

Can You Hear Me Now?

Reading and Writing with Voice

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"Voice is far more than passion or charm; it is central to the learning process. Bill Martin has said that to really own information, to truly enter into the life of the story, poem, or novel, a child must take the words of the text and transform those words in some way. When students write with voice, they put the indelible stamp of their personalities on the information--they make it their own."

[Ralph Fletcher, *What a Writer Needs*, p. 79]

"The reader is in control of the story . . . what matters most is the reader turning the page."

[Brian Selznick, author/illustrator, *The invention of Hugo Cabret*]

What is writer/reader voice?

Voice is the writer's and reader's individual fingerprints on their creation/interpretation. It echoes the writer's enthusiasm and feelings; it imprints her style and personality on the page. Voice communicates a reader's honest wonderings as he wanders through a book, story, drama, or poem. It illuminates writer/reader insight, curiosity, and sense of authority as they lay their experience and understanding alongside the author's (and illustrator's). Voice allows for authentic, personal writing and reading – it assumes and expects writer/reader discovery and honors unique interpretation.

Why does voice matter?

- It acknowledges individual readers and writers – their developing understandings, the connections they make, their attitudes, interests, and experiences.
- It invites multi-dimensional, complex, and rich-with-possibility response and creation, rewarding these over "photocopy" responses and lifeless writing.
- It provides teachers with understandings about writers and readers and about texts – about the multiple interpretations and individual creation.
- It illuminates writing and reading as active and living processes; it treats writing and reading as verbs; it blows breath into the stagnancy of text.
- It is everything that authors/illustrators know, honor, and hope for from their readers.

A few conditions and opportunities that nurture, support, & sustain readers' and writers' voices:

- Establish real reasons to read/write/create and provide respectful, interested audiences for readers' responses.
- Create a classroom climate that respects diverse, independent thinking.
- Provide necessary demonstrations, time, and materials to explore and create oral, written, and artistic responses.
- Discover the value of the written, spoken, and visual arts as a way of creating, making meaning, and discovering -- of extending your own (and students') understanding.
- Appreciate that writers' and readers' voices aren't always distinctly oral or written.
- Value the arts as valid and legitimate ~ for some writers and readers, *this* is their voice.

" . . . all our children need to believe they have something interesting to say. Literature plays a key role in helping children's [adolescents'] voices take the floor."

[Shelley Harwayne, *Lasting Impressions*, p. 60]

Some (but certainly not the only) Ways to Nurture Writer/Reader Voice:

- ~ Establish Real, Frequent, Varied Reasons (and audiences) for writing and reading.
- ~ Read Aloud, Read Aloud, Read Aloud -- with passion, vigor, and life.
- ~ Invite Writing in Response to Literature through:
 - ∞ Interactive Read Alouds
 - ∞ Literary Letters
 - ∞ Literature Circles – During-Reading Responses (open-ended prompts, guided questions, letters/diary, poems, etc.)
 - ∞ Extension Projects
- ~ Slow Down -- Linger over lovely language. Discover golden lines. Reflect on leads that welcome, descriptions that catch the breath, and endings that leave you wanting more.
- ~ Cultivate wonder.

Literature Extension Projects

“A worthwhile literature extension activity grows naturally out of the literature, encourages students to thoughtfully re-examine the text, and demonstrates something the reader has gained from the book.” [Regie Routman, *Conversations*, p. 87]

Worthwhile extension projects grow naturally out of the literature; encourage students to thoughtfully reexamine text; demonstrate something the reader has gained from the book; use diverse response forms to explore meaning; enhance readers’ appreciation and understanding of the book; help readers make connections with other books, with personal experiences, or with other curricular areas.

Help readers EXTEND and DEFEND their interpretation of the book by:

- ∞ Beginning with a whole-class project, then introducing options, eventually offering choices
- ∞ Demonstrating the process by participating/creating yourself
- ∞ Explaining the steps and strategies involved
- ∞ Showing examples and clarifying expectations
- ∞ Emphasizing how extension projects involved thinking
- ∞ Inviting students to explain decisions and self-reflect on their process and product

A Few Extension Projects Possibilities Include:

Alphabet Book: For each letter of the alphabet, design a page with an illustration and a sentence (or golden line) that features that letter to describe a chapter, event, character, or key scene.

CD Cover & Song: Design the cover of a CD to represent the book’s theme, key scenes, characters, create a list of featured songs for the inside of the cover and write (maybe sing) the book’s “hit single.”

Character Bookmark: Include an illustration of a main character on the front with a written description on the back.

Commemorative Stamp: Create a stamp to commemorate the book’s theme or a significant character.

Dance: Choreograph a dance to illuminate a personal response to the book – a key scene, the theme, a character’s fate.

Literary Weaving: Fill adding machine tape strips with words and symbols; weave together to create a tapestry.

Main Idea Belt: Illustrate 4-6 paper disks representing the main events or ideas, write out explanation or golden lines on opposite side & connect together with string or yarn.

Poetry: Write poetry to capture the essence of a character, theme, or the story itself. Present orally and/or accompany with illustrations to create a poetry mural.

Postcard: Depict a significant scene, event, or character on side one. On side two include a written correspondence from one character to another along with a stamp and postmark designed to reflect the book’s time period.

Readers’ Theatre: Write a script re-creating a major scene, then rehearse and present to the class without props or costumes.

Story or Character Quilt: Design quilt squares to represent the main events, chapters, or characters; decorate with symbols on the borders and accompany with a written explanation or selected golden lines.