



# Teaching Six Trait Writing

With

## *Andy Shane and the Very Bossy Dolores Starbuckle*

Andy Shane does not want to go to school and it's easy to understand why. Every time he tries to participate in a classroom activity, Dolores Starbuckle raises her hand to tattletale on him, correct him, or otherwise steal his thunder. Luckily, Andy's Granny Webb (a wise lady who knows the scientific names for bugs) puts an end to the bullying with a surprise visit to school. This story offers a refreshing perspective on a common childhood issue. . . The narrative voice is fresh and whimsical as when an impatient Dolores waves "her arms like a willow in a windstorm." The pen-and-ink illustrations effectively depict Andy's frustration, Dolores's temper, and Granny's zany self-assuredness. Andy Shane is a welcome addition to the pantheon of compelling chapter-book protagonists. Children who feel upstaged by the Junie B.s of the world will be grateful to make his acquaintance.

**School Library Journal: Starred Review**

Read the book once from beginning to end without interruption, so students may experience the pleasure of story. On subsequent days, reread the story and pause at the passage you want to use to model a trait, or reread selected passages to reinforce the understanding of a particular trait. As always, try to concentrate on one trait at a time, extending the modeling into a lesson if appropriate.

### **Ideas**

- CLARITY: The message must be clear.
- FOCUS: The topic is narrowed down to a manageable size.
- QUALITY DETAILS: Details are beyond the obvious or general.

Ask students:

What is this story about?

Was this story easy to understand?

What do authors do to make their message **clear**? (*They ask themselves: What does the reader need to know? They add important information. They leave out unnecessary information.*)

Primary students are notorious for writing bed-bed stories. In other words, they include every detail of a character's day from waking to going to bed (although most students lose steam somewhere around fictional lunch!). Help them realize that authors do not include every detail of a character's day by charting the time spanned in chapters of this book.

Chapter	Time covered
<i>I Hate School</i>	<i>Morning Meeting</i>
<i>Being Stubborn</i>	<i>Before school the next day</i>
<i>Granny's Surprise</i>	<i>Before morning meeting</i>
<i>Beware the Stare</i>	<i>During and after morning meeting</i>

Point out to readers that we trust Andy Shane played after school, had dinner and went to bed on the first day, but that we don't need to read about these events because they are not the **focus** of the story.

Invite students to close their eyes while you read passages with specific **details** such as this paragraph on pages 12 and 13:

***Andy Shane decided to work by himself. He would solve a problem with pattern blocks. He tried to pull out the block bin, but it was stuck on the math shelf. Andy Shane pulled harder and harder still. The container sprang free, but all the blocks went flying into the air.***

Ask, can you see a picture or a movie in you mind as I read? What if the author simply wrote:

“Andy spilled the blocks.”

Do you see the same picture? What words help you to see the picture more accurately? (Note: we think of adjectives as “quality details” when in fact adjectives are often superfluous if strong verbs such as *pull* and *sprang*, or specific nouns such as *pattern blocks* are used.)

## Organization

- A STRONG LEAD: The lead should raise questions in the reader's mind and hold a reader's attention.
- A LOGICAL, ORDERLY SEQUENCE: The order should be logical and effective, with careful linking of one idea or paragraph to another.
- AN EFFECTIVE CONCLUSION: The ending should tie up loose ends and leave the reader with something to think about.

Say, "Listen to the opening sentences. Did the author create a question in your mind? What is the question?" *Why doesn't Andy Shane want to go to school?*

Remind students that many stories begin with a character who wants something. The character tries to get what he wants and fails, but rather than giving up, the character tries even harder. In the end, the character either gets what he wants or changes his mind.

Ask:

- What did Andy Shane want? (*To stay home from school. For Dolores Starbuckle to leave him alone.*)
- What did Andy Shane try? (*He tried to tell his Granny Web that he refused to go to school.*)
- What did he try next? (*He gave Dolores Starbuckle the Granny Web Stare.*)
- Did he get what he wanted in the end or did he change his mind? (*He changed his mind about Dolores and going to school.*)

## Voice

- ENTHUSIASM: The writing conveys enthusiasm and interest in the topic.
- INVOLVEMENT: You feel the writer is speaking directly to you.
- FLAVOR, TONE: The tone should be appropriate to the purpose for the writing and the audience.

