

# The Language Experience Approach (Also Known as Shared Writing)



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*"What I can think about, I can talk about.  
What I can say, I can write about, (or someone can write for me).  
What I can write, I can read"*

Van Allen & Allen, 1966

## What is the Language Experience Approach?

An approach to language learning in which students' oral compositions are transcribed and used as materials of instruction for reading, writing speaking, and listening.

## Why use the Language Experience Approach?

- Offers a **perfect match** between the English language the student controls and the reading task at hand.
- Provides a means for teachers to discuss in detail **how texts work** and how words are written within the context of a meaningful experience.
- Demonstrates **conventions of writing**--spelling, punctuation and grammar.
- Supplies reading material in the classroom that is meaningful and **readable for all students**.
- Focuses students on **composing**, and leaves the writing of the material to the teacher.
- Helps students see **new possibilities** for their own writing. Many students can share orally material which is far more complex and interesting than what they are able to write independently.
- Aids students to see how to **organize their writing** in terms of sequence, categories of information, and transitions.
- Builds a **sense of community** as class events, feelings, and thoughts are shared and written down.
- Enables both students and teachers to **gain confidence** in their writing ability.

# The Language Experience Approach: How Do You Teach with It?

## Step 1 - Language Experience Charts are Generated Around Key Concepts and Group Experiences

### Examples:

1. Daily news from the class, or weekly summaries for parents
2. Writing from a shared experience: a field trip, school-wide event, science experiment
3. Retellings of favorite stories
4. Summaries of content area learning, i.e., social studies/science
5. Classroom observations of pets, plants, or science projects
6. Class rules and procedures

The teacher facilitates **much oral discussion** of the key concepts before, during, and after the group experience in individual, small group, and whole group contexts.

Teachers use sheltering techniques during these discussions to **support and extend** students' language use at their English language proficiency levels.

### Examples:

#### Beginning and Early Intermediate use:

- Realia
- Opportunities to label
- Patterned language

#### Intermediate and Early Advanced use:

- Experience/discussion in small heterogeneous groups
- Read and research with support
- Negotiated responses to extend sentence patterns

#### Advanced use:

- Independent writing of some portions with white boards
- Focus on word choice, style, and voice

# The Language Experience Approach:

## Step 2 - Generate the Language Experience Chart

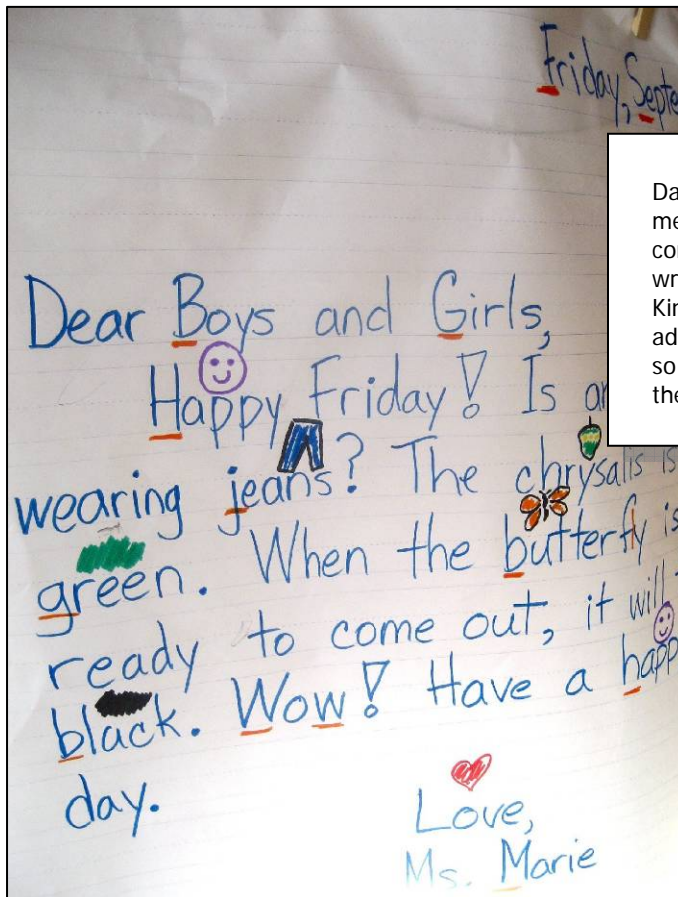
During these shared writing sessions the teacher and students compose writing collaboratively. They discuss the writing together to choose topics, select words, and create the meaning they want. The teacher acts as a guide, not a director of the material. While acting as a scribe for the class she enables students to compose far more complex material than would be possible for students writing on their own. The teacher takes care to keep the experience democratic by avoiding suggestions such as "I would choose," or "I don't think that should come next" instead invites their judgment with questions such as "What do you think about...?" or "Does that fit in here next?"



