

# **Bearing Witness through Narration**

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## **Overview**

Many school curriculums include a balanced literacy framework that includes reading, writing, listening and speaking. Balance is maintained in classrooms where there is reading and writing to students, with students and by students. The balance is implemented by teachers and students who recognize the need to learn to read and write and to read and write to learn. Writing is a crucial component of a balanced literacy framework. Building writing skills and experiences will help to enhance a student's ability to communicate and demonstrate self-expression.

This curriculum unit will provide writing activities that will enhance writing through personal narratives. Students will have opportunities to bear witness to personal experiences and trauma that may have occurred in their lives. Students will be able to bear witness by keeping a journal and diary of experiences that may have occurred in or outside of school. Students will be able to broaden and expand their personal narratives using various writing strategies covered in this unit. The overall goal for the unit is for students to become more expressive and creative with their writing while they are telling their stories.

This curriculum unit is designed for grades four and five. This curriculum could be modified for other grades. This unit will also include various published literary work that will provide students with examples of how professional writers express their feelings and memories. The unit consists of five writing activities. The culminating goal is for students to maintain a journal and or diary throughout the school year or from the time the unit is introduced to students.

The following rationale will explain the importance of combining various writing strategies with bearing witness in order for young writers to express themselves more creatively.

## **Rationale**

The purpose of this curriculum unit is to provide students with strategies to encourage independent writing over a period of time. The curriculum unit will enable students to bear witness through narration and journaling. The journals will allow students to express their thoughts and feelings regarding happiness or tragedy at home or in school. Students should be encouraged to write more independently in order to improve and extend writing skills. Another purpose of the curriculum is to encourage students to write more and enjoy writing. The unit will include activities that will enhance writing through figurative language. Students will be allowed to include illustrations, photos and art with their journals. The unit and writing strategies will be incorporated into the literacy block for 45 minutes daily for one week.

## **Background**

This curriculum unit was inspired by a seminar that focused on testimonials and written accounts of Holocaust survivors. Many survivors of the Holocaust attempted to bear witness in various ways in order to give some account of the horrific experiences they encountered during that period of time. Many of the survivors had a difficult time expressing the tragedy and loss they encountered. The horror was hard to interpret for some survivors to explain to people who did not experience the Holocaust. There were other survivors that were able to express a clear account of their experiences. Many people that did not survive the Holocaust left writings and accounts that needed to be translated in order to be published.

Bearing witness involves talking and writing using language in order to tell a story. The will to bear witness is the will to survive. The survivors express recollections and experiences in ways that may be understandable and relatable. Others speak or write using language that is difficult to understand and can be ambiguous in translation. Sometimes there is an inability for the survivor to connect with others. The language is sometimes a problem because it has to be understood in order to counteract the violence. Many of the survivors of the Holocaust were tortured and stripped of their home, pride and dignity. Many survivors were separated from their families and loved ones. Survivors watched in horror as family members, friends and fellow Jews were murdered.

The survivor/narrator speaks through their child self or adult self. The survivor may also speak or write from common memory or deep memory. Memories of the tragic accounts of the Holocaust are very painful for the survivor to have to remember or relive. The testimonies and stories are also hard for the listener and reader to comprehend. However, it is extremely important for the survivor of an horrific tragedy such as the Holocaust to tell and document their story so that it will not be forgotten or eliminated from history. As listeners and readers, we have the responsibility to do the correct task of responding.

## Objectives

- Students will be able to write a daily entry into a personal journal.
- Students will be able to draw, illustrate and label photos and pictures in a personal journal.
- Students will be able to identify and write similes and metaphors in sentences.
- Students will be able to create, design and decorate a personal journal or diary book.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast two published diaries.
- Students will be able to read and analyze nonfictional and fictional literature.

Students will be able to use the five senses in order to add more descriptions and vocabulary to written journal entries.

## Strategies

This curriculum unit will include a variety of instructional strategies. The instructional strategies used are designed to help students expand and improve their writing skills. The usage of the writing process will also be incorporated into this curriculum unit. Brainstorming, writing, revising and publishing will take place daily to produce the culminating product of a personal journal.

