



Oakland Unified School District  
Writing Proficiency Project

**Process Writing Assessment**  
**(PWA)**

**Fifth Grade**

**Spring**

**Descriptive Essay**  
**“The Secret of My School”**

Teacher Instructions

## 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Spring Prompt Descriptive Writing

This Process Writing Assessment consists of five lessons that prepare students to write a descriptive essay. Ideally it should take place on consecutive days during your regular writing period. Due to scheduling constraints, you may have to “chunk” lessons into more/fewer days. If this occurs please do the lessons in order. Many activities are designed to be done with a partner. Look for the partner icon and plan

accordingly.  Note that shaded boxes are from the student booklet.

- 1) Review all instructions in this manual and prepare materials.
- 2) Use these lessons over the course of one week during your regular Writer’s Workshop or Language Arts time. Adapt lessons to meet the needs of your students. *However, the final writing prompt is to be presented without modifications.*
- 3) Collect student writing and score them in teams, using the rubric and anchor papers.
- 4) OPTIONAL - Continue the writing process with the students, helping them take their writing through revision to publication.

### **Overview of week\*:**

### **Suggested time:**

<b>Day One</b>	<i>Introduce Project:</i> --Brainstorm --Define audience	60 minutes*
<b>Days Two &amp; Three</b>	<i>Critical Thinking :</i> --Choose a controlling idea --Evidence and details & optional research	45-60 minutes*
<b>Day Four</b>	<i>Organize:</i> --Complete outline	45 minutes*
<b>Day Five</b>	<i>Write:</i> --First draft for assessment	60 minutes

\* This is a suggested plan for completing the assessment in one week. You may decide how to break up the activities according to your schedule and how you believe your students will best be able to produce a proficient first draft on Day Five. **Only Day Five must be completed as designed.**

- ☞ Students may participate in *optional research* to collect further evidence in support of their controlling ideas.
- ☞ Next, writers *organize* their ideas in an *outline*, crafting an *introduction* and *conclusion* and attending to the *sequence* of *supporting evidence*.
- ☞ Finally, students are invited to *write* a first draft of their essays. Students also make an initial effort to *edit* their first drafts for neatness, accuracy and readability.



### Day One: Brainstorm secrets

- ☞ Goal: To brainstorm ideas and make notes about their school’s secrets and to identify the target audience for their essays.

#### **Generate Interest in Project**

- ☞ Tell students that because they are some of the oldest students at their school they are being invited to participate in a very special writing project. Let them know that the project will take a week and that it will allow them to showcase everything that they have learned about being writers.

#### **Activate and Build Background Knowledge**

- ☞ Hand out the Student Packets and tell students:
  - They will be using this packet all week to work on the writing project.
  - Put their names on the top of the first page and silently skim through the packet (1-2 min.).
- ☞ **Read page 1 of the Student Packet together.**  
Help students understand what you mean by “descriptive essay” by referring to students’ previous experience with the PWA. They should recall writing descriptive essays about their houses and neighborhoods.

- ☞ **Teaching Tip:** You may choose to read the whole page aloud to your class, or invite them to read it aloud with you chorally or in turn—choose a strategy that will be most comfortable for your students, while maximizing comprehension and participation.

Dear Student,

You're one of the oldest students in our school. Many of you have been here for six years. You are all experts on this school, and you know many things about it that others don't. Teachers at this school are always thinking about how to make this school the best it can be. To learn more, we're going to ask upper grade students to write a descriptive essay about our school. In particular, we want to find out about the secrets of our school—things not everybody may know about but that you do.

Writers do their best work when they have time to think, research and plan. During the next few days, you will do the following activities as part of the writing process:

1. Think about what you know about our school that others don't.
2. Identify an audience and controlling idea for your essay.
3. Research and talk with other students to gather evidence for your essay.
4. Plan and write a descriptive essay about our school.

### **Brainstorm**

Start by inviting students to think about the secret knowledge that they have about their school.

 **Read the first paragraph on page 2 of the Student Packet together.** Point out the box for notes and remind students that notes are just one word or phrase to represent an idea—not whole sentences. Explain that taking notes at this time is optional.

