

# Writing: Step

# 1

## Choosing a Topic

**TOPIC:** an idea around which a story could be based

- WHAT:**
- In the CIAE program, the topic is based on *classroom curricula*.
  - All classes could have the same topic, or each could have its own different topic.
  - Topics can be chosen from any classroom curriculum - social studies, literacy, math, science, etcetera.
  - A topic is a general idea, and does not tell what happens in the story.

### TEACHER

During your first weekly planning meeting, CIAE teachers discuss and decide on each class's topic (without students present).

**HOW:** In various subject areas, consider: What are our educational goals? What do we really want the students to learn this year?

Any subject has potential to become a topic.

*It is not necessary to choose a topic from the sample list!* Choose a topic relevant to YOUR students, based on their curricula for the year.

#### Sample topics drawn from curricula:

Life in rural China  
Uses of money  
Life cycle of insects  
Civil rights  
New York City  
The rainforest  
Peer mediation  
Cooking  
Keeping a healthy body  
Governmental elections



#### TIP!

It is important to assess how much “pre-knowledge” the students need before being able to address their topic -- for example, if they know nothing yet about life in rural China, and that unit isn't going to be taught until June, it might not be the best topic choice.

**PITFAL** Remember, the topic isn't a plot! A topic doesn't tell what happens in the story.

**For Example:**

**Job skills = TOPIC**

**A girl learns skills she needs to get a job in a restaurant = PLOT DESCRIPTION**

# Writing: Step 2

## Choosing the Setting

**SETTING:** *when and where* the story takes place

**WHAT:** The setting will stem from your topic, and will include a place and a time.

**HOW:**

### TEACHER

Prior to class, consider a number of possible settings for your story, based on your topic. Choose several possibilities and find pictures representing the different possible settings.

- 1. In Class:** After discussing with your students that they will be creating a story about your topic, show the pictures of possible settings.
- 2. WHERE:** Choose ONE location as the setting for your story.
- 3. WHEN:** There are three aspects of the setting's time. As a class, decide on each:
  1. What is the year?
  2. What is the season or the month?
  3. What is the time of day?

#### 4. Flesh out your setting.

Once you have chosen a location and a time, brainstorm a list of *objects* (not people or animals) that might be found in your setting. (See examples at right.)

| Times Square<br>Feb. 2007, evening | Amazon rainforest<br>Apr. 1990, morning |
|------------------------------------|---|
| lighted billboards                 | trees                                   |
| hot dog stand                      | river                                   |
| trash                              | bushes                                  |
| street artist's easel              | flowers                                 |
| taxi cab                           | vines                                   |
| snow                               | hut                                     |



Write your detailed setting on a piece of chart paper and post it in the classroom for future reference.



**TIP!** It will probably be most practical, in a short production such as this one, to choose only **ONE** setting for the duration of the play.

# Writing: Step 3

## Creating Characters

**CHARACTER: someone in a story**

- WHAT:**
- To begin with, we will create three characters. (We will probably add more later on in the writing process.)
  - Each character will have his or her own predominant emotion in the story.
  - For the moment, characters will remain gender-neutral.

- HOW:**
1. Brainstorm a list of characters who might appear in the setting you have chosen (see examples at right). Write down as many as you can think of!



| Times Square<br>Feb. 2007, evening  | Amazon rainforest<br>Apr. 1990, morning                                    |
|---|--|
| tourist<br>street artist<br>police officer<br>pickpocket<br>hot dog vendor<br>business person | spider monkey<br>jaguar<br>tree frog<br>parrot<br>iguana<br>Yanomani child |

