

## “Pourquoi Is That the Way It Is?” Creatively Writing to Explain

**Developed by:** Jen Reiter, 2014 Iditarod Teacher on the Trail™, created May, 2017

**Discipline / Subject:** Creative Writing, Writing Workshop

**Topic:** Pourquoi Stories

**Grade Level:** 2-6

### **Resources / References / Materials Teacher Needs:**

Making Thinking Visible by Ron Ritchhart, Mark Church, and Karin Morrison – pages 86-92, 111-118

#### **Alaska/ Arctic Themed Mentor Texts:**

Aurora: A Tale of the Northern Lights by Mindy Dwyer

Northern Lights A to Z by Mindy Dwyer – you will want multiple copies or scans of pages for small groups

The Sleeping Lady retold by Ann Dixon

Berry Magic by Teri Sloat and Betty Huffman

The Gift of the Inuksuk by Mike Ulmer

**From Inhabit Media** ( <http://inhabitmedia.com/> ) – an Inuit owned independent publishing company

Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory

The Walrus Who Escaped by Rachel and Sean Aitsualik-Tinsley

The Legend of Lightning and Thunder by Paula Ikuutaq Rumbolt

The Legend of the Fog by Qaunaq Mikkigak and Johanne Schwartz (please vet before choosing – it may be a tad gruesome for younger readers)

**Other Native pourquoi tales:** <http://www.native-languages.org/legends-pourquoi.htm>

#### **Resources about Pourquoi Tales:**

From Read, Write, Think: <http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/pourquoi-stories-creating-tales-324.html>

**Lesson Summary:** After analyzing mentor texts, students will create an original pourquoi tale to explain a natural phenomenon that is related to the Iditarod.

**Standards Addressed: (Local, State, or National)**

**Grade Three Common Core:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.A

Establish a situation and introduce a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.B

Use dialogue and descriptions of actions, thoughts, and feelings to develop experiences and events or show the response of characters to situations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.C

Use temporal words and phrases to signal event order.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3.3.D

Provide a sense of closure.

**Grade Four Common Core:**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.A

Orient the reader by establishing a situation and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.B

Use dialogue and description to develop experiences and events or show the responses of characters to situations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.C

Use a variety of transitional words and phrases to manage the sequence of events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.D

Use concrete words and phrases and sensory details to convey experiences and events precisely.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3.E

Provide a conclusion that follows from the narrated experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development and organization are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.5

With guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, and editing. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grade 4 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.6

With some guidance and support from adults, use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting.

**Learning Objectives:**

TLW plan, draft, revise, edit, and publish a folktale that explains how or why something is the way it is.

**Assessment:**

Students will be assessed on their final story. Emphasis will be placed upon the concepts introduced to the students via the mini-lessons when assessing the work.

