* is the result of the doing. You *affect* a soccer ball when you kick it, but you *effect* a goal because the goal is the result of the kicking.

**Talk About It: Discussion**

If you saw the movie version of this book, think about how the book and movie differed and which parts were the same. Did any of the characters look or act differently than you expected? What were your feelings about that? What scenes were changed? Why do you think the director made changes from the book? What changes would you have made?

Assignments

1. In this story, the concept of love is central to the plot. Think about all the ways that love is represented in the book, and how love is contrasted with the intellect. It isn't a coincidence that IT is a brain. As we see in the story, intellect can be good or bad, depending on how it is used. In a three-paragraph essay, explore the topic of love and intellect, and how they work for and against one another in *A Wrinkle in Time*. Your writing should exhibit clear organization and sound reasoning, and include specific examples from the story to support your ideas. Brainstorm the ideas you'd like to include first, and then organize them in an outline or graphic organizer before you write your rough draft. Revise and polish your paper so it is an excellent example of your best work.
2. Choose one of the following creative projects.
 - a. Illustrate a scene from the story. Include a brief caption that explains what is going on in the illustration. Your drawings should include specific story details.
 - b. Write yourself into a scene. Imagine yourself in this story. Choose a scene and then rewrite it with yourself as an additional character. How would you act? What would you say? Try to stay within the style of the story, and remain true to the story plot, characters, and setting.

- c. Build a three-dimensional model that expresses the different dimensions the characters experience in the book. Alternately, you can create a collage that uses both words and visuals to express the story's themes.
- d. Create a poem or song about the story. You can choose a specific scene or character to focus on or you can write about the story as a whole. Make sure to reference at least one specific aspect of the story in your poem or song.
- e. Design a new book cover. Think about the most prominent themes in the book or some key aspect of the story that gives a sense of the story as a whole. You can draw original graphics, or use photographs and graphics that you cut and paste on paper or on the computer. Make sure to include the title and author's name.



Up for a Challenge?

If you are looking for more ways to work with the lesson material, whenever you have a choice of assignments, do more than one.

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
Demonstrate organization of ideas in a three-paragraph essay				
Identify relevant details or examples to support an argument				
Demonstrate revision and editing skills				
Demonstrate proofreading skills				

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

When you have completed this lesson, please submit lessons 5 and 6 to your Oak Meadow teacher. If you have any questions about the assignments, contact your teacher or include a note when you share your work.

Lesson



The Giver: The Community

Learning Objectives

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

- Revise weak writing to make it more expressive.
- Demonstrate effective use of adjectives and adverbs.

Reading

Read Section V: An Approach to Style in *The Elements of Style*.

Begin reading *The Giver*. This week, read chapters 1–7. Use your reader’s journal to keep track of characters, significant scenes, story themes, and plot twists. Plan your time so that you read one or two chapters each day.



Reader’s Journal

Use your journal to write down your impressions of the story. Look for recurring themes and symbolism, and note these in your journal.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read Section V in *The Elements of Style*.
- Begin reading *The Giver*.
- Read the Grammar Tip.
- Choose and use a vocabulary word of the week.
- Complete exercises #6 and #7 in *100 Ways*.
- Revise a piece of writing to demonstrate effective use of adjectives and adverbs.

Grammar Tip

Literally and Figuratively

Literal means taking words at their most exact meaning. Using the adverb *literally* is a way to assure your readers that you are employing no figures of speech, and that what you say is what you mean, word for word. Consider these examples:

The first draft of that story was so bad I literally had to throw it out and start all over.

I drove that car until it literally fell apart.

In the first example, the writer actually threw the story out: the writer picked up the paper on which the story was written and put it in the trash can. In the second example, when the writer says the car “fell apart,” it means the car actually came to pieces. When you use the word *literally*, you are assuring your reader of something that actually happened, that you are not being figurative.

What’s happening now in our language, however, is that *literally* is being used as an intensifier, and thus is being used for exactly the opposite of its original purpose. As you’ll notice in the examples above, the word does serve somewhat to intensify the sentence, since it assures us, for example, that the car completely fell apart rather than simply suffering some minor breakdown. This intensification has expanded, tragically, to include a wide range of absurd misuses of the word:

It’s literally raining cats in the Puget Sound area, as local shelters are overrun with felines, and they’re asking for the public’s help to save them.

There may be a lot of cats around Puget Sound, but this sentence assures us that they are actually falling from the sky.

“Arizona is in play like never before,” said the chairman of the state’s Democratic Party. “And the Republicans are literally handing it to us.”

How many Republicans does it take to lift an entire state?

Of course, this doesn’t mean that you should always mean exactly what you say; that would get tiresome. Figurative language can be beautiful, artistic, exciting, and hilarious. It is the essence of great writing. However, we don’t want to lose the one word in the English language that is supposed to guarantee “no figurative language here.” As writers, we have literally hundreds (!) of ways to intensify our writing or give it flair. *Literally* means that, for this sentence at least, you mean what you say.

Vocabulary

Choose a word of the week, or ask someone else to choose one. Write it down and define it, and then use it each day. Try to come up with new ways to use the word. Do you like to sing? Add it to a made-up song. Do you like to draw? Draw a picture that shows the meaning of the word.

At the end of the week, write down one way you used the word in context.



Talk About It: Discussion

Consider creating a reading group for this book (or any other book in this course) so that you are reading the book at the same time as other students. When you meet with your group, discuss the chapters that you read, and try to make predictions about what will happen next. Assign each person a role—Summarizer, Questioner, Character Examiner, Vocabulary Finder, and Illustrator—and each time your group meets, you will change roles. Each person should come prepared to share their work when your group meets.

- **The Summarizer** provides a summary of what happened in the chapters you read.
- **The Questioner** poses three focus questions for your group to discuss.
- **The Character Examiner** discusses how characters change over time and their influence in the story.
- **The Vocabulary Finder** will compile a list of important words and define them for the group.
- **The Illustrator** will create two or three drawings from the section you read.

When the group finishes reading the book, have one final meeting to discuss possible alternate endings if the characters had acted differently or events had unfolded in another way. As a group or individually, reflect on how the group worked together and what changes might be helpful in future literature groups.

Assignments

1. In *100 Ways*, read the following section and complete the exercises listed:
 - Word Choice: Adjectives and Adverbs
 - Exercise #6 and #7
2. After completing Exercise #7, rewrite your paragraph or story, using adjectives and adverbs in a more varied and effective way.

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				
Demonstrate revision technique				
Demonstrate effective use of adjectives and adverbs				

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

If you are interested in creating or joining a reading group for this book, or any book in this course, let your teacher know. You and your teacher can discuss ways to connect with other interested students and to substitute reading group activities for lesson assignments.