Schools have many secrets (secret =something that is known by only a few people). Think about how you would answer the following questions. Make some notes about your answers in the box below. Use just words and phrases, not complete sentences. Be ready to share your thinking.

☞ **Slowly read aloud Questions 1-5 on page 2 of the Student Packet.**

Leave time between each question for students to think silently about the question and take notes if desired.

1. What are some things that students know about this school that you think teachers don't know?
2. What are some things you now know about this school that you didn't know as a kindergartner?
3. What are some secret places that you've noticed in this school?
4. Who are the secret people of this school?
5. What do you think outsiders (people from other neighborhoods or cities) might not know about our school?

*My Notes:*

☞ **Read the paragraph at the bottom of page 2 of the Student Packet together.**

**Working together to find “Hidden” details:**

When people think about schools, they usually think about the most obvious things: teachers, students, classrooms, math, reading, etc. But a lot more goes on at schools than what people first think. Students, teachers and many others live here at school for most of the day, and some people are here even at night.

What things about this school do most people (especially adults) not notice, think about, or even know? What things do you think are unique or special about our school? Be ready to share your ideas with a partner or in a small group.

Organize the students into small collaborative groups of 3-5 students. After establishing expectations for the task, including noise level and a signal for attention, allow students 10-20 minutes to talk in small groups about the school's secrets. Students should make notes in their own Student Packets on page 3.

☞ **Teaching Tip:** If you have already established successful collaborative groups for other learning projects, you may wish to use the same groups. If students are used to having assigned group roles—such as Discussion Leader, Recorder, Reporter, Materials Manager—you may have students take turns with these as well. ELL students may benefit from being in a group with bilingual or more fluent speakers of English.

**Deciding on an audience for your essay:**

☞ Read the paragraph at the top of page 4 of the Student Packet together.

**Deciding on an audience for your essay:**

*What is an audience? Have you ever been in an audience?*

As a writer your audience is the people who read your essay. A good writer always keeps his or her audience in mind when writing, to make sure that the ideas and details of the essay are interesting and important to the reader. You already know that part of your audience will be the teachers of this school. But your essay will be more interesting if you define your audience very clearly before beginning to write. The following steps will help you do this.

- ☞ • Give students 2-4 minutes to reread their notes on page 3, highlighting secrets of particular interest to them.
- ☞ Instruct students to circle the people in Question 2 who may not know about these aspects of the school.

**2. Who do you think doesn't know these secrets? Circle them.**

teachers

the principal

parents

other students

kindergartners

outsiders

other: \_\_\_\_\_

other: \_\_\_\_\_

 Read #3 on page 4 together.

### 3. Who will be the audience for your essay?

Make sure students understand the term “audience.” Brainstorm a list of possible audiences for the essays and write it down on the board. Make sure that each audience defined includes some adults, and also make it clear that other teachers besides you will be reading these descriptive essays. This may help elicit academic language in the students’ writing.

 Instruct students to define and record the best audience for their ideas at the bottom of page 4.

 Collect Student Packets or instruct students to store them in their writing folders.



### Day Two: Choose Your Controlling Idea

 **Goal:** To understand the concept and choose an appropriate controlling idea for the descriptive essay.

#### Introduce the Concept of a “Controlling Idea”

 Frontload the word “control” and talk about control having to do with “order,” “rules,” “knowing your destination.”

 See page 11 for an Optional Lesson on Controlling Idea.

 Read the paragraph at the bottom of page 4 of the Student Packet together.

You have thought about some topics that are secrets at our school, and have chosen an audience for your essay. Now it is time to select the controlling idea for your own essay. This is the idea that will control what you include in your essay, and what you don’t. A good controlling idea is:

1. Interesting to you

2. Interesting to other people
3. Clear and specific.

It should also match the details and ideas you already have about a topic.

☞ Invite students to read the student example on page 5 of the Student Packet with a partner or with the class. In partnerships or as a whole class, briefly discuss the example and identify a controlling idea for the student’s essay.

**Help this student find a controlling idea:**

Look at this student example of notes on “Hidden” topics about her school, and see if you can think of a good controlling idea for her essay. This student wants to become a vet when she grows up, and her audience is general because she believes nobody thinks about her school in quite the same way she does.

