

# Heart Poems

## Plan at a Glance

While I have modeled a five-day lesson plan here, you will want to adapt each individual lesson to the needs and interests of your students.

Day 1 60 minutes	Day 2 50 minutes	Day 3 50 minutes	Day 4 60 minutes	Day 5 60 minutes
<b>DEMONSTRATION</b>				
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sharing poems by others (5 min)</li> <li>• Teaching demonstration (8 min)</li> <li>• Talking before writing (5 min)</li> <li>• Writing the first poems (25 min)</li> <li>• Acknowledging efforts (2 min)</li> <li>• Celebrating—whole-class share (15 min)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Continuing to celebrate, teach, and write poems</li> <li>• Affirming the power of sharing (2 min)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Writing poems</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selecting a favorite poem</li> <li>• Editing poems</li> <li>• Creating a rubric (20 min)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Publishing a poetry anthology</li> <li>• Writing about the author (50 min)</li> </ul>
<b>DEPENDENCE</b>		<b>HANDOVER OF RESPONSIBILITY</b>		<b>INDEPENDENCE</b>

## Introduction

Free verse is the easiest and best way I know to turn all kids into successful, joyful writers. The unstructured form of free verse (nonrhyming poetry), with its accompanying possibilities for using phrases and words instead of full sentences, seems to make writing easier for kids than more traditional forms. Additionally, kids love the choices poetry encourages for the shape, length, sound, and look of the poem on the page. Strict rules that apply to other genres can be relaxed with poetry.

While poems can be about anything—family, friends, sports, small objects, nonfiction interests—I have found that when we write about what's deep in our hearts and what really matters to us—what students have named “heart poems”—student engagement and the quality of writing are high.

## teaching tip

*Get Ready to Write Poetry*

Read lots of free verse aloud (see “Some Favorite Poetry Books,” in Appendix M), notice what poets do, examine poetry anthologies, establish a poetry corner.

These lessons take place in a grade 4 class three months into the school year. Students have already done some poetry writing, but many are not enthusiastic about it. What seems to make them passionate the second time around is:

- Teacher modeling “heart” poems.
- Sharing many “heart” poems by other students.
- Conversations before writing.
- Celebrating students’ efforts.
- Publishing an anthology.

## Lesson Framework

Not every action listed below is included with every piece of writing or in a prescribed order, but every step in the optimal learning model is always incorporated. Gradually releasing responsibility to students after showing them how (demonstration, shared demonstration, guided practice, independent practice) makes it likely they will be successful.

- Select a real audience and purpose for the writing.*
- Read, examine, and discuss examples and characteristics of the genre or form (immersion, demonstration). What do you notice? (shared demonstration).*
- Write a piece in front of students (demonstration) and/or Write a piece together (shared demonstration).*
- Talk before writing (shared and guided practice).*
- Provide sustained writing time with feedback (guided and independent practice).*
- Conference with students (guided and independent practice).*
- Share, celebrate, and reflect.*
- Revisit drafts (guided and independent practice).*
- Conference with students.*
- Share, celebrate, and reflect.*
- Proofread and edit.*
- Publish.*

## Framework Summary

- Demonstrations (5–15 minutes) includes one or more of the following:*
  - Sharing poems by others, such as discussing kids’ poems—includes minilessons woven in on aspects/elements of poetry.

- Teacher thinking aloud and writing a poem.
- Scaffolded conversations before writing.
- Sustained writing time and conferencing (20–30 minutes)*
- Sharing and celebrating (10–15 minutes)*

Think of this framework as a self-perpetuating loop of ongoing writing, demonstrating, teaching, sharing, celebrating, and setting new goals—not as a linear model. With short pieces of writing, you can go from inception to publication in one week.

