

A Sentence A Day

Primary Grades • ELL • Resource Room

by Barbara Mariconda

A fun way to learn
sentence structure,
the conventions of story,
and vivid vocabulary –
in ten minutes a day!



Empowering
Writers™

INTRODUCTION

As young children learn to write, there are many varied skills they need. They need to recognize letters, learn sound-symbol connections, and begin to express their thoughts, memories, and intentions on paper. At the same time, they begin to learn the basic pattern of story.

As children mature they are encouraged to use their basic sound-symbol skills to begin to craft simple stories. However, for some students, writing a series of connected sentences is challenging. So often, children are expected to produce stories before they understand what it takes to write a sentence. How are sentences constructed? What do sentences need? Can this be taught to our youngest writers?

Often, we assume that as students begin to read, they will naturally learn to write sentences as well. But, for many, without direct instruction, this is difficult. When faced with the expectation that they will write entire stories, students feel overwhelmed.

What Happens in Ten Minutes a Day?

In ten minutes a day, students can learn how sentences are constructed, recognize the parts of simple sentences, while reinforcing the basic characteristics of story. Included in the kit: a week-at-a-glance, day-by-day teacher guide, sentence-building word cards for each week, and related coloring pages to inspire thematic thinking. There are enough weekly themes for 38 weeks of school.

- Each week has a theme, with a story that is read dramatically, in short daily installments. The story ends with a question that, in a predictable way, inspires a simple sentence.
- The teacher writes the simple sentence, divided, with a slash, to emphasize the subject/predicate and helps students outline the “who/what” part of the sentence (subject) and the “doing/describing” (predicate) part of the sentence. The “words of the week” necessary for sentence construction are charted for student reference. Teachers may write the daily sentences and words of the week on the white or blackboard, chart paper, or on sentence strips, whatever works in the individual classroom. What’s important is that children can see and refer to each of the weekly sentences throughout the week.

- Then students write the sentence on their paper. They trace the initial capital letter and end punctuation in blue, they underline the subject in red and predicate in green. On each of the next four days the story continues. Day Five features “Friday Free for All” in which students write their own sentence.
- As students write their sentence each day, the teacher circulates and “dots” their work – a quick dot beside each sentence element emphasizing the elements they’ve demonstrated correctly. (*See sample, p. 2*)

Review and Reinforcement

In addition to the whole class, ten minute a day process, **an optional follow-up Word Card Game is included** that follows the theme of the week. Here, children cut out and assemble word cards into simple sentence patterns, gluing these into their “sentence notebooks.” Additional related words are included so that students who need a challenge can incorporate these into the sentences they create. As the year progresses we also provide blank word cards so you can add additional words. Be sure to remind them to add end punctuation!

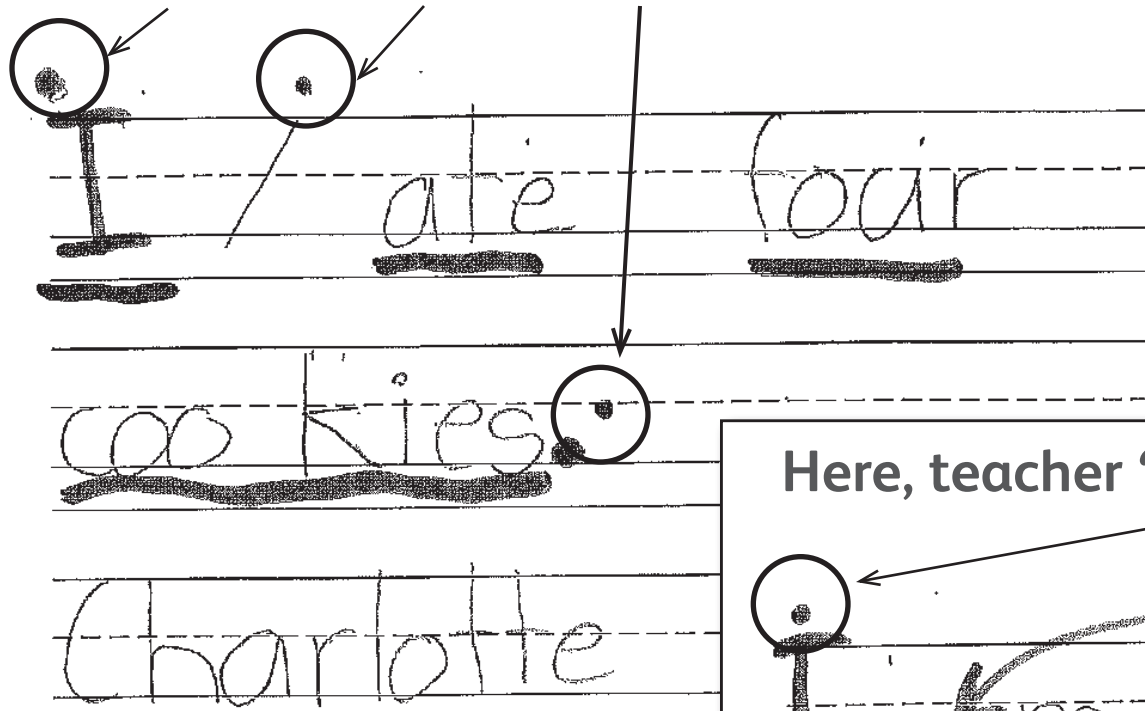
Additional Idea — Create a Sentence Learning Station:

