

Royal Fireworks Language Arts by Michael Clay Thompson

Sentence Island

Third Edition

Compatible with Sentence Island Student Book Second Edition

Instructor Manual

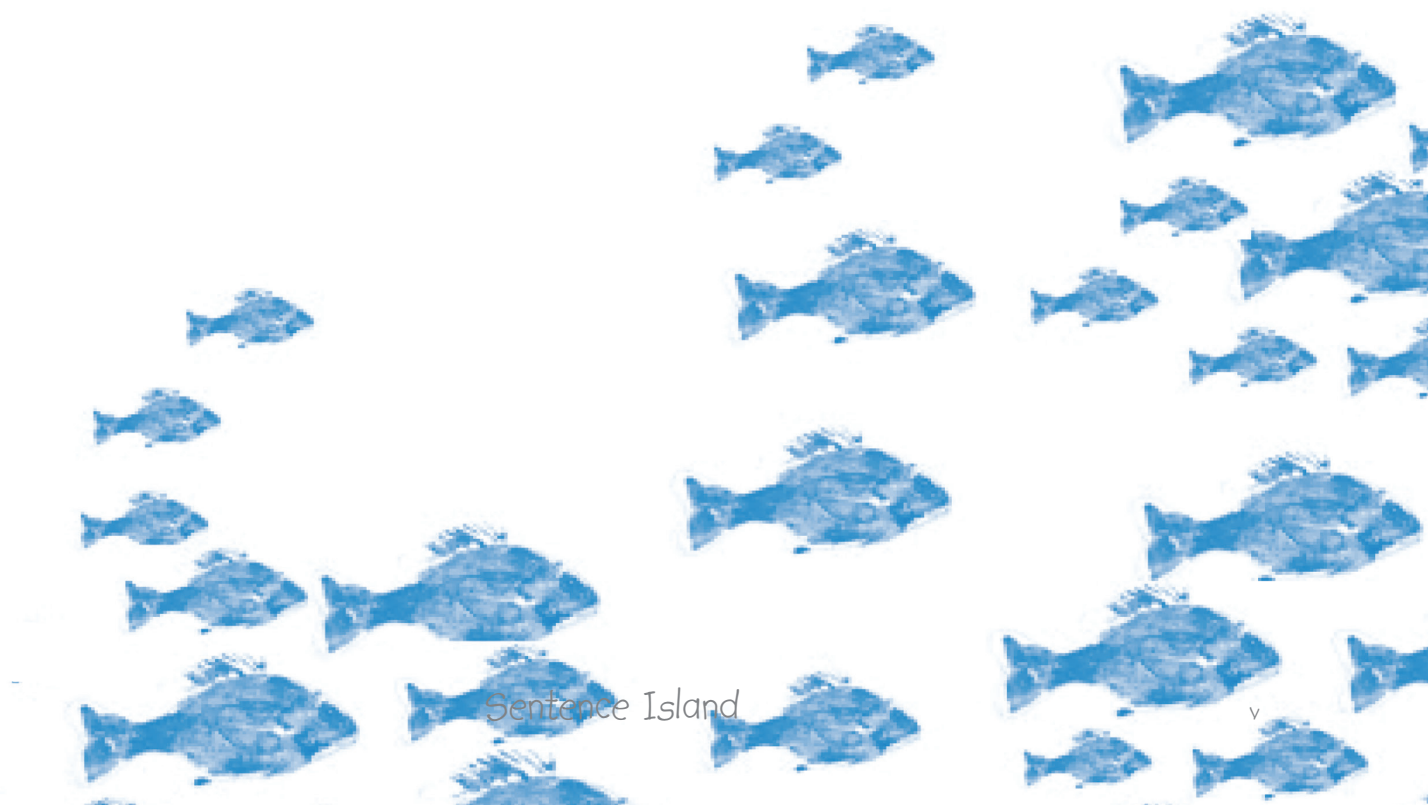
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Art by Milton N. Kemnitz

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Instructor Section



Learning to Write: The Heart of the Process

Learning to write correctly is a wonderful but complex experience that is easily derailed by the sheer weight of detail involved. There are hundreds of things that good writers know and that contribute to their clear writing. In this myriad of details, some are urgent and others merely interesting. Some are required by every sentence; others are unusual but good to know. Some errors are fatal, others merely unpleasant.

If we allow ourselves to be lured by the siren of “covering everything,” we can never bring sufficient focus to bear on the main things, on the critical knowledge that makes good writing possible. To teach beginning writers, we must focus on these main things, on the foundation. Beginners need the beginning.

Like a building, writing is constructed upward from the form of its foundation. Young writers don’t need to know a thousand things. They need to know writing’s form, the inner heart of writing, and to know it deeply, to know it forever. Less, if well-chosen, is more.

The strategy of *Sentence Island* is to start young writers off right by focusing on the true essence of writing: the sentence. No amount

of practice with paragraphs or essays will matter if students cannot write sentences. This approach requires, among other things, the use of grammar as a way of talking about the sentence, so though this is not a grammar book (the companion book *Grammar Island* is the text that provides the necessary grammar instruction for this approach), it does include some sentence grammar and provides at least passing instruction or review in those elements.