- **Direct Instruction** will be teacher-led. Direct instruction will be given to the entire class as a whole group. Small group direct instruction will be used to differentiate instruction for students that need additional support. Direct instruction will be used to facilitate lessons on the writing process, capitalization and punctuation, vocabulary, figurative language, reading and analyzing literature.
- **Accessing Prior Knowledge** will be a strategy used to help students make connections to information and events that they already are familiar with their writing.
- **Graphic Organizers** will be used to organize information students will need to assist with the writing process.
- **Illustrations** will be incorporated so that students may have another way to express or describe their feelings and memories along with their writing. Illustrations may include drawing, art and photographs.
- **The Writing Process** will be included to help students improve on how to become more fluent and organized with different writing styles. The process includes brainstorming, writing, self-editing, editing with the teacher and publishing.

**Discussions** will be a part of the direct instructional portion to give students an opportunity to talk about writing and their experiences.

## **Classroom Activities**

### **Lesson 1**      *Let's Get Started!!!!*

**Overview:** This lesson is designed to introduce students to independent writing through maintaining a personal journal or diary. It is very important for the teacher to be excited and enthusiastic about this independent writing activity in order to try to encourage the students to want to write. The teacher should maintain a journal and diary as well to encourage students. Students will be engaged in discussion about the two key vocabulary words “journal” and “diary”. Students will also have the opportunity to personalize and decorate their journal or diary books.

**Objective:** Students will be able to determine a definition for “journal” and “diary” through discussion and the use of a graphic organizer. Students will be able to design, create and decorate a personal journal book or diary.

#### **Materials:**

KWL Graphic Organizer  
(Appendix 1)

Booklets (The teacher may provide booklets or students may bring in their own booklets. If students are bringing in their own booklets, the teacher would have to request them prior to this lesson through a homework assignment or letter to parents.)

Pencils, crayons, markers, construction paper, scissors, glue, glitter and clear packaging tape.

**Procedure:** Prior to beginning this lesson, the teacher should designate a place in the classroom to display charts used in this curriculum unit. Examples of journals and diaries would also be placed in this area for students to browse through.

1. The teacher will display the words journal and diary on a board.
2. The teacher will tell the students to “turn and talk” with their neighbor or partner about the two words (journal and diary) on the board. Teacher will ask the students to talk about what the words mean and what they may know about each word. The students will also be told to think of questions they may have about journals and diaries.
3. The teacher will distribute the KWL chart to each pair of students to complete the “K” and “W” columns together. The “K” section will include what the students “know” about the topic. This is the part that accesses prior knowledge. The “W” section will include the questions the students would like to know about the topic.
4. The teacher will allow time for the students to complete the “K” and “W” sections of the graphic organizer. The teacher will walk around and monitor the students discussing topic and completing graphic organizer.
5. The teacher will follow up with the discussion by having the students share out their responses to what they completed in the “K” and “W” sections. Teacher may write the responses on a board or chart paper.

6. The teacher will then with the assistance of the students draw a conclusion to define the words journal and diary. The teacher may talk briefly about the definitions and the differences of a journal and diary. The teacher will explain that in the next lesson, they will review and analyze examples of a journal and diary.
7. The students will include the definitions generated by the teacher and the students in the “L” section of the graphic organizer.
8. The students will have the opportunity to add more information and answer questions regarding journals and diaries to the KWL chart throughout the unit.
9. The students will keep the KWL chart in their journal or diary book. The KWL sheet can be folded and used as a bookmark.

**Extension:** The teacher will explain to the students that they will be creating and maintaining a journal or diary throughout the school year. The teacher will explain that they will be learning more about how and what to write in their journals and diaries throughout the week. Today, the students will receive booklets to decorate and personalize. The materials for decoration journals and diaries will be distributed and students will be allotted time to decorate and personalize their booklets. The booklets will be collected until the class is ready to make the first entry.

## **Lesson 2**      ***“What Does a Journal or Diary Look Like?”***

**Overview:** This activity will allow the students to view examples of published journals and diaries. The students will be able to view the different writing styles in order to gain an understanding of that good writers are creative and unique in their own way.

**Objective:** The students will be able to read and analyze excerpts of literature from two different authors. The students will be able to compare and contrast the writing styles and characteristics of two published diaries using a graphic organizer (Venn diagram) and through discussion.

**Materials:** Excerpt from: *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (Appendix 2).  
Excerpt from: *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* (Appendix 3).  
Graphic Organizer: Venn diagram (Appendix 4).  
Several copies of each book

### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher will explain to the class that the students will be analyzing two writers of published diaries.
2. The teacher will introduce each writer one at a time. The teacher will read aloud the summary of each book. The summary is found on the back of each book. The students will then discuss the summary. The teacher will read an excerpt from each book. The teacher may photo copy the pages or post them on a smart board for the students to view.

