

INTRODUCING YOUR STUDENTS TO THE TRUISM BRAID

What's the Classroom Problem?

You've just read something together as a class and now you want your students to write a longer piece about it. You ask the class, *"Can anyone tell me how the father's attitude about dandelions changed in the story?"*

"He didn't get mad anymore."

"What dandelions?"

"Can I go to the bathroom?"

"He ended up liking them."

Encouraged with that last response, you say, *"Ok! How do you know that?"*

"I dunno."

Getting students to know the answer is a big part of the battle. Then getting them to back up their answer with evidence and say more than one sentence about it can be impossible. And then asking them to *write a full essay* about it can feel as if you are climbing Mt. Everest!

Some states have even moved to requiring this longer form of writing on their state assessments, so there is a real urgency for our students to do this well.

So, What's the Solution?

Enter the truism braid.

Many students are familiar with the structures that require a restatement of the question, an answer, a quote to back it up, and an explanation. However, we have found that providing students with the truism braid structure not only guides their writing, but can deepen it as well. Writers are invited to end each paragraph with a truism, which brings it to a reader's experience, giving it more depth and complexity. Then they "braid" their truisms and key words together to create a strong answer and conclusion. And before they know it, the essay has practically written itself.

Below is an introductory lesson for writing a truism braid that you can teach tomorrow.

Basic Steps:

1. Read something together (you can use this to respond to one text or do a crossover of two texts).
2. Display the question and have students write their answer to the question.
3. Have students provide one piece of text evidence to support their answer (on the left side) and explain what was going on in that moment in the story.
4. Have the students write a truism to go with what they have written.
5. Have students repeat steps 3-4 with another example from the same text (if you are using a single text) or from the other text (if you are using two texts for a crossover question).
6. Highlight the key words in each of the truisms.

7. Have the students pull the key words from their truisms up to the introduction (their original answer) and down into their conclusion (at the bottom).
8. Have students transfer their writing into a clean, multi-paragraph response, revising and editing as they go (they should have at least 4 paragraphs).
9. Have students share their completed truism braids with partners and then the whole class.

Tools/Supplies:

- A common text (or two)
- Student journals
- A question for students to answer
- 3 different colored highlighters, markers, crayons, or colored pencils per student

Step One: Read a common text.

If you are using only one text, read one of the books together. If you are using two texts for a crossover question, read one of the books (or another common text) on one day and the other one on the next day. You may wish to start with the quick write provided, but you don't have to. Stop to discuss the story after each reading. For the following example, we read *The Invisible Boy* by Trudy Ludwig and *Each Kindness* by Jacqueline Woodson.

You can ask about any aspect of the story. Here are a few questions to get you started:

- What happened in the story?
- What did you notice?
- What confused you?
- What did you connect with? Why?
- What was the main character like?
- What parts of the story stuck out to you? Why?
- What writer's craft moves did you notice the author using?

Step Two: Ask and answer the question.

Say: To show our understanding, we're going to write a longer response to our story. Let's get our page ready to write.

We always recommend writing with your students. In fact, the first time you do this, consider doing it all together as a class. This work is best done on the board, chart paper, or on the document camera as you walk them through the steps.

Have students create a page in their notebooks that looks like this (see fig. ____)

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored?

A:

How else do you know?

How else do you know?

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored?

A: Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.

How else do you know?

How else do you know?

Say: Now write the question we will be answering at the very top:
Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored?

Say: What do you all think? Which one is worse?

Give students a chance to provide a clear, short answer. Here's the one we thought of: *Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.*
(see fig. ____)

Say: Write your answer at the top of the page (under the question).

Step Three: Support the answer with text evidence and context.

Say: How do we know that's true? In *The Invisible Boy*, where'd you get that clue? Point to or find the words. Then write the snippet of text into the box on the left.

Listen to some students' examples and give students time to write their sentences. Here's what we wrote: *"J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away."* (see fig. ____)

Say: Now ask yourself, "What was going on at that moment in the text?" What was happening in the story right then? Write a short explanation on the lines next to the quote. Be sure to add the name of the text.

Listen to some students' examples and give students time to write their sentences. Here's what we wrote: *"In The Invisible Boy, Brian isn't chosen to play on a team."* (see fig. ____)

Step Four: Write truisms to support text evidence.

Say: What is something that's true about this situation? In the small box below, write a truism for this moment in the text. Make sure it's related to your answer, and to the specific moment you quoted.
(see fig. ____)

Listen to some students' examples and give students time to write their truisms. Here's what we wrote: *It really hurts to feel invisible.*
(see fig. ____)

Step Five: Repeat steps three and four on the other side.

Say: Now we will repeat these steps for our other book *Each Kindness* on the right side. (If this is not a crossover question, but a question about only one text, you'll use a different moment in the same text.) How do we know that the answer is true? In *Each Kindness*, where did you get that clue? Point to or find the words. Then write the snippet of text into the box on the right.