## Lesson Plan Summary

## Day 1 (60 minutes)

## Teacher Talk

*We’re going to be writing poems this week because poetry writing is one of the best ways I know to have fun with writing and say things that are important, playful, serious, or on your mind. Afterward, we’ll put together an anthology, a collection of our favorite poems for other readers—ourselves, our teacher, all the teachers in the school, other classrooms, our parents. [Establishing purpose and audience.]*

*The poems we’ll be writing are free-verse poems, poems that don’t rhyme but still have rhythm and a beat. Rhyming poems that make sense are hard to write, unless you’re someone like Shel Silverstein or Doug Florian.*

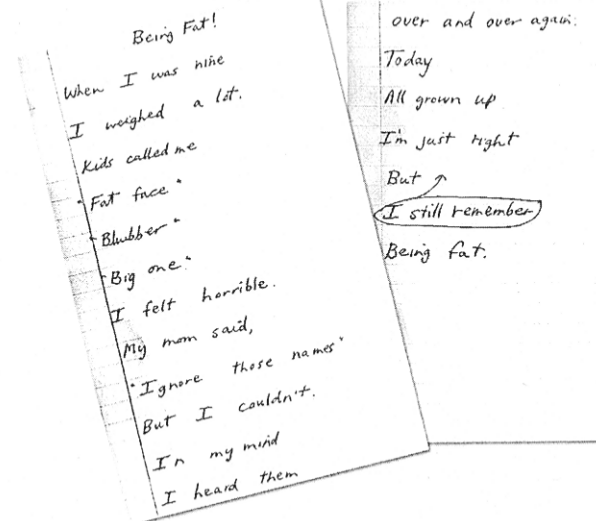
## ▶ SHARING POEMS BY OTHERS (5 minutes)

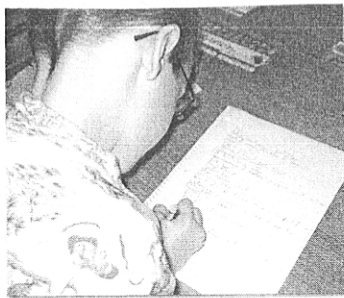
*I want you to really put yourself in your poems. Let me show you a poem I wrote in another class about how I felt being overweight when I was your age. [Read and*

*show “Being Fat!”] We all have things that are hard for us, and that was really hard for me. Listen to my poem. Look at how I set it up on the page. [I show the poem.] Notice, kids, how I tell exactly how I felt. Look at the end. See how I changed my mind about the way I wanted my poem to sound. I just lassoed my words and moved them where I wanted them. It sounds better like this. Listen, I’ll read it again.*

**Noticing a student’s first effort** Now, let’s take a look at some poems by other kids just like you. See what you notice. Here’s Bradley’s first attempt at writing a poem. He’s a fourth grader in another school. [Read Bradley’s

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Student / Teacher	INDEPENDENT PRACTICE





Bradley narrows his broad topic (page 1), and carefully considers word choice, line breaks, white space, and more (page 2).

①  
Hi! My name is Bradley and I love science! Well I like learning about water and my math sheet. I also like math like hard equations and I especially like frog and parrots. I can also make you laugh when you feel sad. Also I'm really smart at math and science. When I first got my glasses I felt shy, I've been wearing glasses since I was 2 years old because I'm lazy eye. Well that's how I can tell about myself.

②  
Wearing Glasses  
Hi!  
My name is Bradley.  
And I was 2 when I had to wear glasses.  
When I first got my glasses I felt very sad.  
Because I know people will call me four eyes  
bug face  
spider boy  
My mom said  
I know those names.  
But deep down in my heart I still  
I say  
"Now that I'm older I stand up for those meanness  
bullies  
that call me names."  
I say  
"Leave me alone!"  
and I walk away.  
Now I also have friends that  
stick up for me  
when I need it.

poem aloud, and show his draft.] Notice how he wrote about lots of things and that his poem looks like a journal entry. Here's how I showed him to make choices in having it look and sound like a poem.

I said to him, "Bradley, do you want it to look and sound like this:" [I write on projected transparency]:

"Hi! my name is Bradley"

or

"Hi!

My name is Bradley."

[I do a few more demonstrations of the choices I gave Bradley and tell the class]: When you're deciding how you want your poem to look on a page you need to say it out loud to yourself and decide where you want your line breaks to be. One of the fun things about writing poetry is you get to decide how the poem looks and sounds.

**Getting to the heart of the matter** Now take a look at Bradley's poem "Wearing Glasses." His first poem was about everything. Here he chooses what's closest to his heart and just writes about that. [I read aloud his poem twice and show his draft of "Wearing Glasses."] What do you notice?

Maelina: He narrowed it down to one thing.

Alex: He told a lot about wearing glasses.

What makes it a heart poem?

Paige: He told his feelings.

