MONSTERS! INK!
Lesson Nine

You've Got The Write Stuff!

By now you and your partner have plotted the "basics" of your story

These are the basics of almost all stories:

1. Sympathetic character

2. Who faces a problem

3. Character (eventually) solves problem, often after trying and failing several times

Now, It's Time to Fill in the details!

Character and Conflict

Character

First, let's go back to your main character. Here are important traits of a main character:

- Has a problem or need.

- Has the ability to solve the problem, whether or not he knows it (there's usually more suspense if he doesn't know it).

- Often has a flaw to overcome to solve the problem or win the reward.

Then, think about your secondary characters: the main character's friends and enemies. To get you started, here are some types of secondary characters, along with famous examples of each.

- Villains: Block the main character from reaching goals. (The Green Goblin in Spider-Man)

- Allies: Assist the main character in reaching goals. (Robin in Batman, Minions in Despicable Me, the team and Baymax in Big Hero 6)

- **Mentors:** Wise characters that help the main character. (Obi-Wan Kenobi in Star Wars, Tadashi in Big Hero 6)

- **Jokers:** Lighten things up! Often the main character's best friend is a joker. (Donkey in Shrek, Minions, Dory in Finding Nemo)

Tips on creating characters:

- If you already have a plot in mind, think of who needs this plot -- who has a need the plot's reward would fulfill? Who could grow by overcoming the obstacles? That is your main character.

- Combine different types of characters. Examples: a funny villain (ex. the villains in the Despicable Me movies); a mentor who is also a joker (Hagrid in Harry Potter); a villain that becomes an ally and helps the main character solve the real problem (Floop in Spy Kids).

Conflict -- a storyteller's best friend

The stronger the story problem, the stronger the story.

- **DON'T be nice to your character!** Create obstacles to the goal. The story is more exciting that way, the character learns more, and the reward is more valuable since the character worked so hard for it.

The classic conflicts:

These are some basic ideas to get you started.

- **Person versus person:** The most popular, since conflicts between people are often the most interesting to readers. (Example: Cinderella and her wicked stepmother)

- **Person versus himself:** Conflict between good and evil or strengths and weaknesses in a character. This is deep stuff and not usually the main conflict. (Example: Gru from Despicable Me is evil and commits crimes, but he is not evil at heart -- he is like that because someone hurt him. Gru feels inner conflict between the good and evil inside of him.)

