

Here's an **organization** technique that asks students pre-plan paragraphs by brainstorming interesting questions that paragraphs might answer.

Purposeful Paragraphs on Memorable Teachers

From Carol Gebhardt, 5th and 6th grades, Florence Drake Elementary

Explanation of this lesson: I use essential questions for each one of my units to help me and my students stay on task. I started noticing some of my students were using these questions to guide their writing in their reports.

Over the summer I read Barry Lane's book After the End. He encouraged his students to cluster questions as a pre-writing activity (see page 44). I felt my students would take more ownership of their writing if they were the ones thinking up the questions and then organizing their answers.

The lesson I have included below is how I first attempted to get my students to write questions as their pre-writing activity.

My essential question for my students to answer after this lesson:

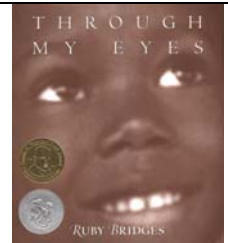
How can we use questioning to create lead sentences and details in order to create a purposeful paragraph?

Step 1: Ask students, "What is the organization trait?"

We have posters around the classroom where we have interactively written the definition of each writing trait. Before the lesson, we read through our classroom organization poster together.

Step 2: Model organizational writing.

For this lesson, I share the first paragraph from Through My Eyes. This book is written by Ruby Bridges and shares her journey through the desegregation of public schools. I chose this book because it is structured in a way that shows my students how a writer can be organized and engaging to the reader at the same time. We note the techniques the author uses to encourage us to read more of her book. Her first sentence, for example, uses a personification in its topic sentence: "When I was six years old, the civil rights movement came knocking at the door."



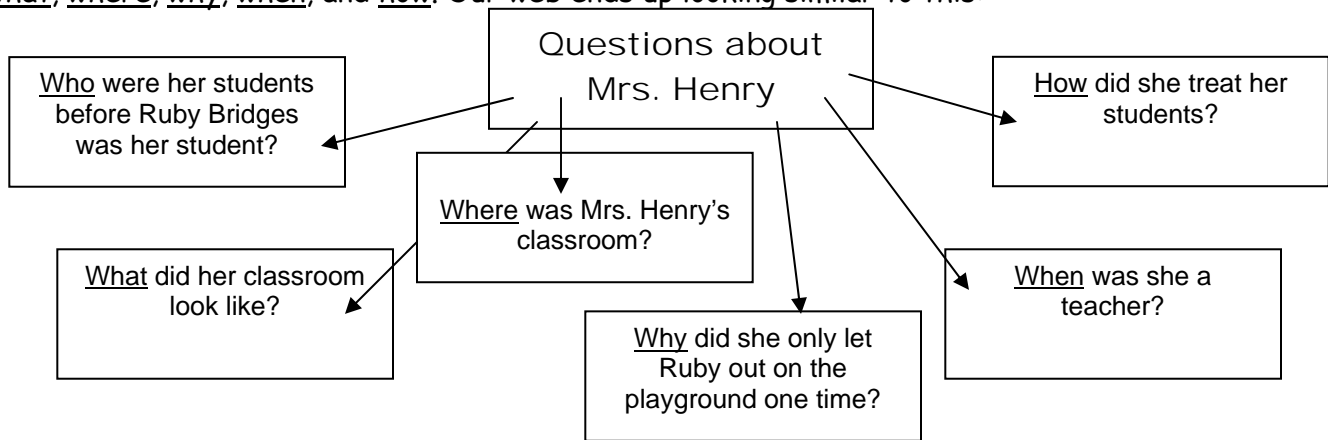
I read other parts of the book to give my students background on Ruby Bridges and her teacher, Mrs. Henry. An introduction to Ruby Bridges and the Civil Rights movement can be found on pages four and five of Through My Eyes. I read pages 10 and 11 to illustrate what life was like for Ruby prior to desegregation. Finally, I read page 22 to introduce them to Mrs. Henry, Ruby's first white teacher.

I put Ruby's account of her memory of Mrs. Henry, from pages 40 and 41, on the overhead. Again, we note how her writing was organized. We look for how her ideas are strung together, and how she makes us wonder about her teacher. This account is more than one paragraph, but it gives us information to ask questions about in order to practice writing our own questions.

Step 3: Thinking in questions

I ask my students what interesting questions could have been asked about Ruby's teacher, based on the reading we have just completed. We brainstorm questions using these question words: who,

what, where, why, when, and how. Our web ends up looking similar to this:



We look back at Ruby's writing to see how she answered each question. We discuss which of these questions had "thick" answers, which are answers where Ruby provided more details to the reader. Then, we discuss how Ruby might have chosen her lead (or topic) sentence about Mrs. Henry and how she concluded her writing on her teacher.

Step 4: Writing prompt and pre-write

My students are now almost ready to write to this prompt:

"Good teachers are hard to forget. Think of a teacher you have had that you will remember for a long, long time. Was it a teacher at school, at home, or for activities or sports? Think about all the ways that person was special. Explain this teacher so clearly that your reader will know just what made him or her a good teacher. You may use a real or made up name for this teacher."

Each student makes a web of questions about their most memorable teacher, using the ideas for questions from Step 4. Before doing this, we discuss how some of the questions for our web might be similar to the questions we asked about Mrs. Henry, but we can certainly write our own original questions. We put stars next to the questions we think were "thicker," questions that would allow us to write using strong, supporting details. We put check marks by questions that asked for answers that are "thinner." Thinner questions make for better introductory or concluding sentences.