☞ Instruct students to record “animals are everywhere at our school!” or a similar idea in the space at the bottom of page 5 of the Student Packet.

This student’s controlling idea could be:

**Deciding on your controlling idea**

<p><b>“Hidden” places:</b></p> <p>Between the walls, in the ceiling, the pine tree in the yard, classroom pet cages, aquarium in Room 207, school garden, ???</p>	<p><b>“Hidden” <del>people</del> creatures:</b></p> <p><i>Pets: mice, snakes, hamsters, turtle, pollywogs, hermit crab, ???</i></p> <p><i>Wild: mice, squirrels, pigeons, seagulls, robins, worms, spiders, roly poly bugs, ???</i></p>
<p><b>“Hidden” activities:</b></p> <p>Stealing food, eating mice, hiding nuts</p>	<p><b>“Hidden” events:</b></p> <p>turning into frogs, the time Rodrigo’s tarantula got lost in the classroom</p>
<p><b>What we learn here that might surprise you:</b></p> <p>What hermit crabs eat, how caterpillars turn into butterflies, how often a snake needs to eat, different kinds of webs spiders spin</p>	<p><b>What kindergartners don’t know:</b></p> <p>Schools are not just for people, you can bring your pet to school for show and tell, Mr. James on the third floor has a pet boa in his classroom, the seagulls will steal your lunch if you’re eating outside</p>

☞ Instruct students review the work they've done on pages 3 and 4 of their Student Packets, and then complete the top part of page 6. Every student should have identified a controlling idea for their essay before continuing to the next step.

**Deciding on your controlling idea:**

Now think about the essay you will be writing. Remember your audience.

My controlling idea is: \_\_\_\_\_

☞ Teaching Tip: You may want to allow students to consult with writing partners to share or refine their controlling ideas.

☞ Teaching Tip: If choosing a controlling idea proves difficult for many of your students, you may want to stop the lesson here, and resume with the next step after you have had time to meet privately with those students to help them come up with a suitable controlling idea.

## ***Optional Lesson to Clarify “Controlling Idea”:***

### **This is your brain with a controlling idea.**

*Materials for Optional Mini-Lesson: This is Your Brain with a Controlling Idea*

- Small bowl
- Tray
- Colander - holes large enough for peppercorns to pass through
- Small jar of peppercorns
- Collection of jars filled with dry beans of different sizes, all too big to pass through the holes of the colander

■ **Show students a selection of clear jars containing dried beans of different sizes. Include one jar of peppercorns in the selection.**

Explain that when writers start thinking about a topic, they have all kinds of ideas in their head about it.

■ **Say dramatically as you hold up a small bowl:** *I want you to imagine that this bowl is a student named Marissa’s brain. As soon as her teacher told her the topic of the writing project, her brain began filling up with ideas.*

Tell students to imagine that the different beans and peppercorns are the ideas the student had about her school. In a musing tone, act out the student’s initial brainstorm by dropping a variety of beans and peppercorns into a bowl as you voice her ideas about the topic of the secret of her school.

Use the beans to represent any of the following or similar ideas:

- Nobody knows that Mrs. Hernandez, the second grade teacher, is my aunt.
- There’s a good hiding place behind the dumpsters on the upper yard.
- There’s a locked door on the third floor—I don’t know what’s behind it.
- Martin, the cafeteria server, is a good friend to students. If you forget your lunch, he will always give you something to eat.

Intersperse the ideas above with ideas about animals from Marissa’s note page. To represent these ideas, use peppercorns.

■ **Now hold up the bowl and rattle its contents around.**

*Say, Marissa's brain is full of great ideas about this topic. But without a good controlling idea, those ideas just rattle around in a jumble inside her brain. She might not even feel like she can begin writing, even though she has a lot of great ideas.*

*Continue, Or, she might start writing without a controlling idea...*

*Pause to dramatically empty the beans and peppercorns onto a tray.*

*... but she'll just end up with a confused jumble of ideas on the page.*

*End, But, if she takes the time to identify a strong, clear & interesting controlling idea...*

*Hold up a colander with holes big enough to just allow the peppercorns through.*

*...then it will help her filter her ideas as she plans and writes her essay.*

*This will make her essay clear, organized, interesting, and easier to write.*

## Evidence and Details for your controlling idea

- ☞ Read the paragraph about Evidence and Details on page 6 of the Student Packet together.