It is worth re-emphasizing that *Sentence Island* does not attempt to serve as a grammar text; rather, it deploys the grammar taught in *Grammar Island* in order to teach children the inner secrets of sentence writing. *Sentence Island* assumes that students already possess a reasonable amount of knowledge about fundamental grammar.

Oddly, the core writing concepts featured deeply in *Sentence Island*—even though they are at the heart of every sentence—often are never learned at all. They are glossed over, or presented as mere items in long lists crowded with less important items, or simply underestimated, but make no mistake, these core concepts, once deeply understood and incorporated, make all the difference in a student's ability to learn to write. It is these core concepts that change writing from a confrontation with chaos to a creative implementation of simplicity and clarity.

What core concepts? Here are some:

One: A sentence is an idea with two sides: a predicate side about a subject side.

Two: There are only eight kinds of words (the parts of speech), but of these there are only two major kinds of words—noun and verb—and six minor kinds, so good writing means command of nouns and verbs.

Three: Even though a sentence may have dozens of words, the main terms of its idea are the five parts of sentence: the subject, predicate, direct object, indirect object, and subject complement. Good writing makes these main terms—especially subject and predicate—clear.

Four: The subject and predicate are the two main parts of the sentence, and they must agree in number; if they don't, the sentence is broken.

Five: Position is important. Where words are affects what they mean. A sentence is like any other system; if the parts aren't connected in the right places, the gears don't turn. Position is also important for emphasis because the first and last words of a sentence stand out.

You can't organize what you can't see. Core concepts make the insides of sentences visible to students and give them control over agreements and arrangements. Knowledge is power.

Chapter Two

Mud Thinks about Doing and Being

Core Concept: Actions and Equations

There are two basic kinds of ideas, based on the verb.

An action verb shows the subject doing something: *Mud chased a fish.*

A linking verb shows the subject being something: *Mud is a fish.*

Action verbs may lead to object pronouns,
and linking verbs may lead to subject pronouns.

Concept Discussion

The secret to the inner logic of sentences is the verb. Our ideas tend to occur in two different forms. We describe something doing something using action verbs, or we assert that something is something in an equation-like form. This difference is so important that we use object pronouns for the direct and indirect objects that may follow action verbs, and we change to subject pronouns for the subject complement that may follow a linking verb. What we learn from this is that there are essentially two kinds of things we can say (and that you'd better know your pronouns).

Once students begin to see the verb as the switch that directs thought into either an action idea or a linking idea, they begin to realize what the parts of the sentence are and that there aren't very many. It is easy to learn the parts of the sentence when you focus on the verb. Once students become acutely aware of the parts of the sentence, they realize that these are the main terms of the idea, and they can learn to focus on these words when they write. A sentence may have twenty words, but only a few of them will be key parts of the sentence.

Points to Emphasize

1. The verb is the key to what will be said about the subject.
2. An action verb will show the subject doing something, but a linking verb may create an equation that shows that the subject is something.
3. There are thousands of action verbs but few linking verbs. The main linking verb is *to be*. A few linking verbs sound at first like action verbs, until you realize that they are creating an equation:

Action: Mud smelled the salt wind carefully.

Linking: The salt wind smelled good.

There are also some action verbs that students first mistake for linking verbs just because they sound like *is*! Here is an action verb that sounds like a linking verb, until you realize that it does not form an equation:

Action: Mud has a pelican friend. (Mud is not a pelican!)

Linking: Mud was a good friend.

4. A direct object can only be a noun or an object pronoun, but a subject complement can be a noun, a subject pronoun, or even an **adjective**! Mud is a fish, Mud is he, Mud is **wet**. *Mud is swimming* uses the progressive verb, so *swimming* isn't a subject complement.

Writing Activities

1. Write a short (ten sentences or fewer) dialogue between two characters, Axe and Link. Axe can only use action verbs, and Link can only use linking verbs.
2. Write two short descriptions of the same thing, but one description uses only action verbs, and the other description uses only linking verbs.
3. Beginning with the subject *Mud* and the linking verb *is*, make a list of subject complements in three groups: nouns, subject pronouns, and adjectives. See how many subject complements you can list in each category. Which category is easiest? Which category is most limited?
4. Indirect objects provide us with a choice. If Mud has a shell and gives it to Oopsy, then we can express this idea using either an indirect object or a prepositional phrase:

Indirect object: Mud gave Oopsy a shell.

Prepositional phrase: Mud gave a shell to Oopsy.

Which choice would be the best answer to the question “What did Mud give Oopsy?” Explain. Each structure has its own emphasis.

