

Sticking to one Topic: How can Writers Plan and Write a 1 Paragraph Response to a Question?

Lesson 1: Categorizing: Sorting Information to Answer the Question

Objectives:

- Students will understand how to take a list of brainstorm “ideas” and separate them into categories.
- Students will understand that the “categories” indicate the “main idea” or “topic” of their paragraphs.

Materials: pencils/pens or other writing implements, and paper

Special note: to be done in conjunction with The Iliad

Steps:

- Explain that writers stick to one topic in paragraphs and they plan it out. All good writers begin with a brainstorm.
- *“We’re going to brainstorm some items together. We’ve been reading The Iliad so we’re going to use subjects related to the book. I will give the subject and you all will tell me things to write down.”* (spend about 10 mins)
 - Characters from the story
 - Character traits of Achilles
 - Character traits of Paris
- *“Now we’re going to separate our lists into categories. Let’s look at the kind of items we listed for [name of list].”* Read each list and separate the items into categories. If they have trouble coming up with categories for the lists you can guide them (for example, “Characters from the story” might have categories like: “gods,” “goddesses,” “heroes.” “Character traits of Achilles” might have categories like: “likeable traits,” and “unlikable traits.”) (5-10 mins).
- Explain how the separate categories each become a topic with details related to it.
- Practice individually with easy subjects like: “animals,” “items in [name a room of a house],” and/or “food.” Help them come up with categories and list the items that go within the categories. (10-15mins).
- *“Now you’re going to try it with a subject we’ve been discussing. Get a piece of paper and write down ‘everything related to being a hero.’”* Give them 2 mins.
- *“Now read your list and find at least 2 categories.”* If they have trouble you can guide them with ideas like “physical traits,” “personality traits,” and/or “deeds.” *“Separate your items into your 2 categories.”* (5-10 mins).

Lesson 2: Topic Sentences: *Letting the Reader Know What You're Going to Say*

Objectives:

- Students will give category names for lists of items and will continue to practice placing items into categories
- Students will create sentences from category names and learn that these are called topic sentences

Materials: writing implements and paper. Prepare ahead of time: words on post-it notes for students to physically move into categories that they have named—give each student 10-15 words, each on a separate post-it, but related to a specific subject which can be broken down into at least 2 categories. Use words relating to subjects such as: hobbies, animals, foods, movies, rap songs, car parts...or others. Put the post-its randomly on a large piece of construction paper (each student will get 1 large piece of construction paper with 10-15 post-its on it). Also prepare ahead of time: a worksheet with several items listed so students can practice naming categories. This sheet will also be used for writing topic sentences.

Steps:

- Warm-up (together): “Let’s list everything we can think of relating to the Greek gods and goddesses.” (take 1 min to list—each student makes their own list).
- *“Make 2 categories for the list you just made.”* If students need guidance, give them some suggestions such as—“goddesses,” “gods,” “their domains,” “their symbols.” (5-10 mins). Read and share.
- *“Now I’m going to give you each a bunch of words that have been grouped together. You are going to figure out the categories. Read the post-its and then move them into your 2 or 3 categories.”* (5-10 mins). When this activity is done, have students each read their category title and then list the items they moved into that category. (5-10 mins). Each student should have at least 2 categories with 5-8 items in each.
- On an overhead—quick review: list several countries then have students give you the name of the category; list several snack foods and have students give you the category; list several brands of shoes and have students give you the category. (5 mins).
- Hand out the sheet you prepared ahead of time with the lists of items. They will individually practice naming the category. (10 mins)
- *“Now we need to practice writing our category names into sentences. This will be practice for writing topic sentences for paragraph writing.”* Explain that you need to put the words of the category name into a sentence that will tell the reader what we are talking about. Use examples from the quick review: for “countries” write something like: “There are many countries in the world.” For “snack foods” get their ideas and write them down. They might be something like: “There are many delicious foods available to eat for snacks.” For “brands of shoes” get ideas from students and write them down. They might be something

- like: “There are many brands of shoes to buy.” Students can then practice writing topic sentences with the post-it categories they had. Students share what they wrote when all done. (10 mins)
- Students then take the worksheet and write sentences for the category names. Go over it together to make sure all students have written good topic sentences. (10 mins)

Lists of items to make into a worksheet (they will come up with the category name and during another part of the lesson write the category name into a sentence).

