The Writing on the Wall

Tia's Bad Day

by Dina Anastasio and Amanda Jenkins
The Readers’ & Writers’ Genre Workshop series includes eleven fiction and nonfiction genres. There are two titles with multiple stories for each genre.

How to use this book
2. Read the realistic fiction stories for enjoyment.
3. Reread the stories and answer the questions on pages 13 and 21.
4. Reread the last story. Pay attention to the comments in the margins. See how an author writes realistic fiction.
5. Follow the steps on pages 22–23 to write your own realistic fiction story.
6. Complete the activity on the inside back cover. Answer the follow-up questions.
Focus on the Genre

Realistic Fiction

What is realistic fiction?
Realistic fiction features characters and plots that could actually happen in everyday life. The settings are authentic—they are based on familiar places such as a home, school, office, or farm. The stories involve some type of conflict, or problem. The conflict can be something a character faces within himself, an issue between characters, or a problem between a character and nature.

What is the purpose of realistic fiction?
Realistic fiction shows how people grow and learn, deal with successes and failures, make decisions, build relationships, and solve problems. In addition to making readers think and wonder, realistic fiction is entertaining. Most of us enjoy “escaping” into someone else’s life for a while.

How do you read realistic fiction?
First, note the title. The title will give you a clue about an important character or conflict in the story. As you read, pay attention to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the main characters. Note how the characters change from the beginning of the story to the end. Ask yourself: What moves this character to action? Can I learn something from his or her struggles?

Features of Realistic Fiction

- The story takes place in an authentic setting.
- At least one character deals with a conflict (self, others, or nature).
- The characters are like people you might meet in real life.
- The story is told from a first-person or third-person point of view.

Who tells the story in realistic fiction?
Authors usually write realistic fiction in one of two ways. In the first-person point of view, one of the characters tells the story as it happens to him or her, using words such as I, me, my, mine, we, us, and our. In the third-person point of view, a narrator tells the story, using words such as he, she, they, their, and the proper names of the characters.
Meet the Characters

Cave Adventures
Summer has finally arrived. Linda and her brother Jake have been coming to the same cabin on this rocky beach since they were little. Their friend Maria is back for her second summer. Cai is new to the seacoast. This summer promises new adventures since Linda and Jake’s dad recently discovered a hidden cave.

Linda, 12, is a big talker with big ideas. She loves technology and gadgets, and hates that the cabins do not get TV reception or the Internet.

Jake, 11, is a smart boy who enjoys playing tricks and shooting hoops on the basket outside the cabin.

Maria, 10, is an only child. She lives with her divorced mother. She likes to bake and cook, and usually has her nose in a book.

Cai, 11, is spending the summer with his grandma. He likes to swim, fish, and play with his dog Tucker.

Oak Street Kids
Five kids couldn’t be more different than Jalissa, Jamal, Brooke, Luke, and Tia. But they have some things in common, too! They all live in the Oak Street Apartments. They all have parents who work during the day. They are in the same afterschool “club” run by the manager of the apartment building, Ms. Tilly. That’s why the Oak Street Kids have made a deal: They will always stick together and help one another.

Jalissa, 10, likes drama and excitement, and is Jamal’s twin sister.

Jamal, 10, is calm and easygoing, the opposite of his twin sister.

Brooke, 11, can always be counted on to organize and take charge.

Luke, 11, may not be a top student, but he’s loyal and fun.

Tia, 9, loves every kind of sport.

Ms. Tilly is the no-nonsense manager of the Oak Street Apartments and takes care of the kids after school.

Tools Writers Use
Personification
Look at the word personification (per-sah-nuh-hih-KAY-shun). You will see the word person in it. Personification means “giving human characteristics to animals or objects.” In these stories, objects are described as if they had human abilities.
A sad look came over my mother’s face. When I saw that look, I remembered. This was our special morning. Mom and I planned it weeks ago. We even put a list of things to do on the fridge.

**Things to Do During Maria and Mom’s Morning at the Beach**

1. Have a breakfast picnic on the big rock.
2. Find two shells that match perfectly.
3. Make a beautiful sketch in the sand with our bare feet.
4. Play Follow the Leader while we’re jumping the waves near the shore.

The screen door creaked awake. Then the door protested the disturbance by closing with a loud CLAP! against the doorframe.

Jake rushed inside.

Jake was wearing a pajama top. His red hair was a mess. His jeans were covered with gray dust. “How odd,” I thought.

“Today is no ordinary day,” my mother told Jake. She cleaned the table. “Today is a very special day. Maria and I are spending the morning together on the beach... just the two of us.”