3. The teacher will then distribute the Venn diagram sheets to students to write down and organize the similarities and differences of the diary entries. The students will discuss the similarities and differences aloud.
4. The teacher will then lead in a brief discussion about the reasons people write journals and diaries. The teacher will explain the concept of “bearing witness”. The teacher will talk about how Anne Frank wrote a diary telling her thoughts, feelings and accounts of her life as a young girl during the Holocaust. The teacher will explain that much of these accounts were true. The teacher will also explain how the author of the Wimpy Kid Series wrote about the experiences and feelings of a young boy at home and school. The accounts are considered realistic fiction. Many of the accounts in this book could happen in real life but are actually fiction. The focus of the discussion will be to discuss what to write about in a journal or diary.
5. **Extension:** The teacher and class will determine the guidelines for writing in a journal and diary and post them on chart paper to display in classroom. The teacher may also allow students to name their journals or diaries to model after Anne Frank who called her diary a friend named “Kitty.”

### **Lesson 3**      *“Adding Seasoning to Our Writing to Make it Spicy” Part One*

**Overview:** This lesson will give students some tips on how to be more creative in their writing by using the five senses to describe various people, places, things and events. Students will be encouraged and expected to include sensory words in their journal or diary entries.

**Objective:** The students will be able to comprise a list of sensory words to describe sight, touch, smell, sound and taste. The students will be able to complete a web comprised of examples for each sense to describe a person, place, thing or event.

**Materials:** Chart paper  
Web Graphic Organizer (Appendix 5)  
Writing Paper  
Sample Sensory Word List (Appendix 6)

#### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher will ask the class, “*What are the five senses?*” (sight, sound, touch, smell, taste). The teacher will list senses on chart paper in columns. The students will discuss and share words that could go in each column to describe that sense. The teacher will add the words to each column. Teacher may refer to sample sensory word list (Appendix 6) for examples.
2. The teacher will display a web on a board, chart paper or smart board.
3. The teacher will write “Lunchroom” in the center of web. The teacher will chart responses from students that describe how the lunchroom looks, sounds, smells, feels or tastes. The sensory words would also be added to class chart.

4. The teacher will give the students a web to work on independently regarding “ice cream.” The students will work independently filling in the web. The teacher may modify the examples for the web. Students will discuss written responses. Any different sensory words may be added to the class sensory chart.

**Extension:** The teacher will model how to take the information from the web about the lunchroom and write a paragraph describing the lunchroom using the senses. The students will then work independently to take the information from the web and write a paragraph describing ice cream using the senses.

#### **Lesson 4**      *“Adding Seasoning to Our Writing to Make it Spicy” Part Two*

**Overview:** This lesson will give students some writing tips on how to write more creatively by using figurative language. This particular lesson will only cover similes and metaphors. Other examples of figurative language such as hyperboles, alliteration, onomatopoeias, and personification may be taught and reviewed later in the school year to creatively expand their writing. Students will be encouraged and expected to write examples of figurative language in their journals or diaries.

**Objectives:** The students will be able to identify similes and metaphors in a passage. The students will be able to use and write similes and metaphors in sentences.

**Materials:** Chart paper, sentence strips, markers, index cards  
Simile and Metaphor Activity Worksheet (Appendix 7)

#### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher will write an example of a simile on the board. The teacher will ask what is being compared. The teacher will explain that a simile is a comparison of two things using “like” or “as”. The teacher will write another example of a simile and ask the students to tell what is being compared. The teacher will ask, “*How do you know this is an example of a simile?*”
2. The teacher will write an example of a metaphor on the board. The teacher will ask what is being compared. The teacher will explain that a metaphor is a direct comparison using a linking verb such as is, was, are, were, or am. The teacher will write another example of a metaphor and ask the students to tell what is being compared. The teacher will ask, “*How do you know this is an example of a metaphor?*”
3. The students will be asked to tell how similes and metaphors are alike and different.
4. The teacher will put definitions and examples on chart paper to post in classroom.
5. The students will be given an activity worksheet that will review identifying and writing similes and metaphors.
6. There will be a classroom discussion about similes and metaphors upon completion of the activity worksheet.

