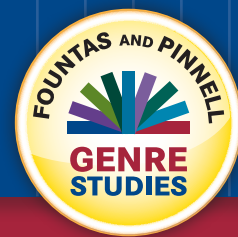


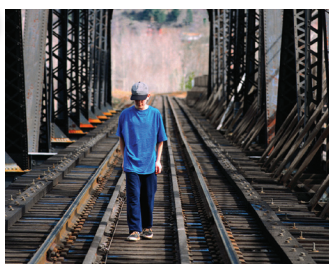
Irene C. Fountas & Gay Su Pinnell

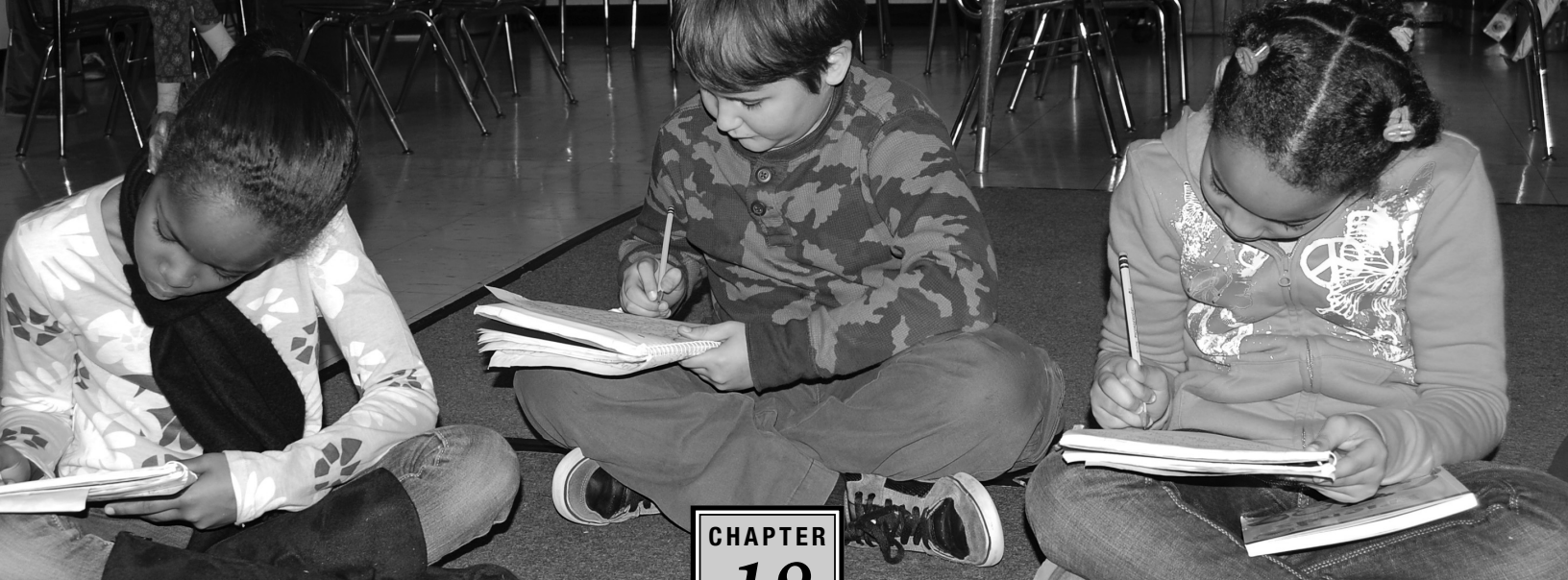


GRADES K-8 +

# Genre Study

Teaching with **Fiction** and **Nonfiction** Books





## CHAPTER

# 18

# Writing About Reading in a Reader's Notebook

*Learning to respond powerfully to books is one of the great truths [students] will learn in school. It reflects their thinking and their learning lives.*

—JANET ANGELLILLO

Readers extend their understandings through language interactions with others, either orally or in writing. In either form they are communicating their thinking. Writing about reading can vary greatly in volume and form. The particular forms students use to write about reading depend on their grade level and their current abilities. The writing can take a variety of forms. You can vary the writing task from “short writes” of just a few minutes (half a page to a page) to polished essays that may fill three or more pages. Writing about reading can be entirely open-ended, in which students write expressively about their thinking, or you can establish some requirements while still allowing open response. At some point, older students should also learn how to write a totally structured response, although the observations and ideas must be their own.

