



ThinkUp!TM

WRITING

Supporting documentation for the development of **ThinkUp! Writing**



ThinkUp! Writing

ThinkUp! Writing™ is a comprehensive, rigorous, and relevant supplemental writing resource for Levels 4 and 7, developed by Texas educators to integrate critical and creative thinking as well as focused reinforcement into writing instruction. This writing resource addresses all writing student expectations for the ELAR Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS). The resource is designed to develop and improve students' composition, revision, and editing skills. With a unique emphasis on deeper thinking, students are empowered to extend and apply learning beyond the classroom.

Units for *ThinkUp! Writing* are aligned with the adopted Writing TEKS (TEA, 2017). *ThinkUp! Writing* includes composition instruction and practice for all genres required in the TEKS as well as instruction and practice for the Revision TEKS and instruction and practice for the Editing TEKS. Each unit includes activities that represent the TEKS and the STAAR requirements with components that support the writing process, integrate the critical thinking skills needed for successful writing. Rubrics developed by TEA were studied and in turn the ELA team developed teacher and student rubrics for assessing writing.

Charles Fuhrken (2009, 2011), a member of the ELA Product Development Team at Mentoring Minds and a leader in the assessment field, conducted numerous training sessions with the team on the development of assessment items. Fuhrken continually informs the ELA team on any new developments in the reading and writing assessment arena. Updates for ELA assessments presented at several conferences, Texas Elementary Principals and Supervisors Association

(TEPSA), Texas Assessment Conference (TAC), and Coalition of Reading and English Supervisors of Texas (CREST) were also considered in the development of *ThinkUp! Writing*. In addition, a training session, an article, and continual updates by Victoria Young (2017; 2018) keep the ELA Product Development Team at Mentoring Minds abreast of current ELA/R information. Previously, Young served in the Student Assessment Division at the Texas Education Agency from 1988 to 2015 as the Director of Reading, Writing, and Social Studies Assessments. She is a content expert assisting the National Assessment Governing Board in its development of new achievement levels (national standards) for the grade 4 NAEP writing assessment, while continuing to provide professional development about how literacy can lead to academic success of all students.

Acknowledging the needs of the user is crucial in designing educational products that are effective in improving teacher and student performance, resulting in academic achievement. Recognizing this acknowledgement, the ELA Product Development Team at Mentoring Minds acted to gather input. An online reading and writing survey was administered in January 2017. Respondents were Texas administrators, principals, assistant principals, teachers, and curriculum and instruction users who had purchased a previously written ELA product in the past 18 months. An email with a SurveyMonkey link was sent to 3,927 users with 192 or 5% returned. The purpose of the survey was to collect user and buyer feedback around the previously purchased Total Motivation Reading and Writing resources to inform the product revisions for a new ELA product that would be released after the new ELA/R TEKS were finalized, approved,



and made public. Feedback was solicited for the teacher and student editions involving the print and online resources. Respondents had the opportunity to comment on what they liked in the resources as well as opportunities to rank the importance or the use of components. Survey respondents provided feedback on the format or layout and what attracted them to the resource. In addition, open-ended responses were solicited on how the teacher edition was used. Respondents were also invited to offer input for future improvement. Upon receipt of the completed surveys, the data were summarized into charts and narrative input for internal use by Mentoring Minds ELA Product Development Team. The ELA Managing Editor facilitated an analysis of the input to determine how the data would be used to inform any new products. According to the survey (January/February 2017), findings revealed that educators do have opinions and view many elements as essential to ELA/R resources, including critical thinking, alignment to and support for understanding the standards and content written with rigor.

In September of 2018 another opportunity was extended by Mentoring Minds to glean information from educators. A focus group, composed of teachers and administrators currently using an ELA/R resource, assembled in East Texas to preview and to provide feedback about the future design and content of ELA/R resources. Insight garnered from this meeting indicated that educators approved of the focus on critical thinking and how thinking was embedded into content but were unsure if funding would be available for purchasing products. All observations and comments yielded favorable results that the new TEKS were being addressed with an all-new product design. During the meeting, targeted questions were discussed, and feedback recorded.

The responses were used as influencers in the development of *ThinkUp! Writing*. Mentoring Minds advocates that gathering customer input and using the input to inform the development of higher-quality resources must be a continual part of the development process.