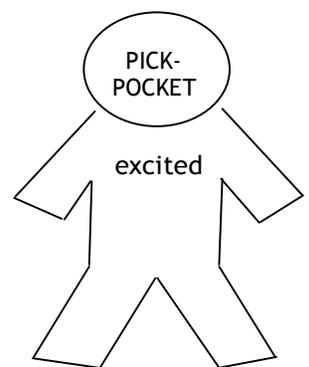
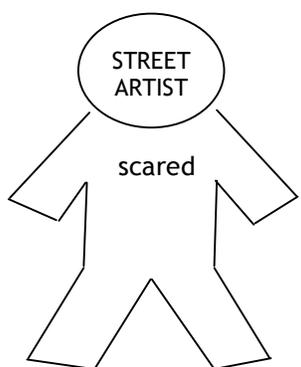
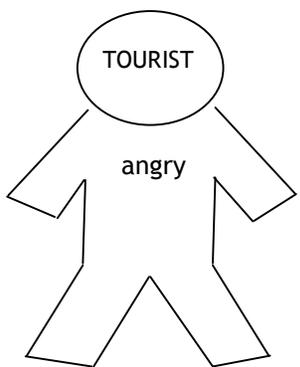
**\*\*\* Remember, we are not assigning gender to any characters yet! \*\*\***

2. Choose **THREE** characters from your list.
3. For each character, assign an **EMOTION**. This is how he or she will be feeling through much of our story.

Depending on the linguistic capabilities of the class, possible emotions can be brainstormed through discussion, or considered with the aid of pictures and/or Mayer-Johnson symbols.

**\*\*\* The three emotions you choose should not be all “positive” or all “negative” - strive for a mixture. \*\*\***

4. On chart paper, create a picture or diagram of each character to help students keep track of them.



**PITFAL**

At this point, characters have **NO GENDER** and **NO PHYSICAL DESCRIPTIONS** (tall, blue-eyed, Japanese, etc.). Keep it this way!

→ Why? Primarily because the show will not be cast until much later, and we want to keep all our casting options open for as long as possible. This also helps to make our characters three-dimensional, rather than being stereotypes.

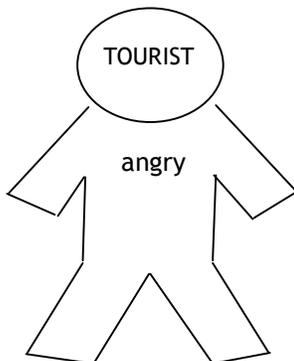
**CHARACTER MOTIVATIONS:**



For each of your three characters, we need to find out **WHY** they are feeling the way they're feeling today. What are they angry about? What could make them feel scared? Why are they excited?

1. Brainstorm possible explanations for the characters' emotions.

**\*\*\* Remember to reference your topic and setting in this discussion. \*\*\***



The tourist could be angry because ...

- S/he spent all his/her money & can't pay the hotel
- The show s/he wanted to see is sold out
- People keep bumping into him/her
- S/he got pickpocketed
- S/he is offended by the Naked Cowboy
- S/he was almost run over by a carload of teachers on their way to a music theater workshop

2. Choose **ONE** explanation for each character. Write this under your character's picture.

## Establishing Conflict

# Writing: Step

# 4

**CONFLICT:** the main problem in a story

**WHAT:** In every story, there is a central problem called the conflict. (It's fine to use the term "conflict" or to simply refer to "the big problem," depending on the level of your students.)

**HOW:** 1. Problems may come from the topic, the setting, or the characters. Brainstorm some ideas:

### Problems from the TOPIC

Think about your **topic**.  
What could go wrong?

### Problems from the SETTING

Think about your **setting**.  
What could go wrong?

### Problems from the CHARACTERS

Think about your **characters**, their emotions, and the reasons for those emotions.

- Could any of the characters have a problem?
- Could any of the characters have a problem with each other?



Write the students' ideas on chart paper.

2. Which conflict seems to excite your students the most? With your students, choose one main problem. This will be the central conflict of your story.
3. Once you have chosen your story's conflict, or "big problem," figure out how each character is involved in the conflict.
  - a) Are they **having the problem** themselves? How does it affect them? How do they feel about the problem?
  - b) Are they **causing the problem**? How are they doing this? How do they feel about the problem?
  - c) If neither a) nor b) are true, how does this character feel about the problem? Do they take sides? Will the problem eventually affect them?



Write your conflict on a piece of chart paper and post it in the classroom for future reference. You will want to include how each character is involved in the problem.

