

WRITING RIGHT FROM THE START: THE PRIMARY WRITING WORKSHOP

WHY BOOK MAKING MAKES SENSE FOR THE YOUNGEST WRITERS

Making Books . . .

is developmentally appropriate

What Matters Most in the Teaching of Writing?

- Time

- Meaningful work

- Talk

- Expectation

- Vision

- Teaching

WRITING WORKSHOP ACROSS THE YEAR

Before children arrive at school...

- Find a big, predictable block of time in the schedule for writer's workshop
- Blank, unlined books are pre-made and ready to go (5-6 pages)
- Timer
- Places to work throughout the room
- Tools out and available (markers, colored pencils, crayons, pencils, ABC charts)

The first few weeks of school...

- Choice in writing is absolutely critical for children to take ownership and become independent in this work.
- Emphasize stamina and long work on books.
- Build a concept of authorship from an author-illustrator study.
- Management and routine grow from the talk about the work children are doing every day.

Structures that support the work across the year...

- Routine, routine, routine
- Anchor charts to revisit as needed – for example:
 - *Workshop routines *Writing strategies
 - *Finished book chart *Study charts
- Hanging file folders to store students' books
- Word study at times *other* than writing workshop
- “Not afraid of my words” interactive talk
- Predictable pattern to studies

Across the day, surround the writing workshop with teaching about how the language system works...

- *daily letter-sound-word study

- *a room saturated with environmental print

- *daily read aloud (more than one when possible)

- *games involving language exploration

- *shared and interactive writing

- *content area writing

- *demonstrations (teacher writing in front of children)

A KEY INSTRUCTIONAL DECISION

If children *initiate*

FINISHING EXPECTATIONS FOR THE YOUNGEST WRITERS

Understanding what it means to be finished is an important part of understanding the *process* of writing. Begin with simple expectations for finishing so all writers can be successful:

I know I'm finished when...

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ASSESSMENT

Developing Process Habits of Mind With Our Youngest Writers

Children learn about writing as a process by...

writing regularly

talking (and listening to others talk) about process in conferences and share times

accounting for process in their finished work

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Four Lenses for Assessment

- Looking closely at individual pieces of writing
- Watching and listening as children are engaged in the process
- Asking children to be articulate about process
- Looking across the work of a single child over time

ASSESSING A CHILD'S COMPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

Assessment Lenses	Essential Understandings About Texts
Is the child's book <i>about</i> something?	Writers focus on a topic when they compose a text.
How has the child organized this book? What is the connection between ideas?	The ideas in a text should be organized in logical ways.
When the child reads the book, does it sound like a book?	The language in written texts has been crafted in particular ways.
Does the child read the book in basically the same way over time?	The symbols in texts (words and illustrations) hold consistent meaning over time.
Is the child making the book <i>in the manner</i> of other picture books he's seen?	Different publishing formats have particular features writers use to making meaning.
What does this book show the child understands about genre?	Different kinds of writing in the world serve different purposes for different audiences, and have features in common that readers expect.
How is the child representing meaning in this book?	Writers use both illustrations (graphics and layout) and written text to make meaning.

Assessment Lenses	Essential Understandings About Process
Is the child intentional about what she is representing on the page?	Writers are purposeful and engage in a continuous process of decision making as they compose a text.
Does the child engage in revision while composing the picture book?	Writers make changes to clarify meaning, enhance style, make texts more readable, etc.
Is there any evidence the child is thinking ahead about what she'll write next?	Writers think ahead as they compose, keeping the text as a whole in mind.
Has the child made any intentional crafting decisions in the book?	Writers often use crafting techniques to make their texts more engaging for readers.
How long has the child worked on this book? In one sitting? Over time?	Writers must stick to the task of writing to see a text through to completion (stamina).
Does the child exhibit a willingness to solve problems as she writes?	Writers must be problem-solvers.