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Daily news or morning message is one of the most common uses of the shared writing approach. This Kindergarten teacher has added doodles and graphics so that students can "read" the message on their own.

# The Language Experience Approach:

## Step 3 - Work the Text

Language experience charts provide contexts for **teaching English language print conventions**.

- **Key words, concepts and phrases** should be lifted from the chart and listed on word banks for future reference as students engage in independent reading and writing on the topic.
- **Phonics, spelling, word origin** elements can be highlighted in context, then taught and extended during future lessons.
- **Grammatical structures and concepts** may be discussed in this context
- **Concepts about print and punctuation** of English may be noted.

## Shared Writing/Language Experience Model With “Work the Text” Sample

- Add “ed” for past tense: planted, placed, covered, watered
- Has capital letter for a day of the week (Tuesday)
- Uses sequence words: first, next, finally
- Uses “pl” blend: planted, placed
- Using ! shows excitement!

We planted green beans on Tuesday.  
First we put soil in the cup. Next we dug  
a hole with our finger. We placed one  
bean seed in each hole. We covered the  
seed with dirt. Finally we watered the  
plants so that they can grow!

# The Language Experience Approach

## Management: Use LEA charts to Support Independent Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking.

- Refer to charts during class discussions.
- Illustrate elements of the charts with small “doodles” where possible.
- Type up and distribute group generated charts for independent reading material.
- Enter key vocabulary into personal word dictionaries.
- Highlight phonics/spelling elements and extend with word study instruction.
- Leave charts posted for as long as possible in the classroom.

## Using the LEA throughout the School Day

### Summaries

Using LEA to scaffold story retellings/summaries teaches students the important skill of summarizing. Often this is a **tested** skill, not a **taught** skill.

1. Facilitate students oral retelling of a Read Aloud by providing the signal words of story sequence:
  - In the beginning....
  - Next.....
  - And then.....
  - After that.....
  - Suddenly.....
  - Finally.....
  - At the end....
2. Help students keep track of the retelling by using the book illustrations and/or drawing “doodles” on the chalkboard.
3. Have students tell each sentence of the retell, and then record their ideas on chart paper. You may list student names next to each contribution, then have students copy and illustrate each section to make up a class book.

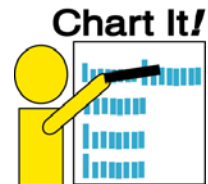
# The Language Experience Approach: Using LEA Charts to Summarize Information in Nonfiction Books

1. Have students restate what they have learned in their own words. Scaffold this discussion by providing word banks of key vocabulary illustrated with simple “doodles” where possible.
2. Have students dictate to you the information in whatever format you are expecting them to be able to eventually write on their own.

For example:

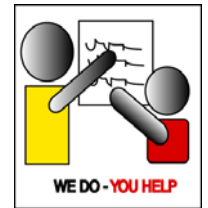
## Beginning/Early Intermediate ELs or K-1<sup>st</sup> students:

- Lists
- Labels on drawings
- Brief phrases and captions on drawings or diagrams
- Patterned sentences (Frogs can \_\_\_\_\_, Frogs can \_\_\_\_\_ etc.)



## Intermediate ELs or 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> grade students:

- Notes on topic
- Question/answer re: the topic
- Simple paragraphs with topic sentence and supporting details
- Graphic organizers/Matrices
- Step by step directions.
- Simple reports organized by topic
- Observation journal



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## Advanced ELs or 3<sup>rd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students:

- Note taking format
  - Report outline
  - Multi-paragraph report
  - Cause/effect, problem/solution, other nonfiction text structures
  - Multiple writing genres: (for example: persuasive essay, interview, etc.)
3. Have students read aloud the charts as you develop them. Leave them posted as references for information and spelling. Students may also recopy/type these selections and illustrate them in order to produce class books about content area topics in school.