Jessi: He wrote about something that really mattered to him.

[If these responses had not been forthcoming, I would have said, "Here's what I noticed. . ."]

What did he do that makes it a good poem?

Aaron: He's got line breaks.

What else did he do that shows he's fooling around with how his poem looks, how it sounds?

Katie: He told us exactly what he's worried about.

Megan: He tells us the names people call him like "four eyes" and "bug face"; he doesn't just say, "People call me names."

He has conversation in here, too. That helps his poem in the same way. He's very specific. He also has thought about ending his poem so his reader feels a sense of closure.

Middle  
By Catherine  
I'm in the middle  
I liked  
Too much attraction  
Oldest,  
Still,  
Too much  
Middle,  
Too little.  
I'm here,  
Over here.

Listen to this poem by Catherine. [See Catherine's poem, "Middle."] It was inspired by a poem her teacher wrote about being a middle child. [I read the poem twice and show how it looks on the page.] What did you notice? [We notice that she has thought about her white space (blank space around the words) and line breaks and that she changes the rhythm of the poem in her last two lines.] What makes it a heart poem? [She really tells us what's in her heart.]

### TEACHING DEMONSTRATION—THINKING ALOUD, WRITING

**Choosing my topic** (3 minutes) If I want students and teachers to be risk takers and write from their hearts, I have to model that. I write about things that were important to me when I was the students' age, things that pulled at my heart. My only planning is jotting down the topics I might write about:

having my best friend move away, fighting with my sister, being a nervous test taker, being afraid of my father (until I was older).

I'm going to write a poem in front of you because I want you to hear and see my thinking so you'll get ideas for what to do when you write. While I'm writing I hope you'll be thinking of possibilities for your own poems. One of the things I love about writing poems is I get to decide how it looks and sounds on the page, if I want to skip lines, how I use punctuation, and so on.

Here are some things that pulled at my heart when I was your age. [I briefly talk about each of my topics named above.] I think I'm going to write about my dad. I'll never forget how mad he was at me and my sisters for letting my mom wash the kitchen floor.

**Writing the poem** (5 minutes) Hmm, how should I start? Beginnings are important for getting the reader's attention. I think I'll call my poem, "Being Afraid of Dad." [I write title.] I'm going to start the poem when Dad came home from work. I want to capture just that moment. Let's see. . .

~~Why is your~~ [I write it as I say it, then cross it out.]

"WHY IS YOUR MOTHER

WASHING THE FLOOR" It has to be all capitals because his voice was so loud. YOU SHOULD BE DOING IT!" I'm underlining "you" because of the way he said it.

Let me see if I like the way that sounds. [I reread first lines.] I'm going to read it again 'cause I don't know what I want to say next.

I froze. [I continue speaking aloud as I write.]

Dad's booming voice

TERRIFIED me.

Being Afraid of Dad  
 Why is your mom  
 WHY IS YOUR MOTHER  
 WASHING THE FLOOR?  
 YOU SHOULD BE DOING IT!  
 I froze.  
 Dad's booming voice  
 TERRIFIED me.  
 Why was I so scared?  
 I knew  
 He was gentle  
 deep down  
 But  
 He was louder than me  
 Bigger than me  
 Stronger than me  
 And  
 I was  
 only nine  
 Stronger than me  
 And  
 I was  
 only nine.  
 And  
 I was  
 only nine.

Why was I so scared? [I stop and think for a moment.]

I knew

He was gentle  
 deep down.

But

He was louder than me  
 Bigger than me  
 Stronger than me

I need to read it again to see how it sounds. [I reread.] I think I want "He was" on a line by itself. [I lasso it, reread from beginning.] I need to end it now.

And

I was  
 only nine

I think it sounds better if I say it like this, with "only" by itself.

And

I was  
 only  
 nine

See poem draft.

How long did it take me to write my poem? [Kids respond, "five minutes."]

I'm going to give you three times that, fifteen, maybe even twenty minutes. You'll be surprised how much writing you can get done. [Almost everyone completes at least one poem, and many write two or three.] Kids, this week, we expect you to write five or six poems. Then, you'll get to choose your favorite one for our anthology.

What did you notice about my poem?

Danny: You didn't write it out like a story.

Megan: You stuck to the subject.

Alec: You used voice.

What do you mean by that?

