

# SIX TRAIT WRITING GUIDE

## Lighthouse Christmas

by Toni Buzzeo; illustrated by Nancy Carpenter  
Dial Books for Young Readers, 2011

### **IDEAS: Family Stories**

If Frances and Peter were visiting your classroom and you asked them to tell you about the most memorable events in their family, they would surely tell about the Christmas that the Flying Santa visited. Invite students to discuss with their families which memorable event they would like to write about. Scribe the first drafts of stories younger students bring to share. Invite older students to write down the first drafts of their own stories.

### **IDEAS: Details that Sing**

Ask students to return to their families to gather as many details as possible to enhance their stories. Help them to see where details will enliven their narration and guide them in the kinds of questions they might ask to elicit them. What was Aunt Lulu wearing? What color was the Jello salad that landed on the white carpet? What tune did Grandpa play on his flute? What was the state of Oma's hat after Fred sat on it? Then, invite students to revise their stories by adding these details.

### **ORGANIZATION: A Pattern of Three with a Twist**

Lighthouse Christmas is a chronological narrative in which the events follow the normal order of time. However, it also uses a modified Pattern of Three. Review the traditional pattern of three in which the character 1) tries and fails, 2) tries and fails, and 3) tries and succeeds. (Note: The Three Little Pigs is a good example that students will be familiar with.) Ask students to discuss how Lighthouse Christmas fits that pattern. Then ask them to discuss the surprise twist on that pattern at the end of the story.

[STORY PATTERN ANALYSIS: Peter tries to figure out HOW Christmas will be celebrated at

his new home on the island. 1) He begins by planning Christmas, drawing and coloring the things that make the holiday special. But Frances tells him there will be no cookies, no songs by the piano, and possibly no presents. 2) Then, Papa offers to send the children to Aunt Martha's where they will have those traditional Christmas treats, and they plan to go. However, after the storm blows in and Mr. Dunlap is saved, Frances changes her mind. 3) Finally, the children decide that even without their traditional celebrations, they can craft a Christmas of their own, and they successfully do so. Most Pattern of Three stories would end there. But in Lighthouse Christmas, there is the final twist—the Flying Santa visit--that gives the children much of what Peter has wanted all along.]

### **VOICE: Whose Point of View?**

Author Toni Buzzeo uses a limited third person narration to tell the story, and students will quickly realize that the point of view is Frances's, as we are often aware of her thoughts. Challenge children to rewrite, or retell, portions of the story from Peter's point of view. How does that change the "voice" of the story?

### **SENTENCE FLUENCY: How Many Words Does It Take?**

Much of the dialogue in Lighthouse Christmas is spoken by two children--Frances and Peter. As a result, many of the sentences are brief. Send students on a hunt for short sentences spoken by the two children. For example, the first line of dialogue is spoken by Peter, and it contains five words: "How many days 'til Christmas?" Frances answers with four words: "One less than yesterday." Peter responds with only one: "Two?"

### **WORD CHOICE: Lively Verbs**

While adjectives can add more specificity to description, lively verbs do important work too. In fact, many authors prefer to use strong verbs in their writing. Send students on a hunt for verbs that are strong and interesting. On the first page, for instance:

- Morning light **drifted** down . . .
- . . .waved the broom to **scoot** him aside

Challenge students to think of the weaker verbs that Toni Buzzeo may have used in her first draft. For instance:

- Morning light **came** down . . .
- . . . waved the broom to **move** him aside

Then discuss which they prefer.

**CONVENTIONS: When You Have Something to Say**

Begin by asking your students what the most common form of punctuation is in *Lighthouse Christmas*, and they'll surely correctly respond that it is the period. But will they know that quotation marks are the second most common form of punctuation in the book? Provide them with the following text from the story and challenge them to supply all necessary quotation marks.

Later, Frances found Peter in the parlor with crayons and paper scraps all around. I'm planning Christmas, he said, and you can help. Frances picked up one of the scraps. What's this plan? Cookie shapes, Peter said. Frances's mouth watered at the memory of butter cookies, sweet with sugar. Then she remembered the empty larder. Maybe not cookies this year. She picked up another scrap. Ho ho ho, the piano, Peter sang. Her ears rang with the memory of Aunt Martha's beautiful playing. Presents for everyone, Peter said. Even the one-eared cat. Frances had to smile. That old cat doesn't even know it's Christmas. But we do. Peter grabbed her hand. We can start making

Christmas and Santa can finish up.