In early October, my students were preparing to begin typing their revised rough drafts into second drafts for their first paper for our in-class writer's workshop. As part of my workshop requirements, students—by each semester's end—must have one narrative, one expository, and one persuasive piece of writing that has gone through all steps of the writing process. If we have time (which we usually don't during our first semester) they create a fourth piece that is a completely "free choice."

As it usually happens, about 90% of my students were writing narratives for their first writer's workshop piece. All of my mini-lessons [on *showing* (not telling), on *invigorating verbs*, on *"writing small"* when focusing on details] were purposely taught to really help that 90% easily apply authentic revision skills to their drafts.

I knew I needed to begin prepping my kids' brains for possible expository and persuasive topics, since that's where they would mostly need to go for the second papers. Even though we were two or three weeks out from having to write a rough draft for that second piece, I wanted them to start exploring expository and persuasive topics in their writer's notebooks now.

Here are the three oral stories (paraphrased, of course) that I told them to relate something interesting that had happened to me, and how the event was inspiring me to think about my next piece of writing, which I was planning to make into an expository piece of writing:

> "Wow, so something totally scary happened this morning at 4:55 a.m.
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> "You guys are probably going to think I'm crazy that we at the Harrison house wake up as early as we do every school day, but my wife likes to spend extra time on her hair before she goes off to teach, and we have an un-spoken promise to our three dogs that they'll get a walk every day unless it's raining or snowing. Morning is just the better time of day for us to walk them, and so we leash them up at 4:55 a.m. every school day and walk them on our usual route even though it's pitch black outside. I can name every constellation in the sky at 4:55 a.m. this time of year. Can you?
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> "So this morning, we are all bundled up, the dogs are all leashed, and we open the front door and step out onto the porch. And this bird—not huge, but not small either—dive bombs us. My wife screamed. The dogs barked. I just barely caught a glimpse of it before it flew off into the darkness. Mostly I heard its wings. *Flap*, *flap*, *flap*.
>
> "Anyway, our hearts are beating, and we talked the whole walk that morning about what kind of bird it must have been. I kept saying, 'I'm going to find out what it was and make it the topic of my expository writing in class. Because what kind of bird has the guts to dive bomb two humans and three dogs?'
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> "After our twenty-minute walk, we slowly walked up to our own front door, cautious that it might dive bomb us again, but it didn't. Has anyone else ever been dive-bombed by a bird in the darm?"

Story #2, next day:

> "Oh gosh, guys, it happened again, only different this time. We were totally slow and stealth as we took the dogs out onto the porch this morning, and there was no dive-bomb. When we got back from the walk, however, as we walked onto the front porch and started unleashing our three dog beasts, my wife screamed again, and there was a flap, flap, flap, but this time I got a pretty good look at it as it flew away into the darkness.
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> "Dena (my wife) was certain that it flew at us from the corner post of our front porch, so we think it was sitting on the porch actually waiting for us.

"And not to be gross, but as it flew away, I saw it squirt out a huge, long stream of white bird droppings from below its very reddish brown tail. I know enough about birds to know that it's the raptors—the hunters—that have feces that come out in that manner. So I think we've got a bird that's using our front porch in the morning as its hunting perch. And I think it's mad at us for disturbing its sacred hunting ground. My other guess is that it might be protecting a nearby nest, but this seems to me to be the wrong time of year for a bird to be nesting.

"Anyway, I am really interested in this bird now, so I'm pretty sure—once I figure out what it is—it's going to be my topic for my expository writer's workshop piece! Any of you have any ideas for yours yet? It's time to start thinking about them."

Story #3, about a week later:

"Oh yeah, just call me Mr. Nature-Photo-Stud today! Since we are convinced the bird is perching on our front porch to hunt in the morning, we've been turning on the porch light at 4:30 (which is when we actually get up), then very carefully peeking through the front blinds to see if we could see our bird friend up there before we leave with the dogs. About almost a week of this strategy not working, we were surprised this morning to have visual evidence of our porch hunter.

"And…I was able to sneak out and snap a photo of him, which really made him mad at me I think. I'll be posting that photo on Edmodo** tonight. I already know what kind of bird he is because I checked right away in our bird identification book, but I want to see if you can figure it out from the photo I post. Everybody better get on tonight. I might have a prize for the first person to correctly identify my 'porch hunter.'"

**Edmodo is a great site for teachers and students; you basically set up a classroom page and give your kids a secret code to join. They can post assignments, photos, or ask for homework help from each other. It truly has been an exciting new element to add to my classroom. Within ten minutes of posting that photo that night, I had over twenty guesses on what kind of bird he was: a Kestrel or "Sparrow Hawk."

When I posted the photo, I also commented, "How could you not want to write an expository essay about something this beautiful using your front porch? You guys need to seriously be thinking about topics for your next writer's workshop draft, which we start in early November.

Here's the photo I posted that night on Edmodo. The flash indeed made the bird mad at me. When we didn't see him for the next three weeks, I was fearful I had angered him enough to make him move to a different porch, but I am happy to report that on November 1, he was back. I will not attempt to photograph him again!