

How do I get the kids to start writing?!



Writing Workshop Mini-Lessons

I have spent a lot of time writing about why we use a writing workshop, how we set up and structure our writing workshop, and even went into detail about our routine and the resources we have on hand. Setting up a space & routine for writing is nice and all that, but what do we actually DO?! What do I SAY? How do I get them to WRITE?

I wanted to share what happened on that first, second and third day of our "writing workshop" to get the kids *actually* thinking and writing.

I know when I first starting on this journey, I wanted to know, "What do I do *today* to start them on that path?" I knew what I wanted the end-product to look like (the kids happily picking up a pencil, opening their journals and writing), but I didn't know how to help them become comfortable... how to help them overcome self-doubt... how to let them take ownership of their writing (without my handing them an assignment or telling them what to write).

When I first started our writing workshop, I used mentor texts, well written books that I selected to help make a point. I hope you find these lesson ideas useful as you explore writing with your own children.

Here are some of our first mini-lesson topics. I used mentor texts and picked them apart to help the kids see some of the elements that make for good writing.

In this series I'll go into more detail on each one:

1. What makes a good book or story?
2. Make your story come alive with details and description.
3. Creating Interesting Characters
4. Story Openings: Set the mood or feeling of your story
5. Gathering story ideas from your own life

These happen to be some of our first lessons, but there's no reason you couldn't start with lesson 5 instead of lesson 1 or 2.

The first six months when we were first beginning our writing workshop adventures, I used children's literature a lot as a springboard for discussion and analysis of good writing.

The good news is that you can use practically any book you have on hand with these lessons.

●	<i>Writing Workshop</i>
	<i>Day Two: Make the Story Come</i>
●	<i>Alive with Details; Show the reader what happened;</i>
	<i>Create images in the</i>
●	<i>reader's mind</i>

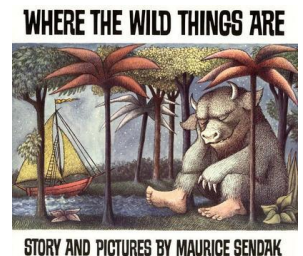
Discussion with the Kids:

What do you think of these sentences? Do they tell us much?

- The room was messy.
- I went to the park and it was fun.
- There was a dog.
- It was raining.
- My friend was nice to me.

How can you make these sentences more descriptive and engaging? Let's change them to try to show the reader what's really going on. Explain in detail what happened. Create images and pictures in the reader's mind. Do this together with the kids to create lively, interesting sentences. [The room smelled like a landfill. In the corner were empty pizza boxes. Socks and dirty clothes were strewn all over the floor.]

Mentor Text: Now we're going to read *Where the Wild Things Are*. Let's really listen to the words the author uses and the descriptive language he uses.



After we read the book: What descriptions really stuck out in your mind? [Let the kids share their ideas. Below are other questions you could ask.]

How did Max's room change?

- the room became covered with vines
- there was an ocean with a boat for Max

What were the monsters like? Even without the illustrations do you have a good idea of what they looked like?

- The monsters rolled their terrible eyes, gnashed their terrible teeth and showed their terrible claws.

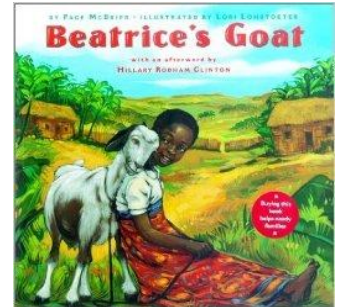
The author worked very hard to create pictures in your mind that would stick with you even after you finished the book. When you write today, you might try to include scenes that come alive for your reader. You might try to include details that tell the reader what is happening... what they might see, hear, taste or smell if they were in the world you are writing about. Authors try to include specific information. When you go off to write, you might want to keep this in mind.

On the next page is another example of a mentor text you could use with this lesson.

Discussion with the Kids: Start with the activity on the previous page about making sentences more descriptive and sharing specific details. Help the students understand how they can show the reader what is happening rather than giving vague information.

- Mr. Henry was angry. [This could become... Mr. Henry's face turned bright red. His eyes narrowed and his mouth turned into a thin, white line.]
- My baby sister wanted that candy. [My baby sister leaned toward the candy in the checkout aisle. Her hands reached and she started to cry, "Mine, mine, mine."]

Another Reading Selection Option: Today we're going to read *Beatrice's Goat*. She lives in Uganda. As we read, I want you to think about how well the author describes this country since we haven't been there before.



After we read the book:

What descriptions really stuck out in your mind as we read *Beatrice's Goat*? Could you picture what life is like in Uganda? [Let the kids share their ideas. Below are other questions you could ask.]

Can you picture what a typical school scene looks like in Beatrice's Village?

- The students sometimes sat on wood benches under the tree.

Did the author do a good job describing the kind of work Beatrice had to do? the kinds of foods she ate?

Do you remember how the author described Beatrice's goat? Do you know what a mango is? Do you know what shape it is? Why does the goat have a belly like that **(It was pregnant)**

- fat and sleek as a ripe mango

Let's read the opening paragraph again. Try to picture the scene as I read:

If you were to visit the small African village of Kisinga in the rolling hills of western Uganda, and if you were to take a left at the crossroads and follow a narrow dirt path between two banana groves, you would come to the home of a girl named Beatrice.


Were you able to picture the route to her home? How is it different from where you live?

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Below I included the story I wrote that day... It was a story about our dog, Boomer. I wrote two versions. After reading the first few sentences, I stopped and asked... "Is this a good story?" Of course, they said, "No!" Then I read the second version. In my story, what could you hear? see? Were my descriptions good? How could it have been better? After I read, I pointed out all the cross-outs and changes I made in my own writing.

Details Make a Story Interesting:

I started with a couple generic sentences about our dog and then wrote a more detailed, descriptive story. When I shared my writing with the kids, I tried to read with a lot of emotion.



● I have a dog named Boomer. She is five. I like her. It's fun to have her around.

I was in the kitchen fixing my coffee. ED was eating her cereal. Suddenly, I heard Boomer whining, yipping and yowling like I've never heard her cry before. My heart started beating fast; I was scared. What was happening to her?

● ED and I rushed to the door. There was Boomer turning around in circles. The grill seemed to fly through the air. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Was there a snake in the grill? Was Boomer being attacked by a fox? ED wanted to open the door, but I held her back. I made ED move away. As I opened the door, the metal grill plate toppled to the ground. Bang! Boomer ran off.

Slowly, I began to figure out what had happened. Boomer must have been licking the remains of the meal drippings from last night's dinner. The tags of her collar probably got caught in the bars of the grill. When she lifted her head, the grill lid came crashing down onto her. She couldn't back away because she was stuck fast under the slats. She ran around trying to get away, but as far as she knew, she was being attacked by the grill!!

● Boomer might be five years old, but I love her as much as the day we first got her. Maybe even more because she brings such excitement to our home!