

Ninja Scholar 2.0 — Student Binder

A year-long training manual · Grades 6–8 · 30 Weeks



4 UNITS

U1 · HERO'S JOURNEY

U2 · SPEAK YOUR MIND

U3 · CROSS THE LINE

U4 · THE LONG ROAD

GRADES 6–8 · 30 WEEKS

DORYOKU · EFFORT, REWARDED OVER TIME

Welcome, Ninja. You're Not Ready. Perfect.

Read This First

You are going to become a stronger scholar than you are right now. Not because you were born for it, but because you're going to start before you feel ready and get better on the way. That's the whole trick. That's the whole year.

Everything after this page is detail.

Meet Mochi

This is Mochi. He is a mochi. He is also, technically, a ninja.

He is the worst-built ninja who has ever lived. He is round. He is soft. He is sticky. He squeaks when he walks and gets stuck to walls, which are two things a ninja is specifically not supposed to do. By every rule of what a ninja is, Mochi should not work.

Mochi works anyway. He's the sharpest scholar in the building, and he earned his headband by refusing to wait until he was good at it.

That's you this year. Not built for it. Doing it anyway. Getting dangerously good.



What Is a Ninja Scholar?

A ninja scholar is someone who:

- 1 Starts before they feel ready.
- 2 Makes a small promise and keeps it.
- 3 Notices the detail everyone else walks past.
- 4 Learns to see themselves as the main character of their own story.
- 5 Never uses their skills to make someone else feel small.

You'll practice sentence-level writing until sentences feel like tools instead of traps. You'll map a great story onto The Hero's Journey. You'll study the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens. You'll read a novel with your class. And every single week, you'll add one new skill to your toolkit.

THE NINJA WAY

we begin before we are ready, we keep going when it is hard, and we never use our skills to make someone else feel small.

Why This Class, Why Now

Anyone can *make* things now. Computers can crank out an essay in four seconds. So the thing that's actually rare, the thing that makes you dangerous in a good way, isn't how fast you can produce. It's what you can *see*. Whether you can tell the difference between fine and great. Whether you notice the detail

that's off.

That's called taste, and it's the one thing that can't be downloaded. This class is a taste factory. We slow down on purpose so you learn to see.

The differentiator is not what you can produce. It is what you can see.

How to Use This Binder

Bring it every week. Write in it. Fold the corners. Make it yours. Here's the decoder ring for what you'll find inside each week:

SECTION	WHAT IT IS
This Week at a Glance	A quick map: which writing phase, which text, which habit, what to take home.
Learn the Ninja Way	One ninja trait to chew on all week, plus a way to connect it to your own life.
Ninja Writing Tool	The sentence skill we're building. It stacks: each week adds to the last.
The Hero's Journey Quest	Your year-long mission to track one story through all ten hero steps.
Class Game / Activity	The loud, social, interactive thing. Always useful. Usually chaos.
Reflection Card	A quick closing check-in so your mentor knows what stuck.
At-Home Assignment	The one thing to do before next class. Never more than 30 minutes.
Parent Email	Exactly what your parents will read, so everyone's on the same page.

Forget what a section is for? Come back here. Ninjas know their tools.

The Point

At the end of the year, this binder will hold proof, in your own handwriting, that you became a stronger scholar than you were in Week 1. One sentence, one habit, one weird true detail at a time.

Turn the page. We start by lying to each other. (You'll see.)

Your Mission: Ninja Certification, Level I

How You Get Certified

Mochi wasn't a great ninja on day one. He got certified by *starting things and finishing them*, not by being perfect. Same deal for you.

To earn Ninja Certification Level I, you need:

- ✦ At least 8 of the 10 requirements below, AND
- ✦ At least 2 Hero Training Missions completed.

That's it. You don't have to do everything. You have to *start before you're ready and keep going*. Progress counts. Nobody's going to nag you. This is your quest, not a chore chart. Fill in the boxes as you go and watch the year stack up.

The 10 Requirements

Check the box when you've done it. Write the date so future-you can see the streak.

✓	#	REQUIREMENT	DATE DONE
☐	1	Pick a film or book, document its Hero's Journey (all 10 steps), and present it at the Showcase	
☐	2	Play in the class RPG game	
☐	3	Complete the 7-day Hero Training Mission ("Heed the Call")	
☐	4	Complete 2 in-class free writes (keep them in your binder ALL YEAR)	
☐	5	Take part in the class debate	
☐	6	Complete the 14-day Hero Training Mission	
☐	7	Write a paragraph at home using the class-generated thesis statement	
☐	8	Complete the 21-day Hero Training Mission	
☐	9	Do the annotation activity : one of each type	
☐	10	Complete a peer review in class	

Requirements done so far: _____ / 10 (you need 8)

HERO TRAINING MISSIONS

A Hero Training Mission is a promise you make to yourself and actually keep. Pick a real goal, track it every day, don't break the chain. You need **at least 2** of these done to certify. (Your class will decide the rules together, like whether the days have to be in a row. Ninjas usually vote for the strict version. Of course they do.)

✓	MISSION	LENGTH	STARTS	MY GOAL	DATE DONE
☐	Heed the Call	7 days	Week 2		
☐	The 14-Day Mission	14 days	Week 5		
☐	The 21-Day Mission	21 days	Week 9		

Missions done so far: _____ / 3 (you need 2)

Am I Certified Yet?

Check both when they're true:

- ☐ I have at least **8 of 10** requirements
- ☐ I have at least **2 Hero Training Missions**

If both boxes are checked, **you're a certified Ninja Scholar, Level I.** Mochi is proud. He's soft, so he's a little weepy about it, but proud.

The Deal (for you AND your mentor)

Inspire, don't require. Progress gets praised out loud. Nobody gets shamed for what they haven't finished, and nobody gets a private reminder unless they truly need one. This sheet is a map of where you're going, not a list of ways to fall short. You started before you were ready. That already makes you a ninja.

Your Ninja

The mechanics. Keep this at the front of your binder all year.



CORE · NEVER RESETS

Name of record _____

Current mask (see page 2) _____

Your three stats – assign +2, +1, and 0 at home. One each. They never change all year.

WITS	VOICE	NERVE
notice · deduce · solve	persuade · perform · recite	act · endure · go first
+2 +1 0	+2 +1 0	+2 +1 0

Your level is the unit you are on. Everyone at the table is the same level, so no one is ever behind.

LV	BELT	CLASS OVERLAY	WHAT IT LETS YOU DO	EARNED
1	White belt	Pathfinder	Name a place the party has not been. It exists.	
2	Yellow belt	Orator	Ask one question a session that must be answered truthfully.	
3	Orange belt	Vanguard	Go first, and describe what is on the other side.	
4	Green belt	Champion	Take a complication meant for another ninja.	
5	Blue belt	Armorer	Lend a companion your special weapon once a session.	
6	Brown belt	Truthsayer	State the enemy's real reason once. The party must weigh it.	
7	Black belt	Keeper	Name what a reward cost, and it becomes true.	
8	Hanko Seal	Sensei	Certify another ninja.	

Draw Your Ninja

This is the fun part. Make them yours.



DRAW YOUR NINJA HERE – GO BIG

Ninja name

Class flavor (the vibe)

What they wear

Their signature look or move

What they always carry

Where they come from – their story

Re-masking at a new unit? Your CORE stays. Redraw the new you on the back of this page – same ninja, new face.

Hero's Journey

WEEKS 1-4

Gear A · Phase 0-1 · The sentence begins, and the quest opens.



Meet Mochi. Also, One of Us Is Lying.

Before We Start: This Is Mochi

This is Mochi. He is a mochi. He is also, technically, a ninja.

He is the worst-built ninja in the history of ninjas. He is round. He is soft. He is sticky. He cannot sneak up on anyone because he squeaks when he walks and gets stuck to walls. By every rule of what a ninja is supposed to be, Mochi should not work.

Mochi works anyway. Mochi is the smartest scholar in this building, and he became a ninja by refusing to wait until he was good at it.

That is the entire class in one sticky rice blob. You are going to be a little bit like Mochi this year: not ready, not built for it, doing it anyway, and getting dangerously good in the process.



THE NINJA WAY

we begin before we are ready, we keep going when it is hard, and we never use our skills to make someone else feel small.

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	1
HABIT	None (foundation week)
TEXT	None yet. <i>You</i> are the text this week
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 0: Kernel Expansion (say it before you write it)
CENTRAL QUESTION	What have you started before you felt ready for it?
TAKE-HOME	Pick a book or movie for your Hero's Journey Quest (due Week 2)

Don't panic about the words you don't know. **Phase 0** = the first sentence trick. **Kernel expansion** = take a boring little sentence and grow it one detail bigger. That's the whole lesson. We'll do it out loud before you write a single word.

One of Us Is Lying

Your mentor is about to tell you three things about themselves. Two are true. One is a bald-faced lie.

Your only job: catch the lie. Vote with your hand. If you vote wrong, you have been out-lied by a grown-up on day one, and you will have to live with that.

Here's the thing nobody tells you: **you already have the superpower this whole class is built on.** You can feel when a detail is *off*. That little "wait, that's not right" feeling is the muscle a scholar uses. It helps you read closely, argue well, and write sentences that land. We're just going to make it stronger.

Write down what the lie turned out to be:

The lie was:

What Is a Kernel? (Ask Mochi)

A **kernel** is the smallest sentence that still works. A subject and a verb. Short, true, and boring on purpose.

An **expansion** is that same sentence, grown by exactly one detail: *when, where, why, or how*. Not all four.

One. Ninjas are precise.

Watch what happens to Mochi:

KERNEL (BORING, TRUE)	EXPANSION (ONE DETAIL BIGGER)
Mochi swims.	Mochi swims laps in my bathtub every night while judging my life choices.
Mochi reads.	Mochi read a 400-page book in one sitting because he forgot he had a body.
Mochi trains.	Mochi trains at dawn, mostly by falling off things on purpose.

Notice: the expansion only answers **one** question. That's the rule. Add one true, weird, specific detail and stop.