- **Person versus nature:** Usually involves natural disasters or survival skills. This conflict is exciting, but often difficult to write about at length. (Example: The character in Jurassic Park must survive in and escape from a dangerous land of dinosaurs.)
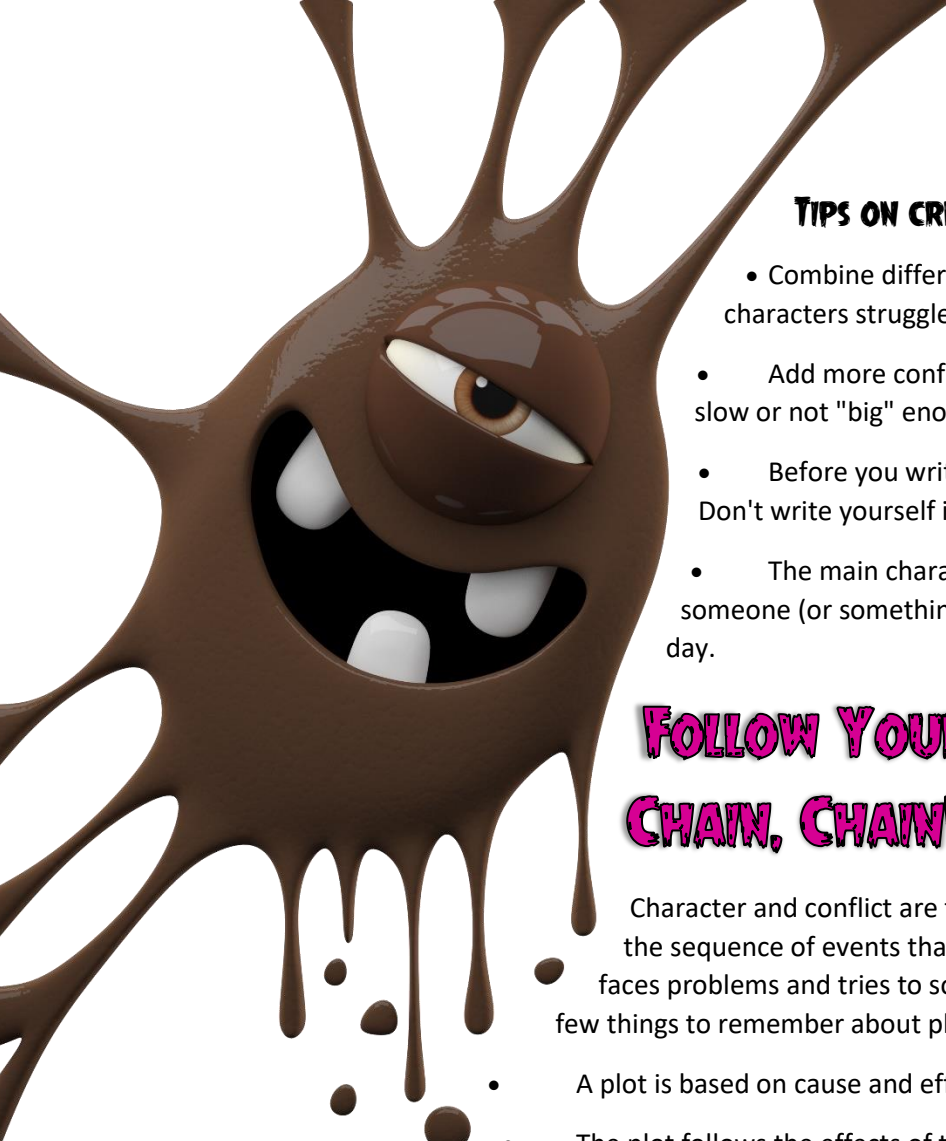
Tips on creating conflict

• Combine different types of conflict. Maybe your characters struggle to survive and fight among themselves.

• Add more conflicts and obstacles if your story seems slow or not "big" enough.

• Before you write, know how the problem will be solved. Don't write yourself into a hole!

• The main character must solve the problem. Don't have someone (or something) enter at the last minute and save the day.

Follow Your Plot: Chain, Chain, Chain!

Character and conflict are the heart of your story. The plot is just the sequence of events that happen as and because the character faces problems and tries to solve (or run away from) them. Here are a few things to remember about plotting:

• A plot is based on cause and effect.

• The plot follows the effects of the character's actions and decisions.

• Avoid simply creating a series of events. You want a chain of events, each affecting the next. Each link in the chain should be necessary to your story!

Reference back to the picture books we've read, how did those authors do it?

Do You Remember What We Talked about with the picture books?

Think about the Elements of most plots

Image via *Hey, That's My Monster!* (Flashlight Press)

You've planned scenes for your story and you should be ready to write and expand on them.

SETUP- Tells/shows who the characters are, where they are (setting) and what they do.

INCITING INCIDENT- An incident that happens that causes a problem for the main character. This problem forces them to want to try to solve it.

EVENTS- where they "Try" to solve it and fail each time. (You may want to encourage students to try to have three or more.)

TRY. FAIL.

TRY. FAIL.

TRY. FAIL.

CLIMAX- Dramatic moment of overcoming or solving problem. (But then…something big happens…and the character makes a choice.)

RESULT- Building down, wrapping up loose ends, and showing positive consequences of climax.

