

# Incite to Write!

## PROGRAM MANUAL

### FOR GRADES 3-8

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**INCITE TO WRITE! PROGRAM MANUAL 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> Grades**  
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# Incite to Write!

## II.

# Mechanics of Writing

## A. Building Paragraphs

## II. MECHANICS OF WRITING -- BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

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## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### CHOCOLATE CAKE! The Power of Asking Questions

**Objective:** Learn to ask questions -- lots of them! Use questions as a strategy for creating supporting details.

**Method:**

Hold out a placard that says:

**My favorite dessert is chocolate cake.**

Students ask as many questions as they can about your chocolate cake, using WHO, WHERE, WHY, WHAT, WHEN questions. Keep count on your fingers, and help them along as necessary to get them started. The class should come up with at least 30 questions. Ask them if they could easily answer each one of the questions. They will say yes. Then ask them if they wrote a sentence answering each one of those questions, how many sentences would they have? The answer of course will be the number of questions they come up with. Then ask them how many sentences are needed for a paragraph: the answer is 5 or 7. And they came up with 30+ !! Reinforce how easy it is to come up with 30 sentences!

Possible questions for "My favorite dessert is chocolate cake"

*Why is it your favorite?*

*Who were you with the first time you ate it?*

*What special ingredients are in your cake?*

*Where did you get your recipe?*

*Where do you buy your ingredients?*

*How big is it?*

*What shape is your cake?*

*What kind of frosting?*

*How long do you bake it?*

*What else do you put on your cake?*

*How many slices do you eat?*

*How do you feel when you eat it?*

*How often do you eat it?*

*How do you eat your cake?*

*When do you eat it?*

*When was the first time you ate it?*

*What kind of chocolate do you use?*

*How do you make it?*

*How long does it take to make?*

*How many ingredients do you use?*

*How many layers?*

*What do you put in the middle?*

*What kind of decorations?*

*What texture is it?*

*How does it taste?*

*How many calories?*

*How do you feel after you eat it?*

*Who do you eat it with?*

*What do you have with your cake?*

*How do you vary your cake?*

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### THE QUESTION GAME



**Objective:** To learn to ask questions.

Questions serve as the springboard into the intuitive world. When students can formulate questions they are well on their way to exploring the depths of higher level thinking. Kids are born asking questions, but they often lose this ability for many reasons as they get older. It is easy, however, to re-ignite in students the pure joy, fun and energy that comes from creating questions on the spot. Students will have to visualize and create pictures in their mind in order to do this activity, waking them up from the “Passive Mind Syndrome” brought on by our electronic game age.

**Method:**

Divide students into two teams, with about 4 or 5 students on each team, or divide the class in half. Teams come to the front and stand on opposite sides while the teacher stands in the middle.

Fill a bag with index cards containing main idea-topic sentences. These can be sentences the students write or you can use sentences straight out of a fiction or reference book. Write one sentence only on each index card.

Let a member from Team A choose a card out of the bag, and then hand it to the teacher. The teacher reads the topic sentence out loud and lets Team A go first. Team A calls out as many questions as they can think of that pertain to that topic sentence. They are allowed less than 1 minute before the teacher turns to Team B. This game should go fast with no pauses. Team B gets to ask as many questions as they can think of, but they must not repeat any questions that Team A asked. After a minute, teacher turns back to Team A. Each team must ask their questions as quickly as possible. If there is more than a 3-second pause between questions, teacher turns to the opposite team, signaling they can now ask questions. When neither team can come up with more questions within a 5-second period, end the game and take a vote on which team asked the most questions.

Allow all questions, even "yes or no" questions. There should be a wide variety of questions, from the general to the specific, from the tangible to the abstract.