As evidenced by customer input or market needs, there appears to be a need for quality resources that support the implementation of writing instruction and that show a strong potential for improving writing outcomes for students with or without writing difficulties. *ThinkUp! Writing* provides an essential framework that offers all students a model text, prompts that encourage narrow and deep thinking, and planning opportunities to structure student thoughts prior to composition of a written piece. More specifically, *ThinkUp! Writing* supplements *ThinkUp! ELAR* by providing students and teachers targeted instruction for all Writing TEKS, with a focus on composing, revising, and editing. The design is student-friendly and supported by teacher interaction and guidance. The content is organized into units whereas each unit offers instruction on a focused TEKS.

Graham & Harris (2002) found that the quality of writing instruction received by students has an impact on writing achievement. Frequent and varied opportunities are needed to engage in and compose meaningful text as well as time devoted to direct instruction in writing skills and strategies (Westby & Costlow, 1991). Furthermore, the state accountability system serves as a stimulus for the development of writing resources for teachers. With the emphasis on improved performance in the area of writing and with many other demands placed upon our schools, the search for products that reflect research recommendations and meet the accountability demands is prevalent.



Students build and acquire competency in two broad areas: writing mechanics and writing process. As students advance in grades, teachers must continue to place emphasis and use reinforcement on the mechanics in addition to process aspects of writing. Gallimore & Tharp (1999) recommend that students be provided with structures, questions, and organizational frameworks that offer support as new concepts are introduced. Studies show that writing processes mature over time rather than students memorizing examples of good writing and creating such compositions immediately. Cazden (1988) noted that writing examples provide the impetus from which students learn. Anderson (2011) noted the importance of model texts and other elements that affect writing behaviors that characterize good writing. Thus, acquisition of writing skills by students requires time to develop and strategies are continuously presented to students which help students think, participate, and learn to improve their individual writing.

ThinkUp! Writing leads students from teacher-directed instruction to independent work using high-interest and varied topics that appeal to students. Findings from studies indicate that student interest emerges and results in the interactions of the student with the written content. Multiple and varied opportunities are present within the student book of *ThinkUp! Writing* that engage students to develop their writing. The way students feel about subject content can relate to the effort put into the task at hand and the learning outcome advocated (Renninger & Hidi, 2002). Studies show that students can feel positively about their writing through support from others. A number of studies indicate teachers can assist students in developing an interest in writing (Renninger, 1992; 2000; Renninger, Sansone, & Smith, 2004). Group work can result in a favorable effect on the interests of students to learn (Hidi, Weiss, Berndorff, & Nolan,

1998). Research suggests that students increase motivation to write if the topics are of interest to them (Hidi & McLaren, 1991). *ThinkUp! Writing* applies these research findings while using content that is realistic and an array of topics that spark the varied interests of the students. More specifically, the unit components provide different opportunities for students to demonstrate mastery or application of concepts/skills.

Tomlinson (1999) and Hall, Strangman, & Meyer (2003) attest to the positive effects of differentiation. Differentiation is a process through which teachers enhance instruction by matching the characteristics of students to instruction and assessment while the students are accessing the same curriculum. *ThinkUp! Writing* reflects differentiation in several ways. Differentiation in grouping practices is evidenced through the opportunities provided for whole class, small group, peer-to-peer, and independent practice. Differentiation in product occurs when a student demonstrates what is learned. Differentiation in terms of a student's learning profile and in relation to product is present in *ThinkUp! Writing*. Students are provided opportunities to discuss model texts, brainstorm ideas, use visual organizers, and write responses through compositions, completion of charts, verbal exchanges, etc. Differentiation also occurs according to the interests of students. The focus of each model text and of writing prompts shows a variety of contexts to appeal to differing areas of interests of students.

