

## C H A P T E R 5

# Getting Ready and Writing Workshop

*“Children view writing...[as] exploration with marker and pen.... [They] learn the power of their gestures by our response to them.”*

—Calkins (1994, p. 59)

**M**ost young children enter kindergarten believing they can write. In addition to responding positively to each child’s written language approximations, Calkins (1994) advises teachers to follow the child’s lead, ask questions that teach and challenge, and absolutely resist taking over the child’s writing and making it the teacher’s writing.

To enable kindergartners to write readable messages, Clay (1991) suggests that kindergarten teachers (a) provide the proper conditions of learning language (Cambourne, 1988) so children will want to write (see chapter 1 for an explanation of these seven conditions) and (b) keep focused on both the dominant goal of guiding young writers to communicate messages and the secondary goal of using Clay’s (1991) four behaviors of emergent literacy (see chapter 1 for an explanation of these behaviors).

As a literacy coach, I have found that the best way to guide teachers in providing these conditions and fulfilling these goals is to demonstrate a writing workshop in their classrooms, followed by a discussion with the teachers.

I would like to note that while it may seem as if things always go perfectly in these lessons, this is far from the truth. I am presenting a composite of my best work to serve as a model. When I first attempted to do a writing workshop, I was armed only with my books as resources, the schedule I’ve presented in this chapter, and the knowledge that a conference should be a “simple conversation” based on students’ interests with the goal of helping writers think for themselves as they learn to put their thoughts in writing (Graves, 1994, p. 49). As problems came up, I looked to the research to help me, especially the books of Calkins (1994) and Graves (1994). I read and reread my copy of Calkins’s (1994) book until it literally fell apart. I made—and continue to make—mistakes, but I’ve found kindergartners (and most young students) to be very kind and tolerant of my teacher

approximations. Learning is a process, and approximation (trying) is a part of the process. It is necessary for all learning, even teachers' learning.

As teachers implement a writing workshop, they should concentrate on kindergartner's primary impulse to want to tell the personal experiences in their lives. This will provide the engagement required for students to do the laborious task of interrelating Clay's (1991) four emergent reading behaviors as they learn to write with invented spelling in a writing workshop.

I usually begin demonstrations the second or third week after school has started to allow time for teachers to get students accustomed to routines and to observe students' reactions to print. During this time, teachers also begin laying the groundwork for developing phonemic awareness by teaching or reviewing phonological awareness of rhyme using nursery rhymes, Dr. Seuss books, and songs. They also work on syllables (beats) by clapping the parts heard in their students' names (Cunningham, 2000).

## Structure of "Getting Ready" and Writing Workshop

After I demonstrate the structure of "Getting Ready" and writing workshop to kindergarten teachers, they use these same two structures every day for approximately an hour in their daily schedules. (See Table 6 for a brief explanation and outline of these structures.)

Teachers can record their daily lesson plans on an outline that incorporates these structures (see Appendix E). For example, although the "Alphabet Song" is presented daily in the alphabet time of Getting Ready, teachers may wish to record an additional alphabet activity for the day. Also, although most teachers begin phonemic awareness time with the "Name Song," they should also record any other phonemic awareness activity that they plan to do. The same is true for writing workshop. The teacher can note new minilessons for the day and possible reminders to review previously taught material that needs additional attention under "Teacher Demonstration and Minilesson" and "Teacher Confers as Students Write."

And, on occasion, the teacher may wish to advise the children before they share their work in Author's Chair of something that the teacher has

**Table 6. Sample Schedule for Getting Ready and Writing Workshop**

**Getting Ready for Writing Workshop (15 minutes)**

- Alphabet Time: Teach the alphabet and "Alphabet Song" (5 minutes)
- Phonemic Awareness Time: Teaching phonemic awareness with playful language (10 minutes)

**Writing Workshop (45 to 60 minutes)**

- Teacher Demonstration and Minilesson: Demonstration of drawing and writing and minilesson based on need (10–15 minutes)
- Teacher Confers as Students Write: Teacher confers, guides, and celebrates while students draw and write (10–15 minutes at first; later on, 30 minutes)
- Sharing in Author's Chair: Teacher chooses a few student authors to share their work in Author's Chair (15 minutes)

observed needs to be corrected—for example, phrasing questions politely by saying, “I wonder why you did...” rather than saying “Why did you do...?” (As previously mentioned, Author’s Chair refers to the time that a few student authors selected by the teacher share their work with the class.)

The first day lesson plans for Getting Ready and writing workshop are presented in two parts: (1) the outline for the lesson plan and (2) the written implementation of the lesson plan. I begin by providing the lesson plan for the first day of Getting Ready, and then the implementation. (Readers may wish to bookmark these plans and refer to them while reading the chapter.)

## Getting Ready

Many beginning kindergartners do not know the letters of the alphabet well enough to write them at will, and most kindergartners do not know how to isolate individual sounds in words (i.e., phonemic awareness). These things need to be taught within meaningful playful language, the purpose of Getting Ready. Following is the outline for Getting Ready.