5. In order to give more depth to the idea that sentences tend to be actions or equations, conduct a group discussion in which you try to think of a sentence that is neither one but is a third alternative. You likely will find that the examples that first seem to qualify are actually variations of the main two.
6. Explore the power of linking verbs and subject complements. Pick something important, such as loyalty or care, and create a long list of subject complements that are metaphors. Loyalty is glue.... Loyalty is a diamond.... Loyalty is an underground river....
7. Write a short story in which all subjects of verbs are nouns, but even-numbered sentences have one or more object pronouns, and odd-numbered sentences have one or more subject pronouns.
8. Review prepositions and prepositional phrases, and then explain that, like direct objects and indirect objects, objects of prepositions must be made of object pronouns: for you and me, with him and her, from us and them. Have students write sentences that have prepositional phrases in which the objects are compound pronouns.



KEMNITZ

Have the students read the chapters aloud, with different students volunteering to read character parts. Pause to check for understanding and to comment on elements that enhance appreciation.

CHAPTER ONE

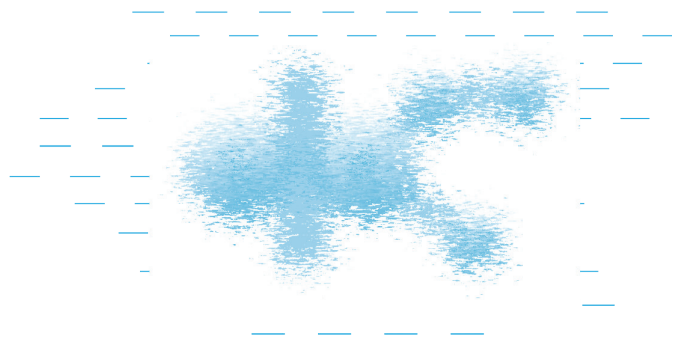
Mud's Two Sides

Once upon a time—
not so long ago—
in a busy, blue sea not far from
Grammar Island...

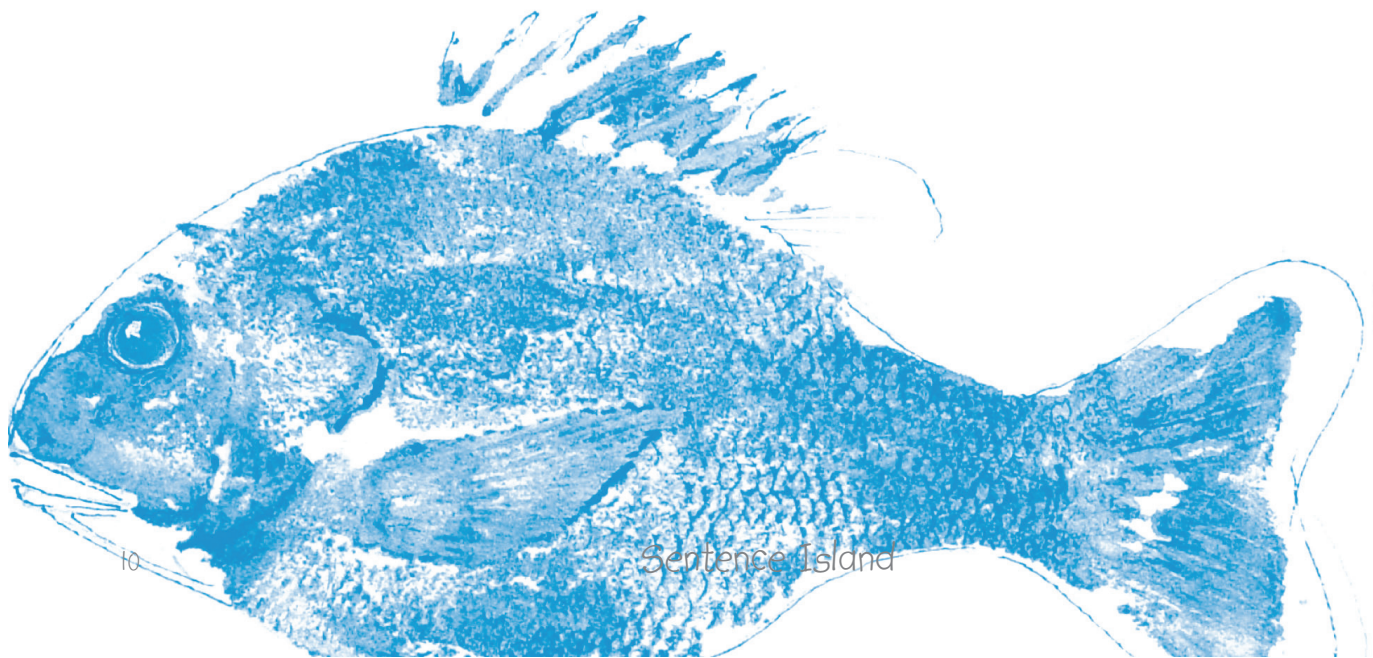
...was Sentence Island,
a blue island filled with ideas.