## Procedural Activities:

### Day One – Mentor Text Exploration:

1. Set the stage with a 3-2-1 Bridge thinking routine (based on pages 86-92 of Making Thinking Visible)
  - a. Set scene by playing this video for the students:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NZlfxWMr7nc> (also makes great background video and music for the writing stages of the project! It's two hours long so no worries about it running out during the class period).
  - b. After the students have had a few minutes to enjoy the video, have them document their thinking with the 3-2-1 Bridge thinking routine. They should record their thinking in their Writer's Notebooks so they can revisit it later. These thoughts should be the things that come immediately to their minds as a way to get their initial, surface level thoughts.
  - c. 3 – Ask for three words – ask them to identify three words that quickly come to their mind when they think of northern lights
  - d. 2 – Ask for two questions – have them identify two questions they have regarding the topic
  - e. 1 – Ask for one metaphor or simile – have them create a simile or metaphor for the topic
  - f. Tell the students they will return to this tomorrow, and bring them to the rug or other meeting area.
2. Tell the students that today you will be sharing with them a story that was written, or told, for a specific purpose. Tell them that their challenge, while hearing the story, is to determine the author's purpose in writing or telling the story.
3. Share Aurora: A Tale of the Northern Lights by Mindy Dwyer with the students.
4. After reading, discuss with the students the author's purpose. Guide them toward the realization that the book was written to explain why there are northern lights.
5. Explain to the students that this is a specific type of folktale called a pourquoi tale. Other types of folk tales include trickster tales, fables, and fairytales.
6. Working with the students, develop an anchor chart that will guide students through the unit. You may choose to have the beginning of the chart already created and just discuss the elements with the students, or you may choose to create it with the students' assistance. Elements of pourquoi tales that should be discussed with the students at this point include:
  - a. Explain why something is the way it is
  - b. Explain how something is the way it is
  - c. Frequently are nature based
  - d. Frequently follow the rule of 3 or 7
7. Have the student work in small groups to mine the book Northern Lights A to Z for other explanations for the northern lights from other culture groups.
  - a. Depending on the time you have, you could have the students mine the entire book for multiple explanations, or you could assign specific pages to search to specific groups. There are seven other explanations featured in the text from China, Lower Yukon River, Greenland, Nunivak, Lapland, Makah, and Norse legends.
  - b. For each new explanation they find, have them create a headline for that idea (based on Making Thinking Visible, pages 111-118). For example, a headline for Aurora: A Tale of the Northern Lights might be "Girl's Adventurous Spirit Leads to Northern Lights" or "Girl Following Caribou Fills Night With Colors for Comfort."
  - c. Students could record their headlines on sentence strips that could be displayed on a "Pourquoi?" bulletin board.
8. Bring the students back together to share their headlines for other reasons why there are northern lights.

## Day Two – Mentor Text Exploration:

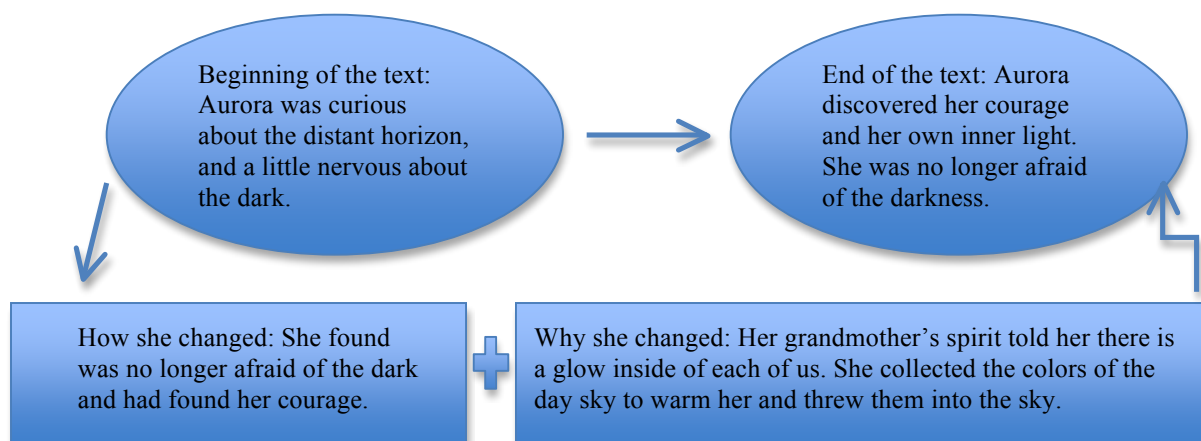
1. Review with the students the purpose and definition of pourquoi stories.
2. Remind that students that as we are just starting to explore this type of story, the best thing we can do is to explore lots of mentor texts to inspire us.
3. Tell the students that today you are going to share with them another explanation for the northern lights. Challenge the students to again think of the author’s purpose in telling this story. Refer to the anchor chart started yesterday and challenge the students to think of other things that could be added to the chart based on this new mentor text.
4. Share Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory with the students. This story is a contemporary story that introduces an Inuit legend about the lights.
5. Revisiting the anchor chart, the students should now realize:
  - a. Pourquoi stories were originally orally told, but many are now being documented
6. Revisit the 3-2-1 Bridge Thinking Routine from yesterday
  - a. Repeat the 3-2-1 steps from yesterday. With their new information, ask them to record 3 words, two questions, and one metaphor or simile
  - b. Bridge – share their thinking – with their writing partner, they should discuss what they noticed about how their thinking shifted on the topic. Remind them that their initial thinking from yesterday isn’t wrong; it’s just a starting point.
7. In their writer’s notebooks, have the students begin a brainstorm list of their own explanations for the northern lights. Encourage them to be creative. No brainstorm idea is bad at this point.
8. Let the student know that northern lights are not the only natural phenomenon that have had pourquoi stories told about them.
9. Split the class into partners or small groups to explore the other Alaska/Arctic themed pourquoi tales:
  - a. The Walrus Who Escaped (Inuit) – explains why walrus’ tusks are straight
  - b. The Sleeping Lady (Athabaskan)- explains why Mt. Susitna is the shape it is
  - c. Berry Magic (Yup’ik) – explains how sweet berries came to grow on the tundra
  - d. The Legend of Thunder and Lightning (Inuit) – explains thunder and lightning
  - e. The Legend of the Fog (Inuit) – explains fog
  - f. The Gift of the Inuksuk (Inuit) – explains inuksuks (be careful with this one – it’s a contemporary story, not a traditional legend; in a way that’s good, makes it more similar to what the students will be creating; in a way it’s in the grey area of non-natives writing native stories)
10. Groups should repeat the Headline Thinking Routine from yesterday for their new stories.
11. When everyone has had a chance to explore their book, have the students do a gallery walk to visit each book and hear from each group about their story, what it explains, and their headline.
12. Add the headlines to the bulletin board started yesterday.
13. Explain to the students that over the next few weeks they will have the chance to write an original Iditarod themed pourquoi tale.
14. In their writer’s notebook, they should begin a brainstorm list of questions related to the Iditarod that they could develop stories around.
  - a. Examples include:
    - i. Why do huskies howl?
    - ii. Why is the Red Lantern red?
    - iii. Why do huskies love to run?
15. If time allows, the students could choose one of their ideas and start writing out their story idea. This exploration should happen in their writer’s notebook as they will not choose their final topic for several days.