## Story Elements Summary

TOPIC: \_\_\_\_\_

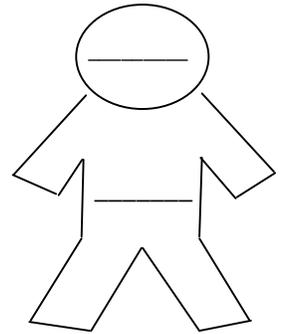
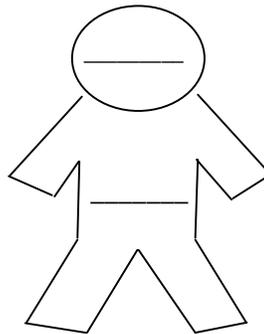
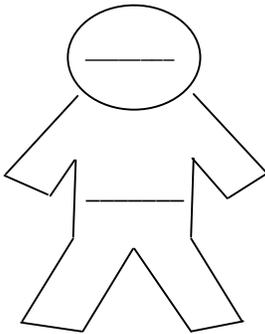
### SETTING (Detailed!)

Where: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

When: \_\_\_\_\_

### CHARACTERS:



Why do these characters feel the way they do in this story?

|       |       |       |
|-------|-------|-------|
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |
| _____ | _____ | _____ |

### CONFLICT - THE BIG PROBLEM

Conflict:

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does each character feel about the conflict?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Sequence of Events

# Writing: Step 5

**SEQUENCE:** the plot outline -- what happens in the story

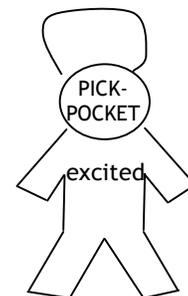
**WHAT:** Now that you have the story elements of topic, setting, characters, and conflict, it's time to figure out what happens in your story!

### TEACHER

#### PRE-CLASS TEACHER PREPARATION:

1. Review your story elements (see Writing: Insert 1, "Story Elements Summary"), and post the elements on chart paper. Add visual aids as available.
2. Prepare several "gingerbread figures" out of stiff paper. Add a loop of string, so that the figure can be worn around an actor's neck.

On three figures, write each character's role and emotion. Leave some figures blank, so that you can use them for new characters you may create.



3. The sequence of our story will be broken down into four main sections. Post four pieces of chart paper, each with the heading of one of the sections:

**1. BEGINNING**  
(before the problem happens)

**2. THE PROBLEM HAPPENS**

**3. THE PROBLEM GETS WORSE**

**4. END**  
(the problem is resolved)

4. Prepare your documentation equipment:
  - cassette recorder, and
  - camera/video recorder, and/or
  - paper, pen and person to write

**STORY SECTIONS: A CLOSER LOOK**

Within each section of our story, there is certain information we need to establish:

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>1. BEGINNING:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Where and when does the story take place?</li> <li>- Who is in the setting?</li> <li>- Why are they there?</li> <li>- What are they doing?</li> <li>- Do the characters know each other or not?</li> <li>- If they know each other, how are they connected?</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>2. THE PROBLEM HAPPENS:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What causes the problem to happen?</li> <li>- How does it happen?</li> <li>- How does each character feel about the problem?</li> <li>- What do they do?</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>3. THE PROBLEM GETS WORSE:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does the problem get worse?</li> <li>- What do the characters do next?</li> <li>- What is the most exciting and/or intense part of the story (climax)?</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>4. END:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How does the problem get resolved?</li> <li>- How do the characters feel about what has happened?</li> <li>- Did any character learn a lesson, and if so, what was it?</li> </ul>  |

**HOW:** 1. With the class, review your Story Elements (topic, setting, characters, conflict).

2. **AUDIO RECORD ALL SESSIONS.**

3. **GUIDED IMPROVISATION:** Some students will act out our story as we create it. Others will offer their ideas and suggestions from the audience.

a) **Actors:** Choose 3 students to act out the 3 characters. Each wears the “gingerbread figure” of their character, to help everyone remember who they are.