- Group 1: pencil, paper, eye contact, directions (things needed to do school work)
Group 2: snowboarding, ice skating, skiing, ice climbing (winter activities)
Group 3: brush teeth, eat breakfast, get dressed, comb hair (getting ready for school)
Group 4: Achilles, Agamemnon, Odysseus, Menelaus (Greek heroes in Iliad)
Group 5: Zeus, Athena, Apollo, Aphrodite (Greek gods and goddesses)

Lesson 3: Details and Keywords: Organizing What you Want to Say to the Reader

Objectives:

- Students will practice turning sentences into keywords
- Students will expand lists of details using the key word strategy

Materials: writing implements, an overhead prepared and photocopied with sentences relating to The Iliad and/or current vocabulary. Individual worksheets as required with sentences (to be turned to keywords). Worksheet from lesson 2. Additional worksheet with lists of details to expand into keywords.

Steps:

- Explain that outlining what we write or taking notes can be faster if we use just keywords from a sentence. We take the important words only. Practice together using the overhead/worksheet. After the first 1 or 2 students should be able to tell you which words to use and copy down what you are writing onto their own sheets. (5-10 mins).
- Give them a different sheet for them to do on their own. (5-10 mins).
- Explain: when preparing your details for writing, you have to expand them a little bit so you know what you want to say about them. Take out the worksheet from lesson 2 and look at the first list of words (pencil, paper, eye contact, directions). Write those down on a separate piece of paper.
- “*We know that the category is ‘things needed for schoolwork.’ Let’s expand these details a little bit.*” Ask them “what about the pencil?” etc... or “why do we need [name of item]”? Write down what they say—then turn it into key words. Example: They may say “you need a pencil to do the writing.” Write the sentence. Turn it to key words: pencil/writing. When you’ve done this task you

should have a detail list in keywords for each of the groups of words from the worksheet. Doing 1 or 2 more together should reinforce the pattern: say the sentence, write the sentence, turn it to keywords. They can finish the sheet on their own. (10-15 mins).

- Have another sheet handy for additional practice if needed. (10-15 mins).

Items for overhead/worksheet and individual practice (sentences to be turned to keywords):

- Hector and Paris were brothers in ancient Troy.
- Paris was banished as a baby because he was going to be the downfall of Troy.
- Paris was secretly brought up by a shepherd instead of being killed.
- Paris returned to Troy and a joyous reunion from his family.
- Paris fell in love with Helen and brought her back to Troy.
- Helen left her husband Menelaus and the city of Sparta to be with Paris.
- Menelaus gathered the Greek troops and sailed for war with Troy.
- The war lasted ten years and many Greeks and Trojans died.
- Helen never really loved Menelaus if she left him so easily for Paris.
- The Greeks tricked the Trojans so they thought the Greeks had gone.
- The Trojans celebrated by bringing the Trojan Horse into the city.
- They didn't know the horse actually had 25 Greeks inside ready to let the rest of the fleet into the city.
- Achilles was seething with Agamemnon and refused to fight anymore.
- Achilles wanted vengeance after his friend Patroclus was killed by Hector.

Items for additional practice:

Zeus, Hera, Aphrodite, Athena

Topic sentence: Each god or goddess chose a side to help during the Trojan war and aided that side in any way they could.

(leave space for them to write the sentence then turn it to keywords)

Achilles, Agamemnon, Briseis, Fight

Topic sentence: Achilles' decision at end of the war had a big impact during the last year of fighting.

(leave space...)

Treaty, losing, coward, fighting

Topic sentence: At one point during the last year of fighting, everyone thinks the war will end with a simple duel between Paris and Menelaus.

(leave space...)

Patroclus, death, vengeance, Hector

Topic sentence: The Greeks are losing the war, so Achilles makes a decision which will change his life and the outcome of the war.

Lesson 4: Putting it Together: Planning your Response to the Question

Objectives:

- Students will break down writing into small steps when given questions to answer in paragraph form: brainstorming, categorizing, detailing in keywords and writing a topic sentence.

Materials: questions (general—for practice together, and relating to The Iliad for individual work). Overhead sheet prepared ahead of time with quick reviews: sentences to keywords, keywords to sentences, category names to topic sentences.

