

# Writing a Creative Non-Fiction Story

*Activity Based on*

*Magnetic Magic*

## I. Introduction:

Using *Magnetic Magic* as a model, as well their new-found knowledge of magnetism, students will write a story about one child who, like Dena, pretends to perform magic. Like Dena, the protagonist gets unmasked by a friend or a new person who has knowledge of the secret number—declination—or in a way the student chooses.

In this exercise, the students will have a set plot line to follow. They do not have to worry about the plot at all. Rather, this exercise is a vehicle for the student to concentrate on description of the characters, the setting, and their action, stretching their skills to find the perfect descriptive words. They should use what they know and have learned about magnetism, using maps and declination to include exquisite details in their writing.

In addition, the students should explore and include in their writing the feelings of both the protagonist and the antagonist. Encourage the students to explore how the antagonist reacts when he/she realizes that someone is fooling little kids. Have them imagine and write about how they would feel being caught at fooling or doing something which is not quite right. Ask them to consider the reaction of the students who were fooled. Then consider at the end, the fact that the antagonist wasn't totally right either. Students should use body language to "show" rather than "tell" about feelings and emotions.

The activity may also be extended to include writing a instructions on how to put on a magnetic magic show and how to find a treasure using directions on a century-old map. Grades 4-6.

## II. Concepts:

- A. Creative non-fiction gives information in an engaging manner.
- B. Creative non-fiction is based on fact and must be strictly researched.
  - 1. In order to describe the action of the characters, students may want to act out the scenes they are writing.
  - 2. In order to write about emotion and feelings, author needs to get into the character's head and wear their shoes.
- C. Difference between fact and "based" on fact
- D. Research includes research for the story as well as for the illustrations or descriptions.
- E. Sources must be reputable.

F. Proper attribution

### III. Skills:

- A. Researching a subject for general mastery
- B. Researching details to expand subject
- C. Writing detailed, engaging descriptions which bring you into the story and help reader visualize the character, scene or action.
- D. Using body language to express feelings and emotions.
- D. Organizing researched material
- E. Writing creative non-fiction

### IV. Materials Needed:

- A. *Magnetic Magic*

### V. Pre-Writing Discussion

- A. In this activity students will be creating a story based on the plot of *Magnetic Magic*.
- B. They will concentrate on writing interesting and detailed descriptions of characters, setting and action.
- C. They will explore the feelings of all the characters and use body language to describe them.
- B. Discuss with students the difference between non-fiction and fact-based fiction or creative non-fiction:

Non-Fiction	Fact-Based Fiction/Creative Non-Fiction
Totally based on facts	Made up story
Writer's work is based on research, including interviews	Writer's work is informed by research, often including interviews.
Goal is to inform	Goal is to provide information in a fun way.
Normally includes quoted material	Does not normally include quoted material. Dialogue is made up.
Bibliography is included in the work	Bibliography is kept by the author and by the publisher to prove accuracy.

#### C. Read *Magnetic Magic*

1. Pick out facts in the story that would have been part of the writer's research. These will now become the students' research notes.
  - a. About magnetism

- b. About finding treasure through a treasure map
  - c. About how to do 'magic tricks' with magnetism.
  - d. Discuss the new facts they learned from the story.
2. Consider when the author is "in the head of" the characters
    - a. How did the characters express emotion with their body?
      - (1) Enrique barely able to contain his laugh
      - (2) Dena feels like smoke is coming out of her ears.
      - (3) This is a picture book, so we can see Dena's reactions. In the students' stories they must write so that the reader can understand their protagonists' and antagonists' reactions without being told what those reactions are.
      - (4) You may want to obtain a book like "The Emotion Thesaurus: A Writer's Guide to Character Expression" to help your students with their expression.
  3. Consider images in *Magnetic Magic*
    - a. Mouths wide open, eyes fixed.
    - b. Everyone went wild
    - c. Feel free to say that the author of this picture book was under a word count constraint and could not use many descriptions. Students will not be held by a word count. They should feel free to express every detail.
  4. What details bring reader into the story?
    - a. Where did author find those details?
      - (1) In research
    - b. What provided the thread of the story?
      - (1) Dena trying to find the treasure.
    - c. What was the hook of the story?
      - (1) Possible answer: "It's magic," Dena said.
        - (a) Now reader wants to know what's magic and how does she do it.
        - (2) Suggest to students that as they write, they will want to look for possible hooks.
          - (a) Something that will want to make the reader keep on reading.
          - (b) Using the same hook as in *Magnetic Magic* is fine.
  8. What was the point of view of the story?
    - a. Omniscient—all knowing
    - b. Allows author to know what is happening everywhere, including in the heads of characters.
    - c. If the point of view is one of the characters, the reader can only learn what that character knows, experiences and sees at that time.
      - (1) If a student chooses the point of view of one character, they can only relate what that animal sees and experiences.

