

Good Year Books

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Introduction

Can you remember what your first day of school was like? Do certain smells remind you of the summertime? Have you ever seen something unusual and then told your friends about it later? Can you close your eyes and picture a place that is special to you? If you answered yes to these questions, then you are already a writer. You already possess the skills to write your own original stories and poems.

We wrote the *Creative Writing Handbook* with the belief that all young writers are inherently creative. You simply need a framework and a few valuable tools to guide you in developing your own natural talent. Think, then, of this handbook as a tool kit. You can use it to build an entire creative writing project or to fix specific writing problems.

This handbook will provide you with all the materials you need to develop as a creative writer. You can, therefore, use the handbook either as a complete guide for your own personal creative writing course or as the common text for a classroom or workshop of fellow writers. Furthermore, this handbook may be used by you independently or under the guidance of a teacher, parent, tutor, or other adult.

The handbook consists of five instructional units—three on narrative writing, one on fiction writing, and one on poetry. The emphasis on narrative writing—non-fictional accounts of personal experiences—stems from our years of working with young writers. We have found that once you have learned through narrative writing to find a voice, set scenes, describe people, use sensory details, edit prose, and so forth, you can then sharpen these skills while doing fictional and poetic writing.

Each of the five instructional units presents:

- An overview
- A step-by-step writing process
- A related example of professional writing
- Related examples of student writing

- Prewriting activities to help you find and focus ideas
- Clear drafting directions
- Excerpts and quotations from famous authors
- Editing activities to help you sharpen your skills and polish your writing

All of the *Creative Writing Handbook's* instructional units are self-contained. This means you can choose to learn about narrative writing without going on to units on fiction or poetry. Or, you can use the poetry writing unit separately from the other units. Each of the prewriting and editing activities can also be used individually. Most of the activities can be completed in about 30 minutes. These activities will enable you to develop writing skills that will make all of your writing—not just your creative writing efforts—more vivid and interesting.

In addition to these five instructional units, some support materials are included in the back of the handbook. The *Writer's Supplement* provides information you need for effective proofreading. A *Glossary* defines a number of writing terms printed in boldface type and used throughout the handbook.

As you progress through the materials in the handbook, we strongly recommend that you keep a writer's journal. The journal will provide a place for you to jot down ideas and images during the prewriting activities. It will also allow you to generate a host of ideas for school writing assignments. Journal writing often enables you to discover and strengthen your own voice in writing and to understand better the

differences between public and private writing. Some guidelines for journal writing appear on pages 10-13 of this handbook.

Finally, for those of you working through this book with other young writers, peer editing sheets are provided in each unit to support the elements examined in that particular unit. Early peer editing sheets help you become comfortable with the editing process itself; later sheets challenge you to provide increasingly effective advice.

Good luck, and good writing.

Unit 1: Beginning a Narrative

Let's start with narrative writing, which can be defined as a story, an orderly personal account of an experience or event. You do not have to go beyond your own experience to write narratives, but you do have to organize the material and present it vividly to your readers.

Effective Openings by Professional Writers

You may at this point wish to read some examples of openings by professional writers. Below is the famous opening to Charles Dickens's novel *A Tale of Two Cities*.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way....

1. Does this opening catch your interest? Explain.

2. Does this opening focus your attention on what the book will be about? Explain.
