

2019 NAPLAN Topic (Years 3 & 5)

The Gate

Write a narrative (story) that involves a gate.

Who or what is on the other side of the gate? Is the gate open or closed?

Perhaps opening or getting past the gate leads your characters to something exciting or difficult.

Note: This exemplar was written by Jen McVeity, creator of the Seven Steps to Writing Success and the author of over 20 books. She wrote this in the exact time that all children receive to draft and submit their NAP writing test. We have not checked or changed Jen's spelling, grammar or punctuation – this example is exactly as she wrote it in the time allowed.

The Gate

Let me tell you about fate and the gate...

You know all those books that tell you to set your goals, work smarter not harder, change in a day, cure how to procrastinate... I swear I'd read them all.

In fact I'd read about five procrastinate books because Mum kept buying them for me. Odd that.

Time, that was another Top Topic of my reading list. I mean what happens to the time between school and snacks and Facebook, Snapchat... and homework? Suddenly it is 10.00pm and it's time for bed. And no time to finish the assignment on the Feeding Habits of Frogs. I swear time expands and contracts... It somehow just disappears when you most enjoy it - and least expect it.

It's hard to explain this to a company high achieving mum and a channel surfing dad I only saw on some weekends.

'But what are your goals?' Mum always asks. Help, she's got me in the 'kitchen deadlock', me stuffing just cooked muffins in my mouth and a pile of homework in my bag and I'm hoping she hasn't noticed I haven't unpacked the dishwasher – my job for the day.

'Ummm,' I mumble between muffin crumbs, 'I'm thinking of applying to study Vet Science.' I mean I liked animals right?

'How long is the degree?'

'Ummm.' Muffin crumbs make it hard to think.

'Hey Dad, I'll be around on Saturday for the footy match.'

'Don't be late!' It was a long-standing joke between us. There was that time disappearing thing you know. It happened at Dad's, too.

'I'll be there in time to see my team beat yours!'

I didn't get my homework done at Dad's either.

How did my friends get so organised? Meet you at 4.00 at the movies – and they were there. See you at 10.00 for breakfast and they were on their second coffee when I got there. They always had such great ideas about doing stuff. How did they fit it all in? Like tonight 'See you at Fed Square for the light show.' Right, just have to check my email and text a few people, grab a shower, try out some new shirts... and now, the black hole of time has made me late again.

Oh and Mum is lurking and the dishwasher is waiting and now I am sneaking out the back door trying to escape again.

The side gate creaks. Damn, I was supposed to oil that. And she calls out:

'Empty the dishwasher before you go.'

Caught. I race inside and rattle dishes into drawers.

'And oil the gate too.' She was making cruel and unusual punishment. She knew it and I knew it. I grab the oil and smack it on hinges and grab my gear and go.

'Running a little late,' I text Jake.

'Me too,' he replies. Well that's a relief. He's late too for a change.

And then I'm on the train and thinking nothing more at all.

Until the texts suddenly start piling in...

'OMG, are you safe?'

'Tell me you you're OK!!!'

And from Jake 'Oh hell, I hope you were late. I hope you weren't there!

There's been a bombing in Fed Square.'

I got off the train. Cold and quaking and trying hard to breathe.

Told Mum I was safe. Jake was safe. We had been late.

Answered all the email and texts and FB posts. Tried not to snivel or cry or think too much about the deaths and the sadness. It would come later.

And then went home.

I expected some sort of ironic joke from Mum about being late saving my life. She didn't say anything, she couldn't seem to get any words out at all. She just held me so tightly for a long long time.

Time is such a strange thing. Sometimes it is fast and sometimes slow.

A few small minutes could hurt you – a car accident, a closing door...a bomb.

A few seconds can save you.

Or change you.

Tick. Flick.

Time matters.

Don't waste it.

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A **Sizzling Start** does not always have to be about big bang action. It can make your reader startled, amused... and in this case curious.

In this case a single object (a gate) is linked to a big idea (fate). Brainstorming words that rhyme with 'gate' was the quick trick that teased out that idea. (Step 1: Plan for Success). You don't have much time in NAPLAN to plan, so you need to practise brainstorming quick, original ideas.

On the narrative story graph, we show a place where **backfill** might be put in to tell us about the character. Here, we start to see that he is a procrastinator - he has good intentions, but he's always running a bit behind.

That character development is carried through in the next two or three paragraphs.

Dialogue (Step 4) does a lot of the heavy lifting in this story. It keeps the pace bouncing along, it reveals character and - at the end - it's the device by which we learn about the plot twist.