### Day Three – Mini-Lesson – Developing Believable Characters:

1. Remind the students that just like in all strong stories, pourquoi stories need to start with a main character who is believable.
2. Create a t-chart on the board labeled Physical Traits and Personality Traits. Using Aurora: A Tale of the Northern Lights as a mentor text. Model for the students how even in this short story, we have a lot of knowledge about Aurora. Do a think aloud as you list Aurora’s physical and personality traits.
  - a. Physical: Dark hair, dark eyes, wears kuspuk with large pockets, dances when she walks
  - b. Personality: dreamy, curious, adventurous, nervous about the dark
3. Tell the students that in order to write strong and believable characters, they need to really KNOW their characters. They need to know everything they can about their main character even if every detail doesn’t show up in their story.
4. Have the students turn to a blank page in their Writer’s Notebook. Have them choose one of the ideas for a story they had yesterday and think about who the main character would be.
5. Have them create a t-chart and have them think about the physical and personality traits of their character. Give them a few minutes to make some notes.
6. Tell the students you know have a really hard challenge for them. You are going to ask them a series of questions about their character. Have them make notes about their responses under their t-chart.
  - a. Sample questions to ask:
    - i. Does your character have a pet? If so what kind?
    - ii. What does your character eat for breakfast?
    - iii. What is your character’s favorite book?
    - iv. What does your character’s bedspread look like?
    - v. What kind of pizza would your character order?
7. During independent writing time, the students can continue to explore their character and maybe work on a character description. They could choose a different story idea and repeat the idea with the main character for that story. Or, they could use what they have created already and try writing the story featuring the main character.
8. When the students group at the end of the free writing time, have them share what they learned about their character with their writing partner.