Conferring: The Talk That Fills Our Classrooms

Interview the writer

- *Have the writer tell you what she is doing and where she is in the process.
- *You might begin the conference by asking, "Tell me about..."
- *You might build the interview off past conferences.
- *Try to avoid opening with yes/no questions.

Keep the tone positive (pep talk, not poop talk)

- *Try to leave children with energy for next steps in writing.

Word Making Development

Below is a general description of the typical kinds of development you will see as children learn to make/spell words. This development is not always linear, some

Composition Dimension: Consistency of Meaning

Developmentally, the way a child reads a book will typically change some with each reading. The changes happen because most young children don't have enough conventional print to carry the message, so they must rely on illustrations and memory for each new reading.

When children reread their books in a different way, they are often making changes and adding details which make the books more interesting or easier to understand. Try not to pin down a child's exact meaning in a book too quickly and miss out on these often richer readings.

Eventually, the meanings in children's books will become more and more consistent as their spellings become more accurate and they are able to hold the meanings more efficiently with words.

Here are some descriptions of typical development you will see as children are learning to keep their meanings consistent. Think about ways you might help children move forward in their development in this composition dimension.

- **Illustration changes in the moment.** A very young child might start off drawing a dinosaur, change it to a dog halfway through, and when it's finished it's a picture of a daddy. The illustration literally changes as it's being composed and continues to change with each reading.
- **Meaning changes with each reading.** The meaning of the child's book changes with each reading. One time the book is about a family, the next time it's about playing outside, and the next time something else.
- **The book is about the same topic but the details change.** The child's book is always about his or her family, but the exact people or what the family is doing changes from reading to reading.
- **The book is about the same topic and many of the details stay the same.** The meaning of the child's book stays basically the same with each reading, but some of the details change or new details are added.
- **The child reads the book the same way each time the day it's composed, but the words change on subsequent days.** This often happens as words start to hold more and more of the meaning, but the spellings are still very approximated. The child forgets the logic of his spelling approximations over time and struggles to reread and recapture his meaning.
- **The child reads the book the same way from day to day.** This usually occurs when a child has mostly near-accurate spelling carrying the message.

Staying On Topic: What is your book about?

Sometimes beginning writers don't realize each page of a book should be about the same thing or tell the same story. You will see quite a range of understandings like the ones described below related to this important composition dimension:

- **The child does not state a topic.**

Teacher: "What is your book about."

Child: "I don't know."

- **The child's book is on topic, but she doesn't state the topic.** For example, a child's book is all about animals, but when asked what the book is about, she doesn't say or realize it's about animals. The writer simply may not be familiar with the question, "What is your book about?"
- **The child states a topic, but the book isn't on that topic.** For example, the child says his book is about snakes, but there are no snakes in the book.
- **The child uses the first page as the topic.** The child states the (e o)0

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Units of Study

UNITS OF STUDY

Definition

A unit of study is a series of whole class conversations, demonstrations and inquiry on a focused topic. The unit of study may be as short as one week or as long as five or six weeks.

Why units of study?

Because the whole class teaching in a writing workshop is very focused from day to day, we sometimes need to organize this teaching in ways that add up to bigger understandings across time for writers. We don't want our teaching to have a "hit and miss" feel to it with a new writing issue every day. We want to stay with the important issues and give them time to get big in the room.

What kinds of things do we study?

Studies need to be "big" enough that writers at many different places can thrive inside them. Basically, all studies will have something to do with either the *process* of writing or the *products* of writing (or both). These are issues that anyone who will be writing will need to spend time thinking about at some point. Here are examples of types of studies:

Process Studies	Product Studies
Living a writing life, and getting and growing ideas for writing. A writers' work other than writing: research, observation, talk, etc. An overview of the process of writing. Revision. Editing. Using a notebook as a tool to make writing better.	c6(g) 1(e:)TJ.6(g) 1.2.8(of)0.6(w)4.50 Td[E]3.9(d)5.7(it)6(in)8.7(g)9.84

AN EXAMPLE:

A Year of Study in a First Grade Writing Workshop

Over the course of the year, we studied...