You may wish to rotate this assignment throughout the class to give other students a turn; just be careful to make sure everyone remains clear about which character is being portrayed by which student.



b) **Sequence:** The students act out the story, section by section. For each section, make sure to answer the questions listed above. Write the important points on the four chart papers you have prepared.



c) **New characters:** In each section, ask the question - Do we need more characters to tell this story? Who are they? (Remember, no genders or physical descriptions yet.) Create a new “gingerbread figure” for each new character. **DOCUMENT THIS INFORMATION.**



d) **Dialogue:** As you go through the story, be sure to always ask, “What would the characters say in this situation?” In addition to audio recording the session, have a para or student write down as much dialogue as possible.

#### 4. NARRATED RUN-THROUGH WITH PHOTOS OF MAJOR PLOT POINTS:

After you have finished a section of the story, you will perform a narrated run-through of that section.

- a) Teacher narrates the story based on the outline established on the chart paper, stopping at each major plot point. The narrator may wish to say “Hold it,” “Stop,” or “Freeze” at this point.
- b) While the teacher narrates, students act out the story being described. When the teacher says to stop, students freeze in position.
- c) While students remain frozen, a teacher, paraprofessional, or student photographs the scene. Thus, photos are taken of each major plot point.



Once all four sections are completed, do a narrated run-through of the entire story. You do not need to re-take the photos.

### TEACHER

#### SCRIPT

After the guided improvisation with the students, teachers will type up the first draft of the script (taken from the audio-recordings, and from written notes).

- Do not worry about correct script formatting for the time being; just make sure that whatever dialogue you have gets typed.
- If there are parts of the story where the dialogue is incomplete, write down the general idea of what is happening at that point in the story.

#### STORYBOARD

The photos taken during the narrated run-through will be used to create a storyboard of the sequence of events. (More detailed instructions about this to follow.)

**\*\*\* REMEMBER: KEEP YOUR DOCUMENTATION IN A SAFE PLACE!!! \*\*\***



#### TIP!

Keep track of your notes, video files and/or audio recordings, and photos. It is very difficult to remember everything that went on in the class after the fact.

#### PITFAL

*Losing your notes, video files, audio recordings, or photos is really horrible! (See “Tip!” above.) Please don’t lose them. You’ll be so much happier.*

# Writing: Step 6

## Storyboard

**STORYBOARD:** A sequence of pictures or drawings that show the plot of a story

**WHAT:** Once you know the four sections of your story, create a storyboard to help remind students of the plot. You can use photos, or you can draw pictures (stick figures are fine!)

**HOW:** 1. Use four chart papers, or divide a paper into four sections.

2. In each section include pictures representing the main action points in that section. Give each picture a caption, also making sure it is clear which character is which.



**1. BEGINNING** (before the problem happens)



Jack and Jill have no water.



They go up the hill to get some water.

**2. THE PROBLEM HAPPENS**



Jack falls down.



Jack's crown is broken.

**3. THE PROBLEM GETS WORSE**



Jill comes tumbling after.

**4. END** (the problem is resolved)



Jack and Jill go to the store and buy Band-Aids and a new crown for Jack.

## Script Formatting

Although there are many ways to format a script, for the CIAE program, we recommend the following (please see *Writing: Insert 2, page 2* for a sample script):

1. **Characters' names** in CAPITAL LETTERS on the left-hand side; dialogue in standard letters and indented. Leave space between different characters' lines of dialogue.
2. (*Stage directions in parentheses, in italic font. Stage directions should generally only include entrances and exits.*)
3. **Song lyrics** in CAPITAL LETTERS.
4. **On each and every page:**
  - a) school name and class number
  - b) title of show
  - c) draft number
  - d) page number

### What NOT to put in the script:

- descriptions of characters
- HOW characters say things
- how people are feeling
- technical cues



**TIP!** In general, the LESS that goes onto the page, the better! The more non-dialogue text on the page, the more confusing it can be for the actors. For the most part, keep it to *what people say* and *entrances and exits*.

Script Formatting: Sample

PS 000, Class 000, 2007  
*Nightmare on 43<sup>rd</sup> St.* First Draft, p. 1

**NIGHTMARE ON 43<sup>rd</sup> St.**

*(November 6, 2007, 8:26 am. 43<sup>rd</sup> Street in Manhattan, beside the Parkade. GERRY and HUNTER are standing on the street.)*

GERRY: Come on, let's get moving! We're going to be late for the workshop!

