



Students Plan Their Own Holiday Stories

Whole Class or Small Group Work (pupil pages 11–13)

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Composing a story requires children to think about settings and words that can be used to describe those settings. Developing word lists before they write helps them broaden their usable writing vocabularies and gives them a strategy to use for vocabulary growth.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Having children write Story Words before composing gives you a chance to review their spelling early in the process. Since the children will probably share their work with others (friends and parents), it is a good idea to have as impressive a final product as possible, without interfering with the writing process.

Step 1: Develop Story Words (Vocabulary)

- ▶ Ask the children what special words (story words) they would like to use in a story they will write.
 - To get them started, pick a holiday and ask them to contribute words that come to their minds when they think of this holiday (e.g., for Thanksgiving, *cold, Grandma's house, snowy, rainy, happy, excited, fun, noisy, cousins, turkey, long ride*).
 - Then draw a Setting Tree on chart paper or the chalkboard and ask the children under which head—**Place?**, **Time?**, or **Feeling?**—they think some of their words should go.
 - Suggest that they think of more words to put under these so that they have lots of descriptors for each of the setting elements (*across town, dining room, Auntie's; afternoon, sunny, fall; thankful, proud, disappointed*).
- ▶ Explain that they will be writing many stories and will need lots of words to describe setting elements to make their stories more interesting. Tell them to copy any of the words they would like to use on the blank lines on page 11 of their books. Also tell them that the printed words on this page are “handy words” (high-frequency words) that they can use in their stories.

Step 2: Organize Setting Ideas—Develop a Setting Tree

- ▶ The following directions should be adapted as appropriate to individual classroom needs depending upon whether the original story is a class story, a series of small group stories, or a series of stories written by individuals.
 - On chart paper or the chalkboard draw the outline of a Setting Tree that includes the words **Place?**, **Time?**, and **Feeling?** Explain to the children that they are now going to make their own Setting Trees to help them be sure they include the elements of setting when they compose their own holiday stories.
 - Give each child three (or more) squares of paper. Tell them to use one (or more) square(s) for the place or places where their story will occur, one or more squares for the time or times when it will occur, and one or more squares to describe the situation, the atmosphere, or general feeling of the story as it flows from beginning to middle to end.

- Tell them they may draw their answers or write a letter on each square that will give an indication of their chosen answers to each of the questions on the Setting Tree. For example, for the beginning of the story, a child might draw a dining room or write a “d” (for “dining room”) for **Place?**, a big clock face showing the hands at 10:00 A.M. for **Time?**, and a couple of smiley or sad faces for **Feeling?**
- If the decision is to do a class story, give the children an opportunity to record their individual choices. Then hold a discussion with them to decide what they think their final choices should be. Put these final choices on the Setting Tree graphic that you have drawn on chart paper or the chalkboard. The same procedure could be used for small group work.
- If your children are up to independent story writing, then they should make their choices and proceed with the development of the Story Plan.

Step 3: Develop a Story Plan

- ▶ Write “Who? Where? When? What? How?” in a list on chart paper or on the chalkboard.
- ▶ If it is a class story, ask the children to use some of the decisions they made about setting as they help you answer the questions. (This same procedure could be used for small groups.) If they are writing individual stories, ask them to review the choices they made for their Setting Trees and answer the questions on the Story Plan accordingly. Whatever grouping is appropriate for your class, remind the children that their choices about setting will affect the way the plot of their story will flow and how the setting will affect the way their characters will act and feel. Also explain that they may draw their answers if they are more comfortable expressing their ideas in that mode.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT?

Children are guided to use tools (the Setting Tree and the Story Plan) whenever they are asked to write or tell a story. These activities provide a common language for understanding story structure and a means for helping children write more interesting and better designed narratives.