*The kinds of things writers make (an overview of the kinds of writing that exist in the world) and how we'll make them in this room (getting started management).

*Where writers get ideas.

*How to read like a writer.

*Finding writing mentors. Donald Crews as a class mentor, then finding our own mentors.

*How to structure texts in interesting ways.

*How to make illustrations work better with the written text.

*How to have better peer conferences.

*Genre study: Literary nonfiction

*How to use punctuation in interesting ways.

*Genre study: Poetry

*How to revise by going back to a piece and adding on.

A BASIC REPERTOIRE OF TEACHING MOVES

As I (Katie) plan for whole class teaching in any kind of study, this is my entire menu of possibilities for how I might go about the teaching:

Inquiry Based Strategies (often unfold over a series of lessons)

- Read (independently or together) just to get a feel for something.
- Read aloud together. Notice together. Turn noticings into specific curriculum.
- Read or look at texts independently (during the workshop or at home). Make notes of noticings. Come back together and turn noticings into specific curriculum.
- Read or look at texts independently with a question or focus in mind(during the

The Predictable Rhythm of *Genre or Craft* Study in the Writing Workshop

*Gather a stack of picture books that are good examples of what you want to study.

The Predictable Rhythm of *Process* Study in the Writing Workshop

We spend time “talking” and “listening” to people who write and we find out how they do what they do.

{Curriculum resources: authors’ notes in books, interviews with writers, books about *how* to write, our own writing process histories}

We chart the strategies and understandings about process that we are learning from writers. We try some of them out.

We finish a piece of writing (in any genre) and are very articulate about the particular aspect of process we have been studying and how it influenced our writing.

Kinds of things we might study:

- Where writers get ideas and how they decide which to pursue.
- Using a notebook as a tool to make our writing better.
- A writer’s work *other* than writing (research, reading, etc.)
- Different ways writers plan before drafting.
- What writers think about during drafting and revision.
- How talking to someone can make our writing better.
- The process of getting something published.
- Dealing with predictable problems (writer’s block, organizing stuff, committing time to writing, etc.)
- Using strategies and tools for editing (proofreading).

Note: Remember that the main way students learn about process is by engaging in writing *often*. The main vehicle for *teaching* about the writing process is share time. Students are recruited each day to talk about the smart process-thinking they are using to get their writing done. In a sense, then, we are always teaching about process whether it is the topic of the study or not.

Deepening Curriculum Knowledge for the Teaching of Writing

Genre

- What kind of writing is this? How is it different than other kinds of writing in the world?
- What *work* does this kind of writing do in the world (topics, audiences, purposes)?
- Why would people want to read this kind of writing?
- Do you know other writing that is like this?
- What do people have to do to get ready to write this kind of thing?
- How long, generally, is this kind of writing? Is it different lengths in different containers?
- What do you notice about how this kind of text is written?

Approach

-

to know, that despite romantic notions of divine inspiration, no story writes itself...the story before us has been consciously, in some cases, painstakingly *written*.” Joyce Carol Oates, *Faith of a Writer*

What have you read that is like what you're trying to write?

Some Genre Study Possibilities that Make Sense for Primary Writers

Literary Nonfiction Book List

Arnold, C. *Shockers of the Sea*

Arnosky, J. *Little Lions*

Ashman, L. *Castles, Caves and Honeycombs*

Aston, D.H. *A Seed is Sleepy*

-----*An Egg is Quiet*

Bash, B. *Urban Roosts*

Bateman, D. *Deep in the Swamp*

Bauer, M.D. *If You Were Born A Kitten*

Bayrock, F. *Bubble Homes and Fish Farts*

Been, S. *Tiger.*

Bernard, R. *Insects*

-----*A Tree For All Seasons*

Bolden, T. *Rock of Ages*

Bourgeois, P. *The Dirt on Dirt*

Brennan-Nelson, D. *Penny: The Forgotten Coin*

-----*My Momma Likes to Say*

Butterworth, C. *Sea Horse*

Calmenson, S. *May I Pet Your Dog?*

Campbell, S.C. *Wolfsnail: A Backyard Predator*

Cassino, M. *The Story of Snow*

Collard, S.B. *Teeth*

-----*Anna and Dad*. h2.35w02 22 (,m1(--)iT(yar)n1002 Ts6(o)-0i2(a9 e002 , D10.8(r)1.9(, E.)JTJ /1-n)15.4 M 6-1.8m