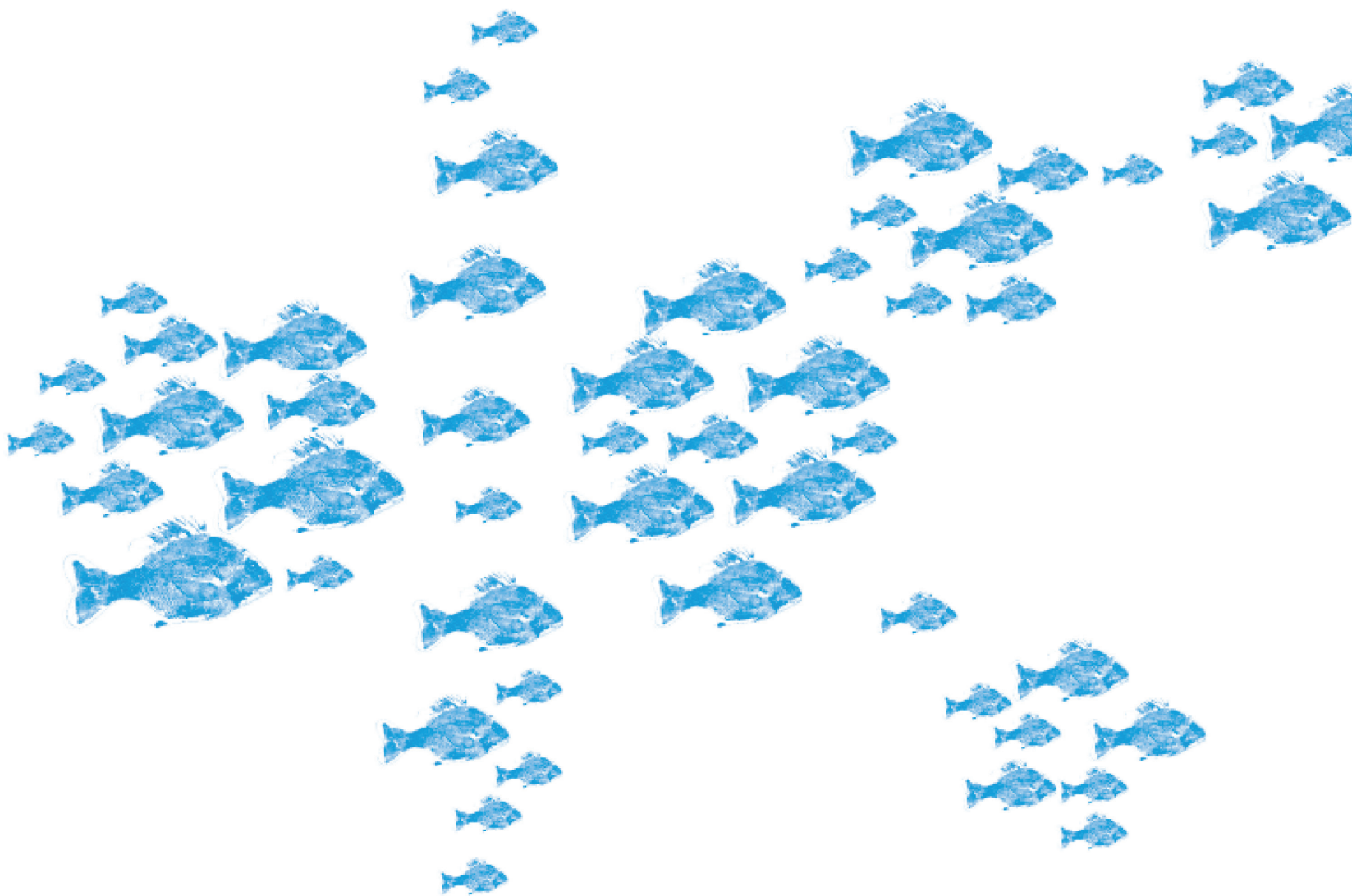
High in the wind,
a gray bird could just discern
the shape of the island,
shimmering in the ocean light.

The shape of the island from the air will prove to be the shape of the sentence itself. The images are designed to enhance the structural concepts.



In the ocean,
schools of blue fish
swam under the waves
that splashed on the beach.
Shells filled the sand
like chocolate chips.





Of all the fish in the school,
one was different.

His name was *Mud*.

The others swam around him.