Your turn: Round 1. Write a boring kernel about yourself or someone you just met:

Round 2. Grow it by ONE detail: when, where, why, or how:

Speed-Dating (For Sentences, Not Romance)

Two lines. Face a partner. You get 30 seconds and **one** question. Then everybody rotates and you never see them again. It's the fastest, loudest way to notice something true about another human, which is the raw material of every good sentence.

Steal any of these questions:

- + What's the weirdest thing you own?
- + Best movie you've seen this year?
- + If you had one superpower, what's the dumb version of it?
- + What's something you're secretly good at?

After 3–4 rounds: pick ONE person. Write a boring kernel about them, then grow it.

PARTNER

KERNEL (BORING)

EXPANSION (ONE WEIRD, TRUE DETAIL)

The bounty: weirdest *true* sentence in the room wins **Mochi's Seal of Approval**. "Bella reads." No. "Bella read a whole book in one day because she forgot to eat lunch." *That's* a ninja sentence. Weird and specific beats neat and tidy every single time.

The Hero's Journey (You Already Know It)

Here's a secret you can't un-know once you know it: almost every story you love is built from the **same ten steps**. Harry Potter, Star Wars, Moana, Spider-Man, The Hobbit: different paint, same skeleton.

This year you'll pick ONE story you love and track it through all ten steps. By spring you'll see the pattern everywhere: in books, in movies, and (weirdly) in your own life.

You'll get the full ten steps in your binder to keep. For now, just one question:

A book or movie I might want to map this year:

My favorite part of it:

(Full 10-step map is on the next page. Read it if you're curious. We'll dig in all year.)

The Hero's Journey: 10 Steps (Keep This)

- 1 The Ordinary World** The hero starts home, ordinary, not yet great. *(Frodo in the Shire.)*
- 2 The Call to Adventure** Something calls the hero away from home. *(Harry gets his Hogwarts letter.)*
- 3 Meeting the Mentor** A guide with special knowledge shows up. *(Glinda points Dorothy to the yellow brick road.)*
- 4 Crossing the Threshold** The hero leaves the safe world behind. *(Frodo leaves the Shire.)*
- 5 Challenges and Trials** Tests of wit, strength, and nerve. *(Rey fights the Empire.)*
- 6 The Special Weapon** A tool only this hero can use. *(Arthur pulls the sword from the stone.)*
- 7 The Supreme Ordeal** The one big battle above all others. *(Luke faces Vader.)*
- 8 Reward for Victory** Recognition or a prize is won. *(Indiana Jones and the true Grail.)*
- 9 Final Test / Transformation** One last test, or the hero is forever changed.
- 10 The Return Home** The hero comes home, different than they left. *(Frodo returns to the Shire.)*

REFLECTION CARD: WEEK 1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Write your best expanded sentence one more time:

2 One book or movie you want to map onto the Hero's Journey this year:

3 Circle one thing that stuck today:

- ☐ Ninjas begin before they're ready (see: Mochi).
- ☐ A kernel is a short, boring, true sentence.
- ☐ An expansion adds exactly one detail.
- ☐ Weird and specific beats neat and tidy.

AT-HOME ASSIGNMENT: WEEK 1

Your first real ninja mission. Talk to a parent and **pick one book or movie** that follows the Hero's Journey. Choose something you already love. You'll be thinking about it for a couple months.

Write your choice here:

Title:

Why I picked it:

Stuck? Any of these work: *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *The Hunger Games*, *Moana*, *The Lion King*, *The Hobbit*, *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*, *Percy Jackson*, or anything family-friendly your parent okays.

Bring this page back next week.

PARENT EMAIL: WEEK 1

(The same note your mentor will send home.)

Ninja Scholar | Week 1: Meet Mochi

Today your student joined Ninja Scholar Skills and met our mascot, Mochi, a very soft, very determined mochi ninja who is proof that you don't have to be built for something to become great at it. This year we study sentence-level writing, the Hero's Journey, the 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens, and one novel together.

This week's task: help your student pick one book or movie that follows the Hero's Journey pattern (*Star Wars*, *Moana*, *Harry Potter*, etc.). They'll map it in class later this year.

No other homework. We're building culture first.

Thanks for sending your ninja to class.

Ninja Scholar Mentor

SMART Goals + Kernel Set-Up

This Week at a Glance

Use this table like a dashboard. It tells you where we are going before we start the engine.

WEEK	2
HABIT	— (foundation week)
TEXT	Self-selected Hero's Journey film or book (chosen this week)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 0 — Kernel expansion (written)
CENTRAL QUESTION	How do ninjas set goals they can actually hit?
TAKE-HOME	Confirm your Hero's Journey film or book choice (make sure you can watch or read it this month)

Last week you learned that ninjas begin before they feel ready. This week you learn what to aim at once you have begun: **ninjas set a target, then they move**. Random effort is just noise. A SMART goal gives your effort a direction.

This week is all about direction. You choose the story you will track all year. You learn how to turn a vague wish into a goal you can check off. And you write three kernel-expanded sentences about your hero before they ever become one.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 2

Every week in Ninja Scholar, we stop and practice one ninja trait. These traits are not costumes. They are habits – small choices you make over and over until they become part of who you are.

This week's trait: "Ninjas know where they're going before they start walking."

You can walk fast and still get lost. You can practice hard and still not improve. What separates a ninja from someone who is just busy? A target.

Think about it. An archer does not shoot arrows in every direction and hope one hits. A basketball player does not close her eyes and throw the ball. A ninja does not say, "I want to be a better writer" and then wonder what to do. A ninja says, "Today I will write one sentence with a specific detail in it."

Targets make effort useful.

Your turn: Name one thing you want to get better at this year – but make it specific. Not "writing." Something you could actually aim at.

Write it below:

This year, I want to get better at

BONUS: How will you know when you have hit that target?

What Makes a Goal Ninja-Ready?

A **goal** is something you want to do. A **SMART goal** is a goal you can actually aim at.

SMART is a checklist. If your goal passes all five checks, it is ninja-ready.

LETTER	QUESTION	VAGUE GOAL	NINJA-READY GOAL
S – Specific	What exactly will I do?	"Get better at writing."	"Write one kernel-expanded sentence about my hero's ordinary world."
M – Measurable	How will I know I did it?	"Read more."	"Read three chapters of my Hero's Journey book this week."
A – Attainable	Can I really do this?	"Read a whole book tonight."	"Read one chapter before bed on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday."
R – Relevant	Does this matter to me?	"Memorize the state capitals."	"Memorize the lines for my monologue because I want to perform them."
T – Time-based	When does it end?	"Drink more water."	"Drink one full water bottle at lunch every day for 7 days."

Notice: the ninja-ready goals are smaller. They are also clearer. You can check them off. That is the point.

Your turn: Pick one vague goal from the list below and turn it into a SMART goal.

Vague goals to choose from:

- + "Be nicer to my sister."
- + "Get stronger."
- + "Do better in math."
- + "Read more."

Vague goal:

S – Specific:

M – Measurable:

A – Attainable:

R – Relevant:

T – Time-based:

My SMART goal:

The Lie Detector Returns — Hero Edition

Here is the truth about sentences: they get sharper when you know how to add one true detail. To prove it, we are playing the Lie Detector game again – this time with heroes.

Your mentor will read three sentences. Two are true. One is a lie. Your job: vote on which one is the lie.

Example about Harry Potter:

- 1 Harry Potter, a wizard who lives under the stairs, has a lightning-shaped scar.
- 2 Harry Potter, a wizard who lives under the stairs, has a pet owl named Hedwig.
- 3 Harry Potter, a wizard who lives under the stairs, has a pet dragon named Fluffy.

The lie: #3. Fluffy is a three-headed dog, not Harry's pet dragon.

Notice what made this work: every sentence starts with the same kernel – "Harry Potter, a wizard who lives under the stairs..." That kernel is about Harry's **ordinary world** – his life before the adventure starts.

Your turn: Write three sentences about your hero's ordinary world. Two true. One lie. Your classmates will vote.

1.

2.

3.

The Hero's Journey Quest — Choose Your Story

Last week you learned the ten steps of the Hero's Journey. This week you choose one story to map all year.

You do not have to read something new. Pick a book or movie you already love – something you would not mind thinking about for the next month or two. You will track the hero through all ten steps. By May, you will know this story better than you thought possible.

Here are some good choices:

- + *Star Wars: A New Hope*
- + *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*
- + *The Hunger Games*
- + *Moana*
- + *The Lion King*
- + *The Hobbit*
- + *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*
- + *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*
- + *The Wizard of Oz*
- + Another family-friendly story your parent approves

Write your choice here:

Title:

Hero's name:

Why I chose it:

Step 1: The Ordinary World

Every hero starts somewhere normal. Before the adventure, before the danger, before the transformation – there is just a kid living a regular life.

In the Hero's Journey, this is called **The Ordinary World**. It is the hero's everyday life before the story really starts. The ordinary world matters because later, when the hero has changed, the reader needs to remember what "normal" looked like.

HERO	ORDINARY WORLD
Harry Potter	Lives in a cupboard under the stairs at the Dursleys', treated like he does not belong.
Moana	Lives on the island of Motunui, learning to be a chief, forbidden from sailing past the reef.
Luke Skywalker	Works on his uncle's moisture farm on Tatooine, dreaming of leaving for the academy.

A kernel sentence about the ordinary world is short and true.

- + Harry lives with the Dursleys.
- + Moana stays on her island.
- + Luke works on a farm.

An expansion adds one detail – when, where, why, or how.

- + Harry lives with the Dursleys in a tiny cupboard under the stairs because he has nowhere else to go.
- + Moana stays on her island even though she longs to sail past the reef.
- + Luke works on his uncle's farm on Tatooine while he dreams of joining the Imperial Academy.

Your turn – Round 1: Write a kernel sentence about your hero's ordinary world.

Round 2: Add ONE detail. Use When? Where? Why? or How?

Round 3: Write two more kernel-expanded sentences about your hero's ordinary world.

1.

2.

SMART Goal Workshop

In class today, you will do three things in one workshop:

- 1 Choose your Hero's Journey story.** Lock in your title and hero.
- 2 Write three kernel-expanded sentences** about your hero's ordinary world – one detail at a time.
- 3 Set one SMART goal for this class.** Something you will hit by a specific date.

