



Syllabus with Lesson Planning Table

Course Description

Through 72 video lessons, the *Cover Story* middle school Language Arts curriculum leads 6th-9th graders through the process of writing the content for their own magazine. By content, this course means *written* content, not photographs or page design. It is not a course in layout or publishing, though the last few lessons address these briefly.

Students create short stories, poems, nonfiction articles, letters and many other creative pieces over the course of one school year. Along the way, they are asked to think deeply about not just their theme and subject matter, but about writing as a creative act. For each type of writing, they are led through a process of brainstorming, outlining, and analyzing that is meant to carry over and expand into the next section.

Objective

At the end of the year, your student should have created enough written content for a magazine. Although it can be fun to typeset the finished work into a format suitable for color printing, it isn't necessary for the course. However, we do strongly suggest that you print off your student's finished works and put them in some sort of physical form he or she can hold in the hand. A three-ring binder is sufficient.

Types of Written Content

Review

Poetry:

Poem inspired by news story, acrostic, cinquain, haiku, limerick, senryu, found poem, free verse, and ballad.

Article

Letter

Short Story (2)

Blog post

Humor piece

How-to article

“How-everything-went-wrong” article
Advice column (letter and response)
Ad copy

Grading

Grades are based on a point system. Points are awarded for four things:

- Student Book* lessons
- Journal* entries
- Completed works (poems, short stories, etc.)
- Unit tests

A few of the exercises have answer keys in the back of the *Teacher’s Guide*. The answer keys are not meant to provide every possible right answer. They are only there to show you the sort of answer you should be looking for. Creative writing isn’t a matter of right and wrong, but of better and worse. (For a full breakdown on points and grading rubrics, please see the *Teacher’s Guide* (pgs. 15–17.)

NOTE: The grammar component is not included in the regular grading scale, but can be added by awarding an additional point for every correct answer in each lesson. See the *Teacher’s Guide* (pg. 17).

Grading Tip for Families

Grading may be done at your convenience. However, we recommend teachers grade all the work for each unit at the end of the unit. This amounts to spending one or two hours each month when your student has completed all twelve unit lessons.

The main reason for grading at the end of a unit is that it allows your student(s) to be creative without feeling that they are being evaluated on their ideas. They need the freedom to jot down bad ideas as well as good ones, and that’s hard to do when someone is looking over your shoulder. Waiting till the end of the unit also allows students to change or expand answers as they progress, instead of feeling stuck with their previous answers because they have already been graded – which can be an extra obstacle to creativity.

Grading Tip for Groups

Our general suggestion to grade at the end of each unit is probably unrealistic for a group setting, considering how many students’ work you may have to evaluate. It is fine to grade more often, as long as you grade piece-by-piece rather than lesson-by-lesson.

We recommend allowing students a gap of time between handing in a creative piece and receiving feedback on it—we suggest at least one week. It is much easier for students to be objective about their creative writing pieces after they have some emotional distance. Many writing courses teach students to self-edit as they write. By separating the creative process from the analytical process, *Cover Story* helps students enjoy being creative.

Reading

Cover Story students read poems, classic short stories, and articles (printed in the *Student Book*), but the program does not involve reading any novel-length books. The assigned readings/poems are:

- “The Ransom of Red Chief” - O. Henry
- “The Interlopers” - Saki

"The Lady, or the Tiger" - Frank R. Stockton
"The Information Conspiracy" - Daniel Schwabauer
"The Most Dangerous Game" - Richard Connell
"The Necklace" - Guy de Maupassant
"An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" - A. Bierce
"The Sniper" - Liam O'Flaherty
"Waltzing Matilda" - by Banjo Paterson
"The Streets of Laredo"
"November Night" and "Triad," poems by Adelaide Crapsey
A few haiku by Soseki and Kato Shuso

If you would like to supplement with a reading list, one suggestion would be to look for books along a theme similar to the theme students pick for their magazine. For instance, if your student decides to write magazine content about gardening, assign books that involve a garden or farming in some way, or if the theme they choose is wilderness camping, assign books about outdoor adventures.

Contests

Throughout the school year, we run five contests based on writing assignments in *Cover Story*. For further details and dates, please see the "Contests" tab on our website: <https://clearwaterpress.com/coverstory/>

About the Instructor

Daniel Schwabauer, M.A., is editor of Crosswind Comics and creator of *The One Year Adventure Novel*, *Byline* and *Cover Story* writing programs. His professional work includes stage plays, radio scripts, short stories, newspaper columns, comic books and scripting for the PBS animated series *Auto-B-Good*. Daniel's young adult novels, *Runt the Brave* and *Runt the Hunted*, have received numerous awards, including the 2005 Ben Franklin Award for Best New Voice in Children's Literature and the 2008 Eric Hoffer Award. The series culminates with *The Curse of the Seer*. He graduated from the University of Kansas Master's program in Creative Writing in 1995. He lives in Olathe, Kansas, with his wife.

Topics and Creative Pieces

This table shows lesson topics and creative pieces the students write; it breaks the lessons down to show you natural breaking points in the course. If you don't plan to cover 3 video lessons per week or if you have to plan around trips or holidays, these natural breaking points should help you choose good places to pause.