HUNTER: Relax, will ya? We have five minutes still. Besides, you know how it is in there – if I have to do one more weird activity in a circle, I'll go bonkers.

*(JORDAN enters)*

JORDAN: Hey guys, am I late? Traffic was awful across the bridge, and I forgot my binder. I spilled my coffee in the car, and this humidity is making my hair freak out. This morning stinks.

HUNTER: I hear you, but I have to say -- it's nice to have a break from the kids.

GERRY: Yeah – I really love my class, but it's sure true that absence makes the heart grow fonder.

**STAY AWAY A LITTLE LONGER**

GERRY: I LOVE THEM, THEY ARE WONDERFUL  
THEY BRING ME SO MUCH JOY  
BUT WHEN I AM TOO CLOSE TOO LONG  
MY PALMS SWEAT, MY HEAD ACHES, MY TEETH GNASH

ALL: ABSENCE, DISTANCE, TIME APART  
IT SURE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER  
I WANT TO DO GREAT THINGS WITH YOU  
SO I'LL STAY AWAY A LITTLE LONGER

HUNTER: THEY'RE FABULOUS AND INTERESTING  
THEY MAKE ME LAUGH A LOT  
BUT IF OUR TIME GOES ON TOO LONG  
MY HEART POUNDS, MY HAIR GRAYS, MY FEET ITCH

ALL: ABSENCE, DISTANCE, TIME APART  
IT SURE MAKES THE HEART GROW FONDER  
I WANT TO DO GREAT THINGS WITH YOU  
SO I'LL STAY AWAY A LITTLE LONGER

# Writing: Step

# 7

## Script Revision

**WHAT:** After completing *Writing: Step 5*, you should have a draft version of the script. Now it's time to flesh out that dialogue!

**HOW:** 1. After typing up the first draft of the script (please see *Writing: Insert 2* for formatting details), make copies for everyone.

2. Review the plot of the story, using your storyboard.

3. Give each of the characters a gender-neutral name (Alex, Pat, Angel, Chris, etc.). These will not yet be in the script, but can be inserted as we go along.

4. **READ-THROUGH:** Choose students to read the parts of the characters, and sit them in chairs in front of the rest of the class. Do a read-through, where each student reads his/her character's lines of dialogue. If desired, use the "gingerbread" cutouts to identify each actor's character.

5. During the read through, both the actors and the rest of the class are listening for answers to the following questions:

### OVERALL PLOT QUESTIONS:

- Did the story make sense?
- What was confusing in the story? What do we need to make clearer?
- Are we missing any important parts of the story (plot points)?
- Do we need to repeat any information in the dialogue to make sure the audience understands?

### MORE SPECIFIC QUESTIONS:

- From the dialogue, was our setting clear? Where are we? When does the story take place?
- Do we know who everyone is, and why they are in the setting? If they have names, can we make sure that the audience knows their names?
- Is this how each character would speak? Are these the kinds of words they would use?
- Do we need any additional characters to tell our story better?

6. Using these questions as a guide, flesh out the script, filling any "holes" in the dialogue and making the story clearer.

# Writing: Step 8

## Choosing Song and Movement Moments

**WHAT:** It is important to decide where your song and your movement piece will occur in your story, and what purpose each will serve.

### SONG MOMENTS

1. Songs can be written about the topic, setting, conflict, or character(s) of the story.
2. We also need to ask, “Where in our story could there be a song?” This will vary depending on what we choose to write the song about.
3. The words of the song can be used to expand upon or explain further some element of the story.
4. The song will be a group song, although it can include some solo sections. This may influence your choice of song moments.