Use the workspace below during class:

MY HERO'S ORDINARY WORLD – 3 SENTENCES

1.

2.

3.

MY SMART GOAL FOR THIS CLASS

I will

by

because

Remember: a kernel is short and true. An expansion adds one detail – when, where, why, or how. Specific details make ninja sentences.

REFLECTION CARD – WEEK 2

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 1** Your hero's name and film/book title:

- 2** One thing you want to find out about their Hero's Journey by the end of the year:

- 3** Write one SMART goal for this class:

I will

by

because

4 Circle one thing you learned today:

- ☐ Ninjas set a target before they start moving.
- ☐ A SMART goal is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based.
- ☐ The Ordinary World is the hero's life before the adventure.
- ☐ A kernel-expanded sentence starts short, then adds one detail.

AT-HOME ASSIGNMENT – WEEK 2

At home this week, confirm your Hero's Journey story choice.

Talk with your parent or guardian about the story you picked. Make sure it is one you can watch or read again this month. Write the final title below:

Title:

Parent initials:

Return this page to class next week.

PARENT EMAIL – WEEK 2

(This is the same email your mentor will send home.)

Ninja Scholar – Week 2: SMART Goals + Kernel Set-Up

This week your student learned how to turn a vague wish into a SMART goal – one that is specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-based.

This week's at-home task: Confirm the Hero's Journey film or book your student chose. They will map this story all year. Please make sure the story is one your student can watch or read at home over the next month.

Examples of approved stories: *Star Wars, Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, Moana, The Lion King, The Hobbit, Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse, Percy Jackson & the Olympians*, or another family-friendly story you approve.

No other homework. We are building direction first.

Thank you for raising a ninja who aims before shooting.

– Ninja Scholar Mentor

Paradigms & Principles + BBS Intro

This Week at a Glance

Use this table like a dashboard. It tells you where we are going before we start the engine.

WEEK	3
HABIT	Paradigms & Principles (the foundation)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 1 – Because / But / So (first written BBS)
TEXT	A short clip selected by your mentor
CENTRAL QUESTION	How do ninjas see what other people miss?
TAKE-HOME	One BBS sentence about a paradigm shift

You chose a goal last week. Now you need two tools that separate civilians from ninjas: **paradigms** (the glasses you wear) and **BBS connectors** (because, but, so). Paradigms help you notice what is driving a person. Connectors show the relationship between ideas. Put them together and you can explain *why* a character did what they did, not just *what* they did.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 3

Every week in Ninja Scholar, we stop and practice one ninja trait. These traits are not costumes. They are habits: small choices you make over and over until they become part of who you are.

This week's trait: "Ninjas question what they believe before they believe what they think."

Everybody wears invisible glasses. The glasses color everything you see. Most people never take them off. Ninjas do.

Two kids get a zero on the same test.

- + Kid 1 thinks: *I'm bad at this. I'll never get it.*
- + Kid 2 thinks: *I don't get this yet. I need a different strategy.*

Same event. Different glasses. Different action. The first pair is a **fixed paradigm**. The second is a **growth paradigm**. Same world. Different results.

Your turn: Write down one thing you used to believe about yourself that turned out to be wrong.

I used to think

Now I think

The evidence that changed my mind:

The Ninja Connector Tool: Because / But / So

Last week you expanded sentences by adding detail. This week you connect ideas with one of three words.

CONNECTOR	WHAT IT SHOWS	EXAMPLE
Because	Reason or cause	<i>The room went silent because nobody wanted to be the one who moved.</i>
But	Conflict or surprise	<i>The colonel talked about control, but the hostess actually showed it.</i>
So	Result or effect	<i>The naturalist counted slowly out loud, so nobody dared get up from the table.</i>

Try it. Pick any sentence from today's clip or from class. Write it three ways, once with each connector. Notice how the meaning changes.

Original sentence:

BECAUSE:

BUT:

SO:

How to Spot a Paradigm Shift

A paradigm shift happens when someone swaps one pair of glasses for a new one. In stories, you can spot it by asking three questions:

- 1 What did this character believe at the start?
- 2 What evidence forced them to see it differently?
- 3 What did they do after the shift?

Those three answers fit neatly into a BBS sentence.

[Character] believed [X] BECAUSE [evidence from the start], BUT [new evidence] SO [what changed].

Your turn: Use the frame above to write one sentence about someone in today's clip.

Circle your connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

The Ninja Game: Flip the Glasses *(if your mentor runs it)*

Your mentor reads a setback out loud: a zero on a test, a missed team, or a friend who walked right past you. Then someone grabs the **Ninja Goggles**, the giant clown glasses.

- 1 One ninja puts on the goggles and reacts in the **fixed** voice: *"I'm just bad at this. Why try?"*
- 2 A second ninja **snatches the goggles**, puts them on, and replays the *same event* in the **growth** voice: *"I don't get this yet. I need a different strategy."*
- 3 Together, lock the shift into one BBS sentence: *"I thought I was bad at this, BUT I'd never tried a new plan, SO now I know I just don't get it yet."*

You only win the Ninja Eye if your flip changes what the person would DO next, not just how they feel. A pep talk is not a paradigm shift.

REFLECTION CARD — WEEK 3

Name: _____ Date: _____

- 1 Write one BBS sentence about a paradigm shift: yours, a classmate's, or one from today's clip.

Circle your connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

- 2 One thing from this week that made you see something differently:

- 3 Circle one thing you learned today:

- ☐ A paradigm is the glasses you wear; it colors what you see.
- ☐ A paradigm shift changes what you DO, not just how you feel.
- ☐ Because / But / So show reason, conflict, and result.
- ☐ Ninjas question what they believe before they believe what they think.

AT-HOME ASSIGNMENT – WEEK 3

At home this week, hunt for a paradigm shift outside of class.

Ask someone at home about a time they changed their mind about something important. Write their answer as one BBS sentence below.

Circle the connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

Return this page to class next week.

PARENT EMAIL – WEEK 3

(This is the same email your mentor will send home.)

Ninja Scholar – Week 3: Paradigms & Principles + BBS Intro

Today your ninja learned that everyone wears "invisible glasses" called paradigms, and that changing the glasses changes the outcome. We also introduced our first writing tool: because / but / so connectors.

At-home ask: Ask your ninja about a time they changed their mind about something. Can they say it in one sentence using "because," "but," or "so"?

Hero's Journey quest reminder: Week 13 midpoint check. Students should have chosen their story and started it by now.

– Ninja Scholar Mentor

Before Next Week: Make Your Ninja

Flip to the character sheet at the front of your binder and fill it in this week. Both pages: the stats and the drawing.

Your three stats: you get +2, +1, and 0, and you decide which goes where.

- + **WITS** – noticing, figuring out, catching what others miss
- + **NERVE** – going first, standing up, doing the scary thing
- + **VOICE** – saying it out loud so the room actually hears you

There is no wrong build. A +0 is not a weakness, it is just where your ninja is still growing.

Next week is your first campaign session, and you cannot play without a finished sheet.

Annotation Bookmark + Discussion Protocol

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	4
HABIT	– (implicit only)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 1 – BBS warm-up on a text sentence
TEXT	"The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner
CENTRAL QUESTION	How do ninjas leave marks on paper?
TAKE-HOME	Show someone your annotation bookmark and one mark you made

Last week you practiced the because / but / so connector. This week you do two ninja moves at once while you read: **annotate** (leave marks on the page) and **ask Discussion Questions** the ninja way. Civilians finish a story clean. Ninjas leave it covered in marks.

The short story for this week is "The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner. A colonial official and his wife are hosting a dinner party in India when something dangerous gets into the room. Nobody at that table reacts the way you would expect. The story is short, but every paragraph carries a choice, a surprise, or a reversal. Your job is to catch the moves the author makes.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY — WEEK 4

This week's trait: "Ninjas read with a pen in their hand."

Most people read the way they watch TV: they let the story wash over them. Ninjas talk back. They underline, circle, star, and question the page.

A pen in your hand turns reading from something that happens to you into something you do. When you mark the page, you are saying: *I noticed this. This mattered to me.*

Your turn: Before you read, write one thing you hope to notice in "The Dinner Party" today.

Today I want to watch for _____

The Annotation Bookmark

Use these four marks while you read. Keep your bookmark nearby all year.

MARK	WHAT IT MEANS	WHEN TO USE IT
Underline	This line surprised me or made me react.	A sentence you want to come back to
Circle	I don't know this word or this detail matters.	Unfamiliar words, names, or repeated images
Star	This is the most important moment so far.	A turning point, a choice, or a reveal

MARK	WHAT IT MEANS	WHEN TO USE IT
?	I have a question or I am confused.	Anything that makes you stop and wonder

Example marks for "The Dinner Party":

- ✦ Underline the sentence where the American sees the hostess's face change: "She is staring straight ahead, her muscles contracting slightly."
- ✦ Circle the word "veranda" if it is new to you.
- ✦ Star the moment you realise the hostess knew something the whole time.
- ✦ Put a question mark next to the colonel's claim that women always scream in a crisis.

Your turn: As your mentor reads the story aloud, make at least four marks. Quantity matters more than perfection today.

BBS Warm-Up: One Sentence from the Story

Your mentor will read this sentence aloud:

"The American did not join in the argument but watched the other guests."

The connector is **but**. Why? Because the sentence sets up tension: the American stayed silent, *but* he was paying attention. The word *but* signals that two things are happening at once.

Your turn: Choose another sentence from the story and say which connector fits.

Sentence from the story:

Connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

Why this connector fits:

The Discussion Protocol

Ninjas do not shout answers over each other. They use a protocol: a repeatable set of moves: so every voice gets heard.

STEP	WHAT YOU DO
Write	Everyone writes one question on an index card
Sort	Put questions in three piles: thin (one answer), thick (many answers), or ninja (starts a real discussion)
Draw	The mentor draws one name. That person picks a thick or ninja question
Facilitate	The person whose name was drawn reads the question and calls on three classmates to answer

Thick questions are better than thin questions. A thin question asks for a fact: "How many people were at the table?" A thick question asks for a judgment: "Who really showed control in the story, the colonel or the hostess?"

