

# Introduction

*“If you want your children to be intelligent, read them fairy tales.  
If you want them to be very intelligent, read them more fairy tales.”*

—Commonly attributed to Albert Einstein

I remember sitting behind my mother as she read to us. I'd brush her hair and listen with my brother and sisters as she read fairy tales to us, one after another, night after night. Our family didn't have much money in those days, but we felt rich with magic tables laid out with feasts, dogs with eyes as big as saucers, and pockets crammed full of jewels.

These are the stories of my childhood, stories in their old, archaic forms, cut for length but not for style or content. They are the stories of the Brothers Grimm, of Hans Christian Andersen, of Charles Perrault. They are neither translated into simpler language nor sanitized to remove the gruesome features in the stories. As Judi and I have immersed ourselves in them, we have both been surprised to discover that few characters are purely good or evil. Most embody a perplexing mixture of both, often stimulating conversation about the world.

We do not presume to offer psychological studies of the functions or features of fairy tales; Bruno Bettelheim covered that definitively, we think; but we are convinced that children need stories as much as they need food. They can get by with very little, but both provide nourishment that fortifies a child against witches, against dragons, against starvation. We see what in the world terrifies our children and what worries them, and we remember being comforted by these stories.

*“Fairy tales do not tell children that dragons exist.*

*Children already know that dragons exist.*

*Fairy tales tell children that dragons can be killed.”*

—G. K. Chesterton, adapted by Neil Gaiman

## How to Use This Book

For any grade level, you can start with reading a story or with writing. Both are fine, as one leads to the other.

Every theme starts with an abstract concept word, like *friendship* or *generosity*. You can help students understand how to develop a theme by expanding concept words into truisms, or life lessons. (See Appendix 11 for a quick lesson.) Truisms are a simple way to ease students into in-depth writing from the heart, without trauma or drudgery.

### **If You Want to Begin With Reading,**

Enjoy the story aloud as a whole group, or quietly. Read it to them. Slowly. Or let student readers read it aloud to the class. Or color-code the story and assign colors to individuals or groups for choral reading. Sometimes we read the story a second time. Highlight parts you like, or annotate using any method you like.

To move to writing, read the prompt on the planning page. Invite students to write truisms, then kernel essays. They may change the words in the structures. You may ask them to use examples from the story to back up their points, or you may want them to draw from other places for examples (their lives, our cultures, history, other literature).

### **If You Want to Begin With Writing,**

Ask students to address the prompt, write a truism, followed by a short kernel essay (demonstrated on the next pages). You might want to introduce the story after they have shared kernels or after they have developed their essays and lead to a discussion about the themes.

### **If You Want to Begin With Talking,**

Use a strategy like the Conversation Strategies from Appendix 5 to get kids thinking about the concept in the prompt. As the conversations progress, their beliefs about the concept crystallize, and they will find it easier to talk on paper if they have talked with actual people first.

### **Rules You're Welcome to Break**

1. Stick to the text structure offered on the planning page.  
You don't have to. In fact, we planted alternatives at the beginning of each section. Choice is essential for good writing. Some situations cry out for freewriting, without a structure at all.
2. Use the fairy tales in order.  
You kidding? You can use them as you like.
3. Don't mess with the words in the text structure boxes.  
Change anything about them you need to (verb tense, point of view, their order, anything).

### **Thoughts to Embrace**

- Variety is wonderfully refreshing.
- Writing should be social, and sharing is the main course, not the dessert, in the process.