- *continued*

## “The Question Game” – continued

### EXAMPLE: "EAGLE IN THE WOODS"

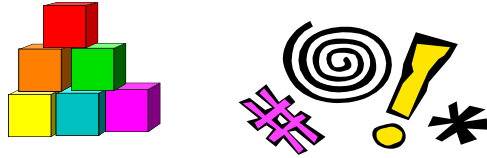
Before starting, ask the students what the key words are that they will be asking questions about. In the following sentence, the key words are *eagle*, *woods*, and *we*. You can suggest that the students first ask questions pertaining to the eagle. A sampling of questions that may be generated from the topic sentence, “**We saw an eagle flying high in the woods**” might include the following:

How big was the eagle?  
What did its wings look like?  
Did you see its eyes?  
What did its feet look like?  
What was its beak like?  
What did it remind you of?  
How long did you see it?  
What were you thinking when you saw it?  
How fast was it flying?  
What time of day was it?  
Did the eagle make any sounds?  
Who were you with?  
Where were you?  
Had you been there before?  
Did you like these woods?  
Where were you when you saw the eagle?  
Did you like the eagle?  
Were there other animals or birds who saw it?  
What was your first thought after you saw it?  
Did you and your friends discuss what you had seen?  
Etc.

What color was it?  
How high was it flying?  
Was it carrying anything in its feet?  
How did you feel when you saw it?  
Did it have food in its mouth?  
Did the eagle change as it flew?  
Was this the first eagle you saw?  
Did it look vicious?  
Was it alone?  
What was the weather like?  
What season was it?  
How long had you been out?  
What were you doing in the woods?  
Did you like the people with you?  
Will you go back again?  
What did your friend(s) say?  
Has it changed your life?

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### BAG OF OBJECTS PARAGRAPH



**Objective:** Create questions from an object and use to build a paragraph.

**Method:**

Pass around the circle a bag filled with small, interesting objects. (It can be the same bag of objects used for Narrative writing).

Each student draws an object from the bag without looking, and then comes up with five questions to ask regarding the object. Then they pass the bag onto the next student.

After all students have had a turn, pass out paper and ask them to write a paragraph (6 sentences) using the questions they asked, or ideas for questions they got from other students.

## BEGINNING PARAGRAPHS

### THE CAPTAIN & CREW + EDITING

**Objective:** To understand the main idea of a paragraph and locate supporting details. Students will recognize which paragraph "captain" (main idea) various sentences go with, and ask permission from the captain to join his/her crew. Students will then rearrange the "crew" (supporting sentences: details) into a proper order (editing).

**Method:**

Three students are chosen to be captains; each comes to the front of the class and holds a topic sentence placard in the front of them. Sentence strips are handed out to the class (see below). One at a time, students read their sentences strips out loud and decide which captain their sentence belongs to. They ask permission of the captain to join his or her ship. The captain determines if the sentence belongs in his crew. If the captain says "yes", the student lines up in back of the captain.

Each captain and crew "paragraph" then reads their sentences, and the remaining students in the class decide if the paragraph sounds right. If not, a student volunteers to "edit" the paragraph by physically re-arranging the crew members until the paragraph sounds correct.

During the editing process, keep reading the paragraph out loud. Editing is a higher order thinking skill. It forces the students to really look at the content of the sentences in order to analyze the sentence's correct placement in the paragraph. Allow time for discussion during this editing process. This provides wonderful opportunities for critical thinking and analysis skills to be modeled. Note that some paragraphs may have more than one correct order for the crew members/sentence strips.

**Example: Paragraph Captains (each written on a separate placard)**

THE BEAR WENT IN SEARCH OF FOOD.

THE TWO GIRLS WENT ON A PICNIC.

WE LOVED THE NEW HOUSE.

**Sentence Strips (Crew) (mix up)**

They drove deep into the woods.

We found a room perfect for having tea in the afternoon.

After eating for a long time, he took some of the berries back to his cave.

Suddenly he saw a large bush covered with red berries, and took some in his large paw.

By the side of a stream there was a clearing where they set out their tablecloths.

It was beautiful.

It looked like a small castle, with many interesting rooms.

It started to rain so they ran back to their car and drove home.

He walked for many miles through the forest, listening carefully.

**They drove deep into the woods.**

**We found a room perfect for having tea in the afternoon.**

**After eating for a long time, he took some of the berries back to his cave.**

**Suddenly he saw a large bush covered with red berries, and took some in his large paw.**

**By the side of a stream there was a clearing where they set out their tablecloths.**

**It was beautiful.**

**It looked like a small castle, with many interesting rooms.**

**It started to rain so they ran back to their car and drove home.**

**He walked for many miles through the forest, listening carefully.**

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### Example 2.: Captain & Crew + Editing

This series of captains/crew is more advanced.