#### Sample Song Subjects

**Topic song:** Characters sing about the topic

**Setting song:** Characters describe the setting of the story, establishing the setting’s mood

**Conflict song:** Characters sing about the story’s main problem

**Character song:** We learn more about a character from themselves and/or others

### MOVEMENT PIECE MOMENTS

#### Sample Movement Piece Subjects

A movement piece to establish the mood of the **setting**

A movement piece to show the feelings of a **character** or group of characters

A movement piece to illustrate the **conflict** between characters

1. Movement pieces are best used to explore the emotions or moods of a certain situation.
2. The stronger the emotional content of the moment chosen, the more potentially effective the movement piece.
3. **THE MOVEMENT PIECE DOES NOT FURTHER THE PLOT OF THE STORY.** It is not a pantomime of action in the plot. There are no words. When the movement piece begins, in a sense, time stops in the story as we focus on the mood or emotion.

- HOW:**
1. Brainstorm possible song subjects and placements in your story; choose the one you like the best.
  2. Brainstorm possible movement piece subjects and placements in your story; choose the one you like the best.

**\*\*\* The song and the movement piece are 2 different, separate moments in the story! \*\*\***  
**You are choosing two places in the story: one for the vocal song, and a different one for the movement piece.**

# Writing: Step 9

## Creating Lyrics (Chorus and Verse 1)

**LYRICS:** The words to a song

**CHORUS:** A song section, repeated throughout the song, with the *same words, same music*. Contains the *main idea* of the song.

**VERSE:** A song section with different music than the chorus. Each verse has the *same music* as the other verses, but *different words*.

**WHAT:** For our story's "song moment," we will write lyrics that will later be set to music.

**HOW:** 1. Review where your "song moment" occurs in your scenario. What is your song about? This is the song's subject.



2. Brainstorm ideas by "webbing" your subject. Generate material by asking any or all of the following questions.

### **SONG SUBJECT: QUESTIONS TO ASK**

1. Ask the five sense questions about your subject:
  - a) Can you see it? What does it look like?
  - b) Can you touch it? What does it feel like?
  - c) Does it have a taste? What does it taste like?
  - d) Does it have a smell? What does it smell like?
  - e) Does it make a sound? What does it sound like?
2. Does the subject have any actions (does it, or do the characters, do anything)? If it does something, how does it do it?
3. How does the subject make you, or any of the characters, feel?
4. What might each of the characters say about the subject?

3. Create a plan for your song. In general, what will the chorus and each of the three verses be about? Which character(s) will sing each section?

4. Write your **CHORUS**. Which character(s) will be singing it? Use ideas from your subject web. The chorus should:

- a) express the main idea of the song
- b) be 4-6 lines in length



5. Write **VERSE 1**. Which character(s) will be singing it? Use ideas from your subject web. Verse 1 should:

- a) provide “supporting details” for and/or explore one aspect of the main idea
- b) be 4-6 lines in length



**LYRICS NEED NOT RHYME.** Forcing lyrics to rhyme often gets in the way of the meaning of the song. If children come up with rhymes on their own that are true to the meaning of the song, that’s fine. If, in their quest for rhymes, children cannot stay focused on the meaning of the song, a “no rhyming” rule is appropriate.

**STOP!**

**DO NOT WRITE ANY MORE LYRICS.**

**SEND THE CHORUS AND VERSE 1 LYRICS TO THE MUSIC TEACHER.**

*Verses 2 and 3 lyrics will not be written until you receive the Verse 1 melody back from the music teacher (this process will be explained in Music: Step 3 and Writing: Step 10).*

# Writing: Step 10

## Write Lyrics to Verses 2 & 3

**WHAT:** Using the melody created for Verse 1 in music class, students will write lyrics to Verses 2 and 3 that fit the Verse 1 melody.

**HOW:**

**Get the Chorus and Verse 1 melody recordings from the music teacher.**

Make sure you have the recording of the Verse 1 melody that is just humming (no words).

1. Revisit your song's brainstorming web(s) from *Writing: Step 9, #2*.
2. Revisit your song's plan from *Writing: Step 9, #3*. Remember what Verses 2 and 3 are about, and which character(s) will be singing them.
3. Using the Verse 1 "humming" recording as a guide, create lyrics for Verses 2 and 3 that fit the Verse 1 melody. *This means that all three verses will be sung to the same melody.*



**Send the Verse 2 and 3 lyrics to the music teacher.**