



SHELL  
EDUCATION

# Writing Strategies for Social Studies

Second Edition



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### Assessing Writing

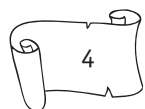
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# Guided Free Write

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## Background Information

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The Guided Free Write strategy, introduced by Peter Elbow (1973), is a slight variation of free writing. The difference is that students are guided in the topics they write about instead of writing about whatever comes to mind. Using this strategy in a social studies class encourages students to write routinely for a designated amount of time for a range of tasks, including demonstrations or activities completed in class. It encourages students to record observations about what they are learning and thinking and to generate questions about social studies concepts. The Guided Free Write strategy allows students to practice writing using social studies terms and concepts with support from the teacher. This builds confidence in writing, enhances vocabulary development, cements understanding, and leads to further discovery. This “thinking through” helps them clarify exactly what it is they do not understand. The primary focus is not on spelling, grammar, or mechanics. The intent is for students to think and write about their thinking.

### Grade Levels/Standards Addressed

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See page 62 for the standards this strategy addresses, or refer to the Digital Resource CD (standards.pdf) to read the correlating standards in their entirety.

## Genres

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Expository, Summary, Narrative, Persuasive

## Stage of Writing Process

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Draft

## Activity

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Prepare for the Guided Free Write by thinking of the central social studies concept or theme that is being taught, and determine a question or questions that will generate thought about the subject. Asking questions as opposed to describing a concept encourages higher-order thinking. These questions can be controversial or may simply encourage students to think further on a given topic. To begin, write the question on the board and instruct students to write on this topic in a notebook or on a sheet of paper. Here are some suggestions for using Guided Free Writes:

- Be sure that all students have access to paper and pencils so they can spend the entire time thinking and writing.
- Tell students not to cross out any information but rather to continually add to their writing. There are no bad ideas. Many of these beginning thoughts will lead to new ideas or trails of thought.
- Keep the classroom free of distractions and noise so that students can focus on their writing.
- Set a timer for 10–20 minutes. This may differ depending on the age of students and the purpose of the Guided Free Write. Remind students that if they are actively thinking on the topic, then it is okay to pause in their writing.
- Remind students not to focus on spelling, grammar, or punctuation. The focus is about getting ideas on paper.



# Guided Free Write *(cont.)*

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## Variation

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Allow students in the primary grades to draw pictures along with writing or typing to explain their thoughts. You may choose to have some students complete the Guided Free Write on the computer. Both typing on the computer and writing on paper provide students with informal writing experience.

## Differentiation

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Allow English language learners to write words or phrases or draw pictures related to what they are thinking about. Provide sentence frames to model how to begin the answers. Encourage English language learners to put concepts down on paper and not to worry about correct tense or wording. Have them share their free writing with you in order to bring voice to what they have written or drawn. Coach above-level students to write about higher-level concepts or processes. The more complex the concept, the more questions, concerns, and solutions will be generated. For below-level students, provide time for discussion before writing to build their confidence. Also allow these students to use pictures, words, phrases, etc., if necessary, instead of writing complete sentences and paragraphs.

# Guided Free Write *(cont.)*

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## Grades 1–2 Example

**Question:**

What are the different jobs that people hold in our community?

**Student Free Write:**

Firefighters put out fires and keep people safe. Teachers teach kids how to read and write and do math. Police officers make sure that everyone follows the laws. Sometimes they have to take people to jail.

## Grades 3–5 Example

**Question:**

What do you think it would be like to have grown up as a slave?

**Student Free Write:**

I'm sure it would have been very hard work. Slave children had to work hard, picking cotton in the fields, working in the fields, carrying heavy buckets of water from the well to the house, doing chores around the plantation, or working in the kitchen. I guess maybe I would have gotten used to the hard work, but it would have been terrible to have a family member sold away to another owner. I can't imagine how it would have felt to have my own sister sold away and to never see her again. That would have been the most difficult part, I think.

## Grades 6–8 Example

**Question:**

Do you think the American Indians were treated fairly in Early America?

**Student Free Write:**

I believe the treatment that American Indians received was unfair and criminal. The settlers came in to inhabited land, bringing disease and dangers to the native people. Although there were times of peace and respect between the two groups, the American Indians were ultimately overtaken by the European settlers. Their land was taken, and they were forced to move to harsher lands. Some were forced to give up their religion and adopt a more European way of life, in effect giving up their own culture.

# Guided Free Write *(cont.)*

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## Grades 9–12 Example

**Question:**

How does Anne Frank’s diary help us understand World War II?

**Student Free Write:**

Anne Frank’s diary provides important insight into life during Hitler’s occupation of the Netherlands. Anne’s diary helps explain the conditions the Jews faced under the Nazi party as Hitler passed increasingly restrictive laws regulating every aspect of the Jews’ daily life. Later, Anne’s family entered into hiding to avoid deportation, and her diary chronicles their struggles to remain hidden and survive. Aside from offering an understanding of the political situation at the time, Anne’s diary also provides the reader with an emotional connection to the atrocities committed under the Nazi regime. Anne writes about her fears, her first kiss, and her relationships with the other people in hiding with her. The fact that Anne ultimately died in a concentration camp is a poignant reminder of the millions of Jews who lost their lives under Nazi rule. Through her diary, readers can connect with a historical figure from this period and also gain a sense of the tragedy and atrocities of World War II.