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored? A: <u>Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.</u>	
How do you know? "J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away." 	How else do you know?

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored? A: <u>Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.</u>	
How do you know? "J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away." 	How else do you know? In <i>The Invisible Boy</i> , Brian isn't chosen to play on a team.

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored? A: <u>Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.</u>	
How do you know? "J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away." 	How else do you know? In <i>The Invisible Boy</i> , Brian isn't chosen to play on a team.
T: It really hurts to feel invisible.	

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored? A: <u>Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.</u>	
How do you know? "J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away." 	How else do you know? In <i>The Invisible Boy</i> , Brian isn't chosen to play on a team.
T: It really hurts to feel invisible.	

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored? A: <u>Being laughed at is worse than being ignored.</u>	
How do you know? "J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away." 	How else do you know? In <i>Each Kindness</i> , Rosalyn and her friends called Maya this nickname because Maya wore hand-me-downs.
T: It really hurts to feel invisible.	

Listen to some students' examples and give students time to write their sentences. Here's what we wrote: "Never New." (see fig. ____)

Say: Now ask yourself, "What was going on at that moment in the text?" What was happening in the story right then? Write a short explanation on the lines next to the quote. Be sure to add the name of the text.

Listen to some students' examples and give students time to write their sentences. Here's what we wrote: "In Each Kindness, Kendra and her friends called Maya this nickname because Maya wore hand-me-downs." (see fig. ____)

Say: What is something that's true about this situation? In the small box below, write a truism for this moment in the text. Make sure it's related to your answer, and to the specific moment you quoted. (see fig. ____)

Listen to some students' examples and give students time to write their truisms. Here's what we wrote: Hurtful words make you feel targeted in front of everybody. (see fig. ____)

Step Six: Highlight key words in the truisms.

Say: Now it's time to choose the keywords to highlight from the first truism. If you don't know what to highlight, close your eyes and say the truism to yourself, then ask which word(s) stuck out. Those will be the words to highlight. When you find it, highlight it in your first color.

Listen to some students' examples of keywords. Here's what we highlighted in pink on the left side: invisible. (see fig. ____)

Say: Now repeat the same process with the truism on the right When you find it, highlight it in a different color.

Listen to some students' examples of keywords. Here's what we highlighted in green on the left side: hurtful words and targeted. (see fig. ____)

Say: We are going to make sure we use these words and ideas in both our introduction and our conclusion, so add both colors to the top (right under the answer) and the bottom (in the big open spot under your truisms). (see fig. ____)

Say: Highlight the answer with a third color, and add that color to the bottom also. (see fig. ____)

Step Seven: Bring the key (highlighted) words into the introduction and conclusion.

Say: Now copy the highlighted words into the empty highlight colors. Start with the introduction first and then move down to the conclusion. Combine them together in a way that makes sense to you and doesn't repeat too much. You don't have to keep them in any specific order, and this can become more than one sentence.

Students will need to see this demonstrated. Here's what we wrote in the introduction: *Being laughed at is worse than being ignored or invisible, because hurtful words turn you into a target.* Here's what we wrote in the conclusion. *Being ignored or invisible makes you feel hurt, but being laughed at is worse because those hurtful words are aimed right at you and make you feel like a target.* (see fig. ____)

Read both the introduction and the conclusion aloud.

Say: Do you notice a difference between the introduction and the conclusion?

Students may notice that you have added more emphasis to the word and you have changed some of the words to make them more intense.

Step Eight: Transfer the truism braid to an essay.

Say: Now your paper is all planned out. Now let's transfer this to a written or typed essay. Each part of this graphic organizer will become its own paragraph. You can type it exactly from the truism braid page, or you can add words as you go.

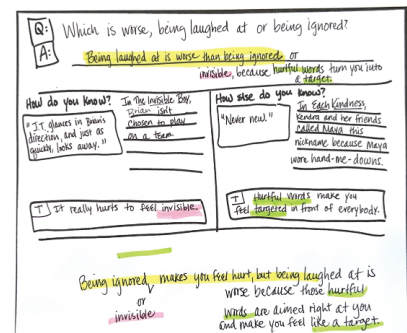
Make sure you ask yourself whether a reader would understand what you're saying, and add whatever you need to in order to make sense.

As you can see, this one could use some more descriptions and explanations. But the skeleton is perfect and would probably score well just by itself. (see fig. ____)

Say: While this is a strong start, what are some ways we can make this writing even better?

Students may respond with:

- strengthening their word choice,
- adding more back story about the characters and the situation,
- adding additional quotes with support,
- putting the quotes into their own words (paraphrasing),
- adding writer's craft (similes, metaphors, visual images, ba-da-bing sentences, etc.),
- removing repetition,
- replacing vague words with pitchforked words or phrases,
- and using sentence variety.