My mother and I were in the kitchen. She was braiding my hair. I heard my friend Jake outside the cabin. He called, “Maria! I have something to tell you!” It sounded important.

“Mom, are you done yet?” I asked. I was getting antsy.

Mom tied the last braid. She used a rubber band. Then she patted the top of my head. “You’re done,” she smiled. “But don’t forget.”

“Forget what?” I asked her.
Mom left the kitchen. Then she poked her head back in. She said, “Don’t forget, dear.” She looked worried. Maybe she thought I might go with Jake. Well, I did want to go with Jake. But I wouldn’t do that to my mom.

My mother left the room. Then Jake said, “You have to come to the cave, Maria! Right now! I have to show you something amazing!”

I tried to act like I was uninterested. But I must admit that I was curious. Jake’s father had found the cave a week ago. Jake loved it there. Linda, Cai, and I all loved the cave, too. It was our own private place. We were going to meet there later.

“You can show me the surprise later,” I said. “This morning is my time with my mom.”

“It won’t take long,” Jake begged. “I promise.”

Was Jake playing a trick on me? He loved to play tricks. I liked Jake’s tricks most of the time. They never hurt anyone. They never made anyone feel sad or look bad.

Jake begged again. “Please come with me now.”

I heard Mom walking back and forth upstairs. She was getting ready for our special morning. She was whistling. She sounded very happy.

I didn’t want to hurt my mother’s feelings. I didn’t want to hurt Jake’s feelings, either. Plus, I really wanted to see what Jake had found.

Maybe I could make them both happy. The cave wasn’t far from my cabin. I could run there and back. I could be back before my mother came downstairs. She would not know I left.

“Hurry,” I told Jake as I ran out the door. I leaped down the porch steps.

The rays from the morning sun beamed into the cave. The rays lit up the walls inside. “Okay,” I said. “Show me.” I was beginning to worry. What if Mom went downstairs to pack our picnic basket? She would not know where to find me.

We went inside. Jake pointed to the cave wall. “Look!” He pointed to something carved in the wall. “It’s a stick figure of a girl.” The girl had her arms in the air.
I moved toward the cave opening. “I have to go,” I told Jake.

“What about your ancient twin?”

“I don’t have an ancient twin,” I said. “I have a modern-day twin. Ancient twins don’t wear rubber bands. And Jake?”

Jake was shuffling his feet. He was staring at the floor of the cave. He looked guilty. I pointed my light. The floor was covered with gray dust. Jake was trying to kick away the dust.

“The next time you carve ‘ancient’ pictures on the walls, wash the stone dust off your jeans,” I said. Then I gave a little laugh.

“You can use my flashlight if you want to stay here and rework your carving. Maybe you can trick Linda.” I said good-bye. I ran home.

Mom was at the kitchen table. Her back was to the door. Her shoulders seemed to be frowning. That made me sad, too. Mom didn’t hear me come in. The empty picnic basket was on the table. I opened the refrigerator. I took out the food we had made last night.

“That girl looks like you, Maria!” Jake shouted. He stood behind me. His words echoed. The echo must have scared him. He didn’t speak for a while. “Maybe you have an ancient twin,” he finally whispered.

I thought about the girl on the wall. Did I really have an ancient twin. Did she wear her hair in braids like me? Did she jump waves? Play Follow the Leader? Did she have picnic breakfasts on the big rock? Did she keep her mother waiting?

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“Isn’t it great!” Jake shouted. “I’ll bet it was made thousands of years ago. It’s definitely an ancient carving.”

“Maybe,” I said. I turned on my flashlight. I shined the light at the carving. It did look a lot like ancient cave art. I had seen pictures of cave art in books. The round head had no eyes. It had no nose. It had no mouth. The fingers on the hands were spread out. The girl had long hair. It was in braids. The braids were tied with circles. The circles looked like… rubber bands?

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I packed the basket. I said, “I’m sorry, Mom. I shouldn’t have left you. Not even for a minute. I hope you will accept my apology. I also hope that you will be willing to change our plans. Instead of spending the morning together... let’s spend the whole day together.”

Mom didn’t say a word. She just hugged me. Then she took my hand. We walked away from the cabin. We headed to the big rock. This was where we liked to watch the waves wash ashore.

The morning sun followed us, smiling brightly.
Tia’s Bad Day

Tia knew that it was going to be a bad day. First she overslept. So she had to rush. She raced down the stairs. Jamal, Jalissa, Brooke, and Luke were waiting for her.

“Sorry I’m late again,” Tia said.

“That’s okay,” Jamal replied. “We can still make it to school on time. But hurry. No dawdling!”