Unit	Lesson	Title	Grouping	Journal Section	Journal Entry
1	1	Tell Me a Story	Thinking about magazines	None	None
	2	The Remarkable Journal	Introducing the journal	Questions: 5 unrelated questions about life, the world, or anything else	Read "Arrival" and "Questions" and write 5 questions of your own on 5 days.
	3	Themestorm	Brainstorming and picking a theme		
	4	Sentencing	Movie vs. concept sentences		
	5	Personally Placed Things	Using specific nouns		
	6	Painted Personally Placed Things	Picking precise adjectives		Read entries and write 5 questions on 5 days.
	7	Explosive Words	Choosing active verbs		
	8	Wildly Explosive Words	Hunting adverbs		
	9	Fightin' Words	Creating emotion through images		

Unit	Lesson	Title	Grouping	Journal Section	Journal Entry
	10	Super Guaco Taco	3 lessons for writing a review		Read entries and write 5 questions on 5 days.
	11	Groupies			
	12	Opinionating			
2	13	The Poetry of Poetry	Writing a poem inspired by a news story	Details: Interesting details about things you encounter.	Read "Details" and then jot down 5 details on 5 days.
	14	Acrostics	Writing an acrostic		
	15	Cinquains	Writing a cinquain		
	16	Haiku	2 lessons for writing haikus		Read entries and then jot down 5 details on 5 days.
	17	Haiku Too			
	18	The Limerick	Writing a limerick		Read entries and then jot down 5 details on 5 days.
	19	The Five Ws	6 lessons for writing an article		
	20	Everyman			
	21	Spiraling			
	22	Astounding Strategies			
	23	Astounding Outlines			
24	Astounding Paragraphs	Read entries and then jot down 5 details on 5 days.			
3	25		Dear Mr. President	3 lessons for writing letters	Curious Paragraphs: One 5-sentence paragraph
	26		Dear Editor		
	27	Dear Reader	Read "Curious Paragraphs" and write a 5-sentence paragraph of your own on 5 days.		

Unit	Lesson	Title	Grouping	Journal Section	Journal Entry
	28	Short Change	9 lessons for writing a short story		Read entries and write a 5-sentence paragraph on 5 days.
	29	Short Heroes			
	30	Short Outlines			
	31	Showing Character			Read entries and write a 5-sentence paragraph on 5 days.
	32	Showing Problems			
	33	Showing Change			
	34	Ramping Up			Read entries and write a 5-sentence paragraph on 5 days.
	35	Circularity			
	36	The Moral of the Story			
4	37	The First Two Layers	Beyond symbols and words to meaning	Dialogue: Five "bounces" of real-life dialogue you overhear (explained in chapter 37)	Read "Dialogue" and write 5 bounces of your own on 5 days.
	38	The Third Layer	Providing context		
	39	The Fourth Layer	Creating relevance		
	40	Write What You Know	Writing what you know		Read entries and write 5 bounces on 5 days.
	41	The Truth about Truth	Writing honestly		
	42	Blog O'Sphere	Writing a blog post		
	43	Exaggeration	Enjoying hyperbole		Read entries and write 5 bounces on 5 days.
	44	Repetition	2 lessons for writing a humor piece		
	45	Timing			
	46	Steampunk Gun	2 lessons for writing how-to articles		Read entries and write 5 bounces on 5 days.
	47	Cinnamon Popcorn			

Unit	Lesson	Title	Grouping	Journal Section	Journal Entry
	48	Going Places	Writing a “how-everything-went-wrong” article		
5	49	Hard Questions	3 lessons for writing an advice column (letter and response)	The People: One 5-sentence paragraph describing a person	Read “The People” and write 5 descriptions of people on 5 days.
	50	Inside Your Head			
	51	Slice ‘n’ Dice			
	52	Story Patterns	9 lessons for writing a short story		Read entries and write 5 descriptions of people on 5 days.
	53	Conflict			
	54	Human Heroes			
	55	Dropping Eaves			Read entries and write 5 descriptions of people on 5 days.
	56	Dueling Words			
	57	Great Openings			
	58	What’s a Meta For?			Read entries and write 5 descriptions of people on 5 days.
	59	Zap Pow			
	60	Parting Words			
6	61	Senryu	Writing a senryu	The Self: A one-paragraph mini-story about yourself, real or imagined.	Read “The Self” and write a mini-story about yourself on 5 days.
	62	Found Me a Poem	Writing a found poem		
	63	The Chains of Free Verse	Writing a free verse poem		
	64	What’s a Ballad?	3 lessons for writing a ballad		Read entries and write a mini-story about yourself on 5 days.
	65	Ghosts ‘n’ Heroes			
	66	Story Poems			

Unit	Lesson	Title	Grouping	Journal Section	Journal Entry
	67	Headlines	3 lessons for writing ad copy		Read entries and write a mini-story about yourself on 5 days.
	68	Benefits			
	69	The Call to Action			
	70	Revising for Theme	3 lessons for finalizing the magazine content		Read entries and write a mini-story about yourself on 5 days.
	71	Putting it Together			
	72	Publishing			
<i>Grammar Lessons - Optional; can be done at any point after lesson 8, but in sequential order.</i>				None	
	1	Kinds of Sentences	All of these lessons stand on their own.	There is no journal work.	
	2	Subjects and Predicates			
	3	Run ons and Fragments			
	4	Parts of Speech			
	5	That Was Tense			
	6	Subject/Verb Agreements			
	7	Subject Pronouns			
	8	Prepositions			
	9	Conjunctions			
	10	Comma Chameleon			
	11	Apostrophes			
	12	Quotation Marks			