**RESOLUTION-** Happy or hopeful ending

PLAN YOUR SCENES

Scenes: how you show your plot

- Decide how to show action, plot, character interactions, lessons characters learn, etc. Example: Don't just say, "Alex was shy." Have Alex demonstrate shyness by the way he interacts with others. Later, show Alex has gotten over his shyness by having him face someone he was previously afraid of.
Reference back to the picture books we've read, how did those authors show instead of tell (ex. read a scene without showing the pictures, what can students 'see' about what is happening, the characters, etc.)?
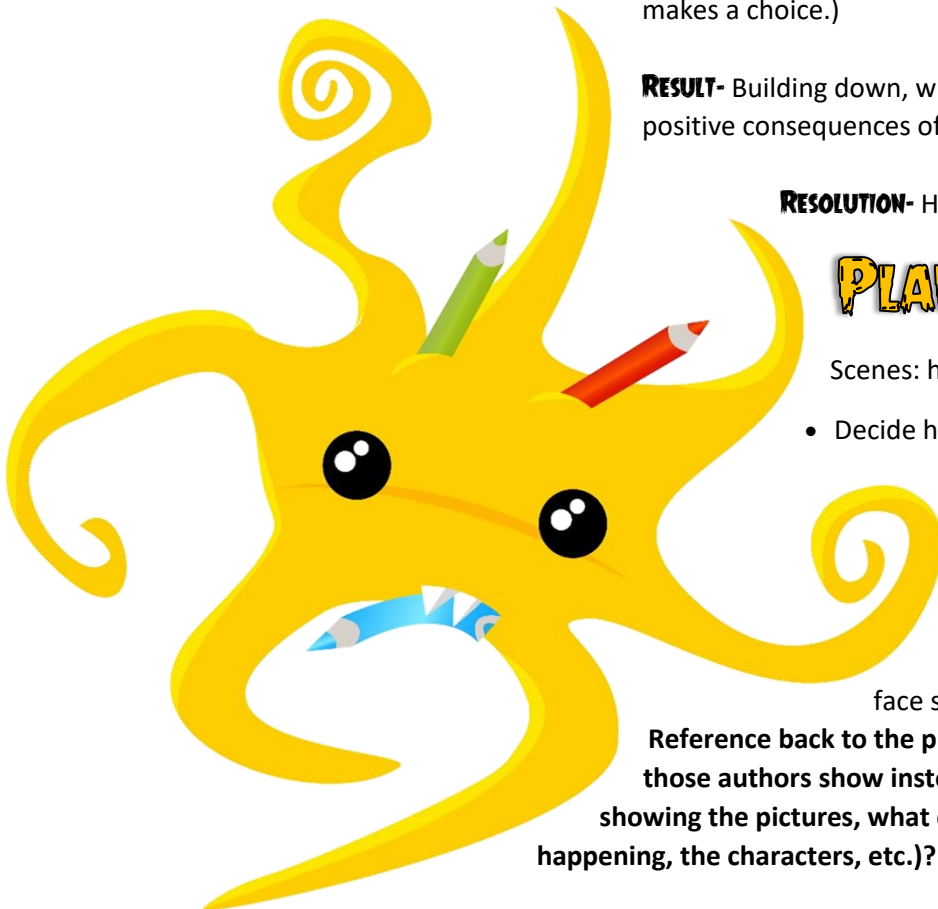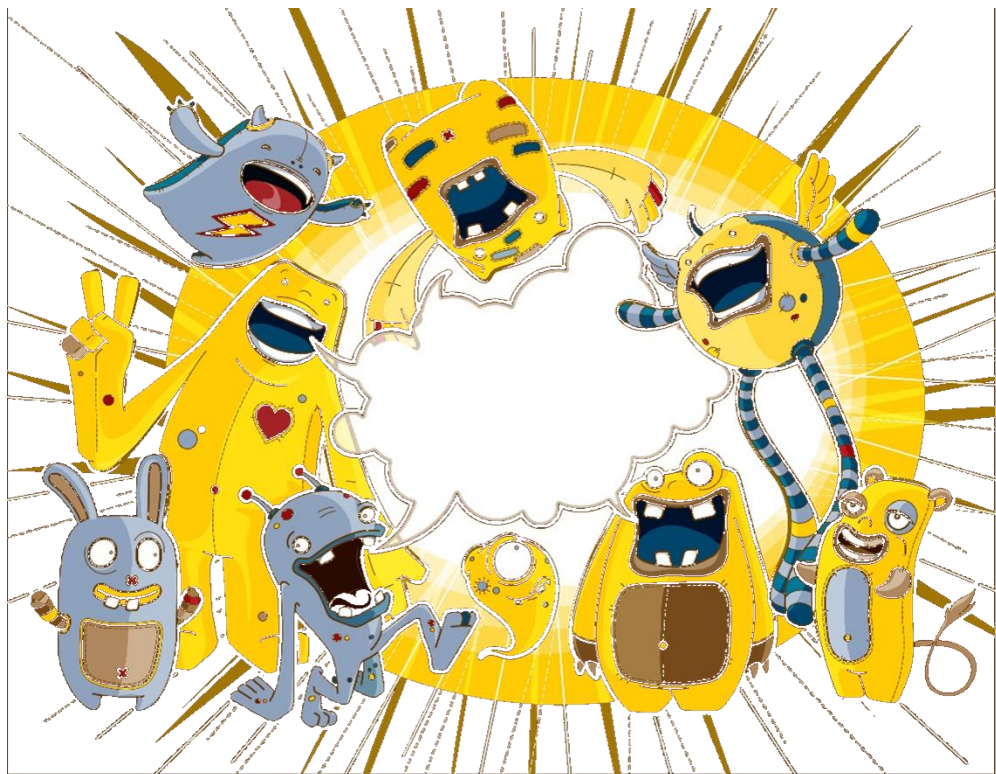
- Each scene needs a beginning, middle, and end. See if you can use the end of one scene or element (example where they try and failed) to transition to the beginning of another, and so on. **Reference back to the picture books we've read, how did those authors do it? Can students find each of the book's scenes' beginning, middle, and end?**

