

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
- experiencing teaching that comes from process (teacher and student modeling)
- studying process with intention (units of study in process)

Questions that help children tell their stories of process

- Where did you get the idea for this book?
- Is this the first time you've written about this topic?
- How long have you been working on this?
- How far along are you with this book?
- Do you write first or illustrate first?
- What are your plans for continued work on your book?
- Do you know how the whole book will go, or are you thinking of it as you make it?
- Have you made any interesting decisions about your words or illustrations?
- Why did you decide to write/illustrate this part this way?
- Why did you decide to add this part? Change this part? Take this part away?
- Have you thought about what you might do with this book once it's finished?
- How does this book fit with all the other things you've written?

Whole class process studies that make sense for primary writers

- How and where writers and illustrators get ideas for writing and illustrating
- Ways to gather ideas for writing and illustrating out in the world (beginning notebooks)
- Different ways to plan ahead for writing and illustrating
- How to work with a peer on writing and illustrating (conferences and collaborations)
- How writers and illustrators revise (words and illustrations)
- Strategies for proofreading

Remember: **The writing process is the story
you tell *after* you've written!**

WHY BOOK MAKING MAKES SENSE FOR YOUNG WRITERS

Making Books . . .

is developmentally appropriate. Young children love to make things and they bring an easy sense of play to making things that is critical to development. The verb *make*, as in “let’s make books” is a much more inclusive verb than *write* for young children as it hints at all the things one might do to make a book.

helps children do bigger work and develop stamina for writing. Learning to face down blank pages and a ticking clock is the central reality of a writer’s work, and book making creates a developmentally appropriate context in which children come to understand this kind of work. Multiple pages invite children to stay with writing for longer stretches of time, and staying with it builds stamina.

helps children live like writers when they aren’t writing. The only work some children know in school is work that is always quickly finished. These children never experience the creative urgency that comes from leaving something unfinished, knowing they’ll return to work on it later. To learn what it’s like for a project to “live on” in their thinking, even when they’re not working on it, children need to engage in work that lasts more than one day, more than one sitting.

makes the “reading like writers” connection so clear. Young children are surrounded by picture books at school, so it makes sense that their writing should match the kind of texts they know best. And when they see themselves as people who make picture books too, people just like Donald Crews and Tana Hoban, young children notice and pick up all kinds of ideas for writing and illustrating from the books adults read to them.

helps children begin to understand composition and decision making. Making a book from start to finish is a process of constant decision making. *What will I write about? What should come first? How should I draw it? Does this look the way I want it? Etc. etc.* These decisions are given over to children as they make books, and the experience of making so many decisions over time nurtures compositional development in so many important ways.

helps children begin to understand genre, purpose and audience. A sense of genre gives writers *vision* for writing: *I’m writing a memoir, an op-ed piece, a movie review.* Writers have a sense of what the writing will be – in terms of genre – when it’s finished. Young children start out with the broad vision of making picture books, but they soon begin to understand the subtle nuances of genre — that there are different kinds of writing inside picture books that do different kinds of work in the world of writing.

helps children believe in the future of finished work: Writers are called on to believe in a finished product that will exist only if they “act and act strategically” (Peter Johnston’s words) to bring it about. Writers must have the will to go from *nothing* to *something*, and with enough experience making books, children come to have faith in a future of writing that doesn’t yet exist.

Assessment

Curriculum

Understandings about texts	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.

Understandings about process	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.

Understandings about what it means to be a writer	Understandings about what it means to be a writer
How (and why) has the child decided to write this book?	Writers choose topics that are meaningful (or find meaning in their assigned topics) and write for purposeful reasons.
How interested is the child in an audience's response to the book?	Writing that is made public will be read, and writers are often mindful of potential readers as they compose.
Has the child composed in a way that led him to new meaning as he was writing?	Composing often helps writers find new meaning in the process of expressing existing meaning.
Can I see in this book that the child has been willing to take compositional risks?	Writers often find aspects of composing to be very challenging.
As I interact with this child around this book, does it seem he has a sense of self as a writer? A sense of history?	Over time, writers come to know themselves in this particular way (as writers) based on their experiences.
Does the child show he understands his powerful position as author of this book?	Writers are responsible for the words they put into the world.