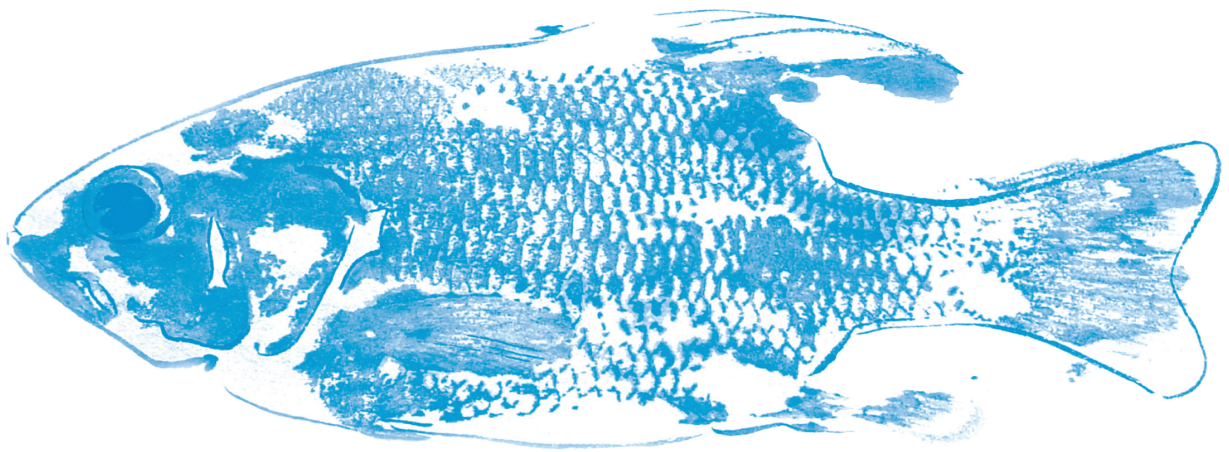
“Are you a mudfish?” they asked.

“No,” said Mud.

“Are you a muddy fish?” they asked.

“No,” said Mud.

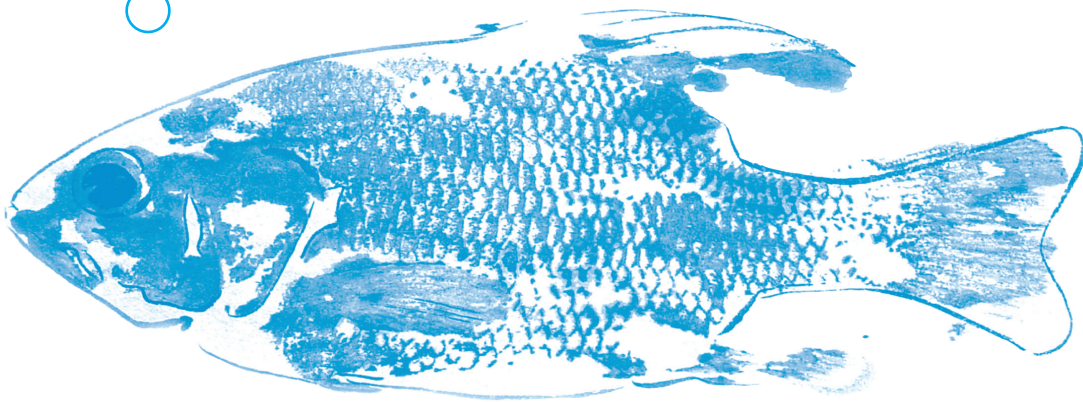
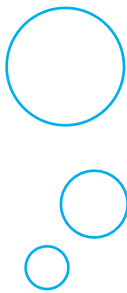
“My name is *Mud*.”



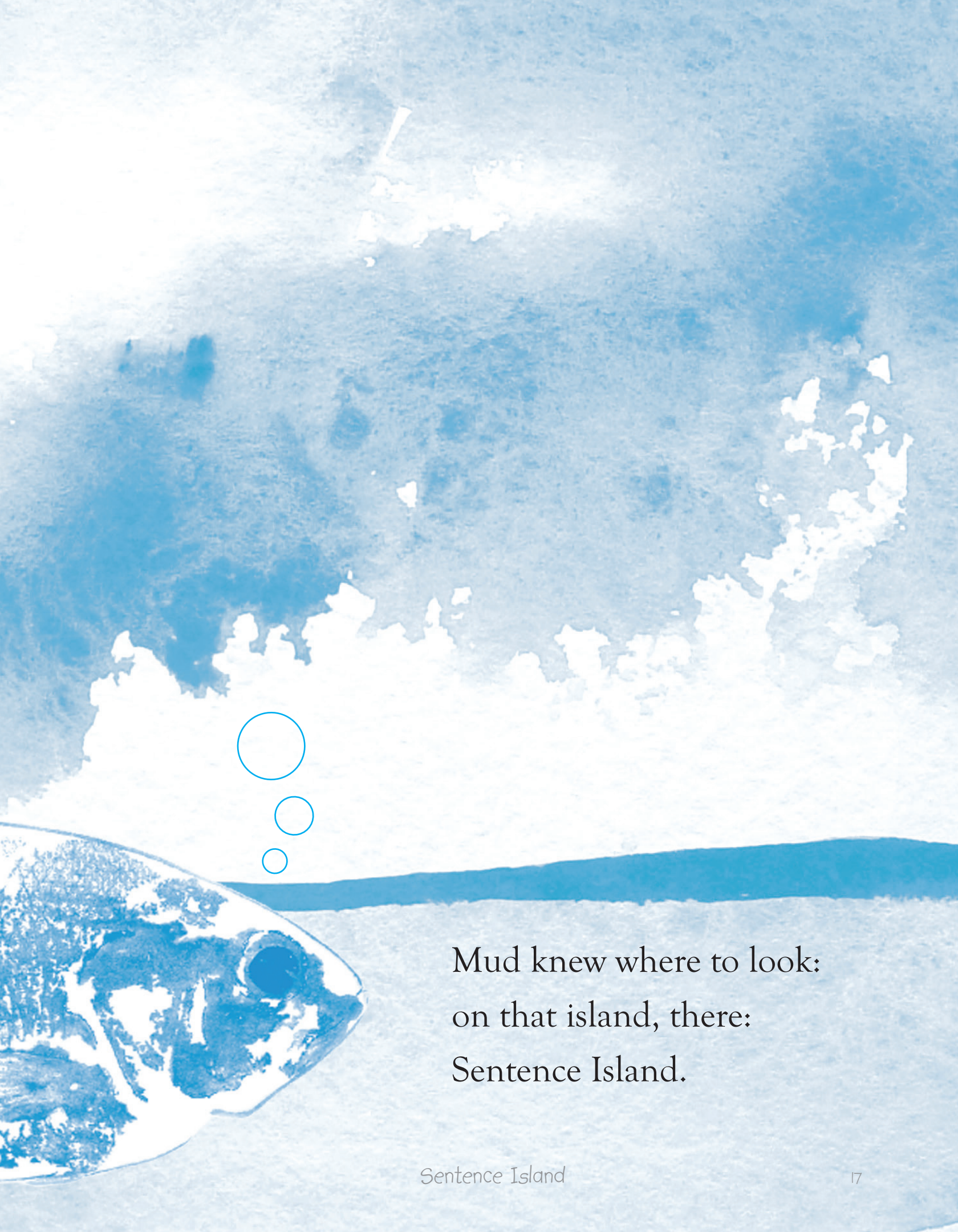
Mud was different;
he didn't care who knew it,
so no one bothered him.