Prompt: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored?

Being laughed at is worse than being ignored or feeling invisible, because hurtful words turn you into a target.

In *The Invisible Boy*, Brian isn't chosen to play on a team. When choosing the teams, "J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly looks away." It really hurts to feel invisible.

"Never new." In *Each Kindness*, Kendra and her friends give Maya this nickname because Maya wore hand-me-downs. Hurtful words make you feel targeted in front of everybody.

Being ignored or invisible makes you feel hurt, but being laughed at is worse. Those hurtful words are aimed right at you and make you feel like a target.

(523 characters)

Step Nine: Share.

If students have done a truism braid on their own, after they write comes one of the most important parts: sharing. As we've said before: writing should be social, and sharing is the main course, not the dessert, in the process, so *don't skip the sharing*. There will be students who didn't think they did it correctly or who didn't understand it at all, so their page might be blank. Sharing will help with that. They will have a chance to hear what other writers did.

Say: *We have written our truism braids, it's time to share what you wrote. Before I tell you how to move around, here is what I don't want to see.* **Say:** *"Here's my writing. Read it."* (This is your chance to poke fun at...I mean, imitate the lethargic behavior of your students when they just toss their notebooks at someone else when it's time to share. Ham it up. Have fun with this.). *What am I doing or not doing?*

Students: *You're not sharing with your voice! You're just trading papers.*

Say: *Now that you know what I **don't** want to see, here's what I do want to see. Right now, I want you to write I HEARD THIS at the bottom of your page. Then draw three lines next to it. When I say 'go,' I want you to stand up, find a partner, and take turns reading your truism braids. Once someone has listened to your truism braid, have them sign their name on one of the lines. Your job is to have three people listen to your truism braid, get three signatures, listen to at least three truism braids, and then sit down when you have finished. I'll know we are finished sharing when we have all returned to our seats.*

Allow students to move around the room and share their writing. Once they have had a chance to get their signatures, gather them back together again and ask for volunteers to share with the class.

Say: *Now that you've had a chance to try out your writing on a few people's ears, who would like to share theirs with the whole class? Did anyone hear a good one that we all need to hear?* (Watch as hands fly up after that question.)

Allow as many students to share as time allows. As students share their pieces out loud, point to each step of the truism braid structure to reinforce it.

Step Ten: Repeating the process (often)

Once students have practiced writing and sharing a truism braid, repeat this process often to give them practice with a variety of things to which they can respond.

If you really want them to internalize this strategy, consider having them practice it two or more times in a week. You may choose to copy the graphic organizer for them to glue onto a page of their notebooks or have them draw it themselves (this helps with internalizing the structure).

Once students have had some practice with writing truism braids and they have a few to choose from, ask students to choose one they think they could revise and edit. If they are having trouble choosing, consider having them choose two or three and trying them out on some listeners to see which one others find most compelling.

To develop a truism braid into an essay, start by turning each part of the truism braid graphic organizer into its own paragraph. Here are some ideas for how to do that:

- Use the "like what" button (After a statement, imagine a reader asking, "Like what?" The student will know what details to add..).
- Use jerk talk (After a statement, imagine a real or imaginary listener that says, "No, it's not!" Prove it!").

- Add some ba-da-bings
- Add some pitchforks
- Hunt for vague writing and change it into something specific
- Add (more) text evidence
- Add descriptions, backstory, more context
- Add metaphors, similes, or other writer's craft
- Add infoshots
- Use the "three questions" technique (Listeners write three questions, things they want to know about the writing.).
- Use the list of Writer's Tools (found in the online companion) as a handy tool for revision.

Video to include:

[Gretchen and Kayla Demonstrate the Truism Braid with *The Invisible Boy* and *Each Kindness*](#)

Here's an example using a single text (the book *Dandy* by Ame Dyckman):

CROSSOVER QUESTION FOR THE INVISIBLE BOY & EACH KINDNESS

Q: Which is worse, being laughed at or being ignored?

A: Being laughed at is worse than being ignored, or invisible, because hurtful words turn you into a target.

<p>How do you know?</p> <p>In <i>The Invisible Boy</i>, Brian isn't chosen to play on a team.</p> <p>"J.T. glances in Brian's direction, and just as quickly, looks away."</p>	<p>How else do you know?</p> <p>"Never new."</p> <p>In <i>Each Kindness</i>, Kendra and her friends called Maya this nickname because Maya wore hand-me-downs.</p>
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T It really hurts to feel invisible.

T Hurtful words make you feel targeted in front of everybody.

Being ignored makes you feel hurt, but being laughed at is worse because those hurtful words are aimed right at you and make you feel like a target.

or invisible