### Day Four – Mini-Lesson – Character Motivation:

1. Remind the students that yesterday they started exploring their characters. Have them turn to their writing partner and share a book character that would be friends with their main character and why the two would be friends. For example, Sam, from My Side of the Mountain, may be friends with Aurora. They both left home on their own to go on an adventure. They are both curious and adventurous.
2. Tell the students that today you want them to know that characters change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story. They have a motivation to make them change.
3. Show the students an organizer like the one below. Do a think aloud to show how you completed the organizer for Aurora’s motivation:



4. Have the students sketch the outline of the organizer in their Writer’s Notebooks and complete them for one of the characters they have been exploring.
5. For free writing time, they could continue exploring the same character, work on a new character, continue exploring a story they’ve been working on, or start experimenting with a new one!
6. To wrap up the free writing period, have the students share with their partner how they are feeling about their stories so far. Is there one idea that’s sticking out above the others?

**Day Five – Mini-Lesson – Seed Ideas for Plotting:**

1. Tell the students that today is the day they need to start narrowing down their idea of their stories.
2. Have them revisit their brainstorm list of questions from the first day. Give them a few minutes to add any other questions to the list that they have come to their minds in the last few days.
3. Have them put a star by the two or three ideas they have that they are leaning toward the most.
4. Show the students the organizer sheet that you have filled out with the seed ideas from Aurora. Think aloud as you demonstrate how you filled out the chart:

What are you explaining?	Why there are northern lights in the sky.
Main character?	Aurora – young girl
Other characters?	Her grandmother, the caribou
Time/Place?	Alaska, long ago
Problem that leads to the explanation?	She is curious and somewhat nervous about the night sky.

5. Distribute the seed idea charts to the students (included). During free writing time today, the students should use the charts to outline the ideas for the two or three stories that are their main choices at this point.
6. When the charts are completed they can work in their writer’s notebooks to continue to explore the three stories.
7. To wrap up the writing period, have the students meet on the rug and distribute a sentence strip to each person. They need to choose their one story idea and write the headline for it. These should be displayed on the bulletin board. (Note: Looking over these headlines should help identify any student who would benefit from small group work on narrowing down a topic).

**Day Six – Mini-Lesson – Drafting with a Story Mountain:**

1. Tell the students that today they will draft their stories.
2. Review with them whatever story mountain organizer is familiar to them. Here is an example if you need one: <http://www.brainpop.co.uk/blog/tag/story-mountain-graphic-organizer/>
3. Do a think aloud of retelling the story of Aurora as you move a finger or pointer up and down the story mountain.
4. Have the students rehearse their stories in the same way. First, have them tell their stories silently to themselves in their heads as they move their fingers up and down their copies of the story mountain.
5. Have them repeat this activity aloud, telling their story to their writing partner.
6. Before sending them off to draft, review the anchor chart of elements of a pourquoi story and any other elements you would expect to see in their stories (dialogue, descriptive language, etc.)
7. The students should then draft their stories outside of their notebooks.

**Day Seven – Mini-Lesson – Leads That Set a Time and Place:**

1. Create cards with the opening lines from the mentor texts you used with the students. Opening lines from suggested mentor texts is included in this packet.
2. With their writing partners, have them explore the opening lines and make some observations about what they see. They can group the openings into categories and give a heading to each category.
3. Lead a discussion about what they have discovered.

4. Many of the mentor tales begin with something along the lines of “Long ago and faraway.” Add to the anchor chart that pourquoi tales usually have very generalized time and place. The times and places are usually easily and briefly named.
5. Have the students turn to a blank page in their notebook. Have them title the page “Leads.” Have them write a lead for their chosen story that follows this format.
6. A few of the mentor texts begin by introducing the character and explaining their name. Have the students write a lead for their chosen story that follows this format.
7. A few of them begin by describing the land or setting. Have the students write a lead for their chosen story that follows this format.
8. A few of them begin explaining a “big idea” (celebrations, strength). Have the students write a lead for their chosen story in this format.
9. Say, “stand up” - students stand up and spread out around the room. Say, “hand up” – have the students raise a hand. Say, “pair up” – students find a partner to and pair up by clasping hands. Have the pairs share their leads and get feedback on them. Repeat several times so that each writer hears from several other students about their leads.
10. Encourage the students that as they continue to work on their drafts today to make certain that their lead is following the characteristics of the genre and encouraging readers to want to dive into the text.