Elsewhere (Fountas and Pinnell 2000, 2006) we have discussed writing as a powerful way to increase

readers’ engagement with texts, help them become more involved in their reading both intellectually and emotionally, and support more organized and analytical ways of thinking about texts. We recommend using a reader’s notebook in which students keep records of their reading and write letters to and participate in other forms of dialogue with their teacher, as well as introducing other kinds of writing about reading as part of small-group instruction (guided reading and literature discussion, for example).

We recently revised the original *Reader’s Notebook* to focus specifically on students in grades 2–4. A new *Reader’s Notebook: Advanced* (2011), for grades 4–8, focuses more on genre (we discuss *Reader’s Notebook: Advanced* in more detail later). Both notebooks offer valuable experiences and resources that increase students’ ability to articulate their understandings about texts in a variety of written forms.

*Reader's Notebook* includes an introduction especially helpful for students who have not used one before. Teachers in grade 4 who have students who have already used a *Reader's Notebook* for two years may want to use *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*. It's aimed at students who understand all the routines of readers' workshop and are ready for formal genre study. Students' experience and foundational understanding guide decisions about using the notebook.

## Using *Reader's Notebook*

The newly revised *Reader's Notebook* (Heinemann 2012) includes four sections: Reading List, Choosing Books, Minilessons, and Writing About Reading. (In kindergarten and grade 1 children may draw and write in blank notebooks.)

In the Reading List section students record the total number of books they read during the year. There is space for specifying reading requirements and a Genres at a Glance chart that defines each genre and assigns it a corresponding code. The Reading List form includes space for recording book titles, authors, genre codes, dates completed, and a code for whether the book was easy, just right, or difficult. Students can also indicate whether they abandoned the book and why. (Graphic texts are given an asterisk.)

The Choosing Books section provides tips for choosing books and giving a book talk. A form on which students can record books they want to read in the future is also included, the assumption being that students will hear about interesting books from their peers or the teacher's book talks.

The Minilessons section offers tips for how to use their notebooks during minilessons. It includes simple diagrams illustrating how fiction and nonfiction texts are organized. For each minilesson presented, students use blank, lined Record of Minilessons pages to copy or glue on information, make notes about what they want to remember, and list books that are good examples.

A chart in the Writing About Reading section lists different formats students can use to write about reading, from brief notes to longer essays. The goal for the student is to interpret the meaning of the text and respond to it. Letters to the teacher give students an

authentic audience for sharing their voice. There is a simple letter form to use as a starting point, as well as guidelines students can use to check their writing.

The inside front cover of the revised *Reader's Notebook* states guidelines for readers' workshop; the inside back cover lists ways to have a good book discussion.

## Using *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

In this chapter we describe in detail the organization of *Reader's Notebook: Advanced* and the way it functions within readers' workshop. We discuss, with examples, a number of ways students can explore genre through writing about reading. Students bring their notebooks to readers' workshop and may use them during any and every part of this instructional period:

- *Book talks and minilesson.* During book talks, students can note titles they are interested in reading. During genre study minilessons, they write down the things they notice, the genre definition, and examples of mentor texts in the Genre Studies section. During other minilessons, they write down the principle, any notes, and mentor texts in the Minilessons section.
- *Independent reading and conferring.* At first, students might write one thoughtful letter a week to the teacher (who responds). This helps students learn how to share their genuine thinking with a real audience. Following minilessons on different forms of writing about reading, students can choose their form of response. The notebook also contains sections for keeping a record of reading, particularly types of genres.
- *Guided reading and literature discussion (book clubs).* During the workshop, teachers sometimes bring together small groups of students for guided reading or book clubs. Guided reading (see Chapter 19) provides intensive instruction for a small group of students who are reading at about the same level of text. In book clubs (see Chapter 14), students either read or listen to a shared text and then discuss

