

Conference—Marking Categories on a Draft

Third Grade

SARAH: Hi, Elaina. So what are you writing about as your topic?

ELAINA: Sea otters.

SARAH: That's great. I love those animals so much. Can you share with me what you have already written?

ELAINA: "Sea otters can eat fish and frogs. They are one of the animals that use tools. They use a stone to crack open the shell of their food. Sea otter pups are as small as a candy bar. A group of sea otters is called a raft. Sea otters hold hands when they're taking a nap. Otter pups can be protected by their mothers when an animal like fox, bobcats, owls, and sometimes wolves."

SARAH: Oh, wow, you're already on the back.

ELAINA: "Sea otters stay warm by a thick coat of fur. Sea otters don't hibernate."

SARAH: You've got a lot of good information. My goodness. You put all this in your writer's notebook when you were gathering information?

ELAINA: Yeah.

SARAH: That's awesome.

So as a writer, you have all this great information about sea otters. Have you thought at all about how you want to organize it?

ELAINA: Not yet.

SARAH: Not yet. Would you like some help with that today? All right.

So let's look at some of the information—now, you've read a lot of nonfiction books before? So, like, what are some of the categories you've seen authors use?

ELAINA: Like what they eat, or...

SARAH: Oh, that's a great place to start. Let's see if you have any information about what they eat.

I see it right up here. You've got, "Sea otters eat fish and frogs." Do you wanna mark that, so that you know that that's what they eat? Because that would be something to go in that category. So one of your categories is going to be what they eat.

ELAINA: What they eat?

SARAH: Why don't you just write "eat." That'll make it easier. OK.

"Sea otters eat fish and frogs. They are one of the animals that use tools." Hmm, I think that'll go in another section, maybe? "They use a stone to crack open the shell of their food."

You have a decision to make as a writer. Do you want to include that idea in another section, or put that with food? Because if they're using the tool to *open* their food, you could put it in the category of food, or you could save it for a special category.

ELAINA: Special category.

SARAH: Special category? So why don't you put another line right here to know that this is where that part stops. Just put a line. Like that.

All right. "...to open the shell of their food. Sea otter pups are as small as a candy bar. A group of sea otters is called a raft. Sea otters hold hands when they are taking a nap. Otter pups can be protected by their mothers when an animal like a fox, bobcat, owl, and sometimes wolves. Otters stay warm by a thick coat of fur. Sea otters don't hibernate."

So right now, it looks like you only have one fact for what sea otters eat. Do you have any more information in your writer's notebook? About sea otters and what they eat? Or is that something you might want to do more research on?

ELAINA: More research on.

SARAH: OK, that's fine. This is just your discovery draft, so we can take as much time as we need. Did you hear any other categories pop up, though, while we were rereading your writing?

I noticed that you talked some about sea otter babies. Would you want to maybe make a category about sea otter pups? About moms and their babies? Could you find some facts in here that would go in that category?

ELAINA: Mmm...that one?

SARAH: Yeah, sea otters—

ELAINA: “As small as a candy bar”?

SARAH: Yeah, why don't you go ahead and mark that. And I'll mark on here so we remember that you're gonna do a section about sea otter babies.

OK, let's keep looking for more information about sea otter babies or pups. Right here you've got the line about otter pups, right? What information do you tell me here?

ELAINA: They can be protected by their mother when a fox, bobcat, or owls and sometimes wolves try to get their baby.

SARAH: So is that something you wanna include with the sea otter pups?

ELAINA: Yeah.

SARAH: OK, go ahead and mark—[??] starts right here.

All right. And make sure, when you're marking, you put your end line, too, so you remember that *this*, right here, is the fact that goes in this section. Perfect.

I'm noticing you talk a lot in your writing about, like, how they hold hands when they're together, and that they don't hibernate, and that a group of them was called a raft? So you kind of have a section about how they kind of stay together. That might be a possible suggestion, as a writer, of a category, that you can decide if you want to use it or not.

So where are you in your writing right now? Are you still drafting?

ELAINA: Yeah.

SARAH: OK. Well, keep it up, you're doing a great job.