- Don't write a short scene for a major event, and don't make a scene out of something that doesn't need to be. Example: If several uneventful days go by as a character waits for important test results, don't write several days' worth of boring events. Skip to the test results and show the character has waited for days. **Reference back to the picture books we've read, how did those authors show the passage of time?**

Dialogue: Look Who's Talking Now!

Dialogue does many things for your story.

- Reveals character (especially through reactions)

- Advances plot

- Brings scenes to life

- Adjusts the story's pace

- TAKES UP SPACE!!! (Start a new paragraph every time a new character speaks. This takes up space, which is useful if you need a story of a certain length.)

Tips on writing dialogue

- Avoid long greetings and goodbyes. These slow the story and add little.

- Convey character by showing a character's reaction or way of speaking.

- Don't use dialogue as a substitute for action. Example: If you have an earthquake in your story, write a great earthquake scene with lots of action. Don't have a character say "Oh! An earthquake!" and leave it at that.

Reference back to the picture books we've read, how did those authors use dialogue? What did students like/dislike about the dialogue in the stories you read?

Setting: Where are we?

- Plan your setting (Hey you've done a lot of that already!) Now, you want to know details about it. This makes your story more vivid.

- Setting helps you avoid "floating" scenes -- conversation or action that could be happening anywhere.

- Setting adds atmosphere to scenes. Example: In a beach story, a character might compare Aunt Mary's screeching to a seagull. In a city story, Aunt Mary might remind the character of a burglar alarm.

- In some books, the setting is like a character. Example: Survival stories like Gary Paulsen's *Hatchet*.
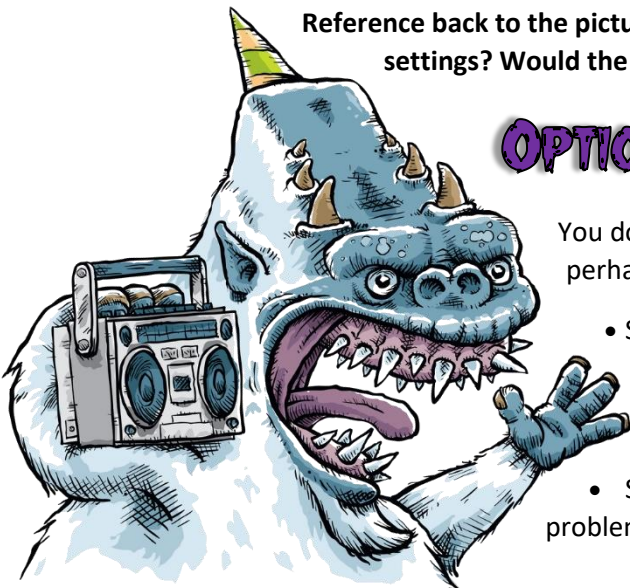
Reference back to the picture books we've read, how did those authors do use their settings? Would the story be different in another setting? How?