- Put together a “kit” including paper and pencils, and a collection of these word cards which are added to week after week. Students can use them to form new sentences. (Word card packs are available for easy implementation.)
- Students can sort word cards by word “types” (nouns, proper nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs.)
- Students use paper and pencils to create new sentences using combinations of words from their collection.

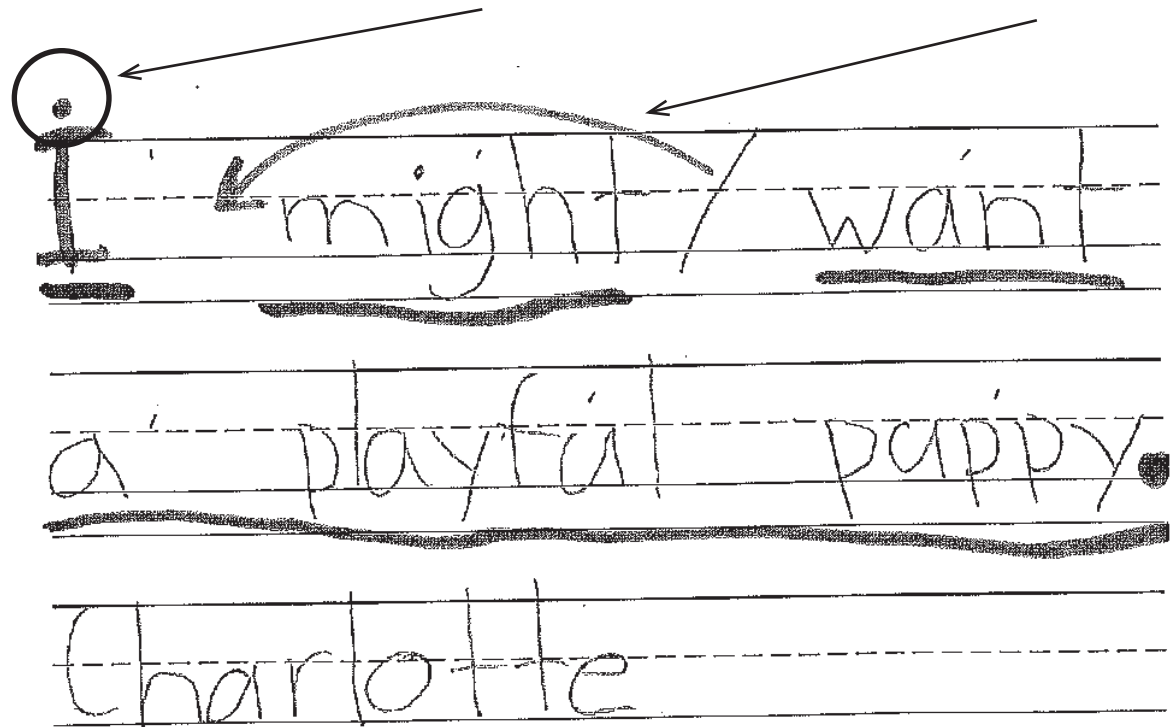
REMEMBER: As in all learning situations, **consistency** is key. Commit to the ten minutes a day, every day, and you will see students learn sentence structure and become accustomed to the language and style of story. The daily exposure will allow students to assimilate and apply this learning and begin to apply it to their own writing!

Sample: Note the way the student indicates subject/predicate with the slash.

Teacher “dots” correct elements.



Here, teacher “dots” and offers a correction.



Week 1: GOING TO SCHOOL

Words of the Week:

Dan / Jan / Mom

Pam / ran

DAY 1

TEACHER READS: It was the first day of school, and, “Oh no!” Dan’s alarm clock never went off! He got up late, and got dressed in a rush. His mom handed him an English muffin as he headed out the door to the bus stop. Off in the distance he could see the yellow flash of the school bus rounding the bend. What did Dan do?