### **Evidence and Details**

Wow! You have your **topics, audience,** and a **controlling idea.** Now you are ready to make some notes about the details and evidence that will support your controlling idea. You only want to include notes about the secret you will write about. In the spaces below, write the **details** about your secret that support your controlling idea. You can use your notes from **“Secrets of Our School – What I Know.”**

- ☞ Give students time to add notes about evidence and details to their topic planner in their Student Packets. Remind them to focus on just details and evidence about their controlling idea. Note = words and phrases.

<b>Who</b> is involved and what happens?	<b>Where</b> is the secret?
<b>What</b> is surprising?	<b>When</b> is the secret happening?
<b>More...</b>	

 **Teaching Tip:** Remind students that this will be a descriptive essay. Their purpose will be to describe their school by revealing the school's secrets in an interesting way. Help students recall the work they did on sensory description for the Fall and Winter PWAs (descriptive essays of a house and a neighborhood). Remind them that that all good essays include lively writing. Now is the time for students to add some good descriptive words to their notes if they haven't already been using this kind of language. Students may want to draw pictures of maps of the school and label them with notes or descriptions pertaining to their controlling idea.

 **Collect Student Packets or instruct students to store them in their writing folders.**



### **Day Three: RESEARCH (OPTIONAL)**

You may wish to give students some time to research the school's secrets. You can group students by controlling idea and send them out into the school to do independent research, or guide small groups of students on research missions for homework. Have each student fill out the research plan (last page of teacher packet) before beginning research. Depending on the research that the students have planned, you may want to enlist the help of various school personnel or parent volunteers.

Some research ideas:

- **Investigate the hidden parts of the school.** In the company of the janitor, explore the parts of the school to which students do not usually have access.
- **Interviews.** Interview teachers about what they do after students leave, interview the lesser-known personnel of the school to discover more about their roles.
- **Research the history of the school.** Interview community residents or do internet research to dig up the history of the school.
- **Lost Marbles.** Research the hidden objects of the school. Interview students about the contents of their cubbies. Check out the Lost & Found or ask the Principal for access to the collection of confiscated objects.



## Day Four: Planning an Essay

### Analyze Student Example

☞ Read the paragraph at the top of page 7 of the Student Packet together.

Good writers organize their ideas before they begin writing. They identify which details are the best evidence to support their controlling idea, then group that evidence into paragraphs that make sense and put the paragraphs in order.

☞ As a class or in partnerships, read and discuss the sample of a student outline on page 7 of the Student Packet.

Discussion questions might include:

- What do you think of the introduction? Is the controlling idea clear? How could the introduction be livelier?
- How do the points support her controlling idea?
- Why do you think the student ordered her ideas in this particular way?
- Which paragraph do you think you would be most interested in reading? Why?
- What do you think of the conclusion? What words or ideas make it intriguing?

*Here is an example of a student's outline:*

#### **Introduction**

(Introduce your school and write your controlling idea)

When people think about Flynn Elementary, they usually think about the people who come here. But one of the most interesting secrets of our school is that it is full of animal life.

#### **Point #1 Classroom Pets**

Evidence:

- Ms. Rodriguez' hermit crabs,
- Mr. James' boa Rosalind,
- hamster in 208,
- mice in 1<sup>st</sup> grade

#### **Point #2 Wild animals too.**

<p>Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● seagulls at lunch time,</li> <li>● the garden for tiny animals,</li> <li>● injured squirrel we found in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade</li> </ul>
<p><b>Point #3</b> can learn a lot about animals at this school.</p>
<p>Evidence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● what hermit crabs eat,</li> <li>● how caterpillars turn into butterflies,</li> <li>● how often a snake needs to eat,</li> <li>● different kinds of webs spiders spin</li> </ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conclusion</b> (Creatively restate controlling idea)</p> <p>Animals are the hidden life of this school. Everywhere you look you can see evidence of animal life. Even at night, when all the people all go home, this school belongs to the animals...</p>

### Making an outline for my essay

☞ Read the paragraph at the top of page 8 of the Student Packet together.