Andy Shane provides lots of opportunities for primary students to play with voice. Choose an expressive sentence such as "I don't want to go to school," or "Ms Janice, someone is misusing the math materials," and have students take turns expressing them in the following voices:

Angry voice  
Sad voice  
Shy voice  
Silly voice  
Serious voice  
Sing-song voice  
“Squeaky fiddle” voice

## Word Choice

- IMAGES: The words create a picture.
- EFFECTIVE USE OF EVERYDAY WORDS: Over-reliance on the thesaurus tends to hamper the effectiveness of good word choice.
- WORDS CAPTURE YOUR ATTENTION: Lively verbs, precise nouns

Point out that Granny Web uses the Latin or “fancy names” for bugs. What does that tell us about Granny? Tell students that choosing the “just right” word can give us lots of information about the characters or settings of a story.

Remind students that the kids in Ms. Janice’s classroom had a ball flipping and flopping, twisting and twirling, wiggling and jiggling, and squiggling and giggling. Strong verbs are the diamonds of good writing. Place a boring sentence on the board and ask students to replace the verb to make far more interesting sentences:

***The dog ate the hamburger***

***The dog devoured the hamburger***

***The dog gulped down the hamburger***

***The dog licked the hamburger***

***The dog tore up the hamburger***

***The dog stole the hamburger***

***The dog hid the hamburger***

***The dog ignored the hamburger***

Ms. Janice asks students if they can think of rhyming words. Dolores comes up with *hullabaloo* and *Kalamazoo*. And at the end of the story, Andy and Dolores have fun rhyming together. Invite pairs in your class to come up with unusual rhymes.

## Sentence Fluency

- SMOOTHNESS AND EASY FLOW: One sentence seems to glide into another sentence.
- VARIETY AND LOGIC: The sentence beginnings and sentence structures are varied.
- DIFFERENCES: In sentence length

At first glance, *Andy Shane and the Very Bossy Dolores Starbuckle* seems to contradict all we teach students about sentence fluency. In this story, the author frequently uses repetition – in other words, her sentences deliberately begin in the same way. Look at the following passages:

Page 1:

He did not want to be at morning meeting.  
He did not want to sit up straight on the rug.  
He flopped down on his belly and watched an ant carry a cracker crumb across the floor.

Page 22

She put her shoulders back.  
She stared at Andy Shane.  
She didn't move a muscle.  
She didn't blink an eyelash.  
She just waited.

Help students understand that sometimes a writer chooses to begin sentences similarly to build suspense. Tension grows as the reader waits in a nerve-wracking way for the author to break the pattern and for something important to happen. Find other stories in which the author uses repetition such as:

*The Teeny Tiny Woman* by Paul Galdone

*Once Upon an Ordinary School Day* by Colin McNaughton

Tell students that if they use repetition, they must be able to explain why. If suspense (or humor) doesn't grow, then the use of the same words can actually bore the reader. (Something we never want to do.)

## Conventions

- EDITING: There should be evidence that the writing has been edited and proofread with care.
- MECHANICS: There should be proper spelling, punctuation, grammar, and usage, paragraphing, and capitalization.
- PRESENTATION: This dimension can expand into the areas of handwriting, neatness, format, and layout.

Show students page 14, ask: “Why did the author choose to write this sentence in capital letters?” (*To show that Dolores was speaking very loudly.*) Encourage students to search for other playful fonts in books and to experiment with words in their own writing.

Look at the occasions when the author uses italics. What are the purposes? Identify the following:

- For emphasis
- To highlight an unusual word
- To show Andy Shane’s thoughts

Turn to page 30 (or copy and project this page on an overhead transparency). Tell students that this page contains dialogue – a conversation -- and show them how the writer began a new paragraph (or drops down to a new line) each and every time a new person speaks. Explain that it’s easier for the reader to identify the speaker when the writer separates the dialogue in this way. Ask students to practice this technique when they are writing dialogue.

**Copyright © 2001, Jennifer Richard Jacobson. All Rights Reserved.**

Permission is granted to reproduce this page for educational use in the classroom / library or in conjunction with educational non-profit workshops or in-service courses in which books written by Jennifer Richard Jacobson are a focus.

This permission notice must remain on any printed and distributed copies of this page.

**Write to me at** [jennifer@jenniferjacobson.com](mailto:jennifer@jenniferjacobson.com)