#### **Day Eight - Mini-Lesson – Endings:**

1. Repeat steps 1-3 from yesterday’s lesson with the endings cards.
2. Remind the students that in pourquoi story endings, there is usually a very clear statement made about what has been explained. Add this idea to the anchor chart.
3. Have the students reread the endings of the mentor texts and craft a very clear ending to their story in their writer’s notebooks.
4. Have the students share their endings with the class one at a time. As they are sharing, the other students are trying to identify the matching headline on the board. If the two things can’t be matched, the writers may need to revisit their endings.
5. As they work on their stories today, encourage the writers to really focus on making sure there is a clear understanding of why or how something has come to be.
6. Drafts should be completed by the end of today’s writing time.

#### **Day Nine – Mini-Lesson - Revising with Lenses:**

1. Share with the students the revising check sheet. The students should read their draft one time with each lens described on the chart. They should then make some notes regarding that lens. So, in total they should read their draft six times, once for each lens.
2. They should then meet with their writing partner and share their story with their partner. The partner will fill out the second side of the check sheet with their observations of the story.
3. Taking all of that information into account, students should then begin making the necessary revisions to their work.

#### **Day Ten – Mini-Lesson - Editing with Cups:**

1. Remind the students that as wonderful as their stories may be, the way that they are presented is just as important.
2. Share with them the editing checklist. They should again, read their story one time for each item on the check sheet, making corrections as they go.
3. You may choose to have the writing partners or the teacher make final editing suggestions.

**Day Eleven – Publishing:**

- Since pourquoi tales are traditionally oral stories passed down from generation to generation, have the students present their final stories in an oral format. Apps like Seesaw, Book Creator, and Adobe Spark are all great ways to get the students to record audio of their stories. They could create illustrations to accompany their audio and help tell their story.
- Alternatively, students could read their stories to younger students in the school.

**Day Twelve – Celebrate:**

- Be sure to take the time to celebrate the writers' final stories! Digital projects could be shared with parents or visitors via QR codes posted in the hallway.

**Materials Students Need:**

Copies of various mentor texts  
Writer's Notebooks  
Sentence strips  
Sticky notes  
Cards with mentor text leads (included)  
Cards with mentor texts endings (included)  
Copies of story mountain organizer  
Copies of seed idea planner (included)  
Copies of revision checklist (included)  
Copies of editing checklists (included)

**Technology Utilized to Enhance Learning:**

- Student could utilize Google Drive or other technology to draft, revise, edit, and publish their stories.
- Publishing could be done via Seesaw, Book Creator, or Adobe Spark
- QR Codes and code readers could be utilized to share final products

**Other Information:**

- This would be a great time to begin learning about the science behind the Northern Lights in science class. Allow the first two days to go by before doing this so as to not interrupt the thinking routines. Or do the science first, and then than present these lessons as an alternative explanation.

**Modifications for Special Learners/ Enrichment Opportunities:**

- Early finishers may be challenged further to write a poem to go with their Pourquoi tale. Have them return to the ending pages of Painted Skies by Carolyn Mallory, which features a poem about the Northern Lights. This poem can serve as a mentor text to create an original poem about their own natural phenomenon.

**Additional Information**



## Seed Idea Planner

What are you explaining?	
Main character?	
Other characters?	
Time/Place?	
Problem that leads to the explanation?	

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## Mentor Text Lead Cards

\*\*\* Note: cut apart so each lead is on a separate card.

“Long ago, before the salmonberries and raspberries, before the cranberries and blueberries, there were only little black crowberries on the tundra. They grew like dots on the tops of the hills.”