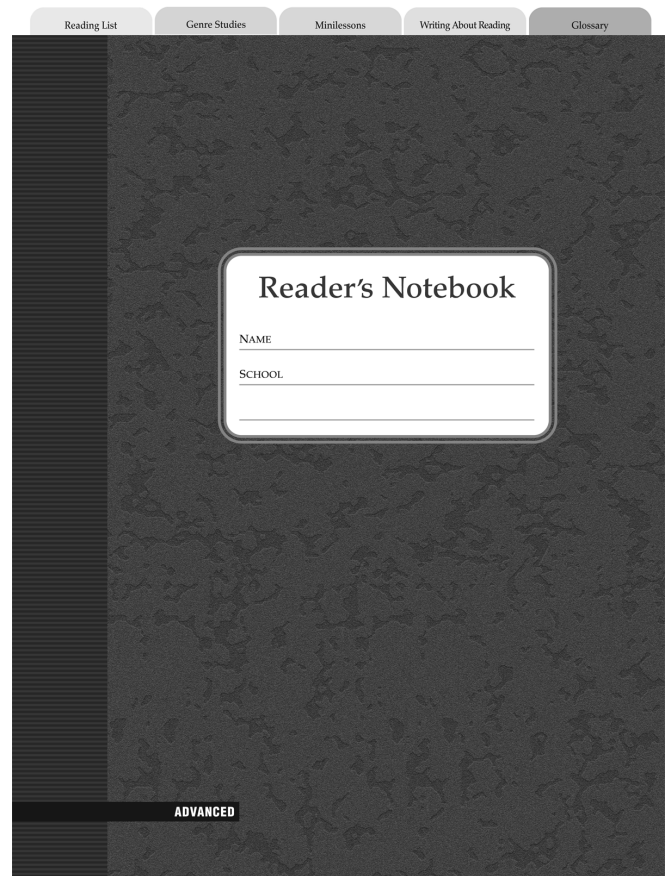
it following literature discussion routines. Students can use their notebook in either situation to note points they want to discuss, jot down things they notice, refer to previous minilessons, remember examples, or analyze texts using graphic organizers.

- *Group share.* At the end of readers' workshop, students bring their notebooks to the sharing session. It helps them remember what they want to share with a partner, a small group, or the whole group.

## Parts and Tools in *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

The notebook includes a collection of helpful tools, as well as specific sections that help students organize their writing. It's designed to be used efficiently. It is amazing how much time can be wasted searching through a notebook to find a specific section or item. The published version (the cover is shown in Figure 18.1) includes tabbed sections that make teaching more efficient and lessons move more quickly:

- The Reading List section supports readers' workshop routines. It includes Guidelines for Readers' Workshop, Reading Requirements, Books to Read, and the Reading List (books read) form.
- The Genre Studies section supports inquiry. It includes a chart to help students understand fiction and nonfiction genres and their relationships, as well as forms on which to record a particular genre's characteristics, definition, and examples.
- The Minilessons section supports the direct lessons taught at the beginning of the workshop (and is referred to during share time). It includes a record of minilessons, along with reference charts describing basic fiction and nonfiction.
- The Writing About Reading section supports a variety of student writing about reading. It includes a chart with definitions of different



**Figure 18.1** Cover and tabbed sections from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

forms for writing about reading, some guidelines students can use to check their writing, a letter explaining how to use the notebook, a list of suggestions for writing about reading, and blank pages for student work.

- The Glossary lists useful terms and their definitions, so students can find definitions quickly.

### Inside Front Cover

Inside the front cover is Guidelines for Readers' Workshop, a set of simple guidelines for the community of readers and writers (see Figure 18.2).

### Section 1: Reading List

During the workshop, students read a book of their own choosing and share their thinking about the book with others. The time spent reading is silent. Students



## Guidelines for Readers' Workshop

1. Read a book or write down your thoughts about your reading.
2. Work silently so that you and your peers can do your best thinking.
3. Use a soft voice when conferring with your teacher.
4. Choose books that you think you'll enjoy and abandon books that aren't working for you after you've given them a good chance.
5. List the book information when you begin reading and record the date and a one-word response when you finish the book.
6. Think about the genre of the book you are reading and what you notice.
7. Always do your best work.

For more information on using *Reader's Notebook: Advanced* see *Guiding Readers and Writers*, and *Teaching for Comprehending and Fluency* by I. C. Fountas and G. S. Pinnell. Published by Heinemann, Portsmouth, NH.

**Figure 18.2** Guidelines for Readers' Workshop from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

do not talk with others unless they are conferring individually with the teacher or engaged in small-group instruction (guided reading or book clubs). Everyone uses soft voices when conferring or working in small groups. There are expectations about how books are chosen, and students have the opportunity to choose books they think they will enjoy.