**Captain:** THE TEST WAS DIFFICULT.  
**Crew:** It had over 100 questions.  
If I had known, I would have studied harder.  
Unfortunately, I failed.

This sentences in this paragraph can be put in almost any sequence and still make a good paragraph.

**Captain:** A MOOSE'S ANTLERS BEGIN TO GROW EVERY SPRING.  
**Crew:** They grow throughout the summer.  
In the winter, the antlers fall off.  
Moose grow new antlers every year.

**Captain:** HAVE YOU EVER SEEN A GALAXY?  
**Crew:** Look up into the sky on a moonless night.  
All the stars you see are part of the Milky Way galaxy.  
We live on the outer edge of this galaxy.

Sentence Strips:

**It had over 100 questions.**

**If I had known, I would have studied harder.**

**Unfortunately, I failed.**

**They grow throughout the summer.**

**In the winter, the antlers fall off.**

**Moose grow new antlers every year.**

**Look up into the sky on a moonless night.**

**All the stars you see are part of the Milky Way galaxy.**

**We live on the outer edge of this galaxy.**

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### WALK THE PLANK! QUESTIONING THE CAPTAIN

**Objective:** Create answers on the spot to questions students ask about your "CAPTAIN", thus building supporting sentences. Determine if a question is appropriate for your paragraph ship.

**Method:**

A student volunteers to be a "Captain". Give student a placard with a captain (main idea) sentence. Other students question her. If she feels it is an appropriate question that she would like in her "crew", she answers **with a COMPLETE sentence**. If the sentence is not appropriate, she tells student to "Walk the Plank" or "Find Another Ship". Continue until the Captain has about 10 sentences or crew members in her Paragraph Ship.

Allow different students to be captains, and then follow up with a writing activity. Students can write on any captain paragraph that was created during the activity. They now have many supporting details and ideas for sentences, and can concentrate on the writing.

Ideas for "CAPTAIN" sentences:

- "I entered the cave at midnight."
- "My treehouse is incredible!"
- "The jungle was silent and eerie."
- "The lake is very dangerous."
- "The alien arrived last night."
- "The mountain was hard to climb."
- "There were 5 chickens at the bottom of the hill."
- "It was around midnight when I finally saw it."
- "Hundreds of trees were being cut down."
- "It began to snow hard."
- "David is a terrific drum player."

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### CAPTAINS & SENTENCE STRIPS Expanding on a Theme

**Objective:** Create group paragraphs using sentence strip paper; guess logical sequence of supporting sentences and re-arrange performing group's "crew" into a proper order.

**Method:**

In groups of 3 or 4, students are given a topic sentence. The topic sentence person is called the "captain". Group then brainstorms questions they can ask regarding the captain sentence. From these questions they develop supporting sentences, and write them down on construction paper or sentence strip paper.

They "perform" it in front of the class by having the captain and the crew stand in a line across the front of the room, holding their sentence strips in front of them for the class to see. They do not stand in proper order, but mix up their sentences. **(They can even put the captain or main idea sentence in the wrong place, and have students try to determine which sentence represents the MAIN IDEA of the paragraph).** They then ask someone from the audience to put the crew in the right order. Group can read out loud their paragraph as much as needed, as the other students must "hear" the flow of the paragraph to determine what needs to be changed.

Examples of topic sentences, or Paragraph "Captains":

"The mountain was hard to climb."

"Mike is the best soccer player on our team."

"My brother and I love to build sand castles at the beach."

"We saw an eagle in the woods."

"I love to hike in the woods". .....etc. etc.

## **BUILDING PARAGRAPHS**

### **WORLD'S FASTEST PARAGRAPH TEAM**

**Objective:** Working with a team, create orally a paragraph as fast as possible from a sentence captain drawn from a bag.

**Method:**

Divide into groups of 4-6. Stand up in groups. A group draws a sentence Captain out of a bag. As soon as they read it out loud, they must make a paragraph with each student contributing one line. They have no time to plan. There should be a minimum of time between each sentence. With younger students, you can point to which student is to go next.