~from Berry Magic by Teri Sloat and Betty Huffman

“Once, long ago in Alaska, there lived a race of giant people along the shores of the Cook Inlet. The land then was warm and covered with fruit trees of every kind. Woolly mammoths and saber-toothed tigers roamed the forests and beaches but did not harm the gentle Inlet people.”

~ from The Sleeping Lady retold by Ann Dixon

“Well then, I’ll tell you the story of a man named Quanguaviniq. His name means one-who-pretends-to-be-frozen because that is just what he had to do one day, long ago.”

~ from The Legend of the Fog by Qaunaq Mikkigak and Joanne Schwartz

“Early one morning in a long ago northern land, a baby girl was born. Her mother named her Aurora, which means ‘the rosy light of dawn.’ This faraway place knew only a daylight sky, for the sun would glide from one end of the sky to the other, hugging the horizon but never slipping below it.”

~ from Aurora: A Tale of the Northern Lights by Mindy Dwyer

“In the past, Inuit were always finding reasons to celebrate. After the long winter, singing festivals were held in the spring to show the people’s happiness at finally feeling warm weather. Inuit travelled from camp to camp to celebrate with each other. During these festivals, they ate, danced, and sang together. By foot or by dogsled, people travelled great distances to share their happiness and celebrate with one another.”

~ from The Legend of Lightning and Thunder by Paula Ikuutaz Rumbolt

“There is strength in the land. This strength is nothing like the power that makes your muscles move. It’s not that kind of strength at all. Instead, it’s something that runs through the whole world – even the creatures who live in it. It’s as though the Land is alive, listening to every heartbeat on its surface. One might call the Strength “magic.” But this would not be describing it very well. Long, long ago, all living creatures understood the Strength. Human beings used it to heal or harm. The animals used it the same way.”

~ from The Walrus Who Escaped by Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley

“Many lives ago, an Inuit girl dashed through a land of snow and stones and caribou and stars. She was small and inquisitive and always, always running. Her father said she reminded him of the Arctic hare, the ukaliq. From that day, she was known as Ukaliq.”

~ from The Gift of the Inuksuk by Mike Ulmer

## Mentor Text Ending Cards

\*\*\* Note: cut apart so each lead is on a separate card.

“Walrus kept his new tusks. His red eyes. He kept the effects of the Land’s Strength, like skin keeps a scar. He left the coast, choosing to live far out at Sea, among the islands. Raven’s regret ran as deep as the Strength of the Land. In time, she returned to say she was sorry – but Walrus was gone. Such a silly little thing, she realized, fighting over food. She and Walrus never spoke again.”

~ from The Walrus Who Escaped by Rachel and Sean Qitsualik-Tinsley

“So, you see, because two orphaned children were neglected and ignored, we now have lightning and thunder in the world.”

~ from The Legend of Lightning and Thunder by Paula Ikuutaz Rumbrot

“The adventurous spirit of Aurora lives on. When you gaze into the night sky of the North and see the dancing lights, you are watching Aurora’s many colors, collected on her special journey long ago.”

~ from Aurora: A Tale of the Northern Lights by Mindy Dwyer

“And with that last drop, she burst. Steam rose from her body, swirling into a heavy mist, and then, for the very first time, a thick fog settled over the land.”

~ from The Legend of the Fog by Qaunaq Mikkigak and Joanne Schwartz

“Today Susitna still sleeps through the seasons, dreaming of Nekatla. If you look across Cook Inlet in the winter, you can see her covered by a snow quilt. In summer, you see her resting beneath a green flowered blanket.”

~ from The Sleeping Lady retold by Ann Dixon

“And from that day until now, Anana’s berries have filled the akutaq at every fall festival.”

~ from Berry Magic by Teri Sloat and Betty Huffmon

“To this day Inuksuit wait for paddlers and canoeists beside shallow lakes. They greet travellers along great highways. They carry a message an Inuit girl shared with her father and brothers, a message between man and animal, between place and people... here within the bounty of the Creator, you are not alone.”

~from The Gift of the Inuksuk by Mike Ulmer