Your turn: Write one thin question and one thick question about "The Dinner Party."

Thin question (one answer):

Thick question (many answers):

The Story: "The Dinner Party"

by Mona Gardner – first published in The Saturday Review of Literature, January 31, 1941. Reprinted by permission.

The country is India. A colonial official and his wife are giving a large dinner party. They are seated with their guests – army officers, and government attachés with their wives, and a visiting American naturalist – in their spacious dining room. It has a bare marble floor, open rafters, and wide glass doors opening onto a veranda.

A spirited discussion springs up between a young girl who insists that women have outgrown the jumping-on-a-chair-at-the-sight-of-a-mouse era and a colonel who says that they haven't.

"A woman's unfailing reaction in any crisis," the colonel says, "is to scream. And while a man may feel like it, he has that ounce more of nerve control than a woman has. And that last ounce more is what counts."

The American does not join in the argument but watches the other guests. As he looks, he sees a strange expression come over the face of the hostess. She is staring straight ahead, her muscles contracting slightly. With a slight gesture, she summons the native boy standing behind her chair and whispers to him. The boy's eyes widen, and he quickly leaves the room.

Of the guests, none except the American notices this or sees the boy place a bowl of milk on the veranda just outside the open doors.

The American comes to with a start. In India, milk in a bowl means only one thing – bait for a snake. He realizes there must be a cobra in the room. He looks up at the rafters – the likeliest place – but they are bare. Three corners of the room are empty, and in the fourth the servants are waiting to serve the next course. There is only one place left – under the table.

His first impulse is to jump back and warn the others, but he knows the commotion would frighten the cobra into striking. He speaks quickly, the tone of his voice so arresting that it sobers everyone.

"I want to know just what control everyone at this table has. I will count to three hundred – that's five minutes – and not one of you is to move a muscle. Those who move will forfeit fifty rupees. Ready!"

The twenty people sit like stone images while he counts. He is saying "two hundred and eighty" when, out of the corner of his eye, he sees the cobra emerge and make for the bowl of milk. Screams ring out as he jumps to slam the veranda doors safely shut.

"You were right, Colonel!" the host exclaims. "A man has just shown us an example of perfect control."

"Just a minute," the American says, turning to his hostess. "Mrs. Wynnes, how did you know the cobra was in the room?"

A faint smile lights up the woman's face as she replies. "Because it was lying across my foot."

The Ninja Game: Three Stars

You get **exactly three Star tokens** for the whole read-aloud. A star marks "the most important moment so far." Once you spend a star, it's gone: and the story is not finished with you yet.

- 1 As your mentor reads, decide when to spend a star. Hold it for a bigger moment, or spend it now? You only get three.
- 2 Call "**Freeze!**" to stop the read and name your mark: *"Star: the hostess just froze her muscles, that's the turning point."*
- 3 If the room agrees it's a real move, everyone makes that mark on the page.

The moments that get the most stars become our discussion questions. **Spend your last star on the moment that matters most: that's the ninja move.**

REFLECTION CARD

Before you leave, complete three things:

- 1 **One BBS sentence about the story.**

Circle your connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

- 2 **One annotation that surprised you today.**

I marked

because

- 3 **At home:** Show your annotation bookmark to someone and explain one mark you made.

The Feast Page

Fill this in as you play. Earn your White belt.



Hero name

Ninja skin – look and class flavor

What I noticed at the feast

The shape I drew, and what it became

The danger we named, in one sentence

Speak Your Mind

WEEKS 5–8

Gear A tail • Phase 1 • From sentences on a page to questions that start fights.

4 UNITS

U1 • HERO'S JOURNEY

U2 • SPEAK YOUR MIND

U3 • CROSS THE LINE

U4 • THE LONG ROAD

UNIT 02 • OPENER

Dinner Party Discussion + Connector Upgrade

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	5
HABIT	– (implicit only)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 1 – Connector Upgrade (first evidence)
TEXT	"The Dinner Party" by Mona Gardner (revisited)
CENTRAL QUESTION	How do you turn a boring question into a ninja question?
TAKE-HOME	Explain the difference between an apprentice question and a ninja question

You annotated last week. Now comes the ninja move: the **Connector Upgrade**. A plain question asks for a fact. A connected question asks for a reason, a conflict, or a result.

You will write questions about "The Dinner Party," pass them to a partner, add a because / but / so connector, and expand them with evidence from the story.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 5

This week's trait: "Ninjas don't ask questions that have answers. They ask questions that start fights."

Not real fights. Thinking fights – the kind where everyone lands somewhere different and the room gets loud because people actually care.

An apprentice question has one answer. A ninja question has many answers, and the answers matter.

APPRENTICE QUESTION	WHY IT IS THIN
"What did the hostess do?"	One answer: she stayed calm.
"Who saw the cobra first?"	One answer: the American (and the hostess).
"Where did the story take place?"	One answer: India.

A ninja question adds a connector. The connector forces people to explain reasons, conflicts, and results.

NINJA QUESTION	WHY IT IS THICK
"The hostess stayed calm because she knew about the snake – but was that fair to the colonel?"	It asks for judgment, not just fact.
"The colonel was so sure he was right that he missed the truth – is confidence always a strength?"	It connects the story to a bigger idea.
"The story ends quietly because the real fight was already won – do quiet endings have more power?"	It asks about the author's choice.

Your turn: Change one apprentice question below into a ninja question.

Apprentice: Why did the American stay silent?

Ninja: _____

The Connector Upgrade Machine

Follow these four steps to upgrade any question.

- 1 Write a plain question** about the story.
- 2 Add a connector.** Pick because, but, or so.
- 3 Add evidence.** Point to something that already happened in the story.
- 4 Add a twist.** Turn the statement into a question that starts a discussion.

Example:

- 1 Plain question:** What did the hostess do?
- 2 Add connector:** The hostess stayed calm because...
- 3 Add evidence:** ...because she already knew the cobra was in the room.

- 4 Add twist: ...but was staying silent fair to the other guests?

Final ninja question: "The hostess stayed calm because she already knew about the cobra, but was staying silent fair to the other guests?"

Your turn: Run your own question through the machine.

Step 1 – Plain question:

Step 2 – Add connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

Step 3 – Evidence from the story:

Step 4 – Twist that starts a discussion:

Final ninja question:

Paraphrase Practice

A ninja does not just copy words from the story. A ninja puts the idea into new words. That is called **paraphrasing**.

Echoing (weak): "The book says the hostess summoned the boy." Paraphrasing (strong): "The hostess quietly called the servant over without drawing attention."

Your turn: Paraphrase one sentence from "The Dinner Party" in your own words.

Original sentence:

Your paraphrase:

The Ninja Game: Divide the Room

A real ninja question doesn't have one answer – it splits a room. Here's how we test yours.

- 1 Your table runs a question through the Connector Upgrade Machine and reads it out loud.
- 2 The whole room votes with their feet: **YES** on one side, **NO** on the other, **undecided** in the middle.
- 3 Your question's score is **how split the room is**. If everyone clumps on one side, it was an apprentice question – one answer. If the room splits and people start arguing, you built a ninja question.

The table whose question divides the room the most – and gets people talking – wins **Ninja Question of the Day**.

REFLECTION CARD

- 1 Write your table's ninja question with one connector and evidence from the text.
-

Circle your connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

2 Paraphrase one sentence from the story.

3 **At home:** Explain to someone what makes a question "ninja" instead of "apprentice."

PBA + Freewrite #1

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	6
HABIT	Personal Bank Account (Roots – explicit)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 1 – BBS warm-up with PBA vocabulary
TEXT	None (autobiographical; student is the text)
CENTRAL QUESTION	What is in your relationship bank account?
TAKE-HOME	Bring your freewrite notebook every week + read "The Gift of the Magi" (it's in your binder, Week 7 pages) before next class

You turned plain questions into ninja questions last week. This week the text is you. You will learn about the **Personal Bank Account** – every relationship has deposits and withdrawals – and you will begin your **freewrite binder**, where messy, honest thinking is allowed.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 6

This week's trait: "Ninjas make deposits before they need withdrawals."

You cannot ask someone to trust you if you have never kept a promise. You cannot ask for help if you have never helped. Every relationship – with parents, friends, siblings, even yourself – has a bank account. You are the banker.

Deposits build trust:

- + Keeping promises
- + Being kind when no one asked
- + Listening first
- + Apologizing when you mess up

Withdrawals drain trust:

- + Breaking promises
- + Gossip
- + Not listening
- + Telling secrets

Your turn: Name one small deposit and one small withdrawal you made this week.

One deposit I made:

One withdrawal I made:

The PBA Ledger

On your index card, make a ledger for this week. Be honest. The goal is not to look perfect; the goal is to see the pattern.

Deposits (this week):

1.

2.

3.

Withdrawals (this week):

1.

2.

3.

Big Rocks First

Imagine a jar. You have rocks, sand, and water.

- + **Rocks** = your most important relationships and responsibilities.
- + **Sand** = small tasks that fill the cracks.
- + **Water** = extra stuff that can wait.

If you put sand in first, the rocks do not fit. If you put the rocks in first, everything else finds a place. That is what "First Things First" means – but this week we are starting with the jar itself: your relationships.

Your turn: Name one "big rock" in your life this week – one person or responsibility that deserves space first.

My big rock this week:

Freewrite Ritual #1

This is your first freewrite. Here are the only rules:

- + **No grammar checks.**
- + **No spelling corrections.**
- + **No wrong answers.**

Your job is to get thoughts on paper, not to make them pretty.

Prompt: *My biggest rock this week.*

This does not mean "what did you do." It means what took up space in your head. Good or bad. The thing that mattered.

Start writing here and keep going for the full five minutes.

The Ninja Game: The Trust Account

Meet **Sam**. Sam has a bank account with his sister – but it isn't money. It's trust. We're going to watch it rise and fall across one week.