Option: Start with a Boom!

You don't have to, sometimes a calmer start is the way to go, or perhaps you want to Your story's opening scene

- Start with the day that is different -- the day the hero is called to adventure

- Start your story as close to the "big event" as you can

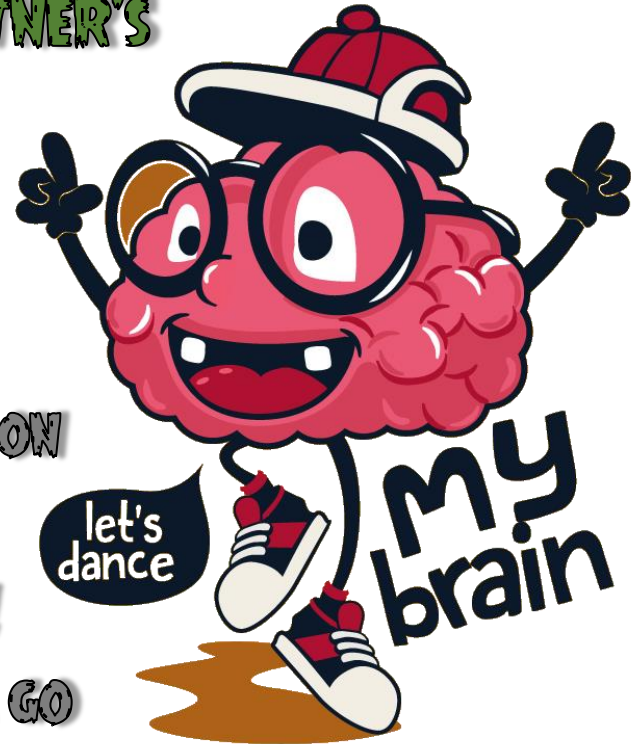- Show the main character and the problem, or hint at the problem.

- Use action to get your story rolling and make your reader want to see what happens next.

Reference back to the picture books we've read, what did those authors do with their opening scenes? What grabbed students' attention about the beginnings of the stories?

Now, it's you & Your Partner's turn to put it all together!

In your rough draft, just concentrate on getting it all on paper! Even the stuff that seems silly or crazy or weird! Get it aaaall Down. You Will go back and fix things later.