Now, use your notes to complete an outline for your essay. You will use this outline tomorrow when you write. As you choose the evidence and details to include in your essay, be sure to think about two things:

1. How does this evidence and details support my controlling idea?
2. What order should I present my evidence and details? This will be the sequence of my paragraphs—first, second, third, etc.

☞ Instruct the students to complete the outlines on page 8 of their Student Packets.

☞ Circulate and assist students as needed.

**Introduction**  
(Introduce your school and write your controlling idea)

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Choose two or three points (topics) to support your controlling idea. Then list the evidence that supports those points.

**Point #1**

Evidence:	
<b>Point #2</b>	
Evidence:	
<b>Point #3</b>	
Evidence:	
<b>Conclusion (Creatively restate controlling idea)</b>	
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 **Teaching Tip:** Some students may need additional time for this step. You may extend the lesson for the whole class or make other times for some students to work on their outlines as needed. Do not proceed to the next lesson until all students have completed their Student Packets through page 8.

 Collect Student Packets or instruct students to store them in their writing folders.



### Day Five: Writing Your Essay

 Make sure students have access to their completed Student Packets during the assessment.

 **Time Check**

☞ Make sure you have scheduled enough time to introduce the prompt, allow students time to complete their drafts, and allow time for the initial editing prompted on page 9 of the Student Packet.

### Generate Interest

☞ Tell students, *“All week we have been getting ready to write descriptive essays about our school. Today’s the day—we’re ready to write! I’m very excited to read these essays and learn all about the secrets of our school.”*

☞ Read the prompt at the top of page 9 of the Student Packet.

### **The Secret of Our School**

You are an expert on our school. In fact, you know many things about it that others may not. What is the most interesting secret of our school that you would like teachers and others to know before you leave? Describe our school from the perspective of this secret. Include lots of details and observations, and as much descriptive language as possible. Be sure to look back at your notes and outline while writing.

### **Writing Reminders:**

Keep the following points in mind since you won't have time to rewrite:

- Introduce your house/apartment with a sentence that captures the reader's attention.
- Organize your ideas so that they are easy to follow.
- Use precise and vivid vocabulary to describe your house/apartment.
- Use a variety of sentence types.

After you write:

- Check your punctuation. Use capital letters, commas, periods, quotation marks and spelling correctly.
- Give your essay a title. (Write a title that will help your reader know what your essay is about).
- Go back and check that you have done everything on this checklist.

### **Give Directions**

- ☞ Read the Writing Reminders in the middle of page 9 of the Student Packet together.
- ☞ After setting expectation for the activity (time, noise level, materials, getting help), distribute the writing paper and let the students begin work. Students work independently and silently on their essays. As students write, circulate through the classroom to assist and encourage. Do not correct student's errors or prompt them as they work. Do not provide spelling but encourage children to sound out unknown words or use available spelling resources.

### **Initial Edit**

- ☞ Read the section titled "After You Write (Editing)" at the bottom of page 9 of the Student Packet with students as they finish.

 ***Teaching Tip:*** You may read through these guidelines with students individually or in small groups as they finish. Avoid interrupting the whole class mid-lesson to read the guidelines aloud. This may prompt students deep in the drafting stage of writing to think about editing prematurely.

 **Instruct students to use these guidelines to do an initial edit of their essays.**

If students have a lot of questions about the guidelines or seem not to understand them, simply say, “Just reread your essay and make any changes you think it needs to show your best work in writing.”

 **Collect essays and Student Packets when they have finished editing.**

 **See Scoring Guidelines for instructions on scoring student work.**

## Research Plan for Day Three (optional)

Research Plan for (Student Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Controlling Idea of Essay: The secret of my school is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Audience of Essay: \_\_\_\_\_

What I want to find out: \_\_\_\_\_

How I plan to research this question: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Notes (What I discovered):