# The Language Experience Approach: Using the LEA after a Fieldtrip

**LEA is the ideal way to record the thoughts and responses to a fieldtrip. Be sure to create these charts with students as soon as you can after a fieldtrip experience.**

1. Have students orally discuss the fieldtrip. Try having them start the discussion in small groups or pairs to get everyone involved. Let students discuss the experience in their primary language when possible. Try to group students with a more bilingual "language broker" who can translate the small group discussion to the whole class when the LEA chart is being built.
2. Scaffold the discussions with a word bank of key vocabulary illustrated by "doodles" or with actual artifacts from the trip: maps, brochures, photos, etc.
3. Have students dictate their recollections to you in whatever format you would like them to be able to write independently:
  - Fieldtrip sequence
  - Paragraphs by topic
  - Graphic organizers/matrices
  - Question/answer
  - Letter
  - Travel journal
4. Have students recopy and illustrate these charts when appropriate to make class books.



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# Using the Language Experience Approach with Essay Writing

## Organizing Writing:

The Language Experience Approach provides the ideal vehicle for showing students how essay writing works. Use the following steps to write several essays together as a class. Always begin with topics that students know a lot about already. Motivating topics for upper elementary students may include:

- Recess activities
- Sports they play
- Recent class projects, fieldtrips, performances
- Holidays
- Class pets
- School-wide events
- Classroom rules and procedures

You can also use the same procedure to introduce younger students in grades K-2 to report writing. Once again, choose a topic the students already know a lot about. This works really well as a culminating activity for a thematic unit on any social studies or science topic. It shows students how to organize information in preparation for beginning report writing.

The LEA charts can be used directly to create a class book on a topic by cutting/pasting the sentences into an enlarged book and inviting students to illustrate each page. See the Animal Matrix chart (on page 27 of Nonfiction Writing Section) for a way to organize animal reports in primary grades.

<i>Rabbit</i>	<i>Big cage</i>	<i>Ms. Knox bought her at a breeder</i>
<i>Cute</i>	<i>Ears move to hear</i>	<i>Needs full water bottle</i>
<i>Eats pellets</i>	<i>Poops only in her cage</i>	<i>Gentle with kids</i>
<i>Soft fur</i>	<i>Brown and white</i>	<i>Goes home with students on weekends</i>
<i>Scratches</i>	<i>Likes carrots</i>	<i>Short tail</i>
<i>Wet nose</i>	<i>Chews on wood</i>	<i>Lies flat when scared</i>
<i>Hops around classroom</i>	<i>Dwarf lop-eared</i>	<i>Need permission to take home</i>

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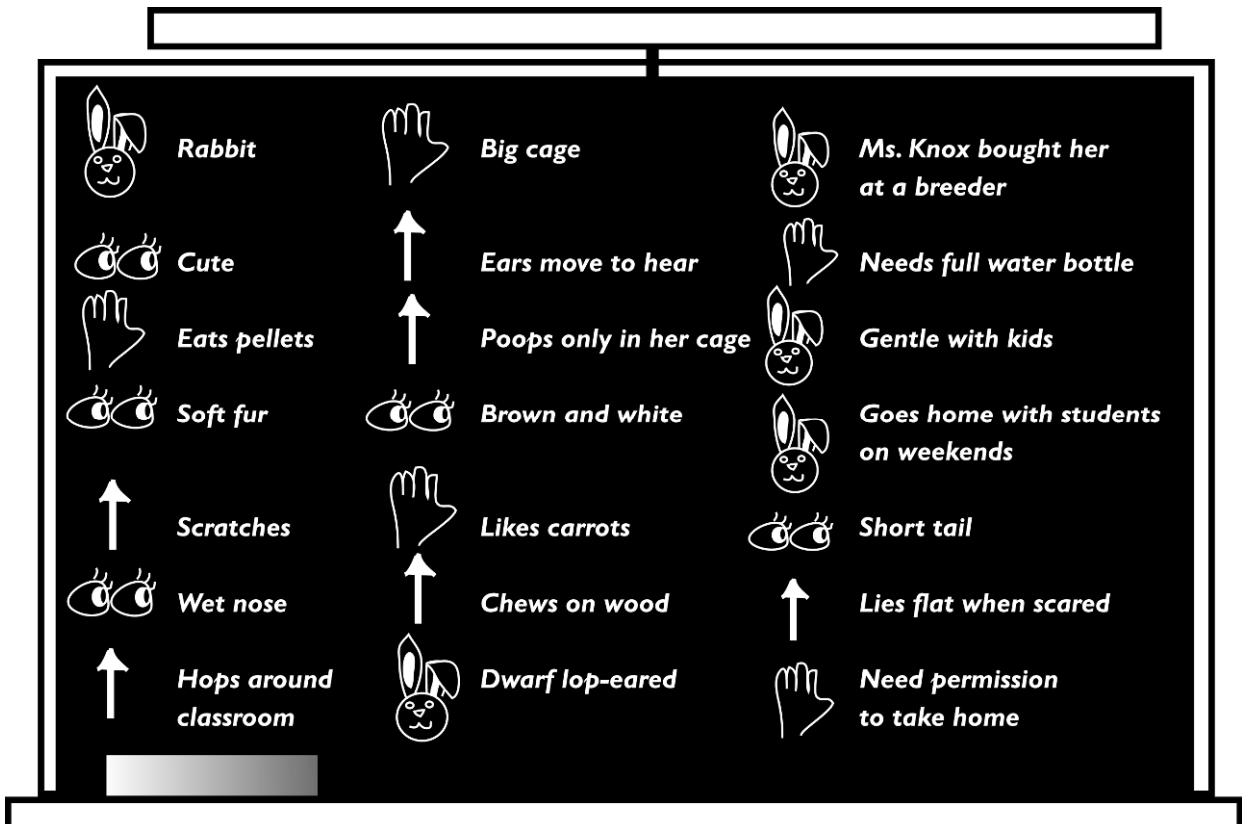