When the first group is done, the next group draws a sentence Captain out of the bag and quickly comes up with a paragraph with each student in the group contributing one sentence. Repeat until all groups have gone.

The second time around, allow less time between creating the sentences. If a team goes too slowly, they have to sit down. Remaining teams continue until one team is left standing as the "World's Fastest Paragraph Team".

**Sentence Captains:**

**The mountain was 6,800 feet above sea level.**

**The boys hid behind the door.**

**I make the best hamburger around.**

**Ashley decided to go on a picnic.**

**A dog was running through the park.**

**It was a long trip.**

**It started to rain.**

**At night the beach is beautiful.**

**Our boat came to a dead stop.**

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### IT'S SHOWTIME!! PARAGRAPH RACES



**Objective:** To write a paragraph of 5 to 7 sentences as quickly as possible.

**Method:**

Give students a captain or main idea first sentence. Allow each student time to write it down on their paper. Tell them you will give them 10 minutes to write a paragraph, adding supporting ideas to their topic sentence. Then, using a timer or alarm clock, call out, "On your mark, get set, It's Show Time!"

Let them know when there is one minute left, 30 seconds, etc. When the timer goes off they count the number of sentences they have, write the number down in the left margin of the paper and circle it. They should also write down the number of minutes. Have them draw a line under the paragraph.

Give students another captain. This time, tell them they will be given only 8 minutes to write. At the end of the 8 minutes, students again count up their sentences and circle the number on the margin and write down the number of minutes.

Repeat once more, allowing only 6 minutes!

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### PARAGRAPH PILES

**Objective:** To put the sentence strips or "crew" in order. Demonstrate comprehension of a paragraph by physically arranging sentence strips into a proper order, using textual clues and critical thinking skills.

**Method:**

Have students work with a partner. They are given the captain sentence and a pile of sentence strips (can be laminated for longer use) and they must determine the order of the sentence strips. When finished, each partner team "performs" in front of class by holding their sentence strips in a line across the front of the room, using another student as sentence holder, if necessary. Classmates edit, if needed. To increase the difficulty, give partner teams 2 captain sentences along with 2 piles of sentence strips combined and mixed up. They must figure out which sentences make the right "crew" for each captain and in what order. When finished they share their results in front of the class, with the class editing.

**Variation:**

- Time the activity and turn into a race. Keep score. If a partner team finishes on time but doesn't get it right, the other partner teams get a point.
- Give all the teams the same paragraph piles and play like Bingo.

**Variation: FIND THE CAPTAIN!**

Give partners a paragraph pile (or 2 piles to make it more difficult) and DO NOT POINT OUT THE CAPTAIN SENTENCE. They must determine the main idea sentence and then put supporting sentences in order. Try with 2 piles on similar subjects.

**Remember, there is often more than one correct way the paragraph can go. Even the main idea sentence or "captain" can be changed in some cases. Allow time for discussion from class when each partner team "performs" and class is editing. This gives students valuable practice in critical thinking skills and provides ample opportunity for thinking and analysis skills to be modeled!**

Use printed paragraphs found in informative textbooks and literary novels, write each sentence of the paragraph on a separate colored strip of paper, and pass out for teams to put in correct order; then compare with textbook.

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### PICTURE PARAGRAPHS



**Objective:** Using a picture as a prompt, students will create a 7-sentence paragraph that includes a vivid description of the picture.

**Method:**

Cut out interesting and colorful pictures from magazines and put in a bag. Ask each student to draw out a picture from the bag. They are to create a 7-sentence paragraph (minimum) on the picture. They must use their imagination to create a context for the picture.

Paragraphs should include descriptive details and adjectives.

## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### I WONDER!



**Objective:** To strengthen critical thinking skills, reading comprehension and imagination by asking questions.

**Method:**

Students pair up and sit opposite each other. Partner A reads a short article or folk tale out loud to Partner B. After each sentence, Partner B must quickly come up with 2 questions that have to do with the sentence Partner A just read.

Partner A quickly writes the questions down, and continues reading the next 2 sentences of the folk tale. After the 2 sentences, Partner B again comes up with 2 questions, which A quickly jots down. B must come up with new questions to ask for each few sentences. If needed, Partner A can mentor by asking, “What are you wondering about now? What did I just read that makes you curious about something?” etc. As they go along, they see which questions get answered by the story. B continues to ask questions after every 2 or 3 sentences that A reads.