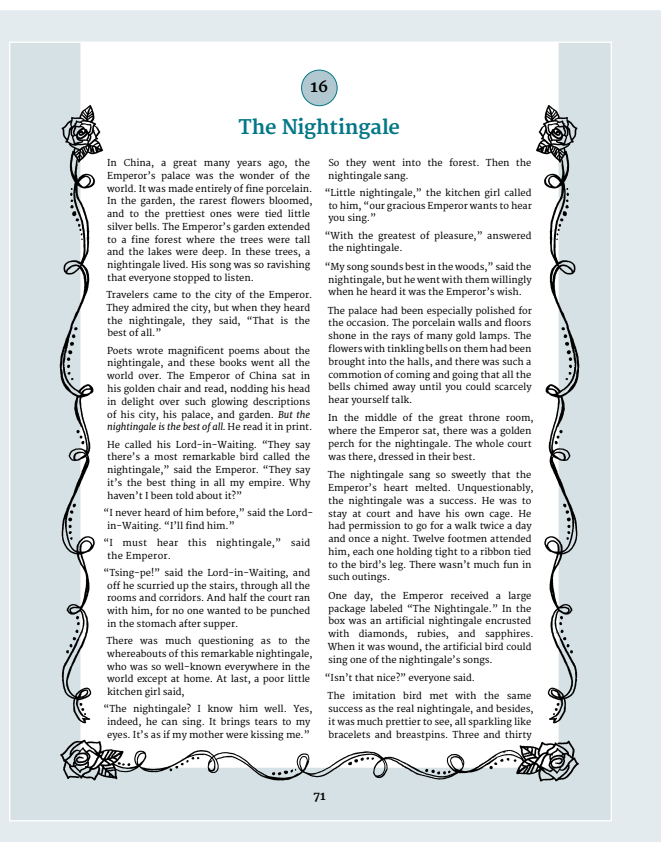
- Students want to learn and improve, not just repeat the exercises. Give them the gift of great stories and wonderful craft. The Appendix is full of tools to help with this.
- Writers should have as much choice as we can figure out how to give them: to choose their topics, their beliefs, their structures, their devices. If all of the essays seem alike, we need to reexamine what we're asking.

Let's look at the processes of a couple of students.

First, the steps of Alex Calvio, an eleventh grader.

Read the story.

("The Nightingale")



(Continued)

Look at the planning page.  
(Identify the topic.)

**16 Love** NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Read the story.  
Think about what we love in the world and how we treat it.  
Write an essay about pure and simple love.

MY TRUISM

WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

I made this wrong assumption	... happened as a consequence	I learned this truth	So now I believe ...
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MY KERNEL ESSAY

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

TRUISM EXAMPLES

1. When a person truly loves, they don't hold grudges. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Real love does not expect anything in return. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Read the prompt.

**Think about what we love in the world and how we treat it.  
Write an essay about pure and simple love.**

(Ask yourself, What do I believe about this topic?)  
Write your truism.

TRUISM EXAMPLES

1. When a person truly loves, they don't hold grudges. \_\_\_\_\_

2. Real love does not expect anything in return. \_\_\_\_\_

3. *love should not be one-sided or obsessive.* \_\_\_\_\_

Choose a structure.  
(How will you show your thinking to your reader?)

WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

I made this wrong assumption	... happened as a consequence	I learned this truth	So now I believe ...
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And change it if you need to.

WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

<i>He</i> I made this wrong assumption	... happened as a consequence	<i>He</i> I learned this truth	So now I believe ...
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Write a kernel essay.

(Write one sentence for each box in the structure.)

16 Love

NAME Alex Calvio

Read the story.  
Think about what we love in the world and how we treat it.  
Write an essay about pure and simple love.

MY TRUISM Unconditional love is the most powerful kind of love, since it requires forgiveness.

WRONG ASSUMPTIONS

He made this wrong assumption	... happened as a consequence	He learned this truth	So now I believe ...
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MY KERNEL ESSAY

- The Emperor showed unhealthy, selfish love.
- The nightingale eventually flew away.
- The Emperor learned that the Nightingale loved him unconditionally.
- Healthy relationships require selflessness.

TRUISM EXAMPLES

- When a person truly loves, they don't hold grudges.
- Real love does not expect anything in return.
- Love should not be one-sided or obsessive.

Add details from the story

(or from somewhere else).

Alex Calvio

Love can take many shapes and forms, in friendships and relationships. Any interaction involving care could be defined as Love. This means that love should not be one-sided or obsessive.