# Essay Writing

## Showing Students How to Organize Writing with the Language Experience Report

### Step One: Brainstorm

1. Choose a topic with which the students are highly familiar.
2. Have students work in pairs or teams to brainstorm as much as they know about the topic. Use Cooperative Talk strategies and Interactive Teaching Strategies to make sure everyone participates in the discussion. You may have students browse/review books on the topics during this phase.
3. Have students share out what they discussed and chart all of their contributions on the white board or chart paper. Use the strategy "no repeats" to make students listen to each other. After one person shares an idea or fact, others cannot share the same thing. If they have used individual white boards or lists on scratch paper to record their brainstorming session, they can check off each item as it is shared out to keep them focused on what has already been said.



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# Essay Writing

## Showing Students How to Organize Writing with The Language Experience Report

### Step Two: Get organized

1. Tell the students, "good writing is always organized." Show them how nonfiction books or articles in magazines are organized into topics. An ideal vehicle for this with younger students is a big book. Ask students to review the brainstorm charts and see if they can find things that go together in the same category. If students do not have a lot of experience with categorizing, you will want to show them a category or two first.
2. Choose a color, or symbol to mark each item as you find the things that go in the same category. See the example below.
3. Work through all of the material until you have categorized it all.
4. Next tell the students that each category needs to be written about in the essay in a logical order. Look at the list of topics that was determined by the class and think out loud with the students about the order for writing about these. Depending on the experience level of the students, you may need to coach the class on what makes the most sense. List the topics again on a chart in outline form (Roman numerals and letters), or numbers only for younger students.

#### ***I. Kind of rabbit***

- a. Dwarf Lop-eared*
- b. Gentle with children*
- c. Purchased at a breeder by Ms. K Knox*

#### ***II. How she looks***

- a. Floppy ears*
- b. Brown and white soft fur*
- c. Wet nose*
- d. Short tail*

#### ***III. How she behaves***

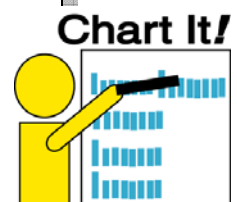
- a. Hops around classroom*
- b. Poops in her cage*
- c. Gets flat when scared*

#### ***IV. Taking care of Rosie***

- a. Needs water*
- b. Eats pellets*
- c. Likes carrots*
- d. Goes home with students on weekends*
- e. Need permission to take home*



