



## *Before Papers Come Paragraphs*

### Introductory Unit: Page One—The Very Beginning Lesson 4: Good vs. Bad Writing—What’s the Difference? / Parent Guide

The Denim *Beret*  
Writing Program

#### Notes on Lesson 4

This lesson is unique in *Before Papers Come Paragraphs* because it is the longest lesson in the entire course. To avoid overwhelming students, I have divided it into three parts, each with its own worksheet. The reason for its length is that it examines the concept of “good” vs. “bad” writing in depth. I consider this lesson essential because students need to have a clear idea of what they are aiming for in their quest to become excellent writers. Please encourage your student to take the time needed to complete the lesson well. The notes on each part are as follows:

PART 1: This part is short and introduces the concept of “good” vs. “bad” writing. Your student will consider the best qualities of favorite literature and make a list of them. Then I will offer my own list.

PART 2: Our study of the qualities of “good” writing continues with a brief examination of three very different, “excellent” books—a picture book, a young adult novel, and a full-color work of adult non-fiction. This is followed by a discussion of traits common to all three of these books—or “the six traits of excellent writing.” Because these traits will become increasingly important in *The Denim Beret Writing Program*, especially in level 3, it is important that your student doesn’t rush through this section.

PART 3: In this final part of lesson 4, students will read a comparison of two similar books in light of the six traits of excellent writing. One book is a classic and an example of “good” writing, and the other is an example of “bad” writing. The comparison will show why one book exemplifies the six traits and why the other one doesn’t. Through regular literary analysis like this, students can begin to recognize the difference in writing quality. This, in turn, will help them become

more aware of the strengths and weaknesses in their own writing, so that they can grow as writers. For that reason, I encourage you to discuss books and poetry with your student not only for their own sake, but also for helping your student learn how to read like a writer.

## Evaluation Guide

### WARM-UP

In the lesson 2 parent guide, I explained writing warm-ups in detail—what they are and how to evaluate and score them. Please refer to that if you missed it. Briefly, check your student's warm-up for the following criteria only:

- continuous writing for a minimum of 10 minutes
- prompt was followed
- completion of approximately a half page (consider size of handwriting when judging this)
- evidence of effort

Record a completion grade on the page when you are satisfied with your student's work.

The instructions for this warm-up are as follows:

- Big Questions: Choose a situation or a question about which you have always wondered and think through it on the page. For instance, I have always wondered why people choose to live where it's cold all year, such as on high mountains or in the Arctic. What do they like about it? Why don't they move to a warmer climate? If I chose this topic, I would ponder possible answers to my question and perhaps come up with some ways I could find out factual answers. This is a great exercise for curious minds!

### LESSON ASSIGNMENT

Part 1: After considering what traits are common to excellent writing, your student will identify and list his personal writing strengths and weaknesses. Then your student will create specific goals to work toward throughout the course. This worksheet should be discussed as much as needed but graded only for completion and effort.

Part 2: This worksheet is divided into two parts. In part 1 your student will summarize “the six traits of excellent writing.” In part 2 your student will choose and examine three literary works that he considers “excellent.” See the answer key below.

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### PART 1: Reviewing the Six Traits of Excellent Writing:

In your own words, define the six traits of excellent writing as discussed in the lesson. Use complete sentences.

- 1) **Audience**—In most cases, writing is meant to be read by someone other than the writer. To be effective the writer needs to compose with a “potential audience” in mind.
- 2) **Purpose**—Writers have personal reasons for writing, but in this case “purpose” is about what writers hope to do to or for the potential audience through their work—what they hope to accomplish.
- 3) **Tone**—To convey ideas effectively, writers must use an appropriate manner of speaking, expressing the attitude and mood that will most effectively fulfill their purpose for their potential audience.
- 4) **Beauty**—The trait of beauty is often emotionally powerful and can cause a literary work to have a profound impact on readers. Although beauty is experienced subjectively, it can also be examined objectively. For example, a news story can be a beautiful example of journalism because of the way it exemplifies that genre.
- 5) **Truth**—Closely intertwined with beauty, a literary work that conveys truth is also powerful. It can mean accurate, clearly explained facts, such as in a history or science book, or it can mean authentic, genuine emotions or experiences, or it can mean philosophical or spiritual truths.
- 6) **Voice**—The most memorable writers express their ideas in distinctive, recognizable ways. More than just style, which can vary according to the audience and purpose of the literary work, voice is the stamp of the writer’s unique self on the page. It can be nurtured but not taught, because it is innate to the writer.

### PART 2: Identifying “Excellent” Literature

Find three works of literature of different types that you think are examples of excellent writing. *You should choose a variety* (not all novels or articles, for instance), and they should be works that you have already read or that you can read easily for this exercise. After you have

collected the literature, begin a new page in your writing notebook (label it with this lesson's title) in the section called "Writing Notes."

Your assignment is to consider each work of literature carefully to determine why you think it deserves to be called "excellent," just as I did for the three examples in this lesson. Use your notebook to jot down as many reasons as you can think of for each. When you are ready, type the three most important ones into the worksheet in the spaces below, adding an explanation for each one. It may be helpful to consider the six qualities I described in the second half of this lesson, but you may offer other reasons for your choices, as well. *The reasons should reflect your best thinking*, not just "It's cool" or "It makes me feel good," etc.

**Please use complete sentences.**

Choice #1: (type title here) Example: *Bedtime for Frances*

- a. *It has a gentle kind of humor that children can understand.*
- b. *It has a main character young children can relate to.*
- c. *The story is fun but comforting, just right for bedtime.*

Choice #2: (type title here)

- a. *Answers will vary.*
- b.
- c.

Choice #3: (type title here)

- a. *Answers will vary.*
- b.
- c.

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Part 3: This assignment is intended to help students begin to think critically about literature through the lens of a writer. Your student will choose two literary works from the same genre, so that they have some key similarities. Then he will consider the strengths and weaknesses of each. Your student should try to keep in mind the six traits of excellent writing during this analysis, but don't expect him to be able to do this well, yet. It will likely take more instruction and practice to fully understand and apply the six traits in either literary analyses or writing projects. Your student's answers will vary according to the literature chosen for the assignment, so there are no "right" or "wrong" answers. Instead, grade your student on effort, detail, depth of thought, and the use of complete, clear sentences. When your student submits the assignment, I encourage

you to discuss the exercises with him. Try to draw out as much critical thinking from your student as possible by asking questions about his responses.