- 1 Your mentor reads one of Sam's actions at a time: *"Sam promised to help his sister study, then bailed to game."*
- 2 The room votes: **deposit or withdrawal – and how big?** A broken promise to your sister isn't the same size as one to a stranger. The balance meter moves.
- 3 Then the twist: **Sam needs to borrow his sister's bike.** Does his account have enough?

That's the whole secret of the Personal Bank Account: **you make deposits *before* you need a withdrawal.** Then open your own ledger below.

REFLECTION CARD

- 1 One BBS sentence about your PBA.

I made a deposit / withdrawal BECAUSE / BUT / SO

Circle your connector: BECAUSE BUT SO

- 2 A sentence about your freewrite experience.

One thing that surprised me while freewriting was

- 3 **Assignment reminder:** Bring this notebook to class every week. Lost notebook = you replace it in class.

Subordinating Conjunctions + Gift of the Magi Intro

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	7
HABIT	– (buffer week)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 2 – Subordinating Conjunction + BBS
TEXT	"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry – you read this at home last week
CENTRAL QUESTION	Can you commit to a sentence shape before you know how it ends?
TAKE-HOME	Keep your copy of "The Gift of the Magi" – it carries through Week 12

You've mastered Because / But / So. This week you add a new opening move: the **subordinating conjunction** – words like *Although*, *Because*, *After*, *While* – that start a sentence before the main idea arrives.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 7

This week's trait: "Ninjas commit to the shape before they know the ending."

A subordinating conjunction is a promise. The moment you write "Although," you've promised a contrast is coming. The moment you write "Because," you've promised a reason. You have to keep that promise by the end of the sentence.

Examples:

- + *Although* Della had almost no money, she found a way to give Jim a gift.
- + *Because* Della had only one dollar and eighty-seven cents, she needed a plan before Christmas morning.
- + *After* Della saw her reflection, she made her decision.

Your turn: Try finishing one of these starters out loud before we read.

Although

Because

The Story: "The Gift of the Magi"

We're reading this together today. Follow along, and underline any moment that surprises you – you'll need it for later weeks.

While you listen, watch for: What does Della give up? What does Jim give up? What do they get in return?

by O. Henry – first published December 10, 1905. Public domain. Paragraphs are numbered so you can cite them in later weeks' "should" questions.

- 1 One dollar and eighty-seven cents. That was all. And sixty cents of it was in pennies. Pennies saved one and two at a time by bulldozing the grocer and the vegetable man and the butcher until one's cheeks burned with the silent imputation of parsimony that such close dealing implied. Three times Della counted it. One dollar and eighty-seven cents. And the next day would be Christmas.
- 2 There was clearly nothing to do but flop down on the shabby little couch and howl. So Della did it. Which instigates the moral reflection that life is made up of sobs, sniffles, and smiles, with sniffles predominating.
- 3 While the mistress of the home is gradually subsiding from the first stage to the second, take a look at the home. A furnished flat at \$8 per week. It did not exactly beggar description, but it certainly had that word on the lookout for the mendicancy squad.
- 4 In the vestibule below was a letter-box into which no letter would go, and an electric button from which no mortal finger could coax a ring. Also appertaining thereunto was a card bearing the name "Mr. James Dillingham Young."
- 5 The "Dillingham" had been flung to the breeze during a former period of prosperity when its possessor was being paid \$30 per week. Now, when the income was shrunk to \$20, though, they were thinking seriously of contracting to a modest and unassuming D. But whenever Mr. James Dillingham Young came home and reached his flat above he was called "Jim" and greatly hugged by Mrs. James Dillingham Young, already introduced to you as Della. Which is all very good.
- 6 Della finished her cry and attended to her cheeks with the powder rag. She stood by the window and looked out dully at a gray cat walking a gray fence in a gray backyard. Tomorrow would be Christmas Day, and she had only \$1.87 with which to buy Jim a present. She had been saving every penny she could for months, with this result. Twenty dollars a week doesn't go far. Expenses had been greater than she had calculated. They always are. Only \$1.87 to buy a present for Jim. Her Jim. Many a happy hour she had spent planning for something nice for him. Something fine and rare and sterling—something just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.
- 7 There was a pier glass between the windows of the room. Perhaps you have seen a pier glass in an \$8 flat. A very thin and very agile person may, by observing his reflection in a rapid sequence of longitudinal strips, obtain a fairly accurate conception of his looks. Della, being slender, had mastered the art.
- 8 Suddenly she whirled from the window and stood before the glass. Her eyes were shining brilliantly, but her face had lost its color within twenty seconds. Rapidly she pulled down her hair and let it fall to its full length.
- 9 Now, there were two possessions of the James Dillingham Youngs in which they both took a mighty pride. One was Jim's gold watch that had been his father's and his grandfather's. The other was Della's hair. Had the queen of Sheba lived in the flat across the airshaft, Della would have let her hair hang out the window some day to dry just to depreciate Her Majesty's jewels and gifts. Had King Solomon been the janitor, with all his treasures piled up in the basement, Jim would have pulled out his watch every time he passed, just to see him pluck at his beard from envy.

- 10 So now Della's beautiful hair fell about her rippling and shining like a cascade of brown waters. It reached below her knee and made itself almost a garment for her. And then she did it up again nervously and quickly. Once she faltered for a minute and stood still while a tear or two splashed on the worn red carpet.
- 11 On went her old brown jacket; on went her old brown hat. With a whirl of skirts and with the brilliant sparkle still in her eyes, she fluttered out the door and down the stairs to the street.
- 12 Where she stopped the sign read: "Mme. Sofronie. Hair Goods of All Kinds." One flight up Della ran, and collected herself, panting. Madame, large, too white, chilly, hardly looked the "Sofronie."
- 13 "Will you buy my hair?" asked Della.
- 14 "I buy hair," said Madame. "Take yer hat off and let's have a sight at the looks of it."
- 15 Down rippled the brown cascade.
- 16 "Twenty dollars," said Madame, lifting the mass with a practised hand.
- 17 "Give it to me quick," said Della.
- 18 Oh, and the next two hours tripped by on rosy wings. Forget the hashed metaphor. She was ransacking the stores for Jim's present.
- 19 She found it at last. It surely had been made for Jim and no one else. There was no other like it in any of the stores, and she had turned all of them inside out. It was a platinum fob chain simple and chaste in design, properly proclaiming its value by substance alone and not by meretricious ornamentation—as all good things should do. It was even worthy of The Watch. As soon as she saw it she knew that it must be Jim's. It was like him. Quietness and value—the description applied to both. Twenty-one dollars they took from her for it, and she hurried home with the 87 cents. With that chain on his watch Jim might be properly anxious about the time in any company. Grand as the watch was, he sometimes looked at it on the sly on account of the old leather strap that he used in place of a chain.
- 20 When Della reached home her intoxication gave way a little to prudence and reason. She got out her curling irons and lighted the gas and went to work repairing the ravages made by generosity added to love. Which is always a tremendous task, dear friends—a mammoth task.
- 21 Within forty minutes her head was covered with tiny, close-lying curls that made her look wonderfully like a truant schoolboy. She looked at her reflection in the mirror long, carefully, and critically.
- 22 "If Jim doesn't kill me," she said to herself, "before he takes a second look at me, he'll say I look like a Coney Island chorus girl. But what could I do—oh! what could I do with a dollar and eighty-seven cents?"
- 23 At 7 o'clock the coffee was made and the frying-pan was on the back of the stove hot and ready to cook the chops.
- 24 Jim was never late. Della doubled the fob chain in her hand and sat on the corner of the table near the door that he always entered. Then she heard his step on the stair away down on the first flight, and she turned white for just a moment. She had a habit of saying a little silent prayer about the simplest everyday things, and now she whispered: "Please God, make him think I am still pretty."

- 25 The door opened and Jim stepped in and closed it. He looked thin and very serious. Poor fellow, he was only twenty-two—and to be burdened with a family! He needed a new overcoat and he was without gloves.
- 26 Jim stopped inside the door, as immovable as a setter at the scent of quail. His eyes were fixed upon Della, and there was an expression in them that she could not read, and it terrified her. It was not anger, nor surprise, nor disapproval, nor horror, nor any of the sentiments that she had been prepared for. He simply stared at her fixedly with that peculiar expression on his face.
- 27 Della wriggled off the table and went for him.
- 28 "Jim, darling," she cried, "don't look at me that way. I had my hair cut off and sold because I couldn't have lived through Christmas without giving you a present. It'll grow out again—you won't mind, will you? I just had to do it. My hair grows awfully fast. Say 'Merry Christmas!' Jim, and let's be happy. You don't know what a nice—what a beautiful, nice gift I've got for you."
- 29 "You've cut off your hair?" asked Jim, laboriously, as if he had not arrived at that patent fact yet even after the hardest mental labor.
- 30 "Cut it off and sold it," said Della. "Don't you like me just as well, anyhow? I'm me without my hair, ain't I?"
- 31 Jim looked about the room curiously.
- 32 "You say your hair is gone?" he said, with an air almost of idiocy.
- 33 "You needn't look for it," said Della. "It's sold, I tell you—sold and gone, too. It's Christmas Eve, boy. Be good to me, for it went for you. Maybe the hairs of my head were numbered," she went on with sudden serious sweetness, "but nobody could ever count my love for you. Shall I put the chops on, Jim?"
- 34 Out of his trance Jim seemed quickly to wake. He enfolded his Della. For ten seconds let us regard with discreet scrutiny some inconsequential object in the other direction. Eight dollars a week or a million a year—what is the difference? A mathematician or a wit would give you the wrong answer. The magi brought valuable gifts, but that was not among them. This dark assertion will be illuminated later on.
- 35 Jim drew a package from his overcoat pocket and threw it upon the table.
- 36 "Don't make any mistake, Dell," he said, "about me. I don't think there's anything in the way of a haircut or a shave or a shampoo that could make me like my girl any less. But if you'll unwrap that package you may see why you had me going a while at first."
- 37 White fingers and nimble tore at the string and paper. And then an ecstatic scream of joy; and then, alas! a quick feminine change to hysterical tears and wails, necessitating the immediate employment of all the comforting powers of the lord of the flat.
- 38 For there lay The Combs—the set of combs, side and back, that Della had worshipped long in a Broadway window. Beautiful combs, pure tortoise shell, with jewelled rims—just the shade to wear in the beautiful vanished hair. They were expensive combs, she knew, and her heart had simply craved and yearned over them without the least hope of possession. And now, they were hers, but the tresses that should have adorned the coveted adornments were gone.