## VI. Pre-writing Preparation

- A. Discuss what the students learned about magnetism and finding treasure.
  1. Have students make a research document which has all the factual information they learn to have it handy.

- B. Have students decide on how they will write their story and create an outline.
  - 1. Model for the students how to get to know their characters. Have the class fill out a description sheet.
    - a. Describe physical features
    - b. Describe protagonist and antagonist
      - (1) Their personality
      - (2) What they like to do for fun
      - (3) What kind of ice cream they might eat
      - (4) How would he/she react if they got caught cheating
      - (5) How would he/she react if they caught someone else cheating
      - (6) How does he/she feel about knowing things
      - (7) How does he/she feel about people who are know-it-alls
  - 2. Have students fill out a description sheet for their protagonist and antagonist.
  - 3. Only some of the information on these sheets will appear in the story, but it informs them as to
- C. Model for students how to describe these features using details.
  - 1. Have students expand their descriptions with details
  - 2. Consider how students can convey emotion with body language.
- D. Consider how language portrays the dynamic of the scene.
  - a. Short choppy sentences or run on sentences define anxiety, speed, fear.
  - b. Adjectives that leave reader breathless or soothe the reader.
- E. Fill in
  - 1. If students have questions about magnetism and declination, encourage them to research these questions in reputable sites on the internet and make note of the citation.

## **VII. Write the story**

- A. Students will write their story using the general plot of *Magnetic Magic*
  - 1. Let the students know they have permission from the author to use it.
  - 2. Concentrate on the craft of writing
    - a. Strong verbs.
    - b. Detailed descriptions.
    - c. Interesting facts.
    - d. Arresting images
  - 3. Consider how to denote the passing of time
- B. Review first draft with student and make suggestions for improvement

## **VIII. Critique Group (optional)**

- A. Group students with a buddy to critique the work.
- B. Have critique buddies use the sandwich method.
  - 1. Thank you for letting me read your work
  - 2. This is what I liked
  - 3. This is what I wish could be different
  - 4. This is what I enjoyed about reading your work
    - a. This last one is more general
- C. Model Critique group interactions.

## **IX. Critique students' work and make suggestions for improvement.**

1. Line Edits
2. Sequencing
3. Hooks
4. Interest
5. Good, detailed descriptions
6. Using body language

## **X. Rewrite**

- A. Save last story under a new date (Naming convention: TITLEYYMMDD, e.g. JenningsMagic150305).
  1. Never throw away a story. May need to use parts of previous stories.
- B. Make grammatical and spelling changes suggested if they are correct.
- C. Consider other suggestions.
  1. Give the comments a chance to settle in. Even if students don't like them, consider them seriously.
  2. May or may not want to take critique's suggestions
    - a. Do they make sense?
    - b. Do they make the story better?
    - c. Do they agree with author's vision of the story or give a better vision?
  3. Most of the time if a critiquer says something doesn't work, it doesn't.

## **XI. Illustrations**

- A. Since this exercise was designed to stretch the students descriptive abilities, illustrations should not be needed.

## **XII. Bibliography**

- A. Have students develop a bibliography if they researched anything to add details to their stories. While a bibliography is not published in a creative non-fiction story, writers must keep their bibliography and their source material in case writer's accuracy is questioned.
- B. Different school districts may require different styles. Below are sample Chicago Style entries.
  1. Book: Pollan, Michael. *The Omnivore's Dilemma: A Natural History of Four Meals*. New York: Penguin, 2006.
  2. Website: McDonald's Corporation. "McDonald's Happy Meal Toy Safety Facts." Accessed July 19, 2008. <http://www.mcdonalds.com/corp/about/factsheets.html>.

## **XIII. Extend the Activity to Non-Fiction.**

- A. Using the same method extend the activity to write a non-fiction description of how to put on a Magnetic Magic show and/or how to find adjust for declination on a hundred-year-old treasure map.