In "The Nightingale," the Emperor discovers a nightingale that sings beautifully. He orders the bird to be given a cage, attached to a string, and for the bird to sing excessively to the point of exhaustion. This is a representation of an abusive relationship, not necessarily a romantic one, but a relationship between two individuals interacting with one another. This is an abusive relationship where not only does the Emperor ignore the nightingale's wish to stay at home in the forest, he also makes the nightingale feel "loved" and needed in order to lead it back to the palace. Additionally, when the bird finally becomes so worn and tired that it can not sing properly, the Emperor replaces it with a machine, "an artificial nightingale encrusted with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires" and which mechanically reproduces the same song as the nightingale. This action proves that the Emperor does not really love the nightingale, just the song that it sang, and with this the nightingale flies away. **Result: the nightingale flew.**

But the nightingale's love for the Emperor proves to be pure and strong. Even after being abused during their relationship, the nightingale still comes back to save the Emperor from death. This is unconditional love, which is more powerful than any other kind of love since it requires forgiveness and unconditional love.

In life we can see that successful relationships involve forgiveness along with communication and care. When a relationship is based on negative emotions such as selfishness, it is unhealthy.

"The Nightingale" teaches us how to keep a long lasting and fulfilling type of love. Personally, I may be able to retain healthy relationships by remembering to not use another person's qualities for my own personal benefit. I will give someone space when they require it and love them for their entire selves, not just one part of them. When a relationship is unhealthy it is best to let it go, just like the Emperor's nightingale. **Healthy relationships require selflessness.**

(Continued)

Add craft (rhetorical devices or other devices).

\*This essay is visible in regular size in Lesson 16.

Alex Calvio

Love can take many shapes and forms, in friendships and relationships. Any interaction involving care could be defined as Love. This means that love should not be one-sided or obsessive.

In the fairytale, "The Nightingale," the Emperor discovers a nightingale that sings beautifully. He orders the bird to be given a cage, attached to a string, and for the bird to sing excessively to the point of exhaustion. This is a representation of an abusive relationship, not necessarily a romantic one, but a relationship between two individuals interacting with one another. This is an abusive relationship because not only does the Emperor ignore the nightingale's wish to stay at home in the forest, he also makes the Nightingale feel "loved" and needed in order to lead it back to the palace. Additionally, when the bird finally becomes so worn and tired that it can not sing properly, the Emperor replaces it with a machine, "an artificial nightingale encrusted with diamonds, rubies, and sapphires" that could sing the exact same tune that the live Nightingale could. This action proves that the Emperor does not really love the nightingale, just the song that it sang, and with this the nightingale flies away.

But while the Emperor does not love the nightingale, the nightingale does love the Emperor. Even after being abused during their relationship, the nightingale still comes back to save the Emperor from death. This is unconditional love, which is more powerful than any other kind of love since it requires forgiveness.

In life we can see that successful relationships involve forgiveness along with communication and care. When a relationship is based on negative emotions such as selfishness, it can easily become a prison.

"The Nightingale" teaches us how to keep a long lasting and fulfilling type of love. Personally, I may be able to retain healthy relationships by remembering to not use another person's qualities for my own personal benefit. I will give someone space when they require it and love them for their entire selves, not just one part of them. A relationship is a team effort and when someone in a relationship refuses to believe that, it is best to fly away until that relationship can get better, just like the nightingale.

Personification Anastrophe Pathos metaphor Ethos metaphor

Here's a paper by Ella, a fourth grader:

Read the story.

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## Cinderella

Once there was a gentleman who married, for his second wife, the proudest and most haughty woman that was ever seen. She had two daughters of her own, who were, indeed, exactly like her in all things. He had likewise, a young daughter, but of unparalleled goodness and sweetness of temper.

No sooner were the ceremonies of the wedding over but the stepmother began to show herself in her true colors. She could not bear the good qualities of this pretty girl and employed her in the meanest work of the house. She scoured the dishes and cleaned madam's chamber. She slept on a wretched strawbed, while her sisters slept in fine rooms.