Alec: It sounded like you were talking to us.

I put myself into the poem.

#### ▶ TALKING BEFORE WRITING (5 minutes)

I have scaffolded conversations with two students, one at a time, with the class looking on. Mostly, I help them narrow their focus and remind them of Bradley's poem, how at first he wrote about lots of things but then zeroed in on the part that was closest to his heart, "getting glasses" (see page 308). I write each student's words on a projected transparency and guide them in thinking

about their beginning, ending, how they want their words to sound and look on the page, and so on.

Teacher  
 Talk

What do you want to say next?

It sounds like a story. Let's make it sound like a poem. You could. . . .

Let's read it again and hear how it sounds so far.

Do you want these words on one line, like this, or on two lines, like this?

I'm going to suggest that you stick to the part about. . . .

Why is this a heart poem? Really put yourself into it.

You may want to think about ending it now.

Neither student who volunteers seems to "get" the idea of heart poems.

Michael talks about making chili and Katherine talks about getting candy on Halloween. So, later, I am surprised by the heartfelt writing of most of the students, in spite of what felt like inadequate examples.

Although we didn't do it for this lesson, sometimes I move from teacher-scaffolded conversations to student-to-student conversation. (*Turn and talk to your partner about what you're thinking of writing about.*) In this case, because the lesson had already gone on so long, I did not. However, if we had not gotten quality poems the first day, then on day 2 I would have had additional scaffolded conversations followed by partner talk.

#### ▶ WRITING THE FIRST POEMS (25 minutes)

Kids, really put yourself into your poem the way Bradley did and I did. If you're sitting there with nothing to say, you probably don't have the right topic.

Everyone gets right to work as teacher Darcy Ballentine and I walk about and have brief roving conferences, which mostly involve affirmation:

I love your title

I like the way you're setting that up on the page.

Your first line is a grabber.

For the couple of students having trouble getting started, Darcy or I have a quick conference and conversation to help them get going. For example, Garrett had copied another student's words from one of the scaffolded conversations. When Garrett said he didn't know what to write about, I looked at his red hair and asked, "What about your red hair? I bet you have some interesting stories about that," and that was enough to get him going. (See his poem and video clip with accompanying notes.)

Notice how Paige has been influenced by my poem "Being Fat." She has taken my line in which my mom says "Ignore those names," and included it in her poignant poem, "Getting Braces," as "If they do, ignore them." She may also

have been influenced in her topic by Bradley's poem, "Getting Glasses." (See DVD for her poem and video clip with accompanying notes.)

► **ACKNOWLEDGING WRITING EFFORTS** (2 minutes)

Students bring their poems up to the area where the whole class gathers.

*How many of you think you did a good job with your poems? [Almost all hands go up.] What made it easier for you to write poems this time?*

Max: It's easy to write about something that's really important to you.

Tina: You were leading us through how to do it.

Catherine: Actually expressing from your heart.

Paige: Hearing other poems helped a lot.

Samantha: We didn't really get deep into it until you showed us. Then it was kinda easy. You gave us examples. You made us think.

Danny: We piggybacked off others' ideas.

Garrett: We knew what to do. We knew what heart poems were.

Alec: After our first poem, we found out it was easy and fun, and we thought "Wow! This is fun. We want to write more!"

► **CELEBRATING POEMS IN WHOLE-CLASS SHARE** (15 minutes)

There are two chairs in our sharing area, one for the teacher and an "author's chair" for the writer. Students read their poems aloud, and mostly, we just celebrate—their efforts, language, risk taking. After the author has read the poem, I read it again (holding the poem so students can see it), point out all the things the student has done well, and may make some teaching points. In fifteen minutes, five students share. (See video clips for Max's, Lahana's, Paige's, and Garrett's conferences and accompanying notes.)

► **TEACHING POINTS FROM DEMONSTRATIONS AND SHARING**

Had I planned to teach all the following strategies in one lesson, I would have exhausted myself planning and thinking about it all. The "efficiency of context" (pages 149, 152–154) makes lots of meaningful teaching possible. These teaching points were made on the first day and retaught and reinforced on subsequent days. (See, also, video clips with notes.)

**Writers:**

- Think about their audience when they write.
- Reread for:
  - Word choice.
  - Line breaks.
  - Meaning.
  - Rhythm.
  - What to say next.
- Use conventions of print for emphasis:
  - Capital letters.
  - Bold print.
  - Punctuation.
  - Underline words.