-----*Do They Scare You?*

-----*Leaving Home*

Cooper, E. *Ice Cream*

Cowley, J, h(C)-1.2 Tw -9.76-1.163

Mugford, S. *Sharks and Dangers of the Deep*
-----*Reptiles and Amphibians*

Literary Nonfiction Book List

Older, J. *Ice Cream*

O'Sullivan, J. *1*

Some Common Approaches to Informational Nonfiction

Many picture books and some feature articles will actually use a combination of these approaches to engage and inform readers.

For each approach, I have listed two examples from my own personal library. Showing students more than one example of a particular approach deepens their understanding of it significantly.

There is no need to use the books or magazines I have listed here, however. You'll want to revisit your own school and classroom libraries to see what examples of these approaches you have on hand (in picture books and magazines), and also other approaches you might find that aren't listed here.

- Information is conveyed in a series of questions and answers.

Why? Lila Prapp

How Many Ways Can You Catch a Fly? Steve Jenkins and Robin Page

- Writing about a topic over the course of some natural time period: a day or night, or through months or seasons.

Birdsongs Betsy Franco

A Day in the Salt Marsh Kevin Kurtz

- *evin Kurtz*

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- Using present tense verbs, the text is written as if it the reader is watching something happen before his or her eyes.
The Eyes of the Gray Wolf Jonathan London
Wolfsnail: A Backyard Predator Sarah C. Campbell
- The text is written to follow the process of how something is formed or made or unfolds in nature.
An Island Grows Lola M. Schaefer
Trout Are Made of Trees April Pulley Sayre
- Writing about a topic in an engaging way, and embedding separate, factual information around the main text.
The Emperor's Egg Martin Jenkins
Surprising Sharks Nicola Davies
- Writing about a topic in an engaging way, and including related factual information at the end of the text.
Vulture View April Pulley Sayre
Close to You: How Animals Bond Kimiko Kajikawa
- Writing about a topic in an engaging way, and including related factual information at the beginning of the text.
Sharkabet: A Sea of Sharks from A-Z Ray Troll
One Tiny Turtle Nicola Davies
- Crafting an actual story (with all the story elements) and embedding factual information around the main text of the story.
White Owl, Barn Owl Nicola Davies
Cook-A-Doodle-Do Janet Stevens and Susan Stevens Crummel
- The writer crafts a series of poems about a topic and then includes factual information about the topic of each poem.
Hey There, Stink Bug! Leslie Bulion
Song of the Water Boatman Joyce Sidman
- The text is written as a series of journal or diary entries which convey information.
Look to the North: A Wolf Pup Diary Jean Craighead George
 "Backyard Hummers" Ellen Lambeth *Ranger Rick* April 2009
- Letters between two (or more) voices are used to frame

Booklist of Topical/Descriptive/Odes

Asch, F. *The Earth and I*

-----*Water*

Aston, D.H. *An Orange in January*

Banks, K. *Fox*

Beach, J. *Names for Snow*

Borden, L. *America Is...*

Bouchard, D. *If You're Not from the Prairie*

Blyler, A. *Finding Foxes*

Browne, MD. *Give Her the River*

Buchanan, K. *It Rained on the Desert Today*

Bunting, E. *Red Fox Running*

-----*Secret Place*

Burleigh, R. *Hoops*

Carlstrom, N.W. *The Snow Speaks*

-----*Goodbye Geese*

Chall, MW. *Up North at the Cabin*

Christian, P. *If You Find a Rock*

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Memoir Picture Books

Bogacki, T. *My First Garden*

Carle, E. *Flora and Tiger*

Creech, S. *Fishing in the Air* (memoir-ish)

Crews, D. *Big Mama's*

Depaola, T. *26 Fairmont Avenue*

Erdrich, L. *The Range Eternal*

Garza, C.L. *Family Pictures/Cuadros de familia*

-----*In My Family/ En mi familia*

Gray, L.M.