In fact, Mud was different
from the other fish in two ways.
(Yes, he could talk, but *all* fish can talk.)

First, Mud could walk on land.
Second, Mud was obsessed;
ideas rose from his head
like bubbles.



Mud was obsessed.
He could not stop thinking about it.
About what?
Oh, the sentence.
Mud had overheard a learned fish saying
wonderful things about the sentence,
and he just *had* to find
a sentence, to see one for himself,
to see a real one,
to learn how to write one.
It was Mud's mission.



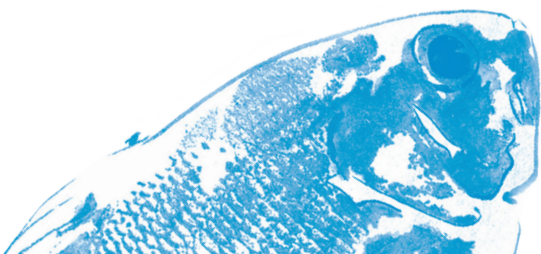
Mud knew where to look:
on that island, there:
Sentence Island.



CHAPTER TWO

Mud Thinks about Doing and Being

Mud was deep in thought.
“More?” thought Mud. “Much more to learn?”
But suddenly he heard
a splash, and then a sploosh,
and two pelicans, who were circling
for some breakfast, glided right
over his head. Being a fish, Mud
eyed the pelicans suspiciously,
but they appeared to wish him no harm.
“Who are you?” they called.



“My name is *Mud*,” called Mud. “Who are you?”

“I’m Oopsy, and that’s my flappy friend Daisy,”
called Oopsy. “We’re very fancy flyers!”

Oopsy almost flew into Daisy.