22 Good Rules of Storytelling

- #1: You/Audiences admire a character for trying more than for their successes.
- #2: You gotta keep in mind what's interesting to you as an audience, not what's fun to do as a writer. They can be very different.
- #3: Trying for theme is important, but you won't see what the story is actually about 'til you're at the end of it. Now rewrite.
- #4: Once upon a time there was ___. Every day, ___. One day ___. Because of that, ___. Because of that, ___. Until finally ___.
- #5: Simplify. Focus. Combine characters. Hop over detours. You'll feel like you're losing valuable stuff but it sets you free.
- #6: What is your character good at, comfortable with? Throw the polar opposite at them. Challenge them. How do they deal?
- #7: Come up with your ending before you figure out your middle. Seriously. Endings are hard, get yours working up front.
- #8: Finish your story, let go even if it's not perfect. In an ideal world you have both, but move on. Do better next time.
- #9: When you're stuck, make a list of what WOULDN'T happen next. Lots of times the material to get you unstuck will show up.
- #10: Pull apart the stories you like. What you like in them is a part of you; you've got to recognize it before you can use it.
- #11: Putting it on paper lets you start fixing it. If it stays in your head, a perfect idea, you'll never share it with anyone.
- #12: Discount the 1st thing that comes to mind. And the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th – get the obvious out of the way. Surprise yourself.
- #13: Give your characters opinions. Passive/malleable might seem likable to you as you write, but it's poison to the audience.
- #14: Why must you tell THIS story? What's the belief burning within you that your story feeds off of? That's the heart of it.
- #15: If you were your character, in this situation, how would you feel? Honesty lends credibility to unbelievable situations.
- #16: What are the stakes? Give us reason to root for the character. What happens if they don't succeed? Stack the odds against.
- #17: No work is ever wasted. If it's not working, let go and move on - it'll come back around to be useful later.
- #18: You have to know yourself: the difference between doing your best & fussing. Story is testing, not refining.
- #19: Coincidences to get characters into trouble are great; coincidences to get them out of it are cheating.
- #20: Exercise: take the building blocks of a movie you dislike. How d'you rearrange them into what you DO like?
- #21: You gotta identify with your situation/characters, can't just write 'cool'. What would make YOU act that way?
- #22: What's the essence of your story? Most economical telling of it? If you know that, you can build out from there.
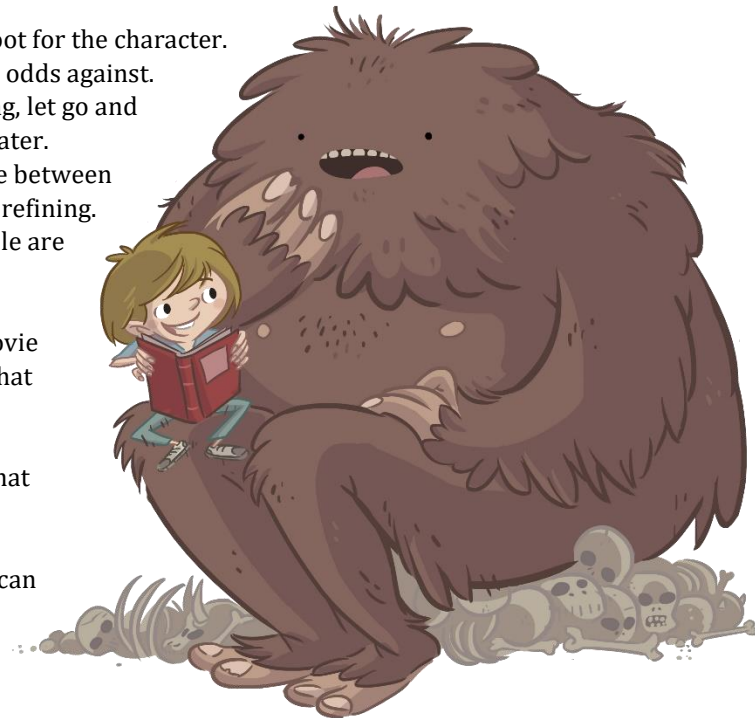
Teacher Rough Draft Review

Materials:

- Rough drafts of student stories
- Rough draft of instructor's (your) story
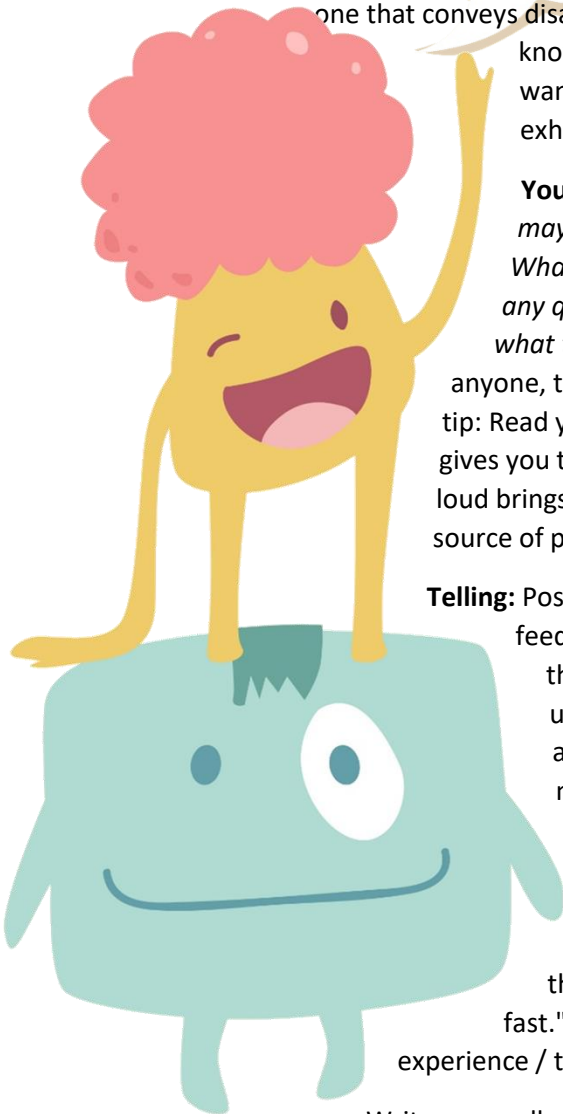- Post it notes
- Pencils