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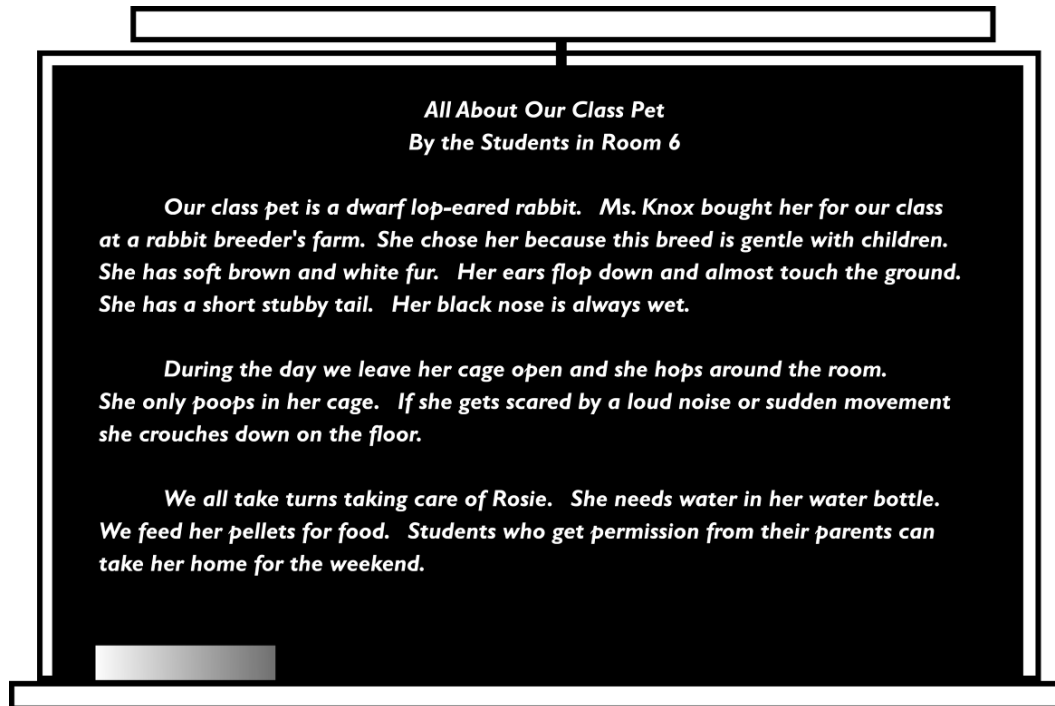


# Essay Writing

## Showing Students How to Organize Writing with The Language Experience Report

### Step Three: Write the Essay Together

1. Use the outline, brainstorm chart (see page 23 this section) with color/symbol coding, and more chart paper to construct a class essay on the topic. Use the same basic procedures for Language Experience explained earlier in this section for the composing part of the lesson. Assure full participation of students regardless of English proficiency level by including cooperative talk strategies and interactive strategies for this phase. Have one student check things off the brainstorm chart as they are used for the class essay. Re-read sections as you write them together to check for flow and organization.
2. Once the essay is finished, you can use highlighters to identify the features of the essay. For example you may be working on:
  - Transition words
  - Topic sentences
  - Concluding sentences
  - Strong verbs
  - Theme
  - Supporting evidence
3. Highlight these features and create call-outs with all-large post-its to label the parts of the essay. Leave this essay up for students to refer to as they follow similar procedures for writing on their own independently or in collaborative groups.



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## Examples for Language Experience Approach: Essays/Summaries

Father Serra  
 Father Serra was born November 24, 1713 Majorica, an island near Spain. He was an excellent student. He worked as a missionary in Mexico. From 1758 to 1767 he was the administrator of the Apostolic College.

In 1769 Father Serra founded the first mission in Alta California, Mission San Diego de Acalá. He founded 8 more missions in Alta Californias.

He walked thousands of miles.

He lived in his favorite mission, Mission San Carlos. His bed was made of wood. He died quietly of tuberculosis. He was 70 years old. He

Upper grade teachers can use Language Experience Approach (shared writing) charts to summarize with the students information learned in social studies. This teaches students how to organize multi-paragraph compositions while also helping the students retain the information about Father Serra.

This teacher is using the Language Experience Approach to show students how to go from a word bank of notes about a topic to constructing paragraphs in a summary of information. Note how the class has crossed off information as they have used it in their writing. Students often have trouble moving from a graphic organizer or list of notes to connected text in writing and this makes it explicit and concrete for everyone in class.

**Writing Summaries**

Martin Luther King, Jr.

*Word Bank*

<del>equal rights</del>	<del>freedom</del>
<del>minister</del>	<del>national holiday</del>
<del>civil rights</del>	<del>preach</del>
<del>believed</del>	<del>birthday 1/15/29</del>
<del>law</del>	<del>learning</del>
<del>bus</del>	<del>13-H.S.</del>
<del>1953</del>	<del>Atlanta, GA</del>
<del>jail</del>	<del>father</del>
<del>marches</del>	<del>decisions</del>