7. Exit Ticket: Students will be asked to write one simile and one metaphor on an index card that is not posted in the classroom.

**Extension:** The students will be asked to write their favorite simile and metaphor on a sentence strip. Include an illustration. Display sentence strips in classroom or on a bulletin board.

## **Lesson 5**                    *“Let the Writing Begin!!”*

**Overview:** This lesson will include the first entry of the student’s journal or diary. The students will be encouraged to incorporate all of the strategies from the prior lessons for each journal entry. Students will write daily for 15-20 minutes independently in their journal or diary. The entry must fall under the following guidelines:

1. The date must be written above every entry.
2. Topic Choices:
  - Daily Writing Prompt from Board
  - Memory Writing about Incidents or Events from the Past. (Home or School)
  - Daily Occurrences
  - Free Write about Any Topic
3. Students will be encouraged to tell their stories using creativity and expression.
4. Sensory words and figurative language must be used
5. Include illustrations and photos when necessary.

**Objectives:** Students will be able to write an entry in their journal or diary daily that is one or more paragraphs. Students will be able to draw an illustration or include a photo with their written entry.

**Materials:** Journal, diary, pen, pencil, photos (optional)

### **Procedure:**

1. The teacher will model writing and entry that would go in a journal or diary on chart paper including sensory words and figurative language.
2. The teacher will distribute journals and diaries.
3. The students will write the daily entry.
4. The teacher will monitor the entries and write encouraging remarks in the booklets throughout the school year.

**Extension:** At the end of the school year the students will have a complete journal or diary. The students will discuss their experiences keeping a journal or diary. The students will also be able to share what they learned, liked or disliked about journaling or keeping a diary. Students will be able to celebrate their success as writers.

## **Bibliography**

Frank, Anne. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, Bantom Edition, 1993, ISBN: 978-0-553-29698-3.

*Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* was selected for this unit to tie the unit skill to the theme of the T.I.P. course “*Teaching the Holocaust*”. This book provides students with examples of diary entries by a real person that was bearing witness during a tragedy.

Kinney, Jeff. *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*, Amulet Books, 2007  
ISBN: 978-0-8109-9313-6

*Diary of a Wimpy Kid* provides students with other styles and examples of diary entries that also included illustrations.

Robbins, Mary Lu. *A Guide for Using Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl in the Classroom*, Teacher Created Resources, 2014.  
ISBN: 978-1-55734-559-2

This book is a resource for teachers that provides additional activities that can be used in conjunction with the curriculum unit for the book, *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*.

Super Teacher Worksheets. <http://www.superteacherworksheets.com>

This website provides teachers with graphic organizers and activity worksheets that can be used with this unit.

Schoolnet, <http://www.philasd.org>

This website provides teachers with the core curriculum standards for grades K-12.

## Appendices

Appendix 1

Graphic Organizer

KWL Chart

<b>K</b>	<b>W</b>	<b>L</b>

“K” - Write what you know about a journal or diary.

“W” - Write what you want to know about journals and diaries.

“L” - Write what you learned about journals and diaries.

## Appendix 2

Read aloud pages from: *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*

Pages 2-5 *Saturday, 20 June 1942*

Pages 5-7 *Sunday, 21 June 1942*

## Appendix 3

Read aloud pages from: *Diary of a Wimpy Kid*

Pages 1-11 *September*

Appendix 2-3 can be modified by using a smart board to show pages or through handouts of the pages.