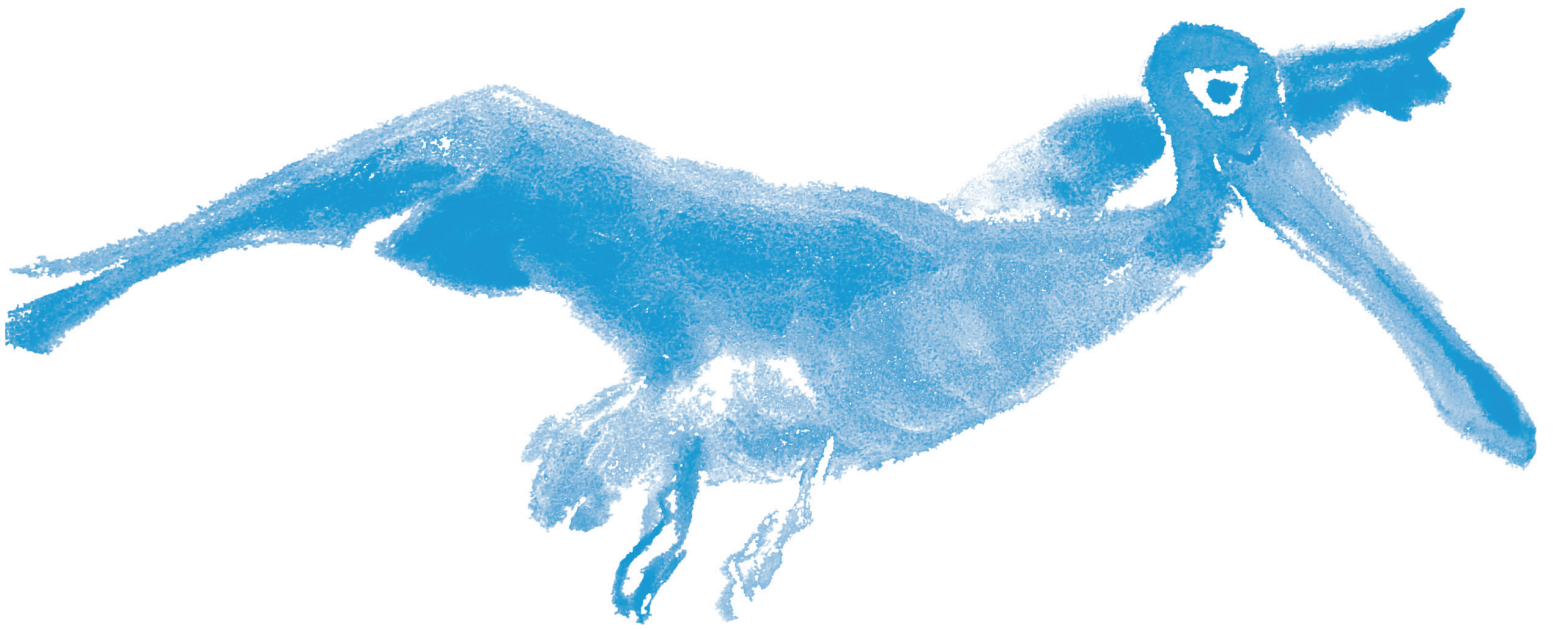
“I’m looking for sentences!” called Mud.

“Cow Loon said I could learn
all about sentences!”

“Cow Loon?” said Oopsy.

“He’s a fine fiddler! *We’ll* inform you
about the facts! We’re familiar with the flight path!”

Laughing like a couple of pelicans,
they flapped in for a floppy landing,



and both of them hopped and almost
flipped on their noses.



“I flunked Flap School,” said Oopsy.

“Your flipper was flat!” said Daisy.

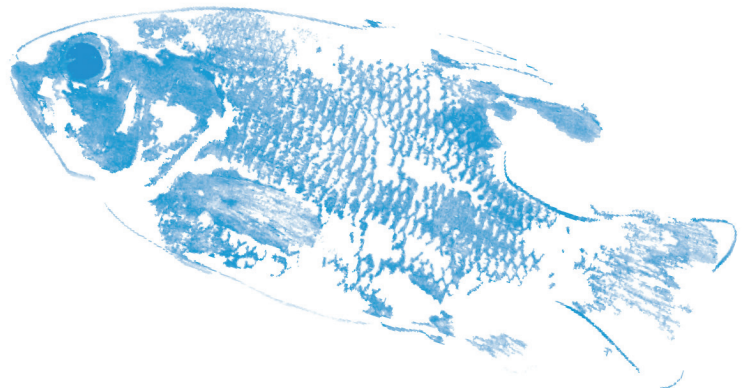
“Don’t be foolish,” said Oopsy,
and they laughed like pelicans.

Mud stared, open-mouthed.

Oopsy-Daisy stopped laughing.

“Sentences,” said Mud.

“Tell me about sentences.”



“Follow, Fred,” said Oopsy, “and I’ll give it a fling,”
and this is what he said:

“Daisy is a doozy, but
Oopsy *flew* loops, see?”

“No,” said Mud, “and my name’s not *Fred*.”

“Daisy **IS**, but Oopsy **FLEW**,” said Oopsy,
“Follow, Fred?”

“No,” said Mud, “and my name is *Mud*.”

They glared at each other.

“Fine,” said Oopsy, “follow this, Fred,”
and this is what he said:

“Daisy *was* hazy, but
Oopsy *sipped* soup, see?”

