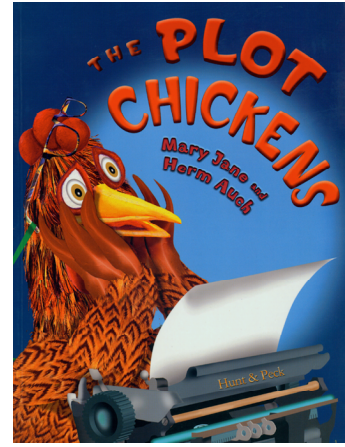


Ideas and Activities to Use with *The Plot Chickens*

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Ideas and Activities

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Themes: love of reading, writing, word play, authors/illustrators

Before Reading:

1. Ask students if they know what a typewriter is and how it works. If you have an old one, show the students. If not, show pictures from the web or **Typewriter Images** and describe how it operates and how it is different from a computer (no spellchecker, only one font, carriage return, no way to copy and paste, and so forth).
2. Ask students, “What do you call the people who write books? Who are the people who paint the pictures? How would you write a story or a book? List a few things on the board.
3. Explain that this story is about a chicken named Henrietta who loves to read. In her first book, called *Souperchicken*, her ability to read saved her aunts’ lives. They used to tease her about spending so much time reading. Now they beg her to read to them.

During Reading:

4. As you come to each writing rule, list it on the board or chart paper. Ask the students what they think “peck out a story” means. (Note the brand of typewriter.)
5. As you read, point out the aunts’ comments and ideas in the speech and imagination bubbles. Most are helpful, except for Aunt Golda’s. Note that the final decision is up to Henrietta, the writer. Since she is the **author**, she is the **authority** of what will go into her story.
6. After reading . . . **send it to a publisher**, ask the students why Henrietta needed to revise her story. Do all authors do this? You might share that E. B. White had at least nine drafts of just the beginning of *Charlotte’s Web* and he had been writing for about 60 years.
7. After reading . . . **the publisher sent a rejection letter**. Explain what a rejection letter is if students don’t know. See if they think well-known authors receive them. (28 publishers rejected Dr. Seuss’ first book and the first Harry Potter book was rejected by 12 publishers. J. K. Rowling was also told, “Don’t quit your day job.”) Ask students if they think Henrietta will give up (thumbs up or down). Talk about the meanings of *devastated* and *brood*.
8. After showing the double-page spread with no text, explain that a four-color printing press really does use those colors in that order but that the press makes many, many copies of the book at one time.

9. After reading the story in the back, ask students if Henrietta did a good job of revising. Good listeners will realize that she didn't revise at all. If she had, do they think a publisher might have accepted it? Why or why not?

After Reading:

10. Go back through the story and concentrate on the illustrations. Mary Jane and Herm work together on them. She does the painting and he works with a computer program to arrange them digitally. Ask the students what they notice. (actual titles of books, speech and imagination bubbles—even a double one with the fox).
11. Look at the list of writing rules. Talk about each one and how Henrietta followed it.
12. Talk about the writing process and how it is not linear, in other words, how you can be getting ideas, revising, and drafting all at the same time and even sharing parts before it is finished. One process doesn't have to happen before or after another. Use the **The Process Approach to Writing** to help students visualize this. Repeat that authors revise many, many times and at different times during the process.
13. Once a story (manuscript) has been accepted by a publisher, does it get printed just the way it is? Explain that the author starts working with an editor who gives suggestions for improving it and that this many take as long as a year. For some examples of drafts and editor's comments, see **Kurtz Waterhole Waiting Draft**. For older students visit this Scholastic site, http://teacher.scholastic.com/activities/flashlightreaders/T_landingPage.asp, and click on "Slideshow of Drafts: See the Story Grow" to view the first five drafts of *Because of Winn-Dixie* by Kate DiCamillo along with her comments.
14. Discuss the following: What is a review? Why is it written? How can reviews be helpful? Is it enough to say "I liked it" or "It was a very good book?" Talk about good reviews giving enough details that the readers understand what the book is about so they can decide whether to read it or not. Explain that not everyone likes the same book in the same way. Talk about likes and dislikes and how background information influences our choices. Mention that *The Horn Book* is filled with reviews to help librarians choose new books for their libraries.
15. Read some reviews from a source like *The Horn Book* or from Amazon.com. Let students write a review of a favorite book. You might want to model one together of a book the class has enjoyed. With younger students you may want to write the review together. Older students might want to post their reviews on Amazon.com.
16. Share the book, *From Pictures to Words: A Book About Making a Book* by Janet Stevens. She does an excellent job of explaining the writing process, showing how she gains confidence with encouragement, and how the author makes the final decisions. Compare this book with *The Plot Chickens* using the **Comparison of Two Stories** sheet for these books.