Research advocates teachers employ a variety of opportunities to assess the needs of their students. In 1998, a review of empirical studies by two British researchers noted the benefits of well-planned classroom assessments. Black and Wiliam (1998b) stated that when classroom assessments are used to adjust ongoing instruction, not only did the content appear to



be learned better, but students seem to improve their performance on external achievement tests. Black and Wiliam (1998a) stated that all activities employed by teachers and students from which they could gather feedback to modify teaching and learning is formative assessment. Popham (2008) defines formative assessment as a process that students and teachers use during instruction (assessment for learning). The assessment feedback guides teachers to make adjustments during instruction and directs students how to improve their performance to reach the intended goals. Lewis (2002) shares how assessment for learning can improve performance. Teachers can study evidence from an assessment and then purposefully plan additional learning experiences based on what students have and have not learned. These findings support that more sound decisions are made based on assessments for learning as opposed to assessments of learning. *ThinkUp! Writing* reflects regular informal means of assessing the students and then using the results to drive future instruction. Activities within the student book, such as the Try It Together component, may be used by students and teachers to gather input to gauge the learning and correct any misunderstandings. Thus, *ThinkUp! Writing* offers several unit opportunities from which purposely planned assessment evidence can be garnered and used to adjust ongoing instruction.

ThinkUp! Writing offers student-friendly and teacher rubrics based on the scoring guides provided by the Texas Educational Agency (2019). The rubrics are to be used for both student and teacher assessment of the compositions. These analytic rubrics or scoring scales describe the performance along a continuum for each identified indicator for each form of composition writing. Rubrics or scales articulate the characteristics of expectations for learners and, consistently, students know precisely how they can improve this

piece of writing as well as future writing. Marzano (2006) advocates the use of a systematic approach to rubric design. When rubrics are designed by district representatives and provided to teachers, then there are no discrepancies from teacher to teacher concerning writing expectations. *ThinkUp! Writing* provides ready-to-use rubrics for teachers and students. Students may use these rubrics to acknowledge the identified expectations in advance and independently score themselves and mark descriptors demonstrated in their writing. Teachers can utilize the rubrics to determine the different levels of competence along a school-wide writing continuum and provide students feedback to improve composition writing performance that is moving toward established goals, as well as to determine how to adjust instruction to address the diverse needs of students.

Numerous studies have examined the effectiveness of various planning and revising strategies in writing (Graham & Harris, 2005; Harris & Graham, 1996). Strategies that research found to have favorable results include teacher modeling, cooperative application of the strategy, and independent practice of the strategy. *ThinkUp! Writing* supports these research recommendations with practice opportunities leading to individual application of the concept/skill about the Writing TEKS that is the primary focus in each unit. With helpful tips placed in each student book prior to the independent writing or practice, students find much support as they plan and apply with essential elements in mind. These components substantiate research findings in leading students to plan appropriately prior to writing or to purposefully reflect during and following a written composition.

ThinkUp! Writing utilizes lessons designed to help students master the elements of composition (e.g., text development), editing skills (e.g., spelling, punctuation), revising skills (e.g., improving writing through word choice or sentence construction),



and process strategies (e.g., planning and revising techniques). Lessons also incorporate certain characteristics that form a language common to shared expectations and feedback regarding the quality of writing (e.g., sentence fluency, voice, organization). Both constitute core components of effective writing instruction, noted Fowler (2007).

Research shows that graphic organizers are key to assisting students to improve academic performance (Egan, 1999). Ritchie and Karge (1996) share evidence that students who create visual displays of concepts are better able to comprehend the concepts. Fountas and Pinnell (2001) cite that when content is illustrated with diagrams, the information can be maintained by students over a period of time. Organizers portray knowledge in meaningful ways which help bring clarity to ideas as connections are made. Several studies noted that information is more easily learned and understood with visual organizers across different populations of students and in different content areas (Landorf & Lowenstein, 2004; Ellis, 2001; Hobbs, 2001; Dye, 2000; Carlson, 2000; Levine, 1995). Once students acquire the basic, yet solid foundation of a concept, then future content can be addressed at higher cognitive levels leading students to become more strategic learners. *ThinkUp! Writing* incorporates a variety of organizers within the various writing units. Graphic organizers and charts encourage students to organize their thoughts prior to writing a piece as well as provide teachers with opportunities to observe how students think. This evidence can help teachers determine if other instruction is necessary or can provide an impetus and feedback from which to have student-teacher conversations.

