### OWW Lesson 3.2

**Narrowing the Focus**

**Learning Objective:** *students see that one general topic has many subtopics and practice narrowing down the focus of their writing based on what interests them*

**Mentor Texts:** *a selection of two or more texts on the same general topic*

*Trees of New England; A Pine Tree and A Maple Tree (RS WA7); The History of Arbor Day; Aani and the Tree Huggers; How a Forest Grows*

**Connection:** You are beginning to get lots of ideas of topics to write about (trees, cats, volcanoes). The next step as a writer is to figure out what it is about that topic that is most interesting or important to **you**. Thousands of books have been written about trees, but they each say something a little different. Today we are going to practice narrowing down a topic, and choosing a focus for our writing.

**Teaching:** Authors start out by learning a little about a topic that interests them and then choosing one aspect of it to learn more about and write about in detail.

I looked for some books on trees, and found a book about why people should plant more trees; one about all the ways people benefit from trees; and one about how a forest grows. [Read brief excerpt(s).] Each of these authors chose to write about an aspect of trees that interested **them**, or that they thought was most important for people to understand.

Authors are good at figuring out what interests them. Today you will get a chance to figure out what you think is most interesting or important about the trees outside our school.

**“Try It”**

Turn to your partner and tell them three things you already know about trees.

**Instructions to students for Independent Outdoor Writing**

Prepare your notebook:

- record the date, time and weather on the left-hand page of
Help students see how any one of the things they found to be important or interesting might suggest a writing focus:

“squirrels live in my tree”... could become a report on all the ways squirrels use trees;

“baby pine cones are growing on a branch” could lead to an informational text on pine cones, or to a comparison of a pine tree and a maple;

“there are no leaves on my tree....” could lead to an explanation of how trees change through the seasons;

“the bark is peeling off” could lead to a guide to identifying a tree by their bark.

your notebook and leave the rest blank to sketch your tree;

• on the right-hand page make a T chart, labeled “interesting” on one side and “important” on the other.

Circle up outdoors, and identify the tree(s) students can observe.

1. Get to know your tree. Look at it from a distance and up close. Look at it from the perspective of an ant, or a bird, or a human. Touch it. Look at how it is similar to the trees around it and how it is different

2. Make a quick sketch of your tree. Sketch the whole tree, and a tiny part of the tree.

3. Talk to your partner about what you think is most interesting about your tree (something weird, or surprising, or familiar?) and write down the most interesting things to you.

4. Talk with your partner about how your tree is important; write down what you think is most important about your tree(s).

5. Use one item from your list of interesting and important things as the focus for writing a short piece about your tree.

Back indoors (or outdoors in good weather)

Share Out

Have students share their writing. Note how many different ways they chose to write about the same topic, and how much more interesting it is if an author has a narrower focus that is important to her.

Applying the skill

Writers are good at noticing what interests them. When you first start thinking and learning about a topic try making notes about the things that really stand out to you. Which of those things are most interesting, or important to you? Try choosing one of them as a focus for your writing.