Paige reads her poem aloud. (See poem, page 341.)

- Have a good title.
- Read with expression.
- Think about opening lines.
- Think about white space.
- Use humor (to entertain).
- Put themselves into a poem (voice).
- Craft an ending (so the poem feels and sounds like it's over).
- Get ideas from sharing and listening to peers.
- Clarify their ideas through talking with peers.
- Move things around (lasso, cut-and-paste).
- Read poem aloud to hear how it sounds and where to put line breaks.
- Think about line breaks.
- May use conversation.
- Can repeat a line or phrase.
- Use imagery.
- May play around with sounds.

**Day 2 (50 minutes)**

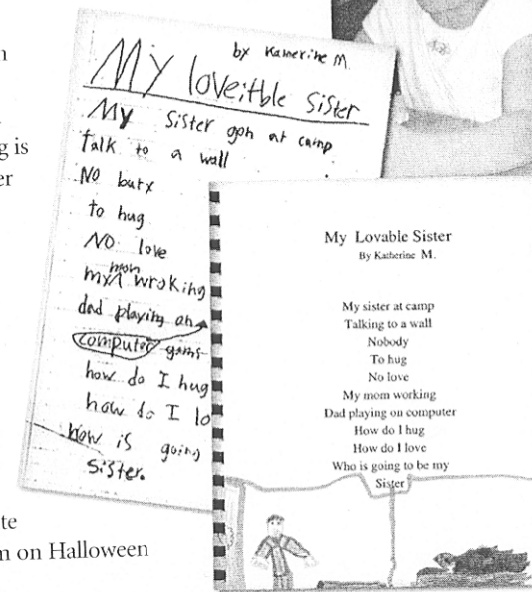
► **CONTINUING TO CELEBRATE, TEACH, AND WRITE POEMS**

To ensure we celebrate everyone's efforts, we begin with whole-class share—affirming, celebrating, and teaching. Although sharing is time consuming, the power of sharing kids' poems is electric. When students write, the influence of hearing classmates' "heart poems" is evident.

Katherine, a struggling reader and writer who is not a risk taker, writes "My Lovable Sister," remarkable for its honesty and grit, and quite a leap from her first poem on Halloween candy.

During whole-class share, in addition to celebrating, I model some of the teaching points just listed: line breaks, precise language, titles that fit the poems, endings with satisfying closure, inserting humor, and so on.

Day 2	
Who Holds Book/Pen	Degree of Explicitness/Support
Teacher / Student	DEMONSTRATION
Teacher / Student	SHARED DEMONSTRATION
gradual handover of responsibility	
Student / Teacher	GUIDED PRACTICE
Student / Teacher	INDEPENDENT PRACTICE



Katherine's draft and final of "My Lovable Sister." Her teacher, Darcy Ballentine, listens and celebrates.



Classroom teacher Darcy Ballantine comments on the power of extensive whole-class share: "Taking the time up front is key. This time spent really makes the actual writing so easy! Otherwise you spend hours conferencing, not to mention frustrated."

#### Affirming the power of sharing (2 minutes)

*What was it like for you when you shared your poetry?*

Alec: Scared 'cause there were so many people listening [other teachers were observing the lesson] but I could see they enjoyed what I wrote, and I liked that.

Danny: I was embarrassed at first, but then everyone clapped, and I felt great.

Casie: It felt good when I realized people liked my work.

Cayce: I wanted to write more.

Classroom teacher Darcy Ballentine says that after her kids wrote heart poems, they were more confident as writers and learners, spoke out more in class, and were always eager to share their work. "It gave those kids who never volunteered a voice. After this experience, they wanted their writing to be heard."

#### Days 3 & 4

Who Holds Book/Pen	Degree of Explicitness/Support
Teacher / Student	DEMONSTRATION
Teacher / Student gradual handover of responsibility	SHARED DEMONSTRATION
Student / Teacher	GUIDED PRACTICE
Student / Teacher	INDEPENDENT PRACTICE

#### Day 3 (50 minutes)

##### ▶ WRITING POEMS

Students continue writing poems and rereading their poems. Revision is minimal. Our focus remains on the joy and freedom of writing from our hearts.

I affirm students for getting ideas from each other's poems and making a new poem of their own. Inspired by Bradley's poem, Alex writes her own heartfelt poem about being afraid kids will make fun of her with her new glasses. Cody writes longingly about losing his puppy. Cassie writes about her invisible friend. Tina writes how she hates being short. (See part of published anthology on DVD.)

#### Day 4 (60 minutes)

##### ▶ SELECTING A FAVORITE POEM

By now, everyone has written at least five poems. Darcy reminds her class it's time to pick a poem to publish for our anthology. Each student carefully reads through each draft and chooses her or his favorite.

##### ▶ EDITING POEMS

As described on pages 160–165, we establish editing/spelling expectations and go through the editing process. Students willingly take on this task, and editing conferences go quickly, averaging just a few minutes each. Poems are short, students only have to edit one, and they know their final copy will go into a beautiful anthology that will be read by many.

##### ▶ CREATING A RUBRIC (20 minutes)

Teachers say, "It always comes down to this. We have to give a grade for the report card." Although I am not a fan of grades, especially for poetry, it is pos-

sible to fairly grade poetry writing if you use an accurate, child-friendly rubric. See page 252 and Appendix F for how we created such a rubric with much input from students.

#### Day 5 (60 minutes)

##### ▶ PUBLISHING A POETRY ANTHOLOGY

**Examine anthologies** This can be done at any time in the poetry writing process. Have students examine a variety of anthologies. Until you have samples of student anthologies, look at commercially published anthologies. As a class, make decisions about organization, title page, table of contents, dedication, acknowledgments, author information, index, illustrations. (See *Kids' Poems: Teaching Third and Fourth Graders to Love Writing Poetry*, Scholastic, 2000, for more specifics.) See DVD for excerpts from their published anthology, which included a table of contents, a page for each poet, and their favorite poem.

##### ▶ WRITING ABOUT THE AUTHOR (50 minutes)

Writing the author profiles (which accompanied each child's photo) followed the optimal learning model, including demonstrations and scaffolded conversations. Darcy first showed examples written by other fourth graders and wrote her own profile while thinking aloud in front of her students.

The whole process went fairly quickly. Taking the pictures and revising and editing the rough drafts required two days (two fifty-minute sessions) to complete.

**Start publishing** Students peer edited their poems, had editing conferences with Darcy, and word-processed and illustrated their final copies. It took an additional day (fifty minutes) to complete the poems.

#### Putting the anthology together (one week, 50-minute periods)

Students finished up all the pieces including finalizing author profiles. Darcy listed each of the parts of the anthology the class had decided to include, and students signed up in groups for the section they wanted to work on, such as title page, cover, dedication, table of contents, and index. Students designed each of these pages using other anthologies as models.

**Celebrating** Students were thrilled with their efforts and at being able to read and have a copy of everyone's poems. Each student received a bound black-and-white copy of the anthology and proudly shared it with their family. The school library and other fourth grades received copies as well. The original was proudly displayed in the classroom library, where it became a favorite for independent reading throughout the school year.

See DVD and pages 338–342. Students worked hard to publish the anthology error-free.

Day 5	
Who Holds Book/Pen	Degree of Explicitness/Support
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Teacher / Student gradual handover of responsibility	SHARED DEMONSTRATION
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**Heinemann**

A division of Reed Elsevier Inc.  
361 Hanover Street  
Portsmouth, NH 03801-3912  
www.heinemann.com

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**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Routman, Regie.

Writing essentials : raising expectations and results while simplifying teaching / Regie Routman.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-325-00601-6 (alk. paper)

1. English language—Composition and exercises—Study and teaching. I. Title.

LB1576.R7585 2005

372.62'3—dc22

2004020939

*Editor:* Lois Bridges

*Production management:* Patricia Adams

*Production coordination:* Abigail M. Heim

*DVD production:* Kevin Carlson

*Typesetting:* Gina Poirier

*Cover design:* Lisa Fowler

*Cover photography:* Terri S. Thompson

*Manufacturing:* Louise Richardson

*About the Cover:* Regie Routman conducts a one-on-one conference in a classroom during a weeklong writing residency.

Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper

08 07 06 05 04 RRD 1 2 3 4 5

*For my father, Emanuel  
And for Peter and Claudine*