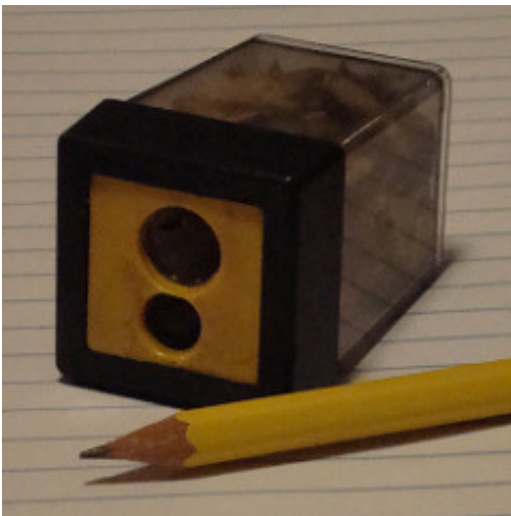


Mary Amato's Tips for Teachers: How to Encourage Creative Writing

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Children have a lot of writing assignments in school. Often, time for creative writing is squeezed out of the curriculum. If you are a teacher who wants to introduce/encourage more creative writing, here are some ideas.

Keep a Writer's Notebook. See my [Tips for Keeping a Writer's Notebook](#) for more info.

Create a Writer's Corner. Stock it with pencils, paper, materials for making [mini-books](#), a mirror for looking at facial expressions (in order to be able to describe them), a phone book or baby naming book for character name ideas, and more. Encourage kids to write a poem or story during free time. Encourage kids who are upset about something to write about it.

Try a "collaborative" journal with your class. In my book, *Please Write in This Book*, the teacher leaves a blank book in her room asking students to please write in it.

Be open to "silly" writing. Students may be inspired to write a story that you think is ridiculous or

silly. Remember, creative writing is not about creating something perfect or something necessarily profound. Be open and encourage creativity, and the child will want to keep writing.

Encourage all kinds of writing. Stories, poems, songs, plays, cartoons, comics, etc.

Allow reluctant writers to dictate to you or a volunteer/assistant. Be a scribe, not an editor. Use the child's exact words.

Embrace and encourage mistakes. The goal is to increase creative fluency and make writing fun. Save the grammar and spelling lessons for later. The truth is that my rough drafts are riddled with mistakes. I'm pushing myself to get something down without trying to edit as I go...children should be allowed to have the same writing process.

Ask questions if the student gets stuck. What is the story or poem about? If it's a story, who is your main character and what does your main character want?

Talk it through one sentence at a time. If the student has trouble organizing or keeping track of thoughts, ask him/her to tell the story aloud one sentence at a time. Write down one sentence at a time.

Write yourself. Model enthusiasm by writing and sharing your own creative stories and poems—especially your “mistakes” or the ones that didn't turn out as well as you'd like or the ones that you're having trouble finishing.

Encourage the child to use his/her own voice. Rather than trying to “be poetic,” or to cram lots of big words into a story, it's important for a child to learn to capture his/her own voice.

Create venues for sharing writing.

- Have a “literary reading” and invite friends and family
- Create podcasts of work
- Publish work on a website
- Encourage students to submit to writing contests.
- Establish a young author's club
- Hold a Young Authors celebration, publishing and sharing books

Try “dialogue journals” between students. Link students who enjoy writing by encouraging them to write to each other by passing a designated notebook back and forth.

Give the gift of the written word. Model meaningful writing. Write real, meaningful messages to your class in your own voice on special days or for special events. No hallmark cards. Say what is really in your heart. This will make a big impression.

Create special “Everybody Writes” Sessions. Help kids to get in the mood by playing an unusual piece of music, lighting a candle (if your school allows this), dimming the lights, asking everybody to sit in a different seat, etc.

Shake things Up. Ask your students to get their creative juices moving by first dancing to an awesome piece of music and getting their bodies moving. Then sit down to write...

For encouraging story writing, use my WOW story technique to get started.

What is a WOW story?

WOW is an acronym that I created to help kids remember a simple story structure.

1. The story has a main character who **W**ants something. This is the beginning of the story.
2. There is an **O**bstacle that gets in the way of the main character. This is the middle of the story.
3. The main character either **W**ins or loses. This is the end of the story.

How to make up WOW stories

1. Choose a main character. This can be a person, an animal, or even an object: for example, a boy, a grandmother, a soccer star, a sock, or a paintbrush!
2. Decide what the main character wants. What might a paintbrush want? Some paint to play with? To belong to a famous artist? Try unexpected ideas. A grandmother might want to ride a motorcycle!
3. Decide what will get in the way of the main character’s desire. Brainstorm lots of obstacles

and decide which one is the most fun or engaging. Obstacles can be simple. A rabbit wants to eat grass on a hillside, but a tiger lives on that hillside. The tiger is the obstacle. A boy wants a new bike, but his father says no. His father is the obstacle. Obstacles can also be emotions. What if a girl wants to ice skate, but she is afraid that she'll fall down? Fear is her obstacle.

4. Decide how/if the main character will "win or lose." Does your main character get what he or she wants in the end? How?

Write or perform WOW stories

Write or dictate your story: Write your stories on paper. Or make a book by folding pages and stapling them together. If your child hasn't learned how to write yet, ask him or her to tell you the story and write it down word for word.

Act your story out: For reluctant writers, try acting out the story first. After you have brainstormed the basics for a specific WOW story using the steps above, act out the story. Choose a narrator who will tell the story and provide cues for the actors. This can be the job of the parent or a child. The narrator should be very clear and say "The End" so that everyone knows when the story is over. After acting out stories, the child may be more interested in writing them down.

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