- 39 But she hugged them to her bosom, and at length she was able to look up with dim eyes and a smile and say: "My hair grows so fast, Jim!"
- 40 And then Della leaped up like a little singed cat and cried, "Oh, oh!"
- 41 Jim had not yet seen his beautiful present. She held it out to him eagerly upon her open palm. The dull precious metal seemed to flash with a reflection of her bright and ardent spirit.
- 42 "Isn't it a dandy, Jim? I hunted all over town to find it. You'll have to look at the time a hundred times a day now. Give me your watch. I want to see how it looks on it."
- 43 Instead of obeying, Jim tumbled down on the couch and put his hands under the back of his head and smiled.
- 44 "Dell," said he, "let's put our Christmas presents away and keep 'em a while. They're too nice to use just at present. I sold the watch to get the money to buy your combs. And now suppose you put the chops on."
- 45 The magi, as you know, were wise men—wonderfully wise men—who brought gifts to the Babe in the manger. They invented the art of giving Christmas presents. Being wise, their gifts were no doubt wise ones, possibly bearing the privilege of exchange in case of duplication. And here I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children in a flat who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest. Of all who give and receive gifts, such as they are wisest. Everywhere they are wisest. They are the magi.

The Ninja Game: Draw the Opener

You don't get to pick your sentence's opener today – you **draw it blind**.

- 1 Reach into the bag and pull one **opener card**: Although, Because, After, While, Since, Even though, Before, or When.
- 2 Build ONE complete sentence about Della or Jim that starts with exactly that word. No swapping for an easier one.
- 3 When your sentence is finished – a real sentence, not just words stuck together – read it out loud and step into the **"Built It" zone**.

The trick: your sentence isn't finished just because it starts right. It has to actually connect. "Although Della sold her hair. She got money." doesn't count – that's two sentences wearing a costume. Squish it into one: "Although Della sold her hair, she got enough money for Jim's gift."

My opener:

My sentence:

REFLECTION CARD

- 1 Your Draw the Opener sentence, final version after any fixes.

-
-
- 2 One prediction:** What do you think Della and Jim's gifts will turn out to be?

I predict

- 3 Reminder:** Bring "The Gift of the Magi" back next week – we're not done with Della and Jim yet.

Annotation + Should-Questions

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	8
HABIT	– (implicit only)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 2 – continued
TEXT	"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry
CENTRAL QUESTION	Was Della and Jim's choice actually the right one?
TAKE-HOME	The class debate question – the whole class argues this one in Week 10

Last week you read the story. This week you judge it. Not "what happened" – **was it right?**

Warm-Up

Board stem: "**Jim looked at Della strangely...**"

Finish it **three ways** – once with *because*, once with *but*, once with *so*. The story never tells you what Jim was thinking, which is exactly why all three can work.

because

but

so

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 8

This week's trait: "Ninjas don't just notice a choice – they judge it."

A "did" question has one answer. *Did Della sell her hair?* Yes. Done. Boring.

A **should question** has no easy answer. *Should Della have sold her hair?* Now we can argue.

The format:

Should [character] have [action]?

Your turn: Try one right now about anything from the story.

Should _____ have _____?

The RPG Session: Meeting with Mochi

This week you finally meet Mochi at the table. He has been in this room since Week One and he has already done everything you are about to do. He answers one question, and only if the whole party earns it. Your job: find two real choices in the story, turn them into should-questions, and vote on the one worth asking. Fill in your ledger as you go.



Mochi's Ledger

Fill this in as you play. Earn your Yellow belt.



Choice #1 I found – what the character gave / what they got

Choice #2 I found – gave / got

My first should-question – Should _____ have _____ ?

My second should-question – Should _____ have _____ ?

The question our party voted to ask Mochi

The step I'm most like right now, and why

Fallback Game: Gallery of Choices

(Your mentor may run this instead of the RPG session. Same job: find choices, build should-questions, vote on the best one.)

Around the room are posters of Della and Jim's biggest choices. Walk through with a partner.

At each station:

- 1 Place ONE dot: **Heart** (this moved me), **Star** (this is the turning point), or ? (I'm not sure this was right).
- 2 Write a one-line should-question stub on a sticky note. Stick it next to your dot.

At the last station: your table reads every stub aloud and votes – **stand up if you think the character should have done it**. A loud, close split means you found a real should question. Everyone standing the same way means it's too easy, so fix it.

Then your table picks ONE to nominate, and the whole class votes on the nominees. Only one question survives, and every binder gets it.

Station 1 should-question:

Station 2 should-question:

Our table's nominee:



REFLECTION CARD

- 1 THE class debate question** – the one that won the vote. Copy it exactly; you argue it in Week 10.

-
- 2 Which side would YOU argue, and why?**

I would argue _____ because _____

- 3 One annotation you're proud of from today's gallery walk.**
-

Cross the Line

WEEKS 9–12

Gear B • Phase 2 • From noticing a choice to standing on one.

4 UNITS

U1 • HERO'S JOURNEY

U2 • SPEAK YOUR MIND

U3 • CROSS THE LINE

U4 • THE LONG ROAD

UNIT 03 • OPENER

Habit 1: Be Proactive + Debate Prep

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	9
HABIT	Be Proactive (explicit)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 2 – proactive language + located evidence
TEXT	"The Gift of the Magi" by O. Henry
CENTRAL QUESTION	Are you choosing your words, or are your words choosing you?
TAKE-HOME	The debate rules sheet (read it with a parent tonight) + your 21-Day Mission tracker

Next week you debate. Today you learn the one habit that makes you impossible to beat in an argument: **choosing your words before your words choose you.**

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 9

This week's trait: "Ninjas say 'I choose,' never 'I have to.'"

Reactive people let circumstances drive. Proactive people keep their hands on the wheel.

REACTIVE	PROACTIVE
"I have to"	"I choose to"
"They make me so mad"	"I control my response"
"If only..."	"I will..."

A real story: W. Mitchell was burned over 65% of his body. Four years later, he was paralyzed in a plane crash. His words: *"Before, there were 10,000 things I could do. Now there are 9,000. I choose to focus on the 9,000 that are left."*

Warm-Up: Flip Della

On the board:

"Della had to sell her hair; there was nothing else she could do."

Rewrite it so Della is the one deciding. Use the frame.

Della chose to

because

The Two Circles

Some things you can do something about. Most things you can't. Habit 1 says: spend your energy inside the circle where you can actually act.

- + **Circle of Concern** = everything you worry about. Weather, prices, what other people decide.
- + **Circle of Influence** = the smaller circle inside it. Everything you can actually do something about.

Sort these three facts from the story. Circle **C** for Concern or **I** for Influence.

C / I Jim's pay dropped from \$30 to \$20 a week

C / I Expenses had been greater than Della calculated

C / I What to give Jim for Christmas

Della's \$1.87 problem sat in her Circle of Concern until she found the one thing she actually controlled. Then she acted.

The Ninja Game: The Proactive Crossing

There's a line taped down the middle of the room. **REACTIVE** on one side, **PROACTIVE** on the other. Everyone starts on Reactive.

Your mentor reads a complaint. To cross to Proactive, you have to say the flipped version OUT LOUD first.

"My sister makes me so mad." → **"I choose how I respond when my sister bugs me."**

No flip, no crossing.

The trick: flipping the FEELING doesn't count. "I guess it's fine" is not a flip, it's a shrug. A real flip changes what you'll DO.

Reactive line I heard:

My proactive flip:

Last round, debate edition: "We have to argue this side." → "We choose to argue this side, and here's why."

My proactive debate sentence:

Debate Prep

My team: Team A / Team B / Jury (*circle one – your mentor assigned it, and no, you can't trade*)

Our question (copy it from Week 8):

IF YOU DREW THE SIDE YOU DISAGREE WITH

Good. Arguing a position you don't hold is a ninja skill. You are not lying, you are proving you understand the other side well enough to carry it.

My team's 3 supporting ideas. Proactive language only: say what a character **chose**, not what happened to them. Every idea needs evidence from the book and where you found it.

1. Idea:

Evidence:

Found on page / paragraph:

2. Idea:

Evidence:

Found on page / paragraph:

3. Idea:

Evidence:

Found on page / paragraph:

Jury only – your two scoring criteria. They have to be checkable. "It was good" is not checkable. "The evidence came from the story" is. You'll read these aloud next week and serve as foreperson.

Criterion 1:

Criterion 2:

REFLECTION CARD

1 My role and one proactive supporting idea.

2 21-Day Mission: write today's date as Day 1.

Day 1:

3 The rules sheet is going home in your binder. Read it with a parent tonight. Know two things by next week: how long each speaking slot is, and what happens when the timer sounds.

4 Next week: the full debate. The timer is the law. Bring your A-game, ninja.

Debate Day

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	10
HABIT	Habit 1, Be Proactive (carries forward, now under pressure)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 2 – your evidence, out loud
TEXT	Your class's should question from Week 8
CENTRAL QUESTION	Can you argue the idea, not the person?
TAKE-HOME	Nothing to turn in. Just your voice.

Two weeks of prep. One should question. Today you find out who can argue it better.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 10

This week's trait: "Ninjas argue the idea, not the person."

Courtroom Walk-In: before we start, say it with the room. *"I choose. I don't have to."*

Today the timer is the law. It will cut somebody off mid-word, and it will be fair about it, because it does that to everyone.

Warm-Up

If you're on a team, finish this sentence with a because / but / so connector:

Our team will win because...

If you're on the jury, finish this one instead:

The strongest argument will be...

The Ninja Game: The Verdict

Today's whole class IS the game. Here is how it runs, no exceptions.