Books should be accessible—that is, within the student's current reading ability—but students should not choose books by text level (see Chapter 19). If students have difficulty selecting appropriate books, you can assist them in individual conferences. If minilessons on selecting books haven't been successful for particular students, you need to reteach them how to choose well—have them read a little of the book and think about whether they can read it independently and whether they understand it. Sometimes you need to help a student get started, especially in a new genre, by setting genre and quantity requirements for student reading (see Figure

## Reading List

### Reading Requirements

Total Books: 45

Requirement	Genre	Tally
3	(RF) Realistic Fiction	
2	(HF) Historical Fiction	
2	(TL) Traditional Literature (Folktales, Fables, Myths, Legends)	
2	(F) Fantasy	
2	(SF) Science Fiction	
3	(B) Biography/Autobiography	
2	(M) Memoir	
10	(I) Informational	
2	(P) Poetry	
2	(H) Hybrid	
15	Genre Free Choice	

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**Figure 18.3** Reading Requirements from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

18.3). Students use the Reading Requirements chart to tally the number of texts read in each category and thus are able to monitor their own reading progress.

If readers' workshop is conducted four or five days a week and students are also reading at home, they can finish approximately one book a week (often more titles of challenging but shorter fiction and nonfiction). Some texts may take longer than a week but others will take less. Whatever the text difficulty, students select texts they can read independently—with accuracy, understanding, and good momentum.

One Reading Requirement category is Genre Free Choice. Having students do a great deal of reading of their own choosing is strongly supported by research (see Chapter 16). But you also want to ensure that over the years students learn to understand many genres. Therefore, at the same time you engage students in genre inquiry and present genre minilessons, have them choose their own examples of the genre to read independently.

## Books to Read

Title	Author	Genre	Check When Completed
The Boxcar Children Return	Gertrude Warner		✓
The Night Swimmers	Betsy Byars		✓
Otis Spofford	Beverly Cleary		✓
The Music of Dolphins	Karen Hesse		✓
Something Upstairs	Avi		
George's Marvelous Medicine	Roald Dahl		
Frindle	Andrew Clements		✓
The Cat's Meow	Gary Soto		
Everything Dog	Marty Crisp		
The Castle in the Attic	Elizabeth Winthrop		
Princess for a Week	Betty Ren Wright		
Humphrey the Hamster Series	Betty G. Birney		

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## Reading List

Select a book to read. Enter the title and author on your reading list. When you have completed the book, write the genre and the date. If you abandoned the book, write an (A) and the date you abandoned it in the date column. Write a one-word response that shows your reaction to the book. Place an asterisk (\*) next to the code in the genre column if your book is a graphic text.

#	Title	Author	Genre Code	Date Completed	One-Word Response
1	Commander Toad and the Voyage Home	Jane Yolen	F	9/5	E
2	The Littles Go Exploring	John Peterson	F	9/7	E
3	Pinky and Rex and the School Play	James Howe	F	9/10	E
4	The Magic Finger	Roald Dahl	F	9/16	E
5	The Twits	Roald Dahl	F	9/21	D
6	Luke's Bully	Elizabeth Winthrop	RF	9/27	JR
7	The Chocolate Touch	Patrick Catling	RF	10/1	JR
8	Postcards from Australia	Helen Arnold	I	10/3	JR
9	George's Marvelous Medicine	Roald Dahl	F	10/7	JR
10	The Aliens are Coming	Colin McNaughton	F	10/10	E
11	Pee-Wee's Tale	Johanna Hurwitz	F	10/16	E
12	Pee Wee and Plush	Johanna Hurwitz	F	10/16	E
13	I'm Too Fond of My Fur	Geronimo Stilton	F	10/25	E

© 2011 by L. C. Fountas & G. S. Pinnell from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.Figure 18.4 Books to Read from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*Figure 18.5 Reading List from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

It is a good idea for grade-level colleagues to determine genre requirements together. Working across grade levels is also a good idea. You want to know your students' previous experiences in genre study, for example. Working together also helps you and your colleagues take a longer-term perspective. When making these decisions, consider:

