SCHOLASTIC

The Trait Crate®

TEACHING ORGANIZATION
USING *I Am America*

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Teaching **Organization** Using *I Am America*
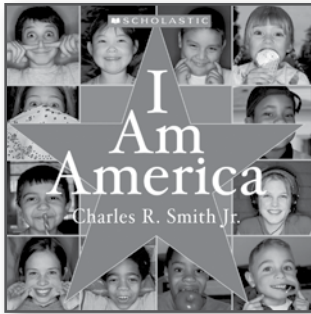
I Am America

Charles R. Smith Jr.,
Author and Illustrator

In this book, the many races, religions, and cultures that make up America are depicted lovingly through images of children. Its simple text—recurring "I am" statements—and colorful photographs show what makes American children alike and different.

In this series of lessons based on *I Am America*, young students try their hand at the organization trait by writing and drawing "I am" statements of their own. They explore how to develop their pieces by thinking about their favorite foods, songs, activities, and physical features, and presenting details about them. Finally, they look at the book's ending as a model for putting the finishing touch on their own writing—without simply using "The end."

Organization: A Definition for Primary Students

Think of organization as the framework—the concrete foundation, the steel beams, the weight-bearing timbers. When the building is finished, the skeleton isn't visible. What you see instead are the shapes of the rooms, the finished walls, the windows, the light fixtures. But the building is solid because of its sturdy framework. You know it works. Same goes for writing. If you look closely at the work of even emergent writers, you may see signs of organization, such as:

- several pictures on the same topic, in sequential order
- information grouped by circling, highlighting, and connecting lines
- a clear beginning and/or ending
- use of connecting words such as *and*, *but*, and *so*
- use of sequencing words such as *first*, *then*, *later*, and *the end*
- a sense of time through a sequence of events
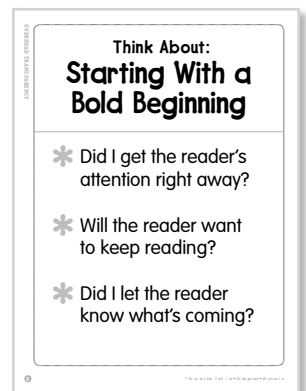- use of labels, titles, and captions
- use of lists

LESSON #1: Starting With a Bold Beginning

Materials:

- a copy of *I Am America*
- overhead transparency of "Key Qualities of the Organization Trait" (page 5)
- photographs from the Internet and magazines
- drawing paper, pens, pencils, markers
- writing paper
- "Things I Do Well" printable (page 6)
- "I Am" printable (page 7)
- overhead transparency of "Think About: Starting With a Bold Beginning" (page 8)

What to Do:

1. Display the overhead "Key Qualities of the Organization Trait" and discuss with students how writers try to begin their work with a word, phrase, sentence, or paragraph that will get the reader's attention.

2. Tell students that you are going to read a book to them that begins with two words, "I am," and repeats that statement throughout. The first "I am" is the title: *I Am America.* Ask students what that means to them. How can anyone be America?

3. Brainstorm other ways to express the idea in the title, such as "I live in America" or "I am an American." Ask students if "I am America" is more or less memorable than those other ways.

4. Show the overhead "Think About: Starting With a Bold Beginning" and talk about what authors do to get the reader's attention. Sometimes they start with dialogue, a sound, a quote, a question, a visual image, a surprising statement, or an interesting fact.

5. Read *I Am America* to students, showing the pictures as you go.

6. Ask students what the author, Charles R. Smith Jr., did at the beginning to get their attention. They might say he uses an "I am" statement and keeps repeating it throughout the book. They might also notice that he uses photos of real children, which are fun to look at. Students may also notice that he uses a photo of the American flag at the beginning to represent all children.

7. Tell students they will be writing their own "I am" statements and illustrating them with photographs.

8. Display the overhead "Think About: Starting With a Bold Beginning" and remind students of the importance of getting the reader's attention right away so they will continue reading.

9. Using the "Things I Do Well" printable, help students think of four things that they do well and represent them, such as "I am a basketball game on Saturday morning" or "I am a lover of books about animals." Ask them to draw pictures of their ideas and, if they are able, to caption them.

Key Qualities of the
Organization Trait

❋ Starting with a bold beginning

❋ Developing a mighty middle

❋ Crafting an excellent ending

Think About:
Starting With a Bold Beginning

❋ Did I get the reader's attention right away?

❋ Will the reader want to keep reading?

❋ Did I let the reader know what's coming?

Name _____ Date _____

Things I Do Well

I am	I am
I am	I am

Key Qualities of the
Organization Trait

✳ Starting with a bold beginning

✳ Developing a mighty middle

✳ Crafting an excellent ending

Name _____ Date _____

Things I Do Well

I am…

I am…

I am…

I am…

Share this scoring guide with students to establish a common language about writing and to help them look at their work for strengths and weaknesses.

My First Scoring Guide
Organization

Strong

I've Got It!
* I have a bold beginning, mighty middle, and excellent ending.
* My details are in the right places.
* I've given my ideas an order that really works.

Developing

On My Way
* I've made a good start at a beginning, middle, and ending.
* Most of my details fit.
* The order of my ideas makes sense.

Beginning

Just Beginning
* My writing doesn't have a clear beginning, middle, or ending.
* My details are jumbled and confusing.
* I have "stuff" on paper, but it's not in order.