In the *ThinkUp! Writing* Teacher Guide, activities are coded to the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). These standards provide educators insight into how the content links to the language proficiency levels and student

expectations for English language learners (ELLs). Teaching and assessing English language learners can be a challenge for educators. It appears some teachers have limited knowledge or experience in working with non-English-speaking students yet these students with diverse needs are present in their classrooms. The developers of *ThinkUp! Writing* incorporated strategies that support ELLs and assist teachers during planning and instruction. When teachers are aware of and can capitalize on these supports, students can successfully face writing challenges and increase productivity. To help improve writing performance for ELLs, the Student Book contains several supports recommended by Haynes (2007) and Haynes and Zacarian (2010) and contains numerous opportunities for teachers to enhance writing environments to ensure optimal engagement. Strategies include: use texts that serve as models of quality writing; include scaffolding by the teacher to help students complete activities such as compare, contrast, or sequence tasks; provide graphic organizers (print and digital) to introduce and structure ideas and to invite students to complete to organize information; group students to work in pairs (e.g., find errors, writing a paragraph); offer visuals to represent ideas (e.g., photographs, drawings, pictures, charts) and allow students to visually represent concepts; teach essential vocabulary in context and with visuals whenever possible; employ think-alouds to guide students to clearly understand the thinking process and steps involved; pause during the lesson and offer students a time to question, summarize, or review information; incorporate Think-Pair-Share and Think-Pair-Draw in case the ELL is not fluent or confident enough to share orally; and have students (after completion of tasks) reflect on and self-assess their participation, how to work more efficiently, and what was learned. Thus, *ThinkUp! Writing* is indicative of a resource that provides students and teachers continued support for differentiating writing instruction.



In 2017, a team of educators from Mentoring Minds generated a list of traits they have observed throughout their education careers that were descriptive of students who exhibited skillful thinking and deeper levels of thought. Based on their varied backgrounds of teaching and leadership experiences, elementary and secondary levels of curricula expertise, a range of 5–38 years working with children, observations of students, conversations with teachers, and 7 months of focused discussions, careful study, and deliberation, these educators collaboratively narrowed their lists to nine behaviors that students exhibited more times than not when thinking critically. Collectively, these nine behaviors (adapt, collaborate, communicate, create, examine, inquire, link, reflect, and strive) were titled 9 Traits of Critical Thinking™ (Mentoring Minds, 2017). The nine traits, when explicitly taught, modeled, and practiced, can guide students in becoming more successful when engaging in cognitively demanding tasks and in social interactions at school and in life beyond the classroom. The traits should be emphasized in context with content-specific learning experiences that align to a trait during instruction. When students are led to practice better thinking in school and in their daily lives, they will become more successful in cognitive-demanding tasks and learn to value thinking throughout their lives. Practice and skillful application of each trait can result in students' actions becoming more productive and automatic when they encounter unknown or challenging situations in the classroom and in the real world. Learning how to think equips students with the ability to navigate challenging life circumstances (academic and social). *ThinkUp! Writing* integrates one trait into each unit's instruction of the standard or concept for the purpose of cultivating a productive critical thinking opportunity for students to grow as deeper thinkers. Teachers should strive to guide students to become increasingly aware of

their thinking and more alert to mindful behaviors they can internalize. Love and Stobaugh (2018) noted the behaviors or traits exhibited by students can affect successful performance of students. Therefore, it is important that teachers introduce, nurture, and continually foster the traits in all content areas with all students.

ThinkUp! Writing enhances critical thinking through offering students opportunities to respond to two constructed-response reflection prompts. These two reflection opportunities in each unit offer students time to reflect on traits and on their understanding of themselves as writers. The literature on critical thinking notes the importance of explicit instruction and indicates that students should be taught how to construct responses that require critical thought. *ThinkUp! Writing* provides numerous situations where teachers may purposefully model situations or ask questions to focus students' thinking on an underlying concept and prompt rigorous thought. Bloom's (1956) Taxonomy and Webb's Depth of Knowledge (DOK) (2002) provide useful frameworks for examining and differentiating among different levels of learning and thought. It is important that teachers recognize the need for critical thinking and include experiences to encourage such thought (Carr, 1988). Creative thinking is often a part of the critical thinking process. Creative and critical thinking are both relevant to the problem-solving process as students plan and prepare compositions. Critical and creative thinking questions or prompts invite students to reflect at higher levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Synthesis, a higher level of thinking on the original and Create, on revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Bloom, 1956; Anderson et al., 2001) can be viewed as creative thinking. These thinking opportunities allow students to make application of the concepts and skills within *ThinkUp! Writing* to a variety of contexts. Given the importance of critical thinking skills to success in everyday life and



the integral role within the Writing TEKS, *ThinkUp! Writing* presents varied opportunities to engage students in learning and in applying critical thinking skills.