SEGMENT	TIME
Opening, Team A	1:00

SEGMENT	TIME
Opening, Team B	1:00
Three ideas per team, alternating	1:30 each
Rebuttal, Team A	2:00
Rebuttal, Team B	2:00
Closing, Team A	1:00
Closing, Team B	1:00
Jury deliberates, out loud, in front of you	3:00
Debrief	4:00

The jury scores two things, and only two (the jury wrote these last week):

- 1 Was the idea **proactive-framed**? Did it say what a character *chose*?
- 2 Was the **evidence from the book**?

Nobody is grading who was loudest. The located evidence wins.

My Debate Notes

My role: Team A / Team B / Jury (*circle one*)

Our question:

My idea and my evidence (copy them off your Week 9 prep sheet, and if you freeze up there, read this line word for word. That is what it is for.)

My supporting idea:

My evidence from the text:

Found on page / paragraph:

Jury Ballot

Jurors only. Mark each team against the two criteria you wrote last week, then the foreperson leads deliberation out loud, criterion by criterion.

- ☐ **Team A:** ideas were proactive-framed
- ☐ **Team A:** evidence came from the book
- ☐ **Team B:** ideas were proactive-framed

- ☐ **Team B:** evidence came from the book

Our verdict, and the one argument that decided it:

The Verdict (everyone writes this)

The question:

The verdict:

The winning argument:

CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENT #5

Take part in the class debate. **Done today.** Go check the box on your Goals Sheet.

REFLECTION CARD

1 One thing YOU did well today (speaker, juror, or teammate).

2 One thing you'd do differently next time.

3 Did you use proactive language? Give one example.

You just did something most adults are scared to do. You argued in front of a room and survived.
That's a ninja move.

Thesis Workshop

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	11
HABIT	– (last week's courtroom rule carries)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 2.5 – a claim, and three reasons you can show
TEXT	Your pick: a Magi claim, your Hero's Journey quest, or an arguable favorite
CENTRAL QUESTION	Do your three reasons actually stand on their own three legs?
TAKE-HOME	Your strongest thesis. Bring your binder next week: binder check.

You argued out loud last week. Today you learn to argue in ONE sentence, the sentence every persuasive paragraph is built on.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 11

This week's trait: "Ninjas state their claim before they defend it."

No more wandering into an argument. You announce where you stand, then you back it up.

The courtroom rule: "I think it's true" is not proof. A judge throws that out. You need REASONS, and they have to be reasons you can *show*.

The thesis frame. Memorize this shape:

[X] is the best [Y] because [R1], [R2], [R3].

Three reasons. Not one. Not five. **Three.**

Warm-Up

Board kernel: **"The chain was perfect."**

Expand it with **because / but / so**.

Opinions Are Not Evidence

Here is a thesis that works:

"The Gift of the Magi is the best Christmas story because the sacrifices are mutual, the ending is a true surprise, and the narrator says the 'unwise' couple were the wisest givers."

You could go find that last one in the story and point at it. That is what makes it a reason.

Here is one that does not work:

"Magi is the best because I like it."

One reason, and the reason is a feeling. You cannot point at "I like it."

The three checks (your inspector will use these on you):

- 1 Is X claimed as **best, most, or should**, so somebody could argue the other side?
- 2 Are there **three** reasons?
- 3 Is each reason **showable**, not a feeling?

Pick Your Topic

Choose one. Sixty seconds, then commit.

- + (a) A Magi claim. Last week's debate question counts.
- + (b) Your Hero's Journey quest film or book.
- + (c) Any arguable favorite: best season, best book, best dessert.

My topic:

Draft 2 or 3 Theses

Different X, or different reasons, each time. The repetition is the rep.

1.

2.

3.

Circle your strongest one. That is the one you build.

The Ninja Game: The Three-Leg Build

You get 3 cups, one per reason. Write a reason on each. But before you can stack a cup, an **inspector** (a classmate) has to hear it and check: is this reason actually DIFFERENT from your others, or is it the same idea wearing a new shirt?

If it passes, stack it. If it's a twin of a reason you already have, that cup goes back.

The proof is in the stack. Three truly different reasons make a tower that stands. Two reasons that are really one make a stack that wobbles.

Reason 1:

Reason 2:

Reason 3:

INSPECTORS

You are checking boxes, not fixing sentences. Checkmark or cross, nothing else. Their thesis stays in their handwriting.

REFLECTION CARD

1 Your strongest thesis, written out in full after inspection.

2 Did all 3 cups make it into your stack? If not, what happened to the rejected one?

3 21-Day Mission: Day 15 check. One week left. Still on track?

This sentence is the seed. Everything you write in a persuasive paragraph this year grows out of it.

Habit 2: Begin with the End in Mind

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	12
HABIT	Begin with the End in Mind (explicit)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 2.5 – the "so" connector, doing predictive work
TEXT	Closes the Gift of the Magi arc
CENTRAL QUESTION	Where are you walking to, and why?
TAKE-HOME	Freewrite #2 + your copy of "The Three Questions" (read it all before next week). Quest paragraph due next week.

Della and Jim's plan failed completely. So why did they still win? Today you find out, and then you decide your own ending before it happens.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 12

This week's trait: "Ninjas decide the destination before they start driving."

Habit 1 taught you that you're the driver, not the passenger. Habit 2 asks the bigger question: now that you're driving, where are you going?

Pick your destination first. Then stay flexible about the route.

The Gift of the Magi payoff:

DELLA AND JIM'S PLAN

Buy the perfect watch chain, the perfect combs

Failed. The chain doesn't fit a watch that's been sold.

DELLA AND JIM'S VISION

Show how much they loved each other

Succeeded completely.

Their plan failed. Their vision didn't. That's the whole habit in one story: begin with the right END, not the right OBJECT, and even a "failed" plan can be a total win.

Warm-Up: The Gap

Board stem: "Jim sold his watch so..."

Finish it **twice**. Once with what Jim *meant* to happen. Once with what *actually* happened.

What Jim INTENDED:

What actually RESULTED:

The space between those two answers is today's habit.

The RPG Session: Crossing the Threshold

The gate is open. It opens once, it does not negotiate, and it has one rule: **whatever you say is on the other side, is.** Say there's a bridge, there's a bridge. Say there's a dragon and you have brought a dragon into all our lives.

Before it opens, it wants to see your pack. Empty your binder at the threshold and show what you're carrying.



The Gate Page

Fill this in as you play. Earn your Orange belt.



What's in my pack – how many freewrites, and what else I'm carrying

The shape I drew, and what it turned out to be out there

What's beyond the gate – my "so" sentence

My mission-frame sentence – I am the kind of person who..., so...

Our crossing roll, and where I came out

If the roll goes badly and you come out alone somewhere else, that's not a loss. You get to tell the party what you see there, and nobody else gets that.

Fallback Game: The Long Walk

(Your mentor may run this instead of the RPG session. Same job: get to the end of the road before you write about it.)

There's a taped line across the room: NOW → 10 YEARS → 30 YEARS → 80TH BIRTHDAY.

Your mentor reads a setup sentence about a character. Walk to the point on the line where you think the outcome lands, then say your "so" sentence out loud, explaining why you stopped there.

The trick: "So she was sad" doesn't count. That's just restating what already happened. A real prediction reaches FORWARD. What happens years later?

Then walk all the way to your own **80th birthday marker**. Stand there for a moment. That's where Freewrite #2 begins.

Freewrite Ritual #2

Same rules as always: no grammar checks, no spelling corrections, no wrong answers. Five minutes on the timer, and the pen does not stop. If you get stuck, write "I'm stuck at my 80th birthday" until you aren't.

Prompt: *At my 80th birthday party, the person giving the speech about me says...*



This one is yours. Nobody reads it unless you offer it.

The Prediction Sentence

Now put the "so" connector to work on a story. **Either one of these counts:**

Mode A – looking sideways at a story you've finished. Change one thing and follow it:

"If Della had kept her hair, **so**..."

Mode B – looking forward at your quest book or film, if you haven't finished it yet:

"My hero keeps ignoring his mentor, **so** I predict the ending will cost him something he loves."

Then one more, about you. This is the mission frame:

I am the kind of person who _____ ,

so

REFLECTION CARD

1 Your prediction sentence: setup + SO + what you predict.

2 How many freewrites are in your binder right now? (Two is the floor, not the goal.)

3 Read "The Three Questions" at home this week. All of it. Your mentor handed you a copy today.

Next week we only re-read three paragraphs in class, so if you skip the reading you'll be lost for the whole session.

4 Next week: your Hero's Journey quest paragraph goes on the board. Is it ready?

You just did what Della and Jim did. You decided what you're aiming for before the story was over.

The Long Road

WEEKS 13–16

Gear C • Phase 3 • From one good sentence to a paragraph that holds.

4 UNITS

U1 • HERO'S JOURNEY

U2 • SPEAK YOUR MIND

U3 • CROSS THE LINE

U4 • THE LONG ROAD

• OPENER

The Hero's Journey Showcase — Your Prep Page

You've been playing the Hero's Journey since Week 1. Your ninja is somewhere on that road right now. Now you show us you can spot the same road in the story you picked back in Week 2.

Ninety seconds. Three beats. Make us see it.

(Half the class presents in Week 13, half in Week 14. Your mentor will tell you which.)

Beat 1 – My story, in one sentence.

My journey is

Beat 2 – Three stages, shown. Name the stage, then the moment in the story that IS that stage. Not all ten. Three.

Ordinary World – the moment:

A middle stage (name it) – the moment:

The Ordeal or the Return – the moment:

Beat 3 – The closer. This is the one that matters. Say it about yourself, out loud, in front of everyone.

The step I'm most like right now is _____ ,

because

You're being scored on four things, and none of them is being smart about books.

- ☐ **Heard** – the back of the room heard every word
- ☐ **Faced us** – eyes on the room, not the floor, not your paper
- ☐ **Three stages** – you named three and tied each to a real moment
- ☐ **On time** – you landed inside 90 seconds

Afterward, one classmate says one thing you did well. That's it. Nobody corrects you in front of the room. That's not how we do it here.

IF YOU FREEZE

Your three beats are right there in your own handwriting. Read beat one off the page. Nobody has ever lost a Showcase for reading their own note.