### Lesson Plan Outline for First Day of Getting Ready (15 minutes)

#### *Alphabet Time: Teaching the Alphabet and “Alphabet Song” (5 minutes)*

Using a large, colorful ABC chart, *point* to the letters as you sing the “Alphabet Song.” Sing it a few times to familiarize all students with the song (see Figure 38).

#### *Phonemic Awareness Time: Teaching Phonemic Awareness With Playful Language (10 minutes)*

Using a chart with the “Name Song” (see Appendix A, p. 279) printed on it, *point* to the words and sing it a few times until students are familiar with the song.

**Figure 38. Student Pointing to Letters**



Using the first day lesson plan outline for Getting Ready as a basis, I present an in-depth description and discussion of the implementation of Getting Ready’s Alphabet Time and Phonemic Awareness Time. Although this implementation, which I refer to as a written demonstration, may appear lengthy, the actual time it takes to enact in the classroom is only 15 minutes. (Note times given throughout chapter.)

When I explain my written demonstrations in the remainder of this section on Getting Ready and the next section on writing workshop, I outline them as follows:

- Aim
- Classroom Setup and Materials
- Procedures
- Discussion

The discussion section focuses on questions that kindergarten teachers have asked me after demonstrations.

## **Demonstration of First Day Lesson Plan for Getting Ready**

**Alphabet Time:  
Teaching the  
Alphabet and  
“Alphabet Song”  
(5 minutes)**

### **Alphabet Time Aim**

To promote visual scanning of the alphabet by familiarizing kindergartners with the “Alphabet Song” so it can become a tool (or strategy) to help them find and copy letters of the alphabet from their individual alphabet strips as needed in their writing.

### **Alphabet Time Classroom Setup and Materials**

Kindergartners are seated in the community circle. The teacher has access to a pointer and a large colorful alphabet chart that includes both upper- and lowercase letters. The words of the “Alphabet Song” should be added to the bottom of the chart: “Now, I know my ABCs, next time won’t you sing with me?” (first verse) and “Now, I know my ABCs, tell me what you think of me” (second verse). Providing the words gives students exposure to meaningful print and enhances their sight vocabulary.

### **Alphabet Time Procedures**

1. Point to the alphabet on a chart and ask the kindergartners if they can tell you what it is. Usually they know; however, if not, tell them it’s the alphabet. Then tell students that they are going to learn all these letters by singing and pointing to them every day as they sing the “Alphabet Song.” (This song will be sung daily throughout the year, once or twice,

until all children can use the alphabet as a strategy to find any letter of their choosing.)

2. Point to the letters as you sing the first verse of the song. Try to watch the students' eyes, especially those who do not know how to write their names. It is imperative that kindergartners look at the letters as the song is sung so they can become familiar with the various shapes of the letters and will be able to find any letter through the use of the song. For example, Ms. Neuenfeldt asks her students to look up by saying, "Let's see if I can see all your beautiful eyes looking up here." (In the same kindly manner, single out any child not looking.)
3. Select a kindergarten volunteer to be the teacher as you sing the second verse of the song and instruct the volunteer to point to the letters of the alphabet. If the volunteer has difficulty pointing to the letters as you sing the song, point to the letters with your finger from above as the volunteer points with the pointer from below. Remind all students to keep pace with the volunteer's pointing; letters *only* should be sung when pointed to.

Familiarizing kindergartners with the "Alphabet Song" and learning to point to and scan the letters as the song is sung a couple of times is all that is necessary for the first day. However, on subsequent days I add the following steps:

4. Have students find the first letter of their names, and eventually any letter that you target. If they have difficulty finding a letter, the class can help the child sing the "Alphabet Song" and find the letter by saying, "Stop!" when the targeted letter is sung.
5. Have students write the first letter of their names and, later in the year, any letter that you target. Also ask the children to write letters in different ways such as in the air with their fingers; on each other's backs; on individual dry-erase boards, or "magic slates," and miniature chalkboards; or with their bodies.

## **Alphabet Time Discussion**

Being able to name the letters of the alphabet is a good predictor of beginning reading achievement, even though knowing the names of the letters does not have direct impact on a child's ability to read (Adams, 1990). Simply teaching children to name the letters without accompanying writing and reading experiences will not promote reading (literacy).

Learning the "Alphabet Song" is a meaningful activity, and by learning to point to the letters as they are sung, students learn how to use the song as a tool (strategy) to find any letter of their choosing as they try to write it (Cunningham, 2000). Pointing to letters of the alphabet as the song is sung is mandatory so children can find any letter and eventually learn to associate that letter with its graphic representation (Holdaway, 1979). (See chapter 2 for a discussion of developmental letter formation.)

When teaching the “Alphabet Song” as a strategy to find letters of the alphabet, it is important to stick to the *same* melody. Using other melodies will only cause confusion and will probably obstruct the song’s usefulness, especially to the literacy-poor child.

Although using the same song every day may seem boring to the teacher, students depend on its familiarity to guide them in finding unknown letters. On occasion a child or two might object. If this happens, check to see if the child can find a particular letter, and then demonstrate the song’s purpose, as Mrs. Clark did with Danny (and Betty) when they both said, “I already know that song!”