Steps:

- Quick review on overhead, together: change sentences to keywords; change keywords to sentences; come up with topic sentences (10 mins)
 - Sentence Review: Yesterday, I went to the store and bought milk. Tomorrow I need to go to the dentist. Wednesday is the middle day of the week. (or similar sentences). Keywords Review: Burlington/city/Vermont; Iliad/story/war/love; Zeus/king/angry/lightening. Topic Sentences Review: things in a kitchen drawer; reasons to fight a war; ways to say No to someone.
- “*Let’s practice answering questions using our new brainstorming and keyword strategies.*” Give the question: Write a paragraph that discusses different hobbies people enjoy and why they enjoy them. “*This is a question a teacher might expect you to write a paragraph about.*” Explain how to break down the task into steps using the strategies we’ve practiced.
- Step 1 should be to brainstorm the hobbies you know and why people enjoy them.
- Step 2 should be to narrow the topic by making categories and sorting the list.
- Step 3 should be to turn the details into keywords.
- Step 4 should be to write a topic sentence for the details.
 - They may come up with something like: photography/artistic; snowboarding/active/exciting; gaming/relaxing; reading/relaxing/enjoyable. With a topic sentence like: People usually choose hobbies that suit their needs.
- Give another writing question for group practice: Discuss the reasons people should graduate from high school. Again, break it down into steps. If they need another question for practice choose from these: Should students have to wear uniforms—why or why not?; Should students be allowed to use cell phones in school—why or why not?. (20-25 mins total for all group work)
- Give individual worksheet—they should get a keyword detail list and a topic sentence for each question, the point is not to write out the answers in paragraphs...yet (10-15 mins)
 - Questions for individual work: 1. Discuss your reasons supporting whether or not Achilles is a hero. 2. Is Paris a hero? Why or why not. 3. How would the story have been different if Patroclus had

not died? 4. What would have been different if Hector had not been killed?

Lesson 5: Concluding Sentences and The Quick Outline: *Finishing What you Want to Say*

Objectives:

- Students will learn 4 ways to write a concluding sentence
- Students will write concluding sentences for the questions they did in the previous lesson
- Students will practice the Quick Outline method for planning their writing

Materials: handout with concluding sentence ideas, quick outline handout, quick review (on overhead sheet), prepared concluding sentence topics (on overhead/worksheets).

Steps:

- Quick review, group activity: putting sentences into keywords/writing keywords into sentences. Use the following (prepared ahead of time on an overhead) Helen/Paris/love/war; Hector/Achilles/duel/death; King Priam bravely went into the Greek camp to ransom his son's body. Achilles was shot in the heel with an arrow which killed him. (5 mins).
- Quick review, group activity: put 2 paragraphs on an overhead—students read them, identify the topic sentences and the supporting details. They transfer the details to keywords. (5 mins)
- Discuss the format for the brainstorming: it is called a quick outline. Show them how to fill in the quick outline sheet using the details and topic sentences they have already written from lesson 4. Fill out 4 quick outlines (one for each question). Point out that the “C.S.” line is still not filled in because we are about to learn how to do that.
- Hand out the “Concluding Sentences” sheet you prepared with the 4 types of concluding sentences. Read, discuss relationship of T.S and C.S. Practice with prepared topics together. (10-15 mins). Make a sheet of prepared topic sentences or just write them on an overhead—together come up with and write 4 possible concluding sentences for each TS on an overhead sheet.
 - Use these topic sentences for practice: There are many ways to spend a weekend day. Sometimes directions people give are unclear. The Trojan War was a long and useless war.
- Each student should write 3 or 4 different concluding sentences for their Iliad questions begun in lesson 4—then they should choose the one they like best and write it on their quick outlines. (15 mins). These outlines will be used in lesson 6.
- Review the steps to writing a paragraph response to teacher questions: brainstorm and categorize, outline the details using keywords, write the topic sentence and then the concluding sentence (use the QO form). (5 mins)

Lesson 6: Outline to Paragraph and Paragraph to Outline: *When you Stick to Your Plan, The Writing is Clear*

Objectives:

- Students will transfer paragraphs that have already been written into QO format
- Students will write paragraphs from a QO

Materials: prepared ahead of time—4 paragraphs that have topic sentences, details and concluding sentences; quick outlines of Iliad questions (begun in lesson 4 and finished in lesson 5). 3 paragraphs that have topic sentences, details and concluding sentences—but which have been written out of order. 2-3 sample quick outlines.