CHART: Dan / ran.

DAY 2

TEACHER READS: Dan wasn’t the only one who was late! His big sister Jan couldn’t find her backpack! She looked in her room, she searched in the closet, she tore through the shelves in the kitchen. “I can’t go to school without my backpack!” she wailed. HONK! HONK! Her bus was rounding the bend. “GO!” her mom said. What did Jan do?

CHART: Jan / ran.

DAY 3

TEACHER READS: Dan flew down the hill toward the bus stop. Suddenly, he heard his mother calling after him. “Dan, honey, WAIT! You forgot your lunchbox!” Dan turned around. His mom needed to get that lunchbox to him in a hurry! What did mom do?

CHART: Mom / ran.

DAY 4

TEACHER READS: The school bus screeched to a halt at Dan’s stop.

He waited, huffing and puffing, for the door to open and climbed up the steps, carrying his lunchbox. As he made his way to his seat, the bus lurched forward. “Stop!” yelled some girls in the back. “Wait for Pam!” they shouted. “She’s coming around the corner now!” The bus stopped short. The brakes squealed. What did Pam do?

CHART: Pam / ran.

DAY 5 – Friday Free For All

TEACHER READS: The bus still had one more stop to make. There’s someone else frantically heading toward the bus stop. Dan, Jan, and Pam anxiously peer out the windows of the bus. Will this last passenger make it to the bus in time? Imagine someone you know who is sometimes late! Write a sentence about how this person made their way to the bus!

TEACHER WAITS, THEN ASKS: Who can come up and write their sentence on the chart? A student comes up, writes, diagrams their simple sentence.

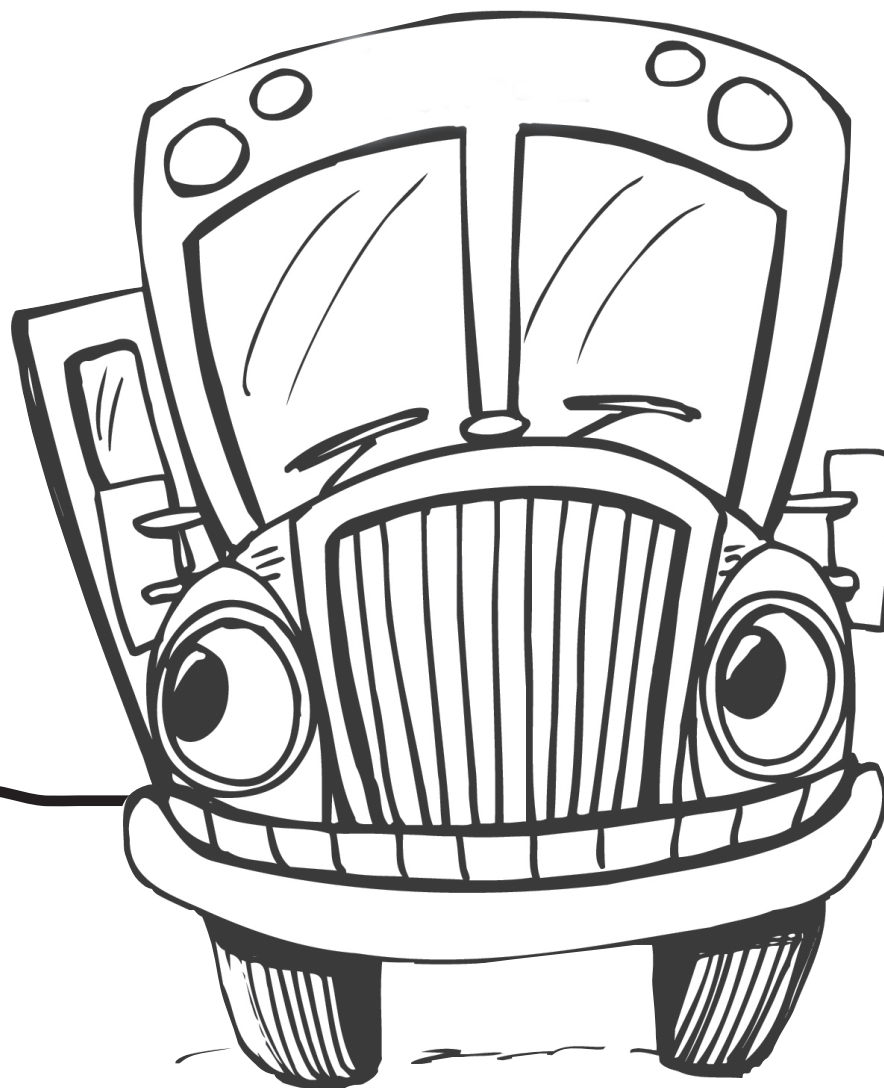
LESSON FORMAT: After charting each day ALWAYS ask:
How do I know it’s a sentence?