They ran all the way. Tia slid into her seat. Then she heard a ding! The late bell rang.

Soon it was time for math class.

“Oh, no!” said Tia. She tapped her forehead. “I was rushing this morning, Ms. Parsons. I left my work at home! But I did it. I promise I did!”

“I believe you, Tia,” said Ms. Parsons. “I’ll let you turn it in tomorrow. But I have to record a zero for today. Bring in the homework. Then I’ll erase the zero.”

Tia never got a zero before, not even for a second. Now she knew that it was going to be a bad day. Another bad thing happened at lunchtime.

“Rats!” Tia said. “I forgot my lunch, too!” She knew she wouldn’t go hungry. The cafeteria lady would give her a free sandwich. But the free sandwich was always peanut butter. Yuck! Peanut butter was gooey. It stuck to the roof of her mouth. Tia only managed to eat half of her sandwich. Then her tongue refused to touch any more of it.

“This has been a very bad day,” she told the other Oak Street kids that afternoon. They walked home from school together.

“Be glad that you can get that zero erased,” Brooke said. “My teacher won’t take late work at all.”

Back at the apartments, the kids opened their backpacks. The building manager, Ms. Tilly, watched the kids after school. Ms. Tilly had a rule: no playing until homework was done.


Tia got her football. She wanted to practice her forward pass. She couldn’t throw a football to herself. So she sat in a chair. She waited for one of the other kids to finish. Sitting around was boring. Tia was glad when Jalissa put her worksheet away.

“Will you play football with me?” Tia asked.

“Sorry, but no,” Jalissa said. She pulled out three bottles of fingernail polish. “I’m leading my class in the Pledge of Allegiance. So I’m going to paint my fingernails red, white, and blue!”

Tia slumped in her chair. “What an awful day,” she said to herself.


Tia and Luke went outside. They went to the apartment courtyard. Tia knew they’d have to be careful with the football. Flowerpots and wind chimes decorated the patios. One careless throw could mean broken glass or pottery.

They had made three tosses when Luke said, “I’m hungry. Let’s get a snack.”

“No!” said Tia. “Let’s keep playing.”


“This is the worst day ever!” Tia shouted.

Tia saw Brooke, Jamal, and Jalissa. They were coming out to play now.
Tia was too mad to stop herself. She kicked the football angrily. 

**PONK!** The ball jumped off her foot. It shot toward a hanging pot of red flowers. **CRASH!** The pot shattered. Dirt and flowers flew everywhere. Broken pieces of pottery hit the ground and danced off in all directions.


“Those are Mr. Morgan’s flowers!” Jamal said.

“Those were Mr. Morgan’s flowers,” Luke corrected.

The five kids went over to look at the damage. “The poor things!” said Jalissa. The limp blossoms made her sad.

“I can’t tell Mr. Morgan!” Tia wailed. “He’ll be very mad!”

“You have to tell him,” said Brooke. “Don’t worry,” Jamal told Tia. “We’ll come with you.”

Tia knew that they were right. “Let’s get it over with,” she said. Tia was shaking as she knocked on Mr. Morgan’s door.

The door opened. Tia said in a rush, “I’m sorry, Mr. Morgan but I—I broke one of your flowerpots.”

Mr. Morgan stepped onto the patio. He looked at the mess and said, “Boy, you sure did! But most of the flowers will be all right if I replant them quickly. I just need to make room in these other pots.”

“M-may I help you?” Tia said. She was still a little scared.

“Sure,” said Mr. Morgan.

“We’ll help, too,” Brooke decided. “Jalissa and I will pick up the broken pieces. Jamal, you and Luke sweep up the dirt.”

They all went to work.

“I’m sorry that I destroyed your pot,” Tia told Mr. Morgan. She handed him a flower. Soil was clinging to its roots.

Mr. Morgan put the red flower next to a yellow one. “That’s a **negative** way of looking at it,” he told Tia. “Let’s look at the positive side. No one was hurt. And you didn’t break my window!”

“I’ll save my allowance,” Tia told him. “I’ll buy you a new pot.”

“Thank you for the offer,” said Mr. Morgan. “But I think the flowers look better this way. The pots are fuller. They are more colorful.”
Ten minutes ago Tia was in a bad mood. Many bad things had happened that day. Now she felt good.

“The only thing that’s different,” she thought, “is that now I’m thinking about good things. Mr. Morgan is being nice to me. My friends are helping me. I am a lucky girl.”

At first, the replanted flowers sagged a little. But as Mr. Morgan watered them, they perked up. They turned their faces to the sun.

“You know what, Mr. Morgan?” Tia said. “I think this bad day is going to end up being pretty **fantastic**!”