Appendix 4

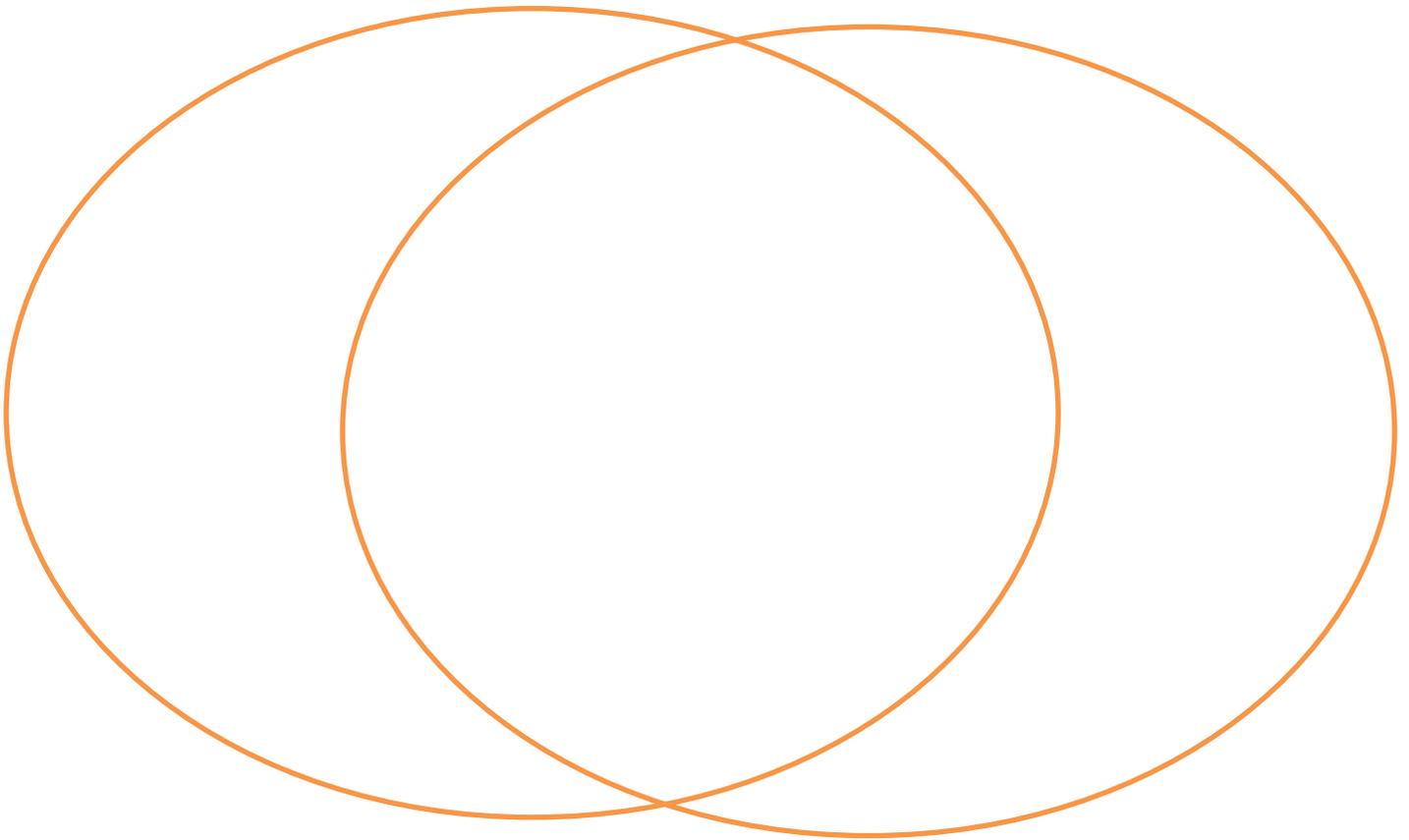
Graphic Organizer

Venn Diagram

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Diary of a Wimpy Kid

Anne Frank: Diary of a Young Girl



Differences should be placed on the outsides.  
Similarities should be placed in the center.