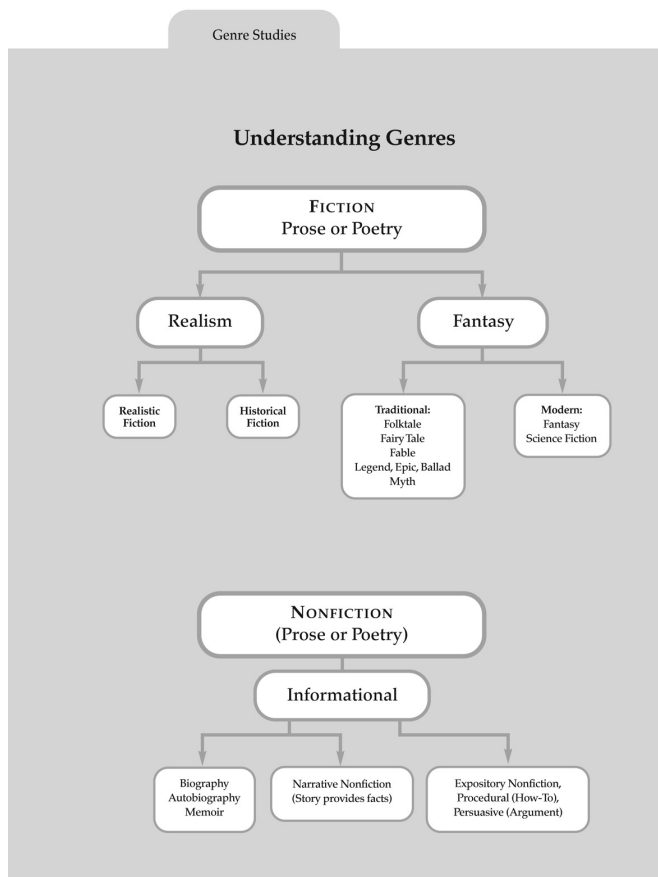
- Requirements of district or state curriculum guides and standards.
- National Curriculum standards (for example, Common Core Standards).
- The emphases codified in *The Continuum of Literacy Learning*.
- The strands of genre study you plan to implement across the year.

The Books to Read form (see Figure 18.4) helps students select books. As they hear book talks or get recommendations from friends, they write interesting titles

on the form. If they have heard about the book in a book talk or read a peer book review of it, they know the genre. If not, they leave the genre notation column blank until they have a chance to read the book.

This list becomes a resource for selecting a new book. When you have a list of interesting books in mind, it's easy to pick a new one. Also, if students need to read in a particular genre, they can quickly identify examples of books they intend to read in that genre. Using this form helps students become readers who always have potential "reads" in mind.

Students use the Reading List form (see Figure 18.5) to keep records on their own reading throughout the year (several pages are provided). They list each title they have read, along with the author, genre, date completed, and a one-word response. Looking at this list together during individual conferences, you and your students can see reading patterns and set goals. The list represents a large and connected body of work on the



**Figure 18.6** Understanding Genres chart

part of the student. Your students can use it to get back to their thinking about particular texts and realize their own growth across the year.

## Section 2: Genre Studies

The Genre Studies section of the notebook supports students as they learn about the various genres of written texts. It begins with a quick-reference chart that breaks out fiction and nonfiction genres and shows their relationships (see Figure 18.6). Students can refer to it during interactive read-aloud, minilessons, guided reading, and individual conferences.

Following the chart are several pages students can use to record their participation in genre inquiry. During interactive read-aloud you chart your students' shared thinking about what they notice about a genre, and together you and your students use these characteristics to create a working definition. Students record this shared thinking on the Genre Studies form (see

Genre Studies

### Genre Historical Fiction

Working Definition	Noticings
<p>A realistic story that tells about life as it might have been lived in the past</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Imagined story set in the real world</li> <li>• tells about life as it might have been lived in the past.</li> <li>• tells about problems and issues of life in the past.</li> </ul>
Book Examples	<p>Often:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Has convincing and believable characters, plot, and setting</li> <li>- Based on real people or events</li> <li>- Connected to the author's own personal experiences</li> <li>- Begins as contemporary fiction but has been around long enough to acquire historical significance.</li> <li>- Uses old-fashioned language in dialogue</li> </ul>

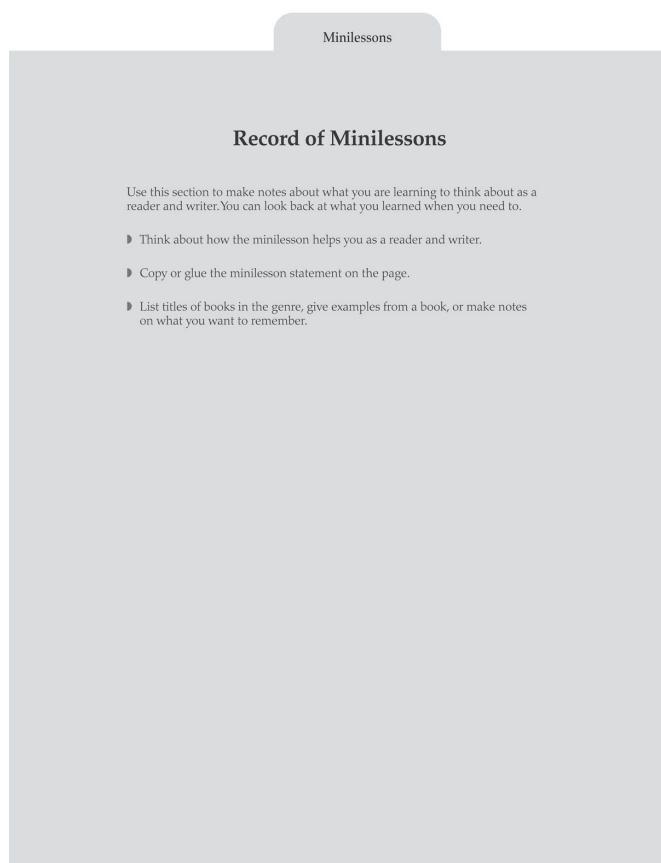
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**Figure 18.7** A page from Genre Studies section

