



## *Before Papers Come Paragraphs*

### Introductory Unit: Page One—The Very Beginning Lesson 1: Picking Up the Pen—The Writing Notebook / Parent Guide

#### The Denim *Beret* Writing Program

## Unit Introduction

Welcome to *The Denim Beret Writing Program*! As a homeschool parent, you have taken on the responsibility to teach your student writing, a responsibility that may feel overwhelming and even intimidating. Having homeschooled myself for a total of 10 years, I understand. In fact, even though I am a writing teacher and have full confidence in teaching other people's children, my confidence disappears when it comes to teaching my own children.

With that in mind, I hope to make the parent guide of *The Denim Beret Writing Program* easy for you to follow. It will tell you what your student is supposed to learn in each lesson, provide an answer key and/or rubric for the assignments, and share any tips and supplies you'll need to help your student. If you are not a strong writer yourself, don't worry. Because I remember how busy a homeschool mom's day can be, I will keep these parent guides as simple as I can to keep your stress as low as possible.

All the lessons should be self-explanatory to your student. While you may need to help your student work through a difficult concept from time to time, you will not need to directly teach your student anything. There are no DVDs or parent lessons, and there are only a few activities that you'll need to direct. I will present everything your student needs to know and will provide instructions for every activity. The three things you will need to do on a regular basis is read the parent guide, grade your student's assignments, and decide whether your student has mastered the concepts enough to move on to the next lesson.

Because this is a mastery-learning program, meaning that I do not reteach any lesson at any point, it is very important that you don't pass your student with a low or even an average grade. He or she must revise those assignments until the grade is at least above average. If your student's grade is satisfactory but you think a few corrections would be valuable anyway, by all

means require them. Revision is necessary to all good writing, so your student needs to become comfortable with it from the beginning.

Before I move on to the lesson 1 parent guide, I'd like to address the subject of grammar, spelling, and mechanics in relation to grading. Some teachers will mark every error, no matter what the assignment is or how much it may overwhelm struggling students, and some teachers feel that these finer points of writing aren't worth addressing at all. You may wonder how much effort you should spend on this when you grade assignments. In this program I urge you not to bother with grammar, mechanics, or spelling until I introduce the rubric to your student near the end of the course.

I say this not because I am indifferent to these aspects of writing. On the contrary, they are essential to completing polished essays, stories, and papers. You will need to teach them and hold your student accountable for them at some point. However, this course is all about composition, a creative process with its own structures and elements. Your student will have enough to do without trying to focus on all the finer points of English at the same time. There will come a time when your student will have to write with technical polish. But that time is not yet.

## Special Unit Supplies

Most lessons in *Before Papers Come Paragraphs* will require only a few simple supplies:

- computer w/word processing feature, such as Word or Google Docs
- printer
- notebook (to be discussed in lesson 1 and below)
- writing utensils (to be discussed in lesson 1 and below)

However, occasionally you will need additional supplies, which should be easy for you to obtain. In lesson 4 of this introductory unit, you will also need a copy of *The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein. You may buy or borrow it.

## Notes on Lesson 1

This lesson does not teach a writing skill or concept, but it does teach a tool common among serious writers. The writing notebook is to a writer what a laboratory is to a scientist. In *The Denim Beret Writing Program*, your student will use the notebook regularly. Lesson 1 will help him or her set it up and understand how to use it.

In addition, your student will be introduced to the writing warm-ups that will begin every lesson through unit 3. Warm-ups are a form of journaling that is based on relaxed writing prompts. They should be completed at the beginning of each lesson and should not be critiqued, except for completion and effort. The warm-ups should be completed in the "Writing Practice" section of the notebook. All warm-ups should be labeled and dated. If your student needs a special accommodation in regard to handwriting, the warm-ups may be done on the computer and then printed and pasted into the notebook. However, this should only be for students who cannot handwrite at least a half page. The computer is typically not a good substitute for journal writing. The intimacy of putting pen to paper is important in journaling.

### Supplies Needed

In this lesson your student will need the following supplies and should personally make the selections:

- sewn-binding composition book or half-size spiral notebook
- writing utensils

Optional supplies will be discussed in the lesson and should also be selected by your student. Your student will also need the following additional supplies throughout the course:

- computer with a word processing feature OR access to Google Docs (which requires a Google account)
- printer

## Evaluation Guide

### GRAMMAR MINI-LESSON:

Your student learned the dual concepts of a "sentence" and a "fragment" (or reviewed it). The instructions for this assignment are as follows: "Below you will find three fragments and three sentences jumbled up. On the short lines below, write "S" if the group of words is a complete sentence and "F" if the group of words is a fragment. Then, if it's a sentence, turn it in to a fragment. If it's a fragment, turn it into a sentence. Write your revisions on the long lines."

Answer key:

1. My kitten likes to.

\_\_\_F\_\_\_ \_Answers will vary but should complete the thought. Example: My kitten likes to play with her toy mouse.

2. Have you ever known?

\_\_\_F\_\_\_ \_Answers will vary but should complete the thought. Example: "Have you ever known anyone who could juggle?"

3. I don't like scary movies as much as funny ones.

\_\_\_S\_\_\_ \_Answers will vary but should reduce the sentence to a fragment.

4. To play ball in the park.

\_\_\_F\_\_\_ \_Answers will vary but should complete the thought. Example: On warm autumn days my best friend and I like to play ball in the park.

5. Once I understood grammar and mechanics, editing my essays was much easier.

\_\_\_S\_\_\_ \_Answers will vary but should reduce the sentence to a fragment.

6. After school I will go to my pottery class.

\_\_\_S\_\_\_ \_Answers will vary but should reduce the sentence to a fragment.

LESSON ASSIGNMENT:

This lesson's assignment doesn't require formal grading, but you'll still want to make sure your student followed instructions for the notebook set-up and writing warm-up #1. Below is a grading rubric you can score, if you choose. It is on the next page so that you can print, score, and file it away. With each rubric I'll provide a suggested scoring key, which can vary based on the assignment. At the end you can give a final grade using my grading key or a traditional letter key, or you can choose not to give a final grade at all.

Again, because *The Denim Beret* is a mastery-learning program, revision should be required when the student doesn't receive a high grade. Only when the student shows mastery of the lesson should he or she continue to the next lesson.

## *Before Papers Come Paragraphs Lesson 1 Rubric*

### Grading Key:

Yes – The student completely fulfilled the requirement.

No – The student did not fulfill the requirement.

Partially – The student completed some of the requirement.

\_\_\_\_ 1. Did the student select one of the two kinds of notebooks suggested, as well as at least two writing utensils?

\_\_\_\_ 2. Did the student divide the notebook into two sections, labeling one section "Writing Notes" and the other section "Writing Practice"?

\_\_\_\_ 3. Did the student label the cover with an identifying title?

\_\_\_\_ 4. Did the student complete the "topic of interest" warm-up, writing nonstop for at least 10 minutes?

\_\_\_\_ 5. Did the student complete the warm-up in the "Writing Practice" section of the notebook?

Comments:

Grade: