In preparation for a lesson on journaling, I greet my students in the morning with this question: “What’s the news?” I give everyone a quiet minute to think about something they might share in response to this question at our Morning Meeting. And I remind them that it can be a very small bit of news like a soccer game coming up or having your dog chew your sock, or something larger like a special birthday celebration.

This greeting is a favorite of my second graders and we use it almost every week. That is why after only a few months, we transition into using journals titled “What’s the News?” These journals act as way to record the same bits of information in a quick and easy way that will later act as ideas for “small-moment” stories. (See page 83 for a writing lesson on small moments.)
Journal-writing can be a challenge for children of all ages. Children often feel that they don't have “anything” to write. They often have a difficult time writing down feelings or reasons for feeling the way they do. They often finish early and say, “I'm all done.” Journal-writing is a skill that we need to “teach” children on a regular basis in a manageable way. We need to give them strategies for learning what to write and how to write it. 

Adapt the sample dialogue that follows, which is based on writing-lesson conversations in my classroom, to introduce and teach this purpose for writing.

Teacher: I noticed that many of you have been having a difficult time thinking of ideas to write about during Writers' Workshop. I was thinking that I know all of you have stories to tell because when we use our “What’s the News?” greeting in the morning, you all have important things to share! This weekend I made a “What’s the News?” journal for each of you. Today I will show you how to use your journal to record things that happen every day!

Each time we write in your journal, it will be important to write the date in the upper right corner. This is important because it helps remind us of when the special event happened or when you chose to write about it.

[Take a moment to show the upper right corner of a journal.

Teacher: Next, I would like you all to think of a piece of news that you shared this morning at Morning Meeting. I will give you three minutes to write. Write the words just like you would if you were sharing the news by speaking it instead. Ready, set, write!

[Allow several minutes for children to write in their journals. Remind students as needed about the news they shared at Morning Meeting.]

Teacher: Wow! Many of you are having a hard time stopping! See how easy it is to write your news? And remember, news can be anything special, funny, happy, sad, important, unusual, or embarrassing that is happening to you.

Today when you go off to write a new small-moment story, remember, you can always go to your “What’s the News?” journal and use an entry as the beginning of a story or a way to get an idea.

[Rather than having students write in their “What’s the News?” journals during Writers’ Workshop, encourage them to use their journals throughout the day to record ideas, and then as a resource during writing time.]
During the lesson on journaling, children learn to write as part of their day. Be sure to have your students do exactly that: write every day. Keep children's journals close by so that at any moment they can grab them and record a moment. Model this type of writing yourself in a class journal. Use the following ideas to help your journal mini-lessons stay fresh and full of good content.

Write Every Day! Use your journals throughout the day, not just at writing time. After an interesting science experiment, have children get their journals out and write about what happened. When children lose teeth, have them quickly jot down the stories in their journals. Using journals throughout the day will help children see that writing fits into their everyday lives. It will also show them that they have lots of ideas for small-moment stories.

Don’t Forget the Date Teach a quick mini-lesson on how to write the date or where to start on the page. Model for children different styles or formats for writing the date, including numerically by month/day/year (11/23/10 or 11/23/2010) and spelling out the month (November 23, 2010).

Highlight After several entries, encourage children to use a yellow highlighter to call out important words in their journals, such as the names of people or places.

Creating Lists Use mini-lessons to explore list-writing, a helpful source of ideas for journaling. Possible list-starters include:
- Name five important people
- Name five things that make you feel happy
- List five places that you have visited
- Name five signs of spring [summer, fall, winter]

Class Journal If having your children write in their own journals regularly is a difficult task to fit in, keep a class journal. When something funny, surprising, or eventful happens in your class, take out your class journal and create an entry together. When children are stuck for ideas during writing time, encourage them to use the class journal to discover an idea.

For two more examples of journals to use, see Science Journals (page 89) and Conversation Journals (page 90).
Create a class memory book that follows a “journal” format.

1. Using large “big-book” paper, journal about special events that happen throughout the school year—for example, a field trip, a class performance, a special visitor, or children's birthdays. Assign each entry to a small group of children (or a pair of children). Include photographs and have children create captions.