## Appendix 5

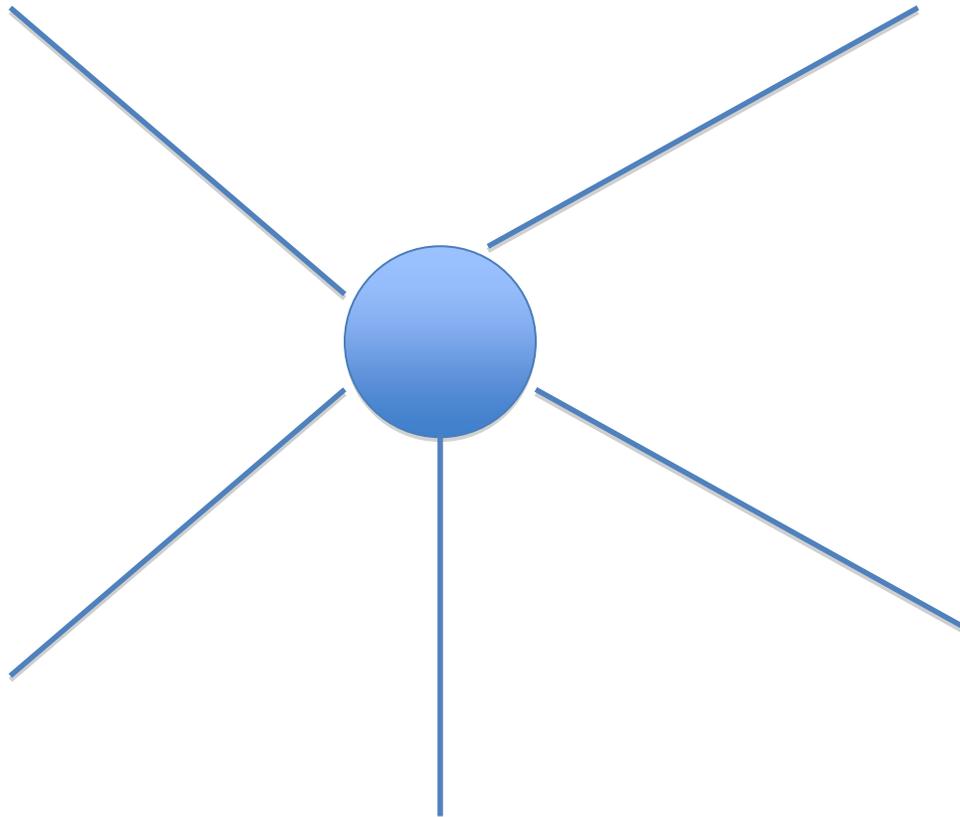
### Graphic Organizer

#### Web

Write "Lunchroom" in the center circle.

Write an example for sight, sound, taste, touch and smell on the five lines.

\* Additional lines may be added for more descriptions.



## Appendix 6

### Sample Sensory Word List

Keep the following lists of words posted in the classroom. Sensory words provide more details and examples in our writing. More words can be added to this sample list.

#### **Sound Words**

1. Buzzing
2. Chattering
3. Exploding
4. Gurgling
5. Honking
6. Laughing
7. Quacking
8. Screeching
9. Ticking
10. Whining

#### **Touch Words**

1. Bumpy
2. Cottony
3. Freezing
4. Greasy
5. Lacy
6. Moist
7. Oily
8. Scorching
9. Sharp
10. Thick

#### **Taste and Smell Words**

1. Bitter
2. Floury
3. Fruity
4. Minty
5. Musty
6. Salty
7. Sour
8. Sweet
9. Tangy
10. Vile

## **Sight Words**

1. Bulky
2. Fine
3. Furry
4. Hairy
5. Metallic
6. Pointed
7. Soapy
8. Rocky
9. Tangled
10. waxy

## Appendix 7

Create a worksheet for students to practice similes and metaphors. Sample worksheets can be found on [www.superteacherworksheets.com](http://www.superteacherworksheets.com).

Some samples for worksheet:

### **Simile**

Write 5 similes about five people you know.

Be sure that similes are kind and positive.

Example: Mr. Wharton is as strong as a bull.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ is as \_\_\_\_\_ as a \_\_\_\_\_.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ is as \_\_\_\_\_ as a \_\_\_\_\_.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is like \_\_\_\_\_.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ is like \_\_\_\_\_.
5. \_\_\_\_\_.

### **Metaphors**

Write a response for each.

1. Dad said my bedroom is a pig pen. What does that mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. My friend Sharla is a clown. What does this mean?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Write a metaphor about someone who is very smart.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Write a metaphor about a plant.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Write a nice metaphor about one of your classmates.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **Standards**

The Common Core State Standards are designed to provide an understanding of what students are expected to learn. Teachers and parents use the standards in order to know is needed to help students learn. The standards are developed to be robust, rigorous, and relevant to the real world. The standards reflect the knowledge and skills that students should acquire in order to be college and career bound.

1.3: Reading Literature: Students read and respond to works of literature – with emphasis on comprehension, making connections among ideas and between texts with focus on textual evidence.

1.3.4.H: Compare and contrast similar themes, topics, and patterns of events in literature, including texts from different cultures.

1.3.4.J: Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate conversational, general academic, and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal precise actions, emotions, or states of being and that are basic to a particular topic.

1.4: Writing: Students write for different purposes and audiences. Students write clear and focused text to convey a well-defined perspective and appropriate content.

1.4.4.M: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events.

1.4.4.O: Use dialogue and descriptions to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations; use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

1.4.4.X: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.