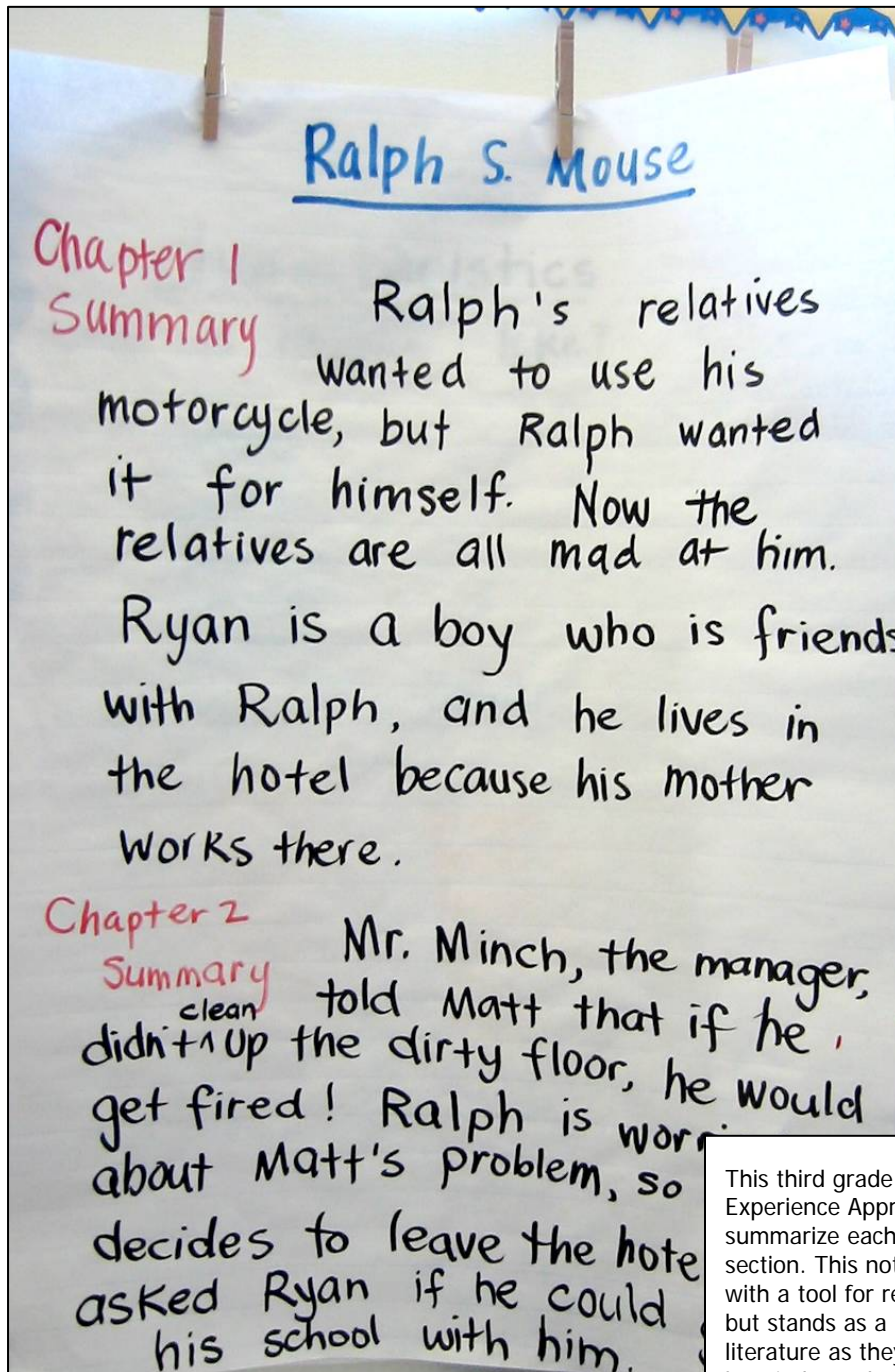
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Martin Luther King, Jr. was born January 15, 1929. He loved learning. When he was 13 years old he began high school. He grew up in Atlanta, Georgia.

He became a minister like his father. Black people didn't have equal rights. For example, they couldn't sit where they wanted.

*Write that down main reading and the signif*

## Examples for Language Experience Approach: Summaries



This third grade teacher uses Language Experience Approach (shared writing) to summarize each chapter after a read aloud section. This not only provides students with a tool for recalling events in the novel, but stands as a model for summarizing literature as they write their own reading logs independently.

This will help not only teach reading comprehension, but also provide a model for writing summaries about reading. In addition, if a student is absent he or she can refer to the chart to see what happened in a chapter that was missed.

# The Language Experience Approach

## References

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