**Analyze the Characters, Setting, and Plot**

- Who were the characters in the story?
- Where and when does the story take place?
- Is the story written in the first-person point of view or the third-person point of view? How do you know?
- What was the main character’s problem?
- What relationships does the main character have with the other characters? How do those relationships affect the outcome of the story?

**Analyze the Tools Writers Use: Personification**

Find examples of personification in this story when:

- Tia can only eat half of her sandwich. (page 15)
- Tia angrily punts the football. (page 18)
- Broken pieces of pottery hit the ground. (page 18)
- Mr. Morgan waters the replanted flowers. (page 20)

**Focus on Words: Antonyms**

Make a chart like the one below. Then look for antonyms in the story to help you understand the following words.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Antonym</th>
<th>How do you know?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>dawdling</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>record</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>careful</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>negative</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>sagged</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>fantastic</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
How does an author write Realistic Fiction?

Reread “Tia’s Bad Day” and think about what Amanda Jenkins did to write this story. How did she develop it? How can you, as a writer, develop your own story?

1. **Decide on a Problem**
   Remember: The characters in realistic fiction face the same problems that you might face. In “Tia’s Bad Day,” the problem is a girl who becomes gloomy and cranky when everything seems to go wrong.

2. **Brainstorm Characters**
   Writers ask these questions:
   - What kind of person will my main character be? What are his or her traits? Interests?
   - What things are important to my main character? What does he or she want?
   - What other characters will be important to my story? How will each one help or hinder the main character?
   - How will the characters change? What will they learn about life?

3. **Brainstorm Setting and Plot**
   Writers ask these questions:
   - Where does my story take place? How will I describe the setting?
   - What is the problem, or situation?
   - What events happen? How does the story end?
   - Will my readers be entertained? Will they learn something?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Tia</th>
<th>Ms. Parsons</th>
<th>Mr. Morgan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traits</td>
<td>responsible; moody</td>
<td>organized; fair</td>
<td>forgiving; a good problem solver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examples</td>
<td>She feels bad when she almost makes her friends late for school, but gets upset with them when they won’t play with her.</td>
<td>She wants students to turn in to their homework on time, but has a back-up system in case someone forgets.</td>
<td>He doesn’t want Tia to feel bad about the flowers, and proposes a plan to save them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Setting     | Oak Street Apartments |
| Problem of the Story | A girl is upset because everything about her day is going wrong. |
| Story Events | 1. The girl oversleeps and is almost late for school. 2. She forgets her math homework and lunch. 3. She becomes angry at her friends, kicks a football into her neighbor’s patio, and breaks one of his flowerpots. |
| Solution to the Problem | The teacher gives the girl an extra day to bring in her homework. The cafeteria lady gives her a peanut butter sandwich to eat. The neighbor accepts her help in cleaning up the mess and repotting the plant. The girl decides the day will be good after all. |
Glossary

ancient (ANE-shunt) very old (page 10)
careful (KAIR-ful) cautious (page 17)
curious (KYER-ee-us) interested in investigating new things (page 8)
dawdling (DAU-duh-ling) wasting time (page 14)
fantastic (fan-TAS-tik) excellent (page 20)
negative (NEH-guh-tiv) lacking positivity (page 19)
ordinary (OR-dih-nair-ee) routine; normal (page 7)
record (rih-KORD) to make a written note (page 15)
sagged (SAGD) drooped (page 20)
whispered (WIS-perd) spoke very softly, especially so as not to be heard (page 10)

Make Connections Across Texts

Complete a graphic organizer like the one below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Story</th>
<th>The Writing on the Wall</th>
<th>Tia’s Bad Day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Point of View</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Setting</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Main Characters</td>
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<td>Problem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Solution</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the Stories

Use your graphic organizer to help you answer these questions.

• What connections can you make to the settings in the stories?
• What connections can you make to the problems in the stories?
• Have you ever acted like a character in one of the stories? Explain.
• Which characters are alike? Which characters are different? How?
• How are the stories’ endings alike? How are they different?
• What could readers learn from these stories?
Two Realistic Fiction Stories

Could the ancient carving on the cave wall really be Maria's twin? Tia's day goes from bad to worse when she breaks Mr. Morgan's flowerpots. What will happen next? Read this book to find out.

Enjoy all of these Fiction Readers' & Writers' Genre Workshop titles.

Dina Anastasio writes stories, poems, and games. She lives in New York City, but her favorite place is the seacoast of Maine.

Amanda Jenkins is an award-winning author of young adult novels, as well as numerous books for students in the elementary and middle grades. She lives in Texas.