2. Keep the big book in your class library for children to read as it is created and also to get ideas for their own writing. Teach children how to take an entry from the class journal and turn it into a story by following these steps:
   - Read an entry
   - Think about the event
   - Decide how you fit into the story
   - Tell your own story

Children will need lots of practice with this skill of taking an idea from an entry and turning it into an idea for a story. Using a class journal is a perfect way to model this skill in either a large- or small-group setting.

**Class Project: Memory Book**

**Literature Links**

Children learn best about journaling through reading journaling stories. By listening to journal entries, they begin to hear how the entries start, how often the entries are written, and what important information is included in an entry. Try these books to provide students with the experience of listening to published journaling.

*Birdie’s Lighthouse* by Deborah Hopkinson (Atheneum, 1997): When Birdie moves to an island off the coast of Maine, her only friend is her diary. In her diary she writes about her family and the important things that she learns from her father, a lighthouse keeper.

*Diary of a Worm* by Doreen Cronin (HarperCollins, 2003): Did you ever wonder what it is like to be a worm? This hilarious book tells children just what it is like. Worms go to school, play with friends, and live with their parents. This book is a perfect way to help children understand the simple things that can go in a journal.

*Notebook Know-How: Strategies for the Writer’s Notebook* by Aimee Buckner (Stenhouse, 2005): This is a wonderful teacher-resource book full of ideas for journaling with children.
Recording Observations in Science Journals

Children love to learn about bugs, creepy-crawly things, and experiments that they often think are magic. Introduce a Science Journal as a special place to record their observations and discoveries.

1. Following a science experiment, record observations on an easel as a way of modeling this form of writing. Incorporate a variety of experiments that lend themselves to a variety of charts, tables, and diagrams to provide opportunities to teach different ways of recording observations.

2. Have students use the modeled observation on the easel as support for writing in their own journals. The more you model, the more success children will have at using their Science Journals independently in future lessons.

Using Conversation Journals

There are many differences between writing letters, postcards, and quick notes. Notes are often shorter than both letters and postcards, and are an appealing form of writing for children. This Conversation Journal provides lots of practice, and is a perfect way to get to know students better at the beginning of the year and connect with them throughout the year. I usually expect students to write notes in their Conversation Journals once a week and I respond to their notes the following week. It is a great place for them to get ideas for stories and for you to ask questions such as “Who do you play with at recess?”

1. Explain that when you write a note, it is shorter than a letter. It is to tell someone something quickly. People leave notes when they will not see the other person or have time to tell the person something important. Share examples of occasions when you might write a note (for example, to let your family know that you’ll be home late).

2. Explain that a Conversation Journal is a way to exchange notes between two people. It’s like a conversation in writing. Their Conversation Journal will be a dialogue between themselves and you, their teacher.

3. Give each child a small journal (a 3- by 5-inch spiral notebook works well). When children open the journal, they will notice that you have written a short note to them. Their job will be to write back to you. Remind children to start their note with a greeting (“Dear ______”) and end it by signing their names.
Dear Families,

This week we will begin an exciting new unit of study in our daily Writers’ Workshop called Writing for Many Purposes. During this unit, children will explore many different real-life reasons to write. We will look closely at the writing we do and see in our classroom and in school.

We would like to invite you, as families, to think about the writing that you do daily. We would like each family to send in a piece of writing from home. Please note that you may wish to send copies of these samples. We hope to be able to use your writing samples during our mini-lessons, teacher/child conferences, and share sessions. Examples of writing samples may include but are certainly are not limited to the following:

- Lists
- Directions
- Recipes
- Notes
- Cards
- Letters
- Journal entries
- Scrapbook captions
- E-mails
- Invitations
- Maps
- Postcards

We encourage you all to be creative in your ideas! Anything that has to do with writing will help expand our unit of writing and model for children the many real-life reasons for writing! Please send your writing sample to school by ____________________. Thanks very much for your continued support.

Happy Writing,
Writer’s Reflection Form

1. Make a ✔ next to the type of writing you did:
   - List
   - Postcard
   - Card
   - Letter
   - Sign
   - Telephone Message
   - Directions
   - Journal
   - Advertisement
   - Invitation
   - Map
   - Small-Moment Story
   - Other:

2. What I like best about my piece of writing: ________________

3. What I would improve next time: ______________________

4. Something I learned about writing while I worked on this piece:
   ________________

5. Color the stars to show how you did.
   ★ ★ ★ ★ ★