Slice-of Life Book List

Alexander, S. *One More Time, Mama*

Appelt, K. *Incredible Me!*

Bauer, M.D. *When I Go Camping With
Grandma*

Bennet, K. *Not Norman: A Goldfish Story*

Bluemle, E. *My Father the Dog*

Bowen, A. *How Did You Grow So Big, So
Soon?*

----*I Loved You Even Before You Were Born*

----*When You Visit Grandma and Grandpa*

Braun, S. *On Our Way Home*

Carlson, N.

Story-List Distinction

As teachers, we sometimes make the mistake of using the word *story* much too loosely. We call every picture book a story, even when it's not.

As teachers of *writers*, it's important we are accurate when we use the word *story*.

So what is a story? A story must contain all the elements of story: setting, character, movement through time, plot, and change.

Lots of the books children read and make themselves are not stories. They simply tell *about* something and move through a list of ideas instead of through time. We often call these *list books* in our teaching to make a simple distinction from story books.

For example, consider the texts of these two books, both of them about a sister named Shauna, but one is a story book and one is a list book.

Shauna Dents the Door

I have a sister named Shauna.

Once when we were little, we were staying by ourselves while my parents were out.

I took Shauna's favorite toy into the bathroom and locked the door so she couldn't get to it or me. On the other side of the door, Shauna yelled and yelled, but I stayed put.

Finally, she kicked the door, BAM, and dented in the wood. We both panicked because our keep-away game had turned out badly. Mom and Dad would be so mad when they found out. We made a secret pact not to tell them and hoped they wouldn't notice.

Weeks went by, and they didn't notice. We thought we were safe.

Then one morning when my mom was vacuuming, we heard her yell out and we knew we were busted.

"No more allowance for the rest of your lives!" She screamed.

(But she didn't really mean it).

My Sister Shauna

I have a sister named Shauna.

She's three and a half years older than me (and always will be!).

Shauna has beautiful red hair (straight, not curly like mine) and freckles, and she always wears a smile.

Shauna is a nurse and she helps people all day long. She is kind and considerate and makes sick people feel better just because she's there.

Shauna has a husband named Charlie, a son named Eric, a daughter named Hannah, and a dog named Daphne.

Shauna loves to read and sing and walk Daphne (Daphne loves that too).

Shauna and I live far apart now and we don't get to see each other much, but we're never far apart from each other's thoughts.

If I could have picked my sister out myself from the special sister store, I'd have picked Shauna, for sure.