ThinkUp! Writing emphasizes composition, revision, and editing skills necessary for writing effective pieces. For Level 4, this writing resource is organized into 21 units. Targeted instruction is promoted within the units by providing 5 units with a Composition focus, 5 units with a revision focus, and 11 units with an editing focus. For Level 7, there will also be 21 units that are each focused on one TEKS: 6 units with a Composition focus, 6 units with a focus on Revising, and 9 units that focus on Editing. Each unit in the Student Book contains the following components.

- **Learning Target and Critical Thinking Trait**—The focus TEKS are identified and stated in one or more I will statement(s). A critical thinking trait is noted along with the trait statement that supports student thinking and mastery of the unit concept/skill.
- **Writer Tips**—This section introduces and provides an in-depth explanation of the unit focus TEKS. This important component presents the student with key information to understand the focus TEKS via direct instruction. Examples, charts, graphs, or strategies are tools that might be used to clarify and visualize the meaning of the focus TEKS. The tips promote understanding as students delve deeper into the concept/skill.
- **Try It Together**—The intent of this section is for the student to apply the concept/skill of the unit focus TEKS. A model text is presented that a student might write in response to a composition prompt for a class assignment or an assessment. In this scaffolded, guided practice opportunity, students are asked to complete an activity based on the model text.

- **Your Turn**—A prompt is stated that invites students to independently write a full-length composition of the genre introduced in the Writer Tips and Try It Together sections. The Your Turn section poses a prompt that is the topic for the composition. Students are encouraged by the teacher to use the writing process as they plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish a composition that responds to the prompt while applying the unit concept/skill and keeping the Writer's Tips in mind. In the revising and editing units, students notice and correct embedded errors that specifically address the revising and editing TEKS.
- **Reflection on My Learning**—Students respond to a questioning prompt that requires them to think and write about the learning process as it relates to the thinking trait. For example, the reflection prompt might ask: *How did you use the _____ critical thinking trait to revise your draft?*
- **Reflection on Composing/Revising/Editing**—Another written reflection opportunity directs students to thinking about the learning and how it applies in their personal writing experiences. An example might be: *What did you learn about yourself as a writer as you composed/revised/edited your writing?*

The unit components of *ThinkUp! Writing* help maximize classroom writing instruction throughout the year with each unit component building upon the others, resulting in preparedness for the forthcoming composition on the state assessment. Ancillary materials encompass a wide range, including additional prompts (e.g., 2 personal narrative, 2 poetry, 6 informational texts, 2 argumentative texts, 2 fiction [only for Level 7], and 2 correspondence). Other tools such as devices, graphic organizers, rubrics, and a glossary will also be included.



The Teacher Guide for *ThinkUp! Writing* will contain generic teaching plans for the Composition units, Revising units, and Editing units. Where appropriate, coding charts will be provided that include Critical Thinking Traits, Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) as related to Writing, Depth of Knowledge (DOK), Revised Bloom's Taxonomy (RBT), and the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS). Other tools such as teacher rubrics, an article on the topic of providing feedback, and the student glossary are included.

In conclusion, *ThinkUp! Writing* is designed around the state standards for Writing and evidence-based findings indicated in this document. Levels 4 and 7 were created specifically to address all writing student expectations found in the English Language Arts and Reading TEKS.

Mentoring Minds ELA Product Development Team is dedicated to providing educators with quality materials that allow the effective use of classroom time so that teachers and students have the tools they need to be successful. The authors of this writing product are former educators who combined their experiences and expertise with the input of practicing classroom teachers and administrators. Based on these experiences, relevant information from the Texas Education Agency, and recommendations from research, *ThinkUp! Writing* was created for the purpose of developing excellence in the writing skills of today's learners.



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