Point out the ‘who’ part and the ‘doing’ part. Ask:

- 1) How does it begin? (With a capital!)
- 2) How does it end? (With a period.)
- 3) Now, you write the sentence on your paper. (WAIT)
- 4) Underline the WHO part of your sentence in RED. (WAIT)
- 5) Underline the DOING part of the sentence in GREEN. (WAIT)
- 6) Trace the capital letter and the period in BLUE. (WAIT)

Walk around and “dot” elements students get correct.





Dan

Jan

Mom

Pam

ran

and

we

they

skip

Week 8: JACK-O-LANTERN

Words of the Week:

It / I / She / Ben / Mom / step / put
the / on / porch / walk / grass

DAY 1

TEACHER READS: It was almost Halloween! Time to carve a jack-o-lantern from a big, round, orange pumpkin! Mom put it on the table and I drew triangle shaped eyes and nose! I made the mouth with pointy, jagged teeth! Mom cut out the facial features and put a candle inside. It was time to place it outside! She opened the front door and cleared a spot on the top step. "Let me put it there!" I said. Where did I put the pumpkin?

CHART: I / put it on the step.

DAY 2

TEACHER READS: In the evening our jack-o-lantern grinned its flaming smile in the darkness. I stood on the bottom of the porch smiling back at my creation. All of a sudden, I saw Ben coming up the street. What do you think he was carrying? Another jack-o-lantern! "Here," he said as he put it down next to me, "I thought your jack-o-lantern needed company!" Now there were two grinning pumpkins! Where did Ben put his jack-o-lantern?

CHART: Ben / put it on the porch.

DAY 3

TEACHER READS: The next night Mom stood on the front walk looking at my two jack-o-lanterns. "Hmmm..." she said. "I think if we put one on the sidewalk it would welcome trick-or-treaters better." Mom picked one of them up and carefully moved it. Where did Mom put the jack-o-lantern?

CHART: Mom / put it on the walk.

DAY 4

TEACHER READS: It was Halloween night! Trick-or-treaters dressed in scary costumes marched up the steps and rang the bell. DING DONG! "Trick or treat!" they yelled. Mom opened the door and OOPS! The door hit my jack-o-lantern and it almost rolled off the step. "Let's move this down," said Mom. Where did she put the jack-o-lantern?

CHART: She / put it on the grass.



DAY 5 – Friday Free For All

TEACHER READS: So, where would you put your jack-o-lantern? Would you put it on the step or on top of the porch? On the walk or on the grass? Imagine your scary, funny, or crazy jack-o-lantern. Where did you put it?

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She

Ben

Mom

step

put

the

it

I

porch

walk

grass

under

We

haystack

Week 20: GROUNDHOG

Words of the Week:

Mr. Groundhog / looked / at / the
sky / people / snow / shadow / his

DAY 1

TEACHER READS: Mr. Groundhog was rolling over in his den, snoring lightly. It was warm and cozy in there under the ground and he dreamed about spring. Suddenly, he felt a poke and a prod! A beam of light flashed into his burrow. He groaned. It must be Groundhog Day, he thought. He stretched and waddled out of his burrow. Outside a crowd of people gathered. They were bundled up in warm coats and scarves. Mr. Groundhog looked up. What did he look at?

CHART: Mr. Groundhog / looked at the sky.

DAY 2

TEACHER READS: It was sunny outside of Mr. Groundhog's burrow. The people cheered and clapped. This made Mr. Groundhog nervous. He shrugged and shivered. It was cold out there! Mr. Groundhog squinted at the men, women, and children in their warm clothes and thought of his warm winter bed. Who did he look at?

CHART: Mr. Groundhog / looked at the people.

DAY 3

TEACHER READS: Mr. Groundhog turned this way. He turned that way. He sniffed at the air hoping to detect the scent of a spring flower or fresh green grass. But all he smelled was winter! Suddenly, he noticed something white on the ground. He shivered again! What did Mr. Groundhog look at?

CHART: Mr. Groundhog / looked at the snow.

DAY 4

TEACHER READS: The crowd around Mr. Groundhog was getting anxious. They stamped their feet and rubbed their hands together in the cold. Mr. Groundhog suddenly felt very sleepy. He longed for the warmth of his bed. He turned around and glanced at the entrance to his burrow. But wait! What was that huge dark shape leaning toward him? He gasped and got ready to run. What did Mr. Groundhog look at?