Poetry Book List

Adoff, A. *Street Music: City Poems*

-----*Love Letters*

-----*Touch the Poem*

-----*The Basket Counts*

Adoff, J. *Small Fry*

Alarcon, F. *Laughing Tomatoes*

-----*From the Bellybutton of the Moon*

-----*Poems to Dream Together*

Ashman, L. *Stella, Unleashed: Notes...Doghouse*

Berry, J. *Isn't My Name Magical?*

Borden, L. *Off to First Grade*

Brand, D. *Earth Magic*

Brown, M.W. *Give Yourself to the Rain.*

Bryan, A. *Sing to the Sun*

Bulion, L. *Hey There, Stink Bug!*

Clements, A. *DogKu*

De Fina, A. *When a City Leans Against the Sky*

Dotlich, R.K. *Lemonade Sun*

Esbensen, B.J. *Echoes for the Eye*

Fletcher, R. *Ordinary Things*

-----*A Writing Kind of Day*

-----*Moving Day*

Florian, D. *Poetrees*

-----*Comets, Stars, the Moon, and Mars*

George, K.O. *Emma Dilemma: Big Sister Poems*

-----*The Great Frog Race*

-----*Little Dog Poems*

-----*Little Dog and Duncan*

-----*Old Elm Speaks: Tree Poems*

-----*Toasting M3.663(222 Tw T)BT--*

Book List of Common Text Structures

compare and contrast- back and forth

Ayres, K. *Up, Down, and Around*

George, L.B. *Inside Mouse/ Outside Mouse*

Hall, D. *I Am the Dog? I Am the Cat*

Igus, T. *The Two Mrs. Gibsons*

Jenkins, E. *Use of Fire* Wrynn6f26.1f(1(S4)1r0 Tc 0 Tw 1.24.7 (TjEMC /P <MCID 70DC /TT1 1 Tf0.002 Tc -0.01

series of questions and answers

Jenkins, S. & Page, R. *How Many Ways Can
You Catch a Fly?*

-----*What Do You Do With a Tail Like This?*

Kaner, E. *Who Likes the Rain?*

Prap, L.

A Few of Katie's Favorite Books for Illustration Study

A Couple of Boys Have the Best Week Ever. Written and illustrated by Marla Frazee.

A Good Night Walk. Written and illustrated by Elisha Cooper.

And Then It's Spring. Written by Julie Fogliano and Illustrated by Emily Stead.

Beach. Written and illustrated by Elisha Cooper.

Bedtime for Mommy

Helping Young Children Learn to Illustrate in More Meaningful Ways

Every picture book is filled with interesting things to notice about illustrations. Here is a list of

In Pictures and In Words: Teaching the Qualities of Good Writing Through Illustration Study. By
Katie Wood Ray. 2010. Heinemann.

Supporting Children's Thinking About
Illustrations in Writing Workshop Helps Them:

build stamina for creative kinds of work

develop habits of process: planning,
designing, drafting, revising and editing

utilize an important habit of mind:
how to read like writers

learn about qualities of good writing
in a parallel context

Instructional Tips for Helping Children Build Stamina in Illustration Work

- Teach children to date-stamp their books when they begin working on them and when they move on to a new book.
- In writing conferences, make it a habit to ask children how long they've been working on the book you are conferring about. Over time, the familiar question will teach them that you expect them to think about the process of their work over time.
- Explain to children that it is fine for them to sometimes put a book away for a while and then decide

Instructional Tips for Supporting Children to Read Like Writers in Illustration Work

- * Because seeing oneself as *like* another person is so critical to reading like a writer, children need to see authors and illustrators as more than just names printed on books. They need, literally, to see them. If they're not already pictured on the book flaps, find photographs of authors and illustrators online, print them, and tape them inside your books. Seeing the actual person who made all the decisions in a book helps make that connection more concrete for children.
- * Always read the author and illustrator notes and dedications in books

Instructional Tips for Supporting Illustration–Writing Connections

- * If you read chapter books aloud to your students, you might consider selecting excerpts and exploring illustration–writing connections. Read an excerpt (more than once if necessary) and ask students to imagine how they might picture the meaning of the words in an illustration. The thinking students do will help them see the connection between what words do to make meaning and what illustrations do to make meaning.
- * Whenever you demonstrate your own thinking about composing an illustration, be sure to point out how you would write your meaning if you were using only words and not pictures. You can just do this quickly in response to your drawing, or you might consider extending the teaching demonstration over two days. On the first day you model your thinking about composing the illustration, and on the second day you show children how you made the same meaning with writing. Of course, it won't be *exactly* the same meaning because the modes have different potentials, but the subtle differences will make for good talk that should deepen children's understandings.
- * As you confer with children, you might share with them the words that come to mind as suggested by their illustrations. For example, if a child has drawn a picture of a very tall building, you might say, "That building looks like it almost touches the sky. All the other buildings are so small around it. It seems like the king of the buildings." Just respond naturally with whatever words come to mind. The point is to show children how pictures suggest meanings that can be expressed by words.