Steps:

- Quick review, as a group: scrambled paragraphs. Read the scrambled sentences and put them in the proper order. (10 mins)
- As a group put the first of the 4 paragraphs into QO format, then have students individually put the other 3 into QO format on their own. (15 mins).
- As a group, look at the first sample quick outline and write it into a paragraph. Emphasize how the topic sentence is already there, putting each detail into sentences is just like what we practiced with keywords to sentences, then the concluding sentence is already there. Practice with another group one if necessary and do the last one individually or have them practice with the last 2 on their own.
- Students should then be able to write their QO's from their Iliad questions into 4 separate paragraphs.

4 Paragraphs that you can use for this lesson:

a. Monday is an unpopular day of the week. People look at Monday on the calendar and realize that they still have 4 more days to go through until they get to the weekend. On Monday mornings, people sometimes have trouble getting up because they are used to “sleeping in” on Saturday and Sunday mornings. In popular culture, Mondays have often been associated with bad feelings and loud groans. If people could sleep through Mondays altogether, they might be able to avoid all those bad feelings.

b. There are many animals that are endangered due to human activity. Many species of whales were hunted nearly to extinction in the last century and now they are having trouble recovering. Pandas are losing their natural habitat in the bamboo forests of China because of humans using the land for their own purposes. Polar bears have less ice to live and hunt on because of the warming oceans and climate change due to human activity. Humans need to change their ways if animals and humans are to live together in harmony.

c. Summer is a favorite time of the year for many people. Because it is so warm, people are outside more and enjoying the weather. There are many things to do in the summer that can't be done in the winter. Students are on vacation and can spend their days doing things they enjoy. Summer is an amazing time of year.

d. Reading is an important, yet rewarding skill to master. There is a ton of information that can be obtained from the pages of a book, so knowing how to understand the information is important. When people read for fun, they are "transported" to a whole world where they can escape reality for awhile. When someone reads well, then lots of things are easier for them to master. Everyone should have the opportunity to learn to read better.

3 sample quick outlines for this lesson:

TS: There are many things to enjoy at the fair.

Ride/rides/enjoyment/fear

Eat/food/spicy/sweet

See/animals/vegetables

Side shows/laugh/question realism

CS: At the fair, there is something for everyone to do and enjoy.

TS: There are several Greek gods and goddesses who the ancient Greeks attributed to parts of the Trojan War and its outcome.

Aphrodite/love/golden apple/Paris/promised Helen

Zeus/king/forbid others help/enjoyed humans toiling

Athena/wisdom/guided Greek Heroes

Hephaestus/blacksmith/forged armor/Achilles/new life to Greeks

CS: If the ancient Greeks and Trojans blamed all their fortunes or misfortunes on gods and goddesses, then they didn't need to take responsibility for their own actions.

TS: There are several legends, all involving one man, that are said to have caused the famous Trojan War.

Paris/not killed/baby/secretly raised

Eris/not invited wedding/mischief with golden apple

Paris/Aphrodite winner/awarded with love

Paris/Helen/leave Sparta

CS: There were many accounts told by the ancient Greeks that supposedly led to the Trojan War, but no single person could ever be responsible for such a tragic chain of events.

3 paragraphs you can scramble (from *National Geographic Kids Magazine* September 2007):

1. Rabies is a dangerous disease, but it is relatively rare. Only 1 or 2 people in the US develop rabies every year, but thousands are exposed. Stay safe by never handling wild animals or petting neighborhood animals whose owners you don't know. Rabid animals are rare, but if you are bitten seek medical attention immediately. When you know more about the risks, you can prevent yourself from ever getting Rabies.
2. The last thing anyone expected to see in the middle of a road was a seal pup. But, there it was, eight miles from its ocean habitat in the North Irish Sea. Luckily, the seal pup was healthy and unharmed, so it was released back into its habitat. The mystery remains unsolved as to how it got so far away from its home. At least the story has a happy ending.
3. Washington pygmy rabbits are some very lucky bunnies. These pocket-sized rabbits were hopping toward extinction just a few years ago. Wildfires and farming in Washington State had destroyed most of their habitat. Wildlife experts started breeding them in captivity. Now the pygmy rabbits are protected and are bouncing back.