

## Lesson Plan: Creative Writing Story Starters

By [Sarah Sahr](#)

Creative writing is one of the best ways to get to know your students. Once students are comfortable enough in English to put pen to paper (or fingers to keyboard), a wealth of teaching and learning opens up. However, as we all know, there are challenges. What is the hardest part about writing a story? Getting the first idea? Having enough vocabulary or grammar? Inspiration? The lesson plan here might present a new writing procedure that takes your students beyond the basics.

<b>Materials:</b> Brown paper bags, notebook paper (from teacher); one household item, optional recording device (from students)
<b>Audience:</b> Intermediate Adult or Secondary Students
<b>Objective:</b> Students will be able to construct a story using story starters, vocabulary, and inspiration from other students.
<b>Outcome:</b> Students will create word lists describing various household items. Students will write a complete paragraph.
<b>Duration:</b> 50–65 minutes (approximately)

### Lesson Preparation

Student preparation: Ask each student to bring a household item from home. Items can be anything: a cheese grater, a towel, a remote control, a screwdriver, a child's toy, a book, etc. It is important that students bring something they would be able to create a story around, so it should have some personal meaning. It is also important that students keep their household item secret.

Teacher preparation: Prepare enough brown paper bags for each student in class. A piece of notebook paper with these categories listed at the top should be stapled to each paper bag:

NOUNS	VERBS	ADJECTIVES
1.	1.	1.
2.	2.	2.
3.	3.	3.
4.	4.	4.

As the teacher, you may want to bring several household items from home as well, as some students may forget to bring something to class.

Also, it might be useful for the teacher to write a paragraph about his or her own household item before class for the closure part of this lesson plan.

### Introduction (10 minutes)

As students enter the classroom, give each person a brown paper bag with the paper attached to it (giving out the bags at the door saves time). Once seated, students should draw a symbol on the bag to identify it as their own—but they should not write their names.

Next, do a quick review of parts of speech, especially nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. This can be done in many ways; here are a few:

- “Call and response”: The teacher calls out a part of speech, students respond with words that are that part of speech.
- Flashcards: The teacher holds up a word flashcard and the class lets the teacher know what part of speech it is.
- Sentence ID: The teacher could share some sentences and ask, “Which word(s) is the noun? Which word(s) is the verb?”

Take no more than 10 minutes on this; it’s just something quick to get the students thinking of parts of speech categories.

### **Brainstorming** (20–25 minutes)

#### **Step 1:**

Once students have recalled the various parts of speech, have them place their household items into their brown paper bags and fold the top. It is best if student did this without other students seeing the items. This isn’t mandatory; however, the element of surprise is nice. Have students put their bagged items on a table.

#### **Step 2:**

Each student should now take someone else’s brown bag back to his or her desk. Once all students have a bag, allow them to open it, look at the item (without removing it from the bag) and write as many words on the notebook paper as they can under each category. It would be useful to do a whole class assessment on the word lists. Take into account whether words are categorized correctly. In a future lesson, review parts of speech if needed.

#### **Step 3:**

Once everyone has had time to write some words down, the bag should be passed to another student. Students should refuse their own bag. The next students should look into the bag and write down any additional words on the notebook paper they can think of, making sure the words are under the proper categories. If necessary, students can pass the bag one last time. The third student should complete the lists, if possible.

#### **Step 4:**

Students need to find their original bag and take it back to their desk. Once everyone is seated again, have students remove the item and detach the notebook paper from the bag.

### **Preparing to Write & Writing** (15 minutes)

Take a few moments to remind students of what makes a good paragraph: 4–7 sentences, topic sentences, supporting details, conclusion, etc. Using the household item and the lists of words as inspiration, students are to write a paragraph about their household item. They may use as many, or as few, words from the list as they wish.

It might be useful to let students know their paragraphs can be fiction or nonfiction, funny or serious or sad or joyful. It’s really up to them. It might also be a good idea to ask students why they brought in a particular item. Is it important to them? Do they use it often?

Make sure to let students know what your main focus in marking will be (e.g., vocabulary use, subject-verb agreement, paragraph mechanics). That way, students can focus on what will be graded (see the side note in Closing). Remind students often during the lesson of the main focus.

### **Editing** (10 minutes)

One of the best editing tools is to have students read their writing out loud. Here are two great options to do this:

1. Pair students up and have them read their paragraphs aloud to each other. As one student reads, the other student can take notes on any errors he or she might hear and share his or her findings after the reading. Then, they can trade roles.
2. For students who like to keep their writing private, a digital recorder can be used (most mobile phones have this option). A student should record his or her own readings and listen back. On the play back, the student would take note of any errors that need to be fixed.

Once complete, give students a few minutes to revise their paragraphs.

### **Closing** (5 minutes)

Ask if any student would like to share his or her paragraph. This may be challenging. If no one volunteers, share your paragraph with the class. Make sure to show them your household item. Last, collect the papers for marking. In marking the papers, there are several areas to consider for assessment: individual writing styles, proper use of words, grammar, continuity and tone of the paragraph, mechanics, etc.

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