Resist the temptation to edit! This is not the time to 'grade their paper' or comment on grammar skills (or the lack thereof). You are not in a 'judge' role, but a 'helper' role at this point. This is the time to **read the story** in its entirety before making a comment, then go back through, unless you are using the 'telling strategy', but that can still be used after a read-through.

Begin by making positive comments; when pointing out weaknesses, use a descriptive tone, rather than one that conveys disappointment or frustration. Ask questions about what you want to know more about, etc. Limit your comments to the central ideas you want to know more about, do not try to cover everything! That's too exhausting for you and the students.

Your turn! Have someone else read through and edit your story! *This may be beneficial to do before you edit review your students' stories. What was helpful in their review? What wasn't? Were you left with any questions about their comments? Were you happy or upset with what they said? Did you agree with their comments?* If you can't find anyone, try to read your story as though it isn't yours and be objective. One tip: Read your story out-loud to yourself. Hearing your own words out-loud gives you the vicarious experience of being someone else." "Reading out-loud brings the sense of audience back into your act of writing. This is a great source of power." What questions are you left with, etc.?

Telling: Post-it Notes make it easier to put into action Peter Elbow's reflective feedback technique, "telling." Telling requires responders to describe their reactions as they read. Telling and other strategies lead to useful feedback for writers. Rather than simply saying, "You should add more details." You might say, as Kathleen O'Shaughnessy notes in [her essay](), the telling technique sounds rather more like this: "While I was reading your piece, I felt like I was riding a rollercoaster. It started out kinda slow, but you could tell there was something exciting coming up. But then it moved real fast and stopped all of a sudden. I almost needed to read it again the way you ride a rollercoaster over again because it goes by too fast." This response is certainly more useful to describe the audience's experience / the writer than, "I think you could add some more details!"

Writers as well as responders can make use of Post-its. You may want to ask the authors of a piece to attach 2-3 specific questions on Post-It notes about the draft they want help with

before they turn it in. For each question, respond on that post it note and give the authors something specific to consider.

Mark the Powerlines. Use Post-it Notes to tag short passages of effective description. They may be similes, metaphors, or just good writing that is chock full of vivid images. A characteristic of a powerline is the ability to move a reader with a clear mental image whether it's to laugh, smile, or shudder.

Sample Supply List Lesson Nine

Lesson Materials

- *I Need My Monster* & *Hey, That's My Monster!* by Amanda Noll
- Optional: video versions of *I Need My Monster* & *Hey, That's My Monster!*
- Completed Plot Elements Plans for each co-authorship from Lesson Eight
- Opening Line Ideas from Lesson Seven for each co-authorship
- Completed Vivid Verbiage Word Banks for each pair from Lesson Six
- Pencils
- Writing Paper
- Completed settings
- Completed characters
- Story ideas from the dice sessions for each co-authorship
- Story Dice, just in case!

Teacher Rough Draft Review

Materials:

- Rough drafts of student stories
- Rough draft of instructor's (your) story
- Post it notes
- Pencils

Pacing Guide:

This lesson has been designed to take One to Two 75-minute sessions to complete.

Make sure to Give your students [and yourself] Enough time to truly flesh out the Rough drafts of their stories, This process may take More or less Time depending on the needs of your classroom and the abilities of your students.