CHART: Mr. Groundhog / looked at his shadow.



DAY 5 – Friday Free For All

TEACHER READS: Mr. Groundhog didn't waste a moment. He took off on his short little legs and dove for the entrance to his burrow. The warm dark tunnel felt welcoming and he could hardly wait to go back to sleep in his cozy bed. What did Mr. Groundhog look at longingly?

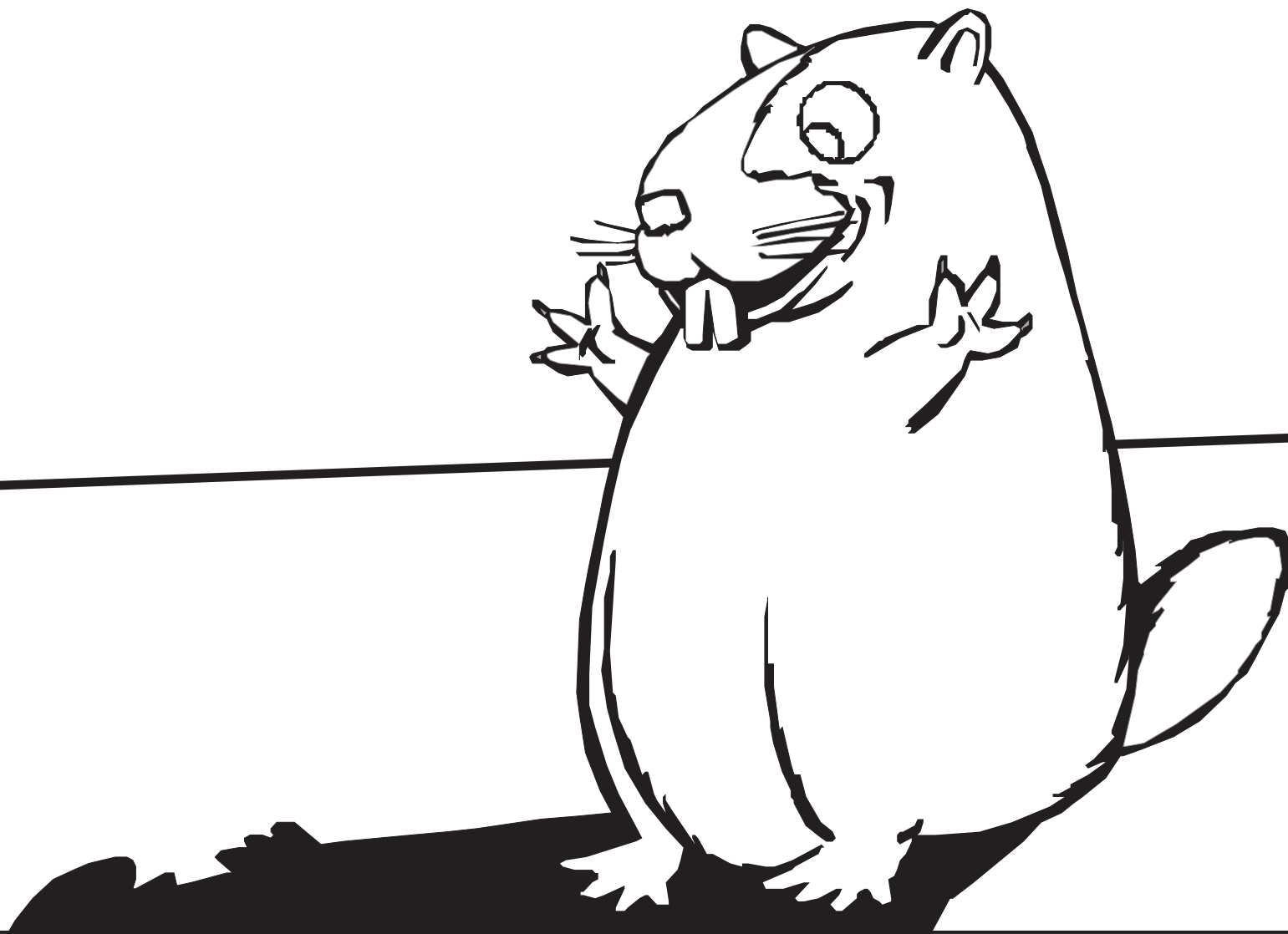
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Mr. Groundhog

looked

at

the

sky

people

snow

shadow

his

Mrs.

peered

squinted

gazed

sun