



Level 1

Cluster and Describe

Introduction

Level 1 students are often too young to read and spell, and their fine motor skills are not well suited for assignments that require handwriting for large amounts of time. This fun assignment enables them to compose expository sentences that reflect their learning without burdening them to read, spell, or write out words.

You will need to work with your student for this project, which is cumulative in nature. Over a number of weeks, you and your child will create a book that is tied to his historical studies. The idea is to compose one page a week (or more if you and your student wish to) and then assemble these into a book at the end of the unit or semester.

When completed, each “Cluster and Describe” page typically has a large illustration (that usually fills about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the page) and one to three sentences below this, explaining the illustration or the topic. For instance, if one was making a Cluster and Describe book about Presidents of the United States, each page would feature a drawing of the President, and each caption might give his name, when he served as President, and the state where he was born. A Cluster and Describe book about the flora (plants) and fauna (animals) of ancient Egypt might have a page on the lotus flower. The picture would show the blossom, and the caption would name the plant and explain its significance in Egyptian culture.

About Illustrations

The type of illustrations you require for this project will depend very much on your child, your resources, and your gifts and talents. Here is a starter list of approaches to illustrating Cluster and Describe projects:

- * Your child can draw each illustration from scratch. (You can give him art credit for this!)
- * Your child can trace illustrations from books or online print-outs, and then tweak and color them to make them his own, using such media as crayon, paint, or magic markers.
- * You can supply your child with a coloring book. The outlines of the illustration are already complete; the child colors them and supplies the caption. (Some coloring books already contain captions. We suggest you cut them off and have the child paste the coloring book page onto a piece of construction paper. Then, you can mount the caption on the construction paper, too, after it is written.)
- * You can use clip art, online illustrations, or other digital resources (including, sometimes, photographs that your child takes with the family’s digital camera). Print these in the proper size for each page each week. (This would be good for a book on Presidents, for instance.)
- * Finally, if you are artistic and have time, you might enjoy illustrating each page for your child.

Prewriting

We suggest that you sit down with your student and explain the scope of the entire project on the day that you begin it. Tell him that, for each page, he will need an illustration and then he will work with you to “write” the caption beneath it. Tell him how many pages you intend for him to complete in all, and how long he will be working on this project.

We suggest that you then get started with the first page right away.

- * Show him the illustration, or explain to him what he should draw, trace, or create.
- * Once you have the illustration in hand, introduce your student to our Simple Cluster Dia-

Writing Aids includes a helpful companion section to this one: “Sentence Structures.”

Many times, the *Tapestry* reading assignment charts suggest coloring books that have a great deal of historical information for young students, especially in the right-hand “Alternate Reading” charts.

The Simple Cluster Diagram is found in the Supplements section on the WA Disc.



gram. Show him how it has one central circle and three surrounding, related circles.

- * Using a question-and-answer time, have your student tell you the main idea of the page you are working on. For instance, if you are doing a page of a Presidents book, ask him for the name of the President (let's say that it's President Washington). Write this for him in the center circle.
- * Next, fill in the other three circles with information about the central topic. Again, you will need to lead strongly; we suggest you do so via careful questioning. Your young students can easily understand the idea of putting one fact in one circle. Though they may not be able to properly relate sub-circles to one another with lines between them that show ideas supporting the main idea, as older students do, they still can fill in the main circles with the descriptive data needed for the very brief pieces they are writing. In this example, you might start by reviewing what you've learned about President Washington:
 - Ask, "Where did he grow up?" (Student answers, "Virginia." Write it in one circle.)
 - Ask, "When was Washington President?" (If the student doesn't know, help him find the answer in another resource and then write it in another circle.)
 - Ask, "What were good things this President did?" (Student may say, "He was the Father of our Country. He was honest. He had good manners. He served two terms.") Record them near the appropriate circles for the categories you've chosen beforehand.

Drafting

- * After you have recorded sufficient information on your Cluster Diagram, work with your student on a piece of scratch paper to write one to three sentences on the topic.
- * The student can dictate these to you.
- * If you so desire, you can write them out in large print so that the student can copy them under the illustration as a handwriting exercise.

Editing, Polishing, and Presenting

Since you are so involved with the composition of these captions, there is almost no editing or polishing involved in this project. If your student has copied your composition for handwriting practice, simply check his work for accuracy, then file his completed page.

You will want to set aside some time near the end of the process to help the student assemble the book. He will need to illustrate a cover and write a table of contents. Here are the usual steps in this process:

- * Help him put the pages in a good order and then number them in order (placing the numbers at the bottom of each page). As the two of you do this, we recommend that you overview the book's contents by reading the captions of each page aloud to him.
- * Write, or make a model and then have him copy, a list of the page titles that will become the Table of Contents. (Leave space for him to write in page numbers!)
- * Have the child write in page numbers.
- * Finally, help him work out a good design for a cover that summarizes the contents of his book. He can then illustrate the cover by whatever means you choose.

As always, be sure to find a way for the student to display his work!