The poor girl bore it all patiently, and she used to go to the chimney corner and sit down there in the cinders and ashes, which caused her to be called Cinderella. However, Cinderella, notwithstanding her coarse apparel, was a hundred times more beautiful than her sisters.

It happened that the king's son gave a ball and invited all persons of fashion to it. Our young misses were mightily delighted at this invitation.

They said to Cinderella, "Would you not like to go to the ball?"

"Alas!" said she, "you only jeer me; it is not for such as I am to go to such a place."

"You are quite right," they replied. "It would make the people laugh to see a Cinderwench at a ball."

They went to court, and Cinderella followed them with her eyes as long as she could. When she lost sight of them, she started to cry.

Her fairy godmother, who saw her all in tears, asked her, "You wish that you could go to the ball; is it not so?"

"Yes," cried Cinderella, with a great sigh.

"Well," said her godmother, "be but a good girl, and I will contrive that you shall go."

Then she took her into her chamber, and said to her, "Run into the garden, and bring me a pumpkin."

Cinderella went immediately and brought it to her godmother. She struck the pumpkin with her wand, and it was instantly turned into a fine coach, gilded all over with gold.

She then went to look into her mousetrap, where she found six mice, all alive. She gave each mouse a little tap with her wand, and made a very fine set of six horses of a beautiful mouse-colored dapple gray.

For a coachman, Cinderella brought a rat, and the fairy touched him with her wand, turning him into a fat, jolly coachman.

After that, she said to her, "Go again into the garden, and you will find six lizards behind the watering pot. Bring them to me."

Her godmother turned them into six footmen, who skipped up immediately behind the coach, with their liveries all bedaubed with gold and silver. The fairy then said to Cinderella, "Well, are you not pleased with it?"

"Oh, yes," she cried; "but must I go in these nasty rags?"

Her godmother then touched her with her wand, and Cinderella's clothes turned into cloth of gold and silver, all beset with jewels. She gave her a pair of glass slippers, the prettiest in the whole world. She got up into her coach, but her godmother, above all things, commanded her not to stay past midnight, telling her that if she stayed one moment longer, the coach would be a pumpkin again, her horses mice, her coachman a rat, her footmen lizards, and that her clothes would become just as they were before.

She promised her godmother to leave the ball before midnight, and then drove away, scarcely able to contain herself for joy. The king's son, who was told that a great

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Look at the planning page.

(Identify the topic.)

**3** **Hardships** NAME \_\_\_\_\_

Read the story.  
Think about the different challenges that people face.  
Write an essay about different kinds of difficulties that people face.

MY TRUISM

TYPE OF SOMETHING				
<table border="1"><tr><td>One kind</td><td>Another kind</td><td>The worst kind</td><td>Truism</td></tr></table>	One kind	Another kind	The worst kind	Truism
One kind	Another kind	The worst kind	Truism	

MY KERNEL ESSAY

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

TRUISM EXAMPLES

1. Life's challenges can help people find their strengths.  
2. Inner strength can help overcome any obstacle.  
3. \_\_\_\_\_

Read the prompt.

(Does the assignment ask you to use evidence from the story?)

**Think about the different challenges that people face.  
Write an essay about different kinds of difficulties that people face.**

(Ask yourself, what do I believe about this topic?)

Write your truism.

TRUISM EXAMPLES

1. Life's challenges can help people find their strengths.  
2. Inner strength can help overcome any obstacle.  
3. *yard work is very hard.*

Choose a structure.

(How will you show your thinking to your reader?)

TYPE OF SOMETHING

One kind	Another kind	The worst kind	Truism
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And change it if you need to.

TYPE OF SOMETHING

One kind	Another kind	The worst kind	Truism
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(Continued)

Write a kernel essay.

(Write one sentence for each box in the structure.)

### 3 Hardships

NAME Ella S. Jackson

Read the story.  
Think about the different challenges that people face.  
Write an essay about different kinds of difficulties that people face.