Step 5: Rough drafting

Students prepare to write their rough drafts by first answering all their questions on slips of binder paper. I write my own answers on large sentence strips to put them on the board.

We each choose one "thin" question's answer to inspire a lead sentence.

Next, we put our sentences in an order that makes sense to us. I model my thinking aloud by putting my strips up and then rearranging the strips if I think there is a better order. My students manipulate their strips of binder paper at the same time. Students are directed to use the answers to their thin questions as a lead or a concluding sentence, and the thicker sentences

to be used as supporting detail sentences—or as the inspiration to an entire paragraph. I try not to limit my students to a five sentence paragraph. I encourage them to read their sentences out loud to see if they like how their writing sounds. When their sentences are in an order they like, they write their paragraphs out on binder paper. This new draft is their second attempt at answering the prompt, and we call it our second draft. The length of the paper and number of paragraphs depended on the student. For this writing prompt, students did not go past one page.

Step 6: Revision and editing checklists

To help revise their papers for idea development, each student works with a partner. Students read their papers to a partner, and the partner has to ask two good questions they still have about the teacher from the draft. Writers can then add more detail to their writing. Students have the option of adding the new answers to the draft or keeping it in the original form.

After draft two is complete, students use the following editing checklist and then have a conference with me about their papers before starting their final draft.

CATEGORY	RESPONSIBILITIES
Capitalization	<input type="checkbox"/> I have capitalized the first word of each sentence. <input type="checkbox"/> I have capitalized the names of people. <input type="checkbox"/> I have capitalized the names of months, days, and holidays. <input type="checkbox"/> I have capitalized the names of cities, states, countries, continents and famous places (.e.g., Empire State Building).
Conventions**	<input type="checkbox"/> I used commas, periods, question marks, and exclamation points correctly. <input type="checkbox"/> I used quotation marks around dialogue. <input type="checkbox"/> I used apostrophes correctly in contractions and possessives.
Organization	<input type="checkbox"/> My report is sequenced in a logical order. <input type="checkbox"/> My introduction is exciting and inviting.

* We are focusing on the organization trait, but I still expect you to check for the conventions we had previously worked on during mini lessons in our writer's workshop.

Step 7: Final draft

The technique of having students use questions as a prewriting activity teaches them to not only organize their thinking, but it also empowers them to take ownership of their writing. Continue

stressing ownership of writing by having students self-assess their own final drafts with the rubric you will use when you assess them.

Below is the rubric I use. I made this rubric on-line at the Rubistar website:
<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php>

6+1 Trait Writing Model : Memorable Teacher

Teacher Name: **Mrs. Gebhardt**

Student Name: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Grammar & Spelling (Conventions)	Writer makes no errors in grammar or spelling that distracts the reader from the content.	Writer makes 1-2 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes 3-4 errors in grammar or spelling that distract the reader from the content.	Writer makes more than 4 errors in grammar or spelling that distracts the reader from the content.
Capitalization & Punctuation (Conventions)	Writer makes no errors in capitalization or punctuation, so the paper is exceptionally easy to read.	Writer makes 1 or 2 errors in capitalization or punctuation, but the paper is still easy to read.	Writer makes a few errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and interrupt the flow.	Writer makes several errors in capitalization and/or punctuation that catch the reader's attention and greatly interrupt the flow.
Introduction (Organization)	The introduction is inviting, states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper.	The introduction clearly states the main topic and previews the structure of the paper, but is not particularly inviting to the reader.	The introduction states the main topic, but does not adequately preview the structure of the paper nor is it particularly inviting to the reader.	There is no clear introduction of the main topic or structure of the paper.
Sequencing (Organization)	Details are placed in a logical order and the way they are presented effectively keeps the interest of the reader.	Details are placed in a logical order, but the way in which they are presented/introduced sometimes makes the writing less interesting.	Some details are not in a logical or expected order, and this distracts the reader.	Many details are not in a logical or expected order. There is little sense that the writing is organized.
Conclusion (Organization)	The conclusion is strong and leaves the reader with a feeling that they understand what the writer is "getting at."	The conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all the loose ends.	The conclusion is recognizable, but does not tie up several loose ends.	There is no clear conclusion, the paper just ends.

Table of Contents of the entire *Going Deep with 6 Trait Language Guide*

Five Essays to Inspire Dialogue Among Teachers:

These five essays come with embedded Trait Post-Its so that teachers can not only discuss each essay's content but also think about specific writing traits as they're being used by each essay's author.

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The Trait Modules:

These six modules contain lesson plans and resources from a variety of first- through twelfth-grade classrooms. These modules are not about giving away the lessons and resources to just the teachers who teach the exact same grade. The lessons and resources should not be quickly dismissed if it's discovered that the providing teacher teaches a different age or socio-economic level of student.

These lessons and resources come from teachers who have gone out of their way to help students own trait language in their classrooms. Helping a student own an academic language is a universal concept, not a grade specific one.

The goal of these six modules is to promote "adaptive talk." If, while exploring these modules, a teacher says, "I like the idea here, but I'd make it look different for my students, and here's how," then that teacher has succeeded in using this guide in the way it was intended.

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