NAPLAN testing time moves fast! If there had been more time to edit this piece, the segment about the footy at Dad's might have been deleted (Step 6: Ban the Boring).

Show, Don't Tell - this is a strong Step 5 moment. The protagonist has trouble getting things done. We think maybe Dad is a procrastinator, too. Of course, the homework didn't get done at Dad's. These moments build a strong picture of rounded characters through what they intend - versus what actually happens.

*The side gate creaks. Damn, I was supposed to oil that. And she calls out:
 'Empty the dishwasher before you go.'
 Caught. I race inside and rattle dishes into drawers.
 'And oil the gate too.' She was making cruel and unusual punishment. She knew it
 and I knew it. I grab the oil and smack it on hinges and grab my gear and go.
 'Running a little late,' I text Jake.
 'Me too,' he replies. Well that's a relief. He's late too for a change.
 And then I'm on the train and thinking nothing more at all.*

Dialogue (Step 4) reinforces the relationship between the mum and the kid. Dialogue reveals character and moves the plot along. This is also an example of Step 5: Show, Don't Tell. We infer that the kid means well, and so does the mum, but she is the exasperated, busy – trying hard to bring him up well.

Tension (Step 3) occurs here, partly in the change of pace ('suddenly') and the contrast between 'nothing more' and 'OMG'. One is low energy, one is very high. This is the **action climax**.

Until the texts suddenly start piling in...

*'OMG, are you safe?'
 'Tell me you you're OK!!!'
 And from Jake 'Oh hell, I hope you were late. I hope you weren't there!
 There's been a bombing in Fed Square.'*

There is a sudden shift in the story here. Dialogue (Step 4) delivers the plot twist. Sentences are short and quick so that we feel the tension (Step 3) as the story theme shifts from the preoccupations of one kid to bigger world problems.

*I got off the train. Cold and quaking and trying hard to breathe.
 Told Mum I was safe. Jake was safe. We had been late.*

This is a great example of Show, Don't Tell (Step 5). We feel empathy with the character's intense emotion without being told what it is.

*Answered all the email and texts and FB posts. Tried not to snivel or cry or think
 too much about the deaths and the sadness. It would come later.
 And then went home.*

This reveals a bit more about the character and makes it feel real. It also illustrates Ban the Boring (Step 6) because with only four words 'It would come later.' the whole aftermath is made clear to the reader. Very economical use of words.

The ending took a bit of time (8 mins) because it was deliberately crafted for impact.

I expected some sort of ironic joke from Mum about being late saving my life. She didn't say anything, she couldn't seem to get any words out at all. She just held me so tightly for a long long time.

The character resolution or emotional wrap-up comes after the action climax. Here, the Exciting Ending (Step 7) moves firmly into the emotional realm and we are affected by the feelings the mum has for her son. We empathise.

Time is such a strange thing. Sometimes it is fast and sometimes slow.

A few small minutes could hurt you – a car accident, a closing door...a bomb.

A few seconds can save you.

Or change you.

Tick. Flick.

Time matters.

Don't waste it.

There is more character resolution here (Step 7) as we realise that the protagonist has changed. He's grown up suddenly just a bit.

The Gate

by Jen McVeity

(NAPLAN submission, 2019 primary test)

Sizzling Start

The story begins as the narrator directly addresses the reader: 'Let me tell you a story about fate and the gate...'

This introduces the main themes and prompts curiosity in the reader so they want to read on!

Exciting Ending (Action climax)

He gets off the train, shaking. His world has suddenly changed. Is Jake safe? Yes. Both had been late.

Character Wrap-up (Emotional resolution)

His Mum's reaction: 'She didn't say anything, she couldn't seem to get any words out at all. She just held me so tightly for a long long time.' We see he has changed in the closing statement:

'Time matters.
Don't waste it.'

Boulder (Main tension scene)

A sudden shift in the story. Messages and calls pour in and through them and dialogue we learn that there has been a bombing at Fed Square.

Rock (Medium problem)

He's on the train, late for his meeting with friends at Fed Square. He feels bad, his Mum is a bit mad at him, he knows he isn't on top of things. Jake is also late.

Pebble (Small problem)

His Mum keeps pressing him about his goals. 'But what are your goals?' Mum always asks.' The narrator hasn't a clue and we can see conflict will be the result.

Backfill

The narrator can't seem to get things done. Time slips away. Homework and chores.

Gradual build up of tension

Interest level