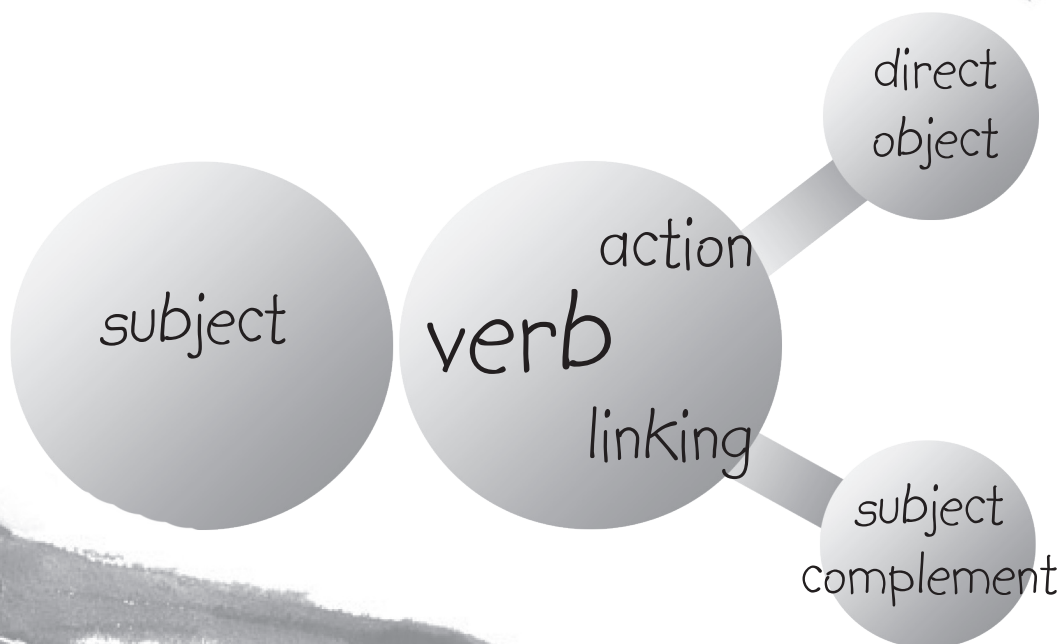
“No,” said Mud, whose name was *Mud*.

“Fine, Fred,” said Oopsy, “follow further,”
and this is what he said, very slowly:

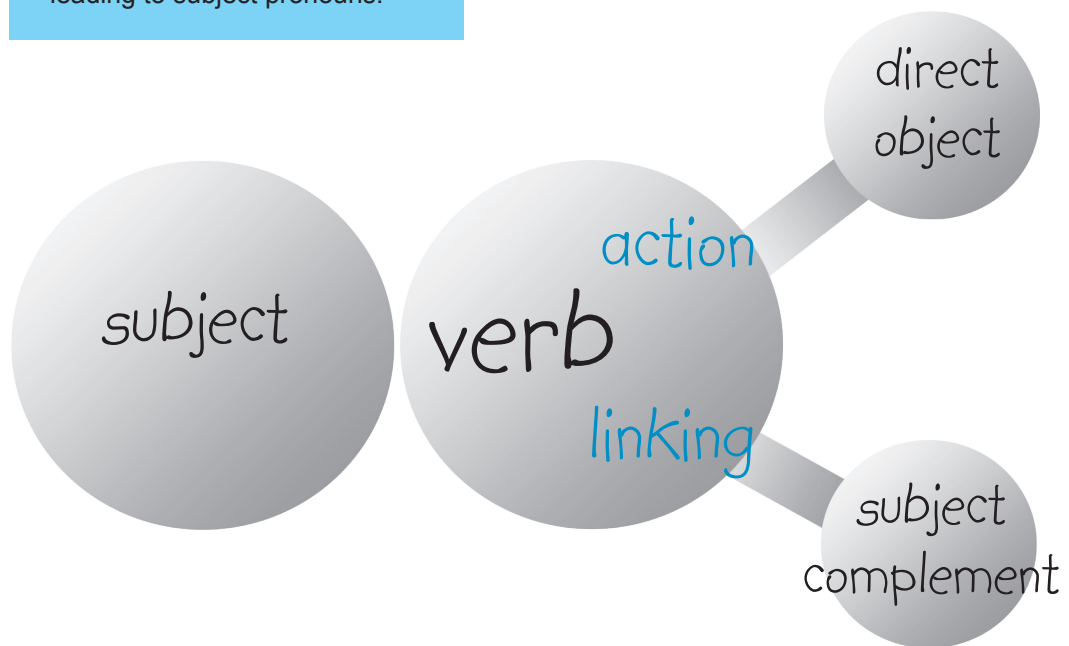
“Daisy *eats* fish, and
Mud *is* a fish. See?”

Oopsy is trying to show Mud the difference between action and linking verbs. “Daisy was hazy” has a linking verb and a subject complement, but “Oopsy sipped soup, see?” has an action verb and a direct object.

Mud raised a scaly eyebrow.
“No,” he said, “and I don’t like that sentence!”
Daisy flopped and flapped and said,
“The figure, Oopsy, show him the figure.”
Oopsy looked dubiously at Mud but said,
“Fine, Fred. Follow this,”
and he drew in the sand with his bill.



It is not too strong to say that no one who does not understand this can learn to write correctly. The verb is the main logic switch in the sentence, with action verbs leading to object pronouns and linking verbs leading to subject pronouns.



“These are called the **parts of the sentence**,”
said Oopsy, “and there is more to follow, Fred,
but we’ll fly with this fact: a sentence
has a **structure**, with **parts** that are connected,
just like other structures.

Every sentence features a subject,
made of a noun or pronoun,
and every sentence has a verb. Follow:
the verb might be an **action** verb,
like *see*, *ran*, *ate*, or *flew*,
or the verb might be a **linking** verb, like *is*.
There are flocks of action verbs
but only a few linking verbs.”