MY TRUISM Yard work is hard work

#### TYPE OF SOMETHING

One kind

Another kind

The worst kind

Truism

#### MY KERNEL ESSAY

1. Raking leaves and trimming branches is hard.
2. Weeding is tough.
3. Putting down mulch is dirty and hard.
4. Hot and sweaty yard work is rough.

#### TRUISM EXAMPLES

1. Life's challenges can help people find their strengths.
2. Inner strength can help overcome any obstacle.
3. Yard work is very hard

Add details from the story

(or from somewhere else).

Yard work is challenging.

If you've ever done housework under a blazing sun, you should have an idea of what yard work at my house is like. The yard work I am used to contains many challenging tasks to be fulfilled!

As a start, I have always done leaves and trimmings first. My Dad backs away at stray scattered branches and sawdust, so I have to chop up the branches which means there is more to do. The branches that have been chopped off get shoved and squeezed into gargantuan black trash bags that can weigh a ton each, when they are full. We (my family and I) then work as a team to get the bags to the side of the road. I like this job the least, because I always seem to get numerous scratches and scrapes, but I am always pleased with myself when I finish.

Weeding and raking takes determination if you ever complete it. The grass snarls up the weed pullers and the rake. I sometimes doubtful about their coming out, but by some miracle, somebody gets them out. However, that did not accomplish anything, so we occasionally just do it the old fashioned way: by hand!

Even still, there is more work to do. The even harder part is putting down mulch. It seems to be the end of the scene. I step on it, I spread it over and over again, so before you could say "I'm as sweaty as a pig" my arms are limp and feel like lead! Did I mention that mulch gets you so dirty, that you look like you slid down the chimney like it was the world's greatest slide?! Lumbering around with a bag of mulch isn't very fun. So let me tell you YARD WORK IS HARD WORK!

So before you complain, think about how much you'd like hot n' sweaty yard work compared to what you're doing!

-Ella S. Jackson, grade 4

Trimming branches is hard.

Weeding.

Sweating. Mulch is so dirty!

Yard work is rough.



Add craft (rhetorical devices or other devices).

For craft ideas, see the Writer's Toolbox in Appendix 16.

If you've ever done hot sweaty work under a blazing sun, you should have an idea of what yard work at my house is like. The yard work I am used to contains many challenging tasks to be fulfilled!

As a start, I have always done leaves and trimmings first. My Dad hacks away at stray scattered branches that have grown longer than reasonable, which means there is more to do. The branches that have been chopped off get shoved and squeezed into gargantuan black trash bags that seem to weigh a ton each, when they are full. We (my family and I) then work as a team to get the bags to the side of the road. I like this job the least, because I always seem to get numerous scratches and scrapes, but I am always pleased with myself when I finish.

Weeding and raking takes determination if you ever complete it. The grass snarls up the weed pullers and the rake. I'm sometimes doubtful about their coming out, but by some miracle, somebody gets them out. However, that did not accomplish anything, so we occasionally just do it the old fashioned way; by hand!

Even still, there is more work to do an even harder part is putting down mulch. It seems to be the endless sceneiro of "scoop, dump, spread! Over and over again, so before you could say "I'm as sweaty as a pig!" my arms are limp and feel like lead! Did I mention that mulch gets you so dirty, that you look like you slid down the chimney like it was the world's greatest slide?!! Lumbering around with a bag of mulch isn't very fun. So let me tell you YARD WORK IS HARD WORK!

So before you complain, think about how much you'd like hot n' sweaty yard work compared to what you're doing!

-Ella S. Jackson, grade 4



But what about other cultures? Stories from other lands? We invite you to participate in the next collection. If you will send us the stories you remember hearing while in someone's lap, or while brushing someone's hair, we would love to collect and offer them next. (E-mail them to Judi, jreimer2003@hotmail.com.)

Meanwhile, we invite you to share these stories to fortify your children with powerful writing choices while filling their pockets with jewels.