Figure 18.7), because the characteristics and working definition become the basis for minilessons. Once students are very familiar with genre inquiry, they can also list some of the things they notice independently, for later sharing. Students also list here some examples of texts in each genre, from interactive read-aloud, literature discussion, and independent reading. Remembering mentor texts supports concrete understandings of the genre.

## Section 3: Minilessons

As you move from inquiry to minilessons, help your students learn how to make their own record of minilesson principles so that they can look back on what they have learned and think about the minilesson and how it helps them as readers and writers. They can also list titles of books in the genre, give examples from a book, or make notes of what they want to remember. Instructions are provided at the beginning of the section.

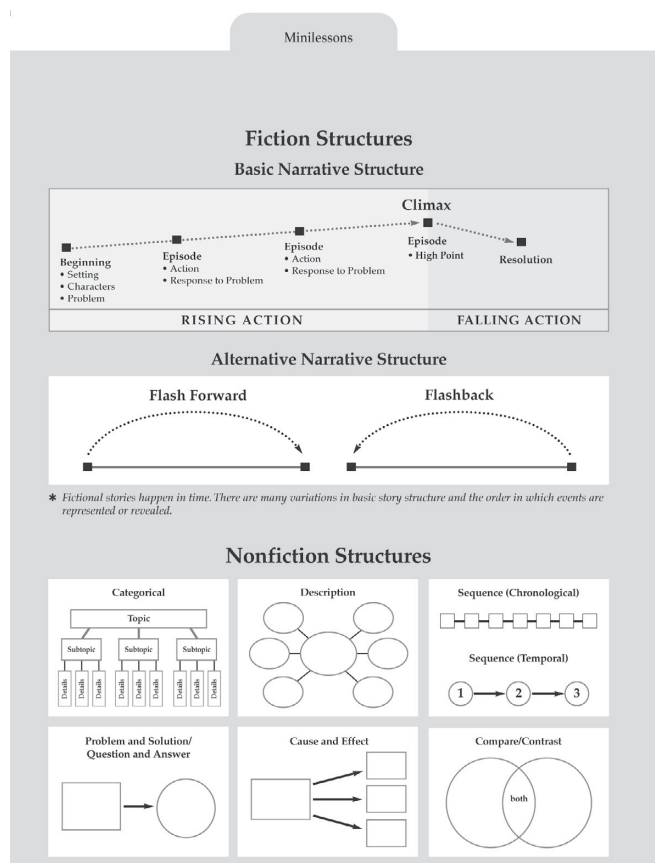


**Figure 18.8** Record of Minilessons page from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

The Record of Minilessons page (see Figure 18.8) is followed by several diagrams depicting fiction and nonfiction text structures that students need to be familiar with: basic narrative structure, an alternative narrative structure for fiction, and the most important nonfiction text structures (see Figure 18.9). Students can refer to these diagrams while reading independently and during small-group reading instruction and interactive read-alouds. Following the diagrams are a number of blank pages on which students can take notes on the minilessons: the minilesson principle, text examples, any other notes that will be helpful.

## Section 4: Writing About Reading

Here students collect the letters they write about books as well as other kinds of writing about reading they have completed. The section begins with a list of forms of writing about reading and related definitions (see Figure 18.10). Each of these types of writing (introduced



**Figure 18.9** Text Structures page from *Reader's Notebook: Advanced*

through minilessons and demonstrations) is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Following this page is a list of guidelines students can use to check their writing (see Figure 18.11). First on the list, students need to reread their writing to be sure it makes sense. They also need to include standard parts of a letter (the date and a greeting and closing, for example) and to address the teacher (or peer) who has written to them. The guidelines also include: the book that is being read; the journal. They include: lining the title; a quotation from the book; also need to be neat and legible; are completed; read.

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