

Focus: Instructional Tools

- Text Feature Cards
- Journals
- Early Literacy Continuum for Writing
- Benchmarks
- Anchor Papers

It is helpful to look at all of the tools to see how the children will use the materials across the various classroom settings – pre-kindergarten to intermediate grades.

Text Feature Cards – help develop students’ understanding of basic narrative and expository elements of writing. There are four text cards:

Yellow – one *Emergent Story Card* for pre-kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms

Green – two – an *Early Story Card* and *Early Expository Card* for first and second grade classrooms

White – one *Fluent Text Features Card* – double sided with narrative elements on one side and expository elements on the other for second and third grade classrooms.

The cards are designed to help create a continuum of learning within a school by developing consistent literacy understandings among teachers as well as effective reading and writing practices for students.

Yellow card helps students understand how stories work, especially when writing their own. The cards present the elements of a story – character or characters, action, setting, speech. The green Early Story Card adds time to the story – when did it happen?

Teachers need to model using the cards during their own modeled writing time.

The cards remind the teacher the kinds of questions that she needs to ask as she writes her story and works with small groups of children.

The cards help to elicit more complete oral stories from the children so they can draw a more detailed picture or pre-write. They help students ask the same questions as they tell and draw their story. The children need to put enough detail in their picture so they remember the story over time. If you sat with a child and he told you a story, and then drew a picture, would the child be able to tell you basically the same story if you showed him the paper a week later? Or even longer?

Sight words are at the bottom of the card – children will begin labeling objects in their own pictures.

The back of the card has the alphabet and pictures so children can begin writing even the beginning sounds of words.

In kindergarten the children should use the card to produce writing below the picture that has details and voice.

After the children are familiar with the ways to use the yellow card, with help and direction from the teacher, the children should be able to use the green Early Story Card with little support from the teacher.

Many of the elements on the front of the yellow and green cards are the same. Notice that the pictures on the green cards include a pencil since more of the focus shifts to the writing of the story, rather than the drawing of the picture.

The Early Expository Card goes along with the Early Story Card to help children understand and differentiate between the two broad text forms of narrative and expository. The boxes on the Early Expository Card contain more realistic pictures or drawings. The pictures help the children to move through the steps of putting together information they already know about a topic and to determine where they need to get more information. It includes looking for pictures to add to the information and adding a title. The backs of the two green cards are the same with the blends and the words that children need to learn to spell.

There are posters that have the same elements as the yellow and green cards.

Journals – yellow for pre-k and generally the first nine weeks of kindergarten. The journals support development of fine motor control, oral language, letter-sound knowledge, and vocabulary in an enjoyable and meaningful way.

In the yellow book the story happens above the line, in the picture. The children draw about personal stories. So the detail is important in the drawing. The teacher can print the more compelling part of the story below the line.

The yellow journal is to be used only when you are working with small groups of children. It is not a “free writing” journal. It is also used for periodic formative assessment with students. The only time you would give the books to the children and say, “Write me a story” is during formative assessment.

The left side of the journal pages are used for the teacher to demonstrate any drawing the child is unsure about making. The left page is also for the teacher to write notes assessing the oral story and the fine motor skills of the child.

Ideally you would use the yellow book once a week with your children.

Establish a cycle of about every three or four weeks using the writing in the journal as an assessment. When you do lessons in the yellow book with the child, number them 1, 2, 3, 4 and then put the letter A on the line for Assessment the week you are using their work as an assessment.

Later in the year, or with your more advanced children, students can begin to write below the line. It may just be a string of letters. It may be that they write the first sounds that they hear in the word. Later it might be first and last sounds.

The Early Literacy Continuum for Writing – The first column is used for assessing the drawing made by the child. The far right column is the oral language used by the child during the lesson.

In kindergarten when the child reaches a 5 in student work and a 5 in oral language, that is the time to transition him into the green book – My Writing Journal. My Writing Journal has a smaller section for drawing since the focus is moving towards the writing process. The picture is more of a sketch to help them remember what their story is going to be about. Now the teacher is working to develop the children’s proficiency in working “below the picture”. Now the children work on beginning and ending of story. There are conventional lines for writing, and a space for dates at the top of the pages. At

the bottom of the pages are self-check cues. The book also contains Word Lists, Word Families, and empty space for children to add their own words.

If there are pages left in the yellow book after the child reaches a 5/5 score, make a note in the yellow book that you transitioned the child on to the green book. Let the child then use the rest of the pages in the yellow book for independent drawing and writing of stories.

My Draft Book – kindergarten/ first grade – even less space for drawing. Word Lists, Word Families. Stories should involve beginning, middle and end. Self checking is at the bottom of the pages. The teacher assessment is in the back of the book.

Writing Benchmarks – Common Core numbers on kindergarten through 3rd grade benchmarks.

In the Writing Benchmarks what do you notice about the fourth quarter of prekindergarten and the first quarter of kindergarten?

Anchor papers – A set of student writing at proficiency for each quarter of each grade level. Use them to compare your students' writing and assess where they are toward reaching proficiency.