Appositives + "The Three Questions"

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	13
HABIT	– (Gear C launch)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 3 – the appositive "noun upgrade"
TEXT	"The Three Questions" by Leo Tolstoy
CENTRAL QUESTION	Can two commas turn a noun into a character?
TAKE-HOME	Re-read the story. Mark the hermit's three answers + one surprising thing the king does.

You've spent twelve weeks building sentences: connectors, transitions, questions that start fights. This week you add a tool that works *inside* a single noun: the **appositive**. Two commas, one phrase, and a plain noun starts telling the reader who someone really is.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 13

This week's trait: "Ninjas pack a whole character into two commas."

A noun tells you *what* someone is. *The king. The hermit.* An appositive, a phrase tucked between two commas, tells you *who* they are.

The king, **a man who thought a reward could buy wisdom**, asked the hermit.

Same noun. Now you know him.

The rule: the phrase has to ADD something. "The king, a male royal" wastes the commas, because you already knew that. "The king, a man who doubted his own wisdom" earns them.

Your turn. Upgrade your own name. The shape is *I, (your comma-phrase), am a ninja.*

I, _____, am a ninja.

The Appositive Upgrade

Four steps. That's the whole tool.

- 1 Start with a noun, usually a character.
- 2 Add a comma.
- 3 Add a phrase that reveals something new about them.
- 4 Add a comma, then finish the sentence.

NOUN ALONE	UPGRADED WITH AN APPOSITIVE
The hermit	The hermit, a frail old man who never left his wood , kept digging.
The king	The king, a man so proud he thought a reward could buy wisdom , dismounted alone.
The wounded man	The wounded man, an enemy who came to kill the king , begged for mercy instead.

The Ninja Game: The Upgrade Hunt

You already read "The Three Questions" at home, so today your mentor re-reads just three paragraphs: the king's proclamation, the hermit digging, and the king's failed questions.

While they read, **underline one noun per paragraph**. Three underlines, that's all. Pick the noun hiding the most character. Don't underline everything.

The trick: a good target is a noun where the description would surprise the reader. "The king" is a target. "The horse" usually isn't, unless that horse is hiding something.

Paragraph 1 – my underlined noun:

Paragraph 2 – my underlined noun:

Paragraph 3 – my underlined noun:

Your Two Sentences

Pick two of your three underlined nouns. Give each one a comma-phrase that makes the reader know them better.

1.

2.

Your mentor is checking three things and nothing else: **two commas? does it rename the noun? does it add something new?** Not spelling. Not handwriting.

REFLECTION CARD

1 Your best appositive-upgrade sentence (copy it from above).

2 The Showcase. Circle one: **Presented today / Presenting Week 14**

3 At home: Re-read "The Three Questions" aloud. Mark (1) the hermit's three answers, the exact sentences, and (2) one place where the king does something surprising.

Novel ballot: you got a strip today with five titles. It stays on the table, face-down. We vote in Week 16.

SPO Debut

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	14
HABIT	– (implicit)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 3 → 4 – the Single Paragraph Outline
TEXT	"The Three Questions" by Leo Tolstoy
CENTRAL QUESTION	Can three sentences carry one whole idea?
TAKE-HOME	Re-read the story. Circle every "now" and "most important" the hermit says.

Last week you upgraded nouns with commas. This week you build your first real **paragraph**, and it has a shape. Three sentences, one architecture. The middle sentence is the only one you don't write yourself: it belongs to the story.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 14

This week's trait: "Ninjas frame the story's words with their own."

A paragraph isn't a pile of sentences. It's a build: **solid, dotted, solid**.

- ✦ **Solid (Scene)** – your voice, setting up the moment.
- ✦ **Dotted (Prove it)** – the story's voice, a quote you copy exactly.
- ✦ **Solid (Own words)** – your voice again, saying what the quote proves.

The dotted line is the only part you borrow. The two solid lines are you, holding the evidence up and telling the reader why it matters.

Warm-Up: Keep the Appositive Alive

Your mentor put one of last week's sentences on the board, with somebody's name in it. Find the appositive, then write one about yourself.

I, a person who _____, _____

The Showcase — Group B

If you didn't present in Week 13, **today is your day**. Ninety seconds, three beats, and the closer about which step you're most like right now.

Your prep page is at the front of this unit. It's already in your handwriting. If you freeze, read beat one straight off it.

When Group B finishes, every ninja on the roster has stood up and presented. That's the milestone, done.

The Ninja Game: The Dice Game

Your table rolls for evidence. Here's how:

- 1 **Roll the die.** Match the number to a category below.
- 2 **Find one sentence** in "The Three Questions" that fits.
- 3 **Explain it** to your table. If they agree it fits, it counts.

ROLL	HUNT FOR...
1	A place the king shows patience
2	A place the king shows impatience
3	Something the hermit does instead of answering
4	A sentence about helping someone
5	A sentence about revenge
6	Free choice – any sentence about "the most important"

Three rolls, no repeats. Speed beats perfection. Then pick your best sentence and drop it into the dotted line of your group's SPO.

Sentence 1:

Sentence 2:

Sentence 3:

The SPO: Solid / Dotted / Solid

Here's the model, built about the king:

SOLID (SCENE)

The king came to the hermit because he wanted answers to his three questions.

Dotted (Prove it): "I have come to you, wise hermit, to ask you to answer three questions."

Solid (Own words): The king believed that knowing the right time, the right people, and the right task would keep him from ever failing.

See the shape? You write the first and third. The story writes the middle.

Your group's turn. Pick one character – king, hermit, or wounded man. Build one SPO using a sentence your table found in the dice game.

Our character:

Solid (Scene):

Dotted (Prove it) – copy it exactly, with the quote marks:

Solid (Own words):

Everyone's name goes on it. This one is the table's, not one person's.

Our names:

REFLECTION CARD

1 Read your paragraph backward, starting with the own-words sentence. Does it still make sense?

2 Which part was hardest to write – the scene, the quote, or the explanation?

3 At home: Re-read "The Three Questions" one last time. Circle every "now" and "most important" the hermit says. Write the total at the top of your copy.

Next week you build one of these alone.

Habit 3: First Things First

This Week at a Glance

WEEK	15
HABIT	Put First Things First (Habit 3, explicit)
WRITING FOCUS	Phase 4 – your first solo SPO
TEXT	"The Three Questions" by Leo Tolstoy
CENTRAL QUESTION	What goes in the jar first?
TAKE-HOME	Mark one place in your quest story where a character puts first things first

Last week your table built a paragraph together. This week you build one alone. And you learn the habit that decides whether anything gets built at all: **putting first things first**.

LEARN THE NINJA WAY – WEEK 15

This week's trait: "Ninjas put the rocks in before the sand."

Picture a jar. You have rocks, pebbles, and sand. Pour the sand in first and the rocks won't fit. Put the rocks in first and the sand pours into every gap. Everything fits, but only in that order.

The rocks are what matters most: your family, your practice, the promise you made. The sand is everything else. Same 24 hours. The order is the whole difference.

The hermit already knew this. When the king demanded the three most important answers, the hermit handed him a spade. The most important time is **now**. The most important person is the one in front of you. The most important thing is to do them good.

Warm-Up

Board sentence: "**The king, a man who wanted answers, came to the hermit.**"

Add an appositive to *the hermit*. Then add a second sentence that starts with a transitional phrase.

The Big Rock in Your Paragraph

Your SPO has a big rock too: the one sentence carrying the most weight. Usually it's the **own-words** line, where you say what the quote proves.

Here's a model. Watch the third sentence.

SOLID

The hermit never answered the king's questions directly.

Dotted: "Here comes some one running," said the hermit.

Solid: The hermit, **a man who believed action teaches more than words**, showed the king that NOW mattered more than answers.

That appositive in the third sentence, *a man who believed action teaches more than words*, is the big rock. It renames the hermit AND delivers the lesson. The other two sentences are the jar holding it.

The RPG Session: Challenges and Trials

Three trials today, and Tolstoy already wrote all three of them: the right time to act, the person you most need, and the most important thing to do. Mochi ran this gauntlet and did badly at all three, and he's still here, so relax.

But everything you do, somebody else has to describe out loud afterward. So maybe do it well.



The Gauntlet Page

Fill this in as you play. Earn your Green belt.



Trial of Timing – the shape I drew, and what arrived at exactly the wrong moment

Trial of Company – who the party decided I most needed with me

The Deed – what I actually did, in my own account

Our roll, and how the deed is remembered

My witness said I did this well

Signed by my companion

If the roll comes out low, your deed is remembered too small, and a companion has to stand up and say what it actually took. That's not a punishment. That's a friend correcting the record in your favor.

Your SPO — The Deed

Write ONE complete SPO about any character in "The Three Questions." This is your account of the third trial.

Solid (Scene) – set up one moment from the story:

Dotted (Prove it) – one quote, exactly, with quote marks:

Solid (Own words) – what the quote shows, WITH an appositive naming the character:

Before you call it done, point at your big rock.

My big rock is the sentence that says:



Witnessing: Positive-Only Peer Review

Swap papers with one partner. Your job is to find one thing that worked, and say it specifically.

- + **Sand:** "Good job." (*Tells them nothing.*)
- + **Rock:** "I like how you used the king's own words as evidence, because it made your point feel true."

Write it on the slip, staple it to your partner's SPO, hand it back. **No corrections. No "next time." Only what worked.**

I like how you

because

REFLECTION CARD

1 The compliment a classmate gave you today. Write it down, because you'll want it later.

2 Which was harder: writing the paragraph, or saying something kind about someone else's?

3 At home: In your Hero's Journey quest story, mark one place where a character puts first things first, or fails to. Be ready to describe it next class.

The Mission: did you finish? If yes, you kept a promise to yourself, and that's Habit 3 in action. If you extended, the finish line is the same. Keep going, ninja.

*End of the **W1-15 build** – the W7-15 consolidation run is complete. Units 1-3 complete; Unit 4 is three-quarters built (W13-15 in, W16 remaining). Weeks 16-30 consolidate in later passes. RPG sessions live: W4 (The Feast), W8 (Meeting with Mochi), W12 (The Gate), W15 (The Gauntlet). The HJ Showcase is complete across W13 + W14.*