

Grade 8 English

Oak Meadow Teacher Manual

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Lesson



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.

Students will be reminded periodically to use their reader's journal. This is a good habit to encourage in your student as it can benefit reading comprehension and deepen the student's skill in literary analysis.

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!

Students are encouraged to involve their entire household in learning a new word each week and using it in context. Students will keep a list of the words, along with definitions and

sentences using the word in a relevant way. You can check this list throughout the semester, or wait until the end of the semester, when the entire list will be submitted.

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.

A plot summary should identify key elements of the story and highlight the main character’s goal or challenge and the obstacles the character must overcome. Many students get bogged down in specific details that aren’t necessarily salient to the plot; point these out if they are included as they can turn a “brief” summary into a convoluted description of unrelated story elements.

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.

Students will highlight what worked well in the story and what didn’t, focusing on one story strength and one weakness. By considering what they particularly liked and disliked about the story, students will gain perspective on what was effective. The reasoning behind this choice should be clearly explained.

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?

This assignment asked students to find a personal connection to the plot, characters, setting, or even a specific story detail. The goal is for students to see the universal elements underlying the story particulars and to find meaning and relevance to their own lives.

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

The writing exercises in *100 Ways to Improve Your Composition and Creative Writing* provide a variety of ways for students to strengthen their writing skills. These exercises can be evaluated based on the instructions provided in the reading sections prior to the exercises. Additional tips are offered below.

Exercise #1: Take note of your student’s reflections on writing. This will help you guide and encourage the student to develop areas where more confidence or skill is needed.

Exercise #100: Students are asked to describe a favorite childhood memory. Look for clear descriptive writing using sensory details. If the writing lacks detail, students may benefit from recounting the story aloud; additional detail can also be encouraged by asking specific questions as the story is being told.

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.

Learning checklists are found at the end of each lesson in both the student coursebook and this teacher manual. You may want to encourage your students to complete the checklist at the end of each lesson to help them stay focused on the skills they are acquiring. You can use the teacher manual checklist to keep track of areas where the student needs support and ideas for how to provide that support.

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				

Lesson *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.



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.

Continue to encourage your student to use the word of the week in conversation and writing.

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*.



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.

Discussion topics related to the literature are offered throughout the course. Giving students the opportunity—and encouragement—to discuss their thoughts, questions, feelings, and ideas will help them reflect on what they are reading. Reflection and discussion can lead to an enhanced understanding of the material, particularly the underlying literary themes. Discussion also helps students learn how to analyze and critique what they are reading and clearly communicate their ideas. Encourage your students to discuss the reading by showing an interest in it and expressing your own thoughts and questions.

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.

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 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.

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: _____

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 mountaintop 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 #36 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: 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.



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?

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.

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.

This is a comprehensive three-paragraph essay that should show a variety of writing skills including clear organization, sound reasoning, concrete literary references, editing, and proofreading. Feedback can focus on specific ways the student can improve these skills; if possible, students should be given the chance to revise the paper based on the feedback.

2. Choose one of the following creative projects.

The student’s choice of creative project should include specific references to the book. The goal is for students to explore literary themes in a novel, creative way; artistic ability is not what is being evaluated.

- 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				

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.

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.

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.



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

Exercise #6: Students will rewrite sentences to eliminate ineffective adjectives and adverbs. Sample answers are given but student responses will vary.

- a. The judge whispered to the prosecuting attorney.**
- b. The graceful dolphins playfully swam near our boat.**

- c. She's the fastest swimmer on the team.
- d. His car is always filthy.
- e. The curvy road is dangerous.
- f. That dinner tasted delicious.
- g. The deafening thunderstorm was frightening.
- h. My headache is excruciating.
- i. The generous millionaire donated money to the local hospital.
- j. He hit the wall repeatedly in frustration.

Exercise #7: Students will choose several adjectives and adverbs and then try to write a descriptive paragraph using only those words as modifiers. The resulting paragraph is likely to sound stilted, flat, and possibly nonsensical. This exercise is intended to help students become aware of the importance of vivid and accurate descriptive words. If the student uses more than the chosen adjectives and adverbs, point this out—it may come as a surprise.

2. After completing Exercise #7, rewrite your paragraph or story, using adjectives and adverbs in a more varied and effective way.

Using the paragraph written for Exercise #7, students will rewrite it with a variety of descriptive words. Compare the two paragraphs to see what changes have been made, and to evaluate the effectiveness of the changes.

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				