




13. Better Paragraphs

 30-50 min	 Worksheets 13-1 and 13-2
 Learn that a new idea gets a new paragraph.	

What is it?

A lesson in what constitutes a paragraph.

This short writing activity is an ideal choice when you want to start and finish a first draft in one period, and have a bit of pair work conversational fun at the same time.

The teaching point is highly relevant if your students, like some of mine, do not seem to appreciate the value of a paragraph as a tool that separates ideas and makes text readable.

Set Up

Copy Worksheets 13-1 and 13-2 for students, or display on the classroom projection screen.

Flow

Teacher instructions: ask students to write a fictitious story. It's about a character that goes on an adventure and encounters four things.

On one level, the focus is adding descriptive details that activate the senses. There should be a strong sense of place, discovery and movement. The other element is paragraph organization.

There are several requirements.

1. There is a 20-minute time limit to write the first draft.
2. The story must include four things (woods, water, a key and a barrier), which are described on Worksheet 13-1.

3. Each element gets a separate paragraph. In English writing, one paragraph should talk about one idea. Therefore, the story should have at least four paragraphs; probably more if there is an introduction and conclusion.

Extension: Pair Work

At the end of 20 minutes, confirm all students have finished the first draft. Pair up students. In a small class, have students read stories to their partners. Each student will then ask his/her partner questions about the four elements in the story.

In a large class, reading aloud might be a little noisy, so consider asking partners only to ask questions about the four elements.

Before the pair work activity begins, make an announcement: the four elements in the story have some special power. They reveal something about the writer's true character and hidden philosophical thoughts.

The code is on Worksheet 13-2.

The Four Elements Worksheet 13-1

Introduction

You are going to write a short story about adventure and discovery. The focus of this creative writing exercise is descriptive details that activate the senses. There should be a strong sense of place and movement.

Writing Task

There are three requirements. First, finish the first draft in 20 minutes. Second, your story must include four things. Third, each thing must be described in a separate paragraph.

The four things you need to put in the story are:

1. Woods. You are walking in a forest. What is it like? What do you see and feel?
2. Water. You come to water (e.g. a lake, river, ocean). Describe what you see, hear, feel. What do you do?
3. A Key. Describe the key. What do you do with it?
4. A Barrier. At the end of the woods, there is a barrier of some kind (e.g. a door, gate, wall). What is it like? What is on the other side? What do you do about it?

The Four Elements: The Code Worksheet 13-2

Introduction

Now that you have written a creative story, it is time to discover its hidden meaning. Some scientists believe creative writing is a window on the soul. We just need to know the code.

The Code

Read your story to your partner. Your partner will listen and together you both will discuss the four elements:

Here is the code:

- **Woods:** It shows us how you see life now. Is it bright or scary? Happy or sad?
- **Water:** It describes your future life. Is it dark or lovely? Good or bad?
- **A Key:** This describes how you see success. Do you see a big or small key? Is it shiny or dirty? Do you keep it or leave it?
- **Barrier:** This shows us what you think about death and life after death. Do you cross the barrier or runaway? Do you stop?

Do you think the code helps us understand people's true character?