Mrs. Clark: Danny, will you find the letter *v* on this chart?

[Danny is unable to locate the letter, but when the class sings the song and he and Mrs. Clark point to the letters, he is able to.]

Mrs. Clark: Class, remember I said you need to know this song so well that you can find any letter with it.

[Next, it is Betty’s turn to find letters, and Betty is able to find every letter Mrs. Clark targets.]

Mrs. Clark: Betty, I am so pleased for you; you really do know all these letters! In fact, you know them so well, I would like you to help me teach them. Would you like to do that?

[Betty beams and answers “yes” with enthusiasm. Then Mrs. Clark lets Betty point to the letters as Betty leads the class in singing the song.]

Mrs. Clark: Class, whenever any of you learn your letters as well as Betty knows them, you can become a teacher, too. When you know something as important as this, you need to help the other children to learn it, just like I do.

When students point to, find, and write letters, they need a risk-free atmosphere that supports approximation. Students need to be encouraged to try, and if they have difficulty, they need kind, nurturing support to complete the task. Often, this support can be provided by classmates as well as the teacher by saying, “Stop!” when the targeted letter is identified. Another alternative if a student gets stuck is to ask the student to call on a fellow classmate to whisper the answer in his or her ear. Students should not be afraid to try; mistakes can be pathways to learning with proper guidance.

---

## Phonemic Awareness Aim

To introduce kindergartners to phonemic awareness (the ability to hear individual sounds in words) through the use of the “Name Song” and sound matching of initial consonant sounds, the least difficult of phonemic awareness activities.

## Phonemic Awareness Classroom Setup and Materials

Students are seated in the community circle. The teacher has access to a pointer and the “Name Song.” (The words should be printed on chart paper in enlarged print; see Appendix A.)

### Phonemic Awareness Procedures

Because kindergartners love to work and play with their names, I like to begin each category of phonemic awareness activities (i.e., matching, isolating, substituting, blending, and segmenting) with the “Name Song.” (See Appendix A for phonemic awareness activities.) When first introducing the “Name Song,” I use only those student names that begin with single consonant sounds because they are the easiest to hear. (Names beginning with long vowels, digraphs, and short vowels are addressed last, when they become familiar to students.)

1. Direct the students’ eyes to the words of the “Name Song” with the pointer (see Appendix A, p. 279, for lyrics).
2. Sing the song (sung to the tune of “Skip to My Lou”) once to familiarize the students with it.
3. Choose a phoneme (a beginning consonant sound of a child’s name) to insert in the first verse of the song (e.g., “Who has a name that starts with /m/?”). Repeat this line three times. Then in the second verse of the song, supply the answer to the question by inserting a name that corresponds with the phoneme that you chose in the first verse (e.g., “Mary has a name that starts with /m/”). Repeat this line three times. As you sing the song, ask the student whose name you are using to stand up. For example, if Mary is the only one whose name begins with /m/ in the room, she is the only one to stand up. If other students in the class have a name that begins with /m/ like Marvin or Marilyn, they would stand up, too. It is helpful to repeat the song with these students’ names in it. Children also love to hear their names used like this.
4. Sing the first line of the song again and insert a new phoneme, “Who has a name that starts with /j/?” When I ask students to listen for a sound, I usually give a gentle tug on my ear lobe. Again, all the children who have a name that begins with /j/ are to stand up. If a child does not recognize the sound of /j/ as the beginning of his or her name, the child will soon with this kind of practice. For now, simply ask the child to stand.

If some children say a name that does not begin with the appropriate phoneme, practice “iteration” (Yopp, 1992). (Iteration is a Reading Recovery technique similar to slow stuttering, that I typically only need to use in the beginning of the school year and have found to be extremely useful.) For example, if someone answers that Billy is a name that starts with /j/, I say, “Now listen closely: /b/-/b/-/b/-/b/ Billy, does the /b/ sound

the same as /j/-/j/-/j/-/j/, Joey?" I really emphasize the beginning phoneme in both names.

5. As students become more familiar with names, target all the students' names, even those beginning with long vowels, digraphs (e.g., *sh*, *th*, *ph*, and *ch*), and short vowels.

Kindergartners understand that digraphs represent one sound; however, they do not know that a digraph is one sound spelled with two letters. The following example provides an introduction to digraphs and illustrates how a child's name became an important teaching tool for the digraph *sh*.

[Mrs. Clark introduces Shane's name in the "Name Song," and Shane stands up.]

Mrs. Clark: Class, what letter do you think stands for the sound /sh/ in Shane's name?

Children: S.

Mrs. Clark: Shane, will you write your name on the board for us, please?

[Shane writes his name.]

Mrs. Clark: [pointing to Shane's name] Class, did you notice that Shane begins with an *s* just as you said, but it also has an *h* following it? Listen closely now as I say /sh/, /sh/, /sh/. Does it sound different than /s/, /s/, /s/?

[The children agree it does.]

Mrs. Clark: That's because whenever *h* follows *s*, it makes this *one* sound, but this one