At the end of a page or two, or the conclusion of the story if it is short, A and B must write the answers to Partner B's unanswered questions, using their imagination.

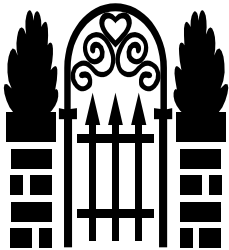
## BUILDING PARAGRAPHS

### BE SPECIFIC: VISUALIZING

**Objective:** To wake up our minds and fill in all the details in the "corners" of the paragraph we are writing; to create a vivid and precise picture in our imagination of what we are writing about.



#### METHOD:



First, have students say specificity three times out loud as fast as they can.

**SPECIFICITY! \* SPECIFICITY! \* SPECIFICITY!**

Discuss what specificity means. Next, ask students to close their eyes. Tell them you are going to take them through a guided visualization, and they are to fill in the details any way they like:

Imagine you are walking up to an incredible house. It is the most wonderful house you have ever seen. What is the house surrounded by? Is it in the woods? On top of a mountain? By a river? The ocean? .....What does the landscape around the house look like? Are there flowers and trees, or cactus? What kind? What color?

What does the outside of the house look like? What is it made of? What color? How big?

Now imagine you are walking up to the front door. What does the door look like? What is it made of? What color? What does the doorknob look like?

Open the door slowly. What do you see? ..... What kind of furniture do you see? What colors?..... What are on the walls?.....the ceiling?

You are now walking to your bedroom. It is your favorite room, because you have decorated it just the way you like. How do you get to your bedroom? Down a hall? Up the stairs?

You enter into your bedroom. What kind of bed do you have?.....What does the bedspread look like? What colors and patterns? ..... What is on the windows? When you look out the windows, what do you see?

What color are the walls? .....What do you have on the walls?..... Do you have games or computers or a TV? ..... What is on the floor? What else is in your room that you love?

**When the visualization is over, have students share just one aspect of their imaginary picture with the class. Then have them write a whole page (2 for older grades) on their house and what they saw in their imagination.**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### TOM'S PIZZA

Think about the following "caption: main idea" sentence:

**Tom makes the best pizza in town.**

Write down 7 questions you could ask.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

Now write a paragraph explaining who Tom is and why his pizza is the best. Use the questions above to help you **get ideas** on what to write. Do **NOT** write answers to your questions one after the other in order to make your paragraph. See which questions go together and what other details come to your mind as you write your paragraph.

Tom makes the best pizza in town. \_\_\_\_\_

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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### DRAGON PARAGRAPH

Think about the following "CAPTAIN" (main idea) sentence:

**The dragon lived in a strange cave deep in the forest.**

Write down 7 questions you could ask.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_

In your mind create answers to your above questions. Now write a paragraph on the above, using your answers to the above questions to help you get ideas for sentences in your paragraph. The first sentence in your paragraph is the "captain" sentence.

The dragon lived in a strange cave deep in the forest.

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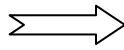
**BUILDING PARAGRAPHS**

**PUT YOUR CAMPING CREW IN ORDER!**

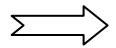
**Main Idea: How do you prepare for a week-long camping trip?**

Empty rounded rectangular box for writing the main idea.

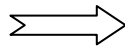
Empty oval box for writing a detail.



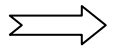
Empty oval box for writing a detail.



Empty oval box for writing a detail.



Empty oval box for writing a detail.



Empty rounded rectangular box for writing the conclusion.

**Transition & Linking Words:** another, along with, additionally, next, later, when, meanwhile, before, as soon as, besides, in addition, afterward, after, finally

**BUILDING PARAGRAPHS**

**PANTOMIME PARAGRAPHS**

In pairs, pantomime the following object. *Visualize* what you look like. What color are you? How big? What kind/flavor? Picture as many details as possible. Then write 4 sentences on each object.

ICE CREAM CONE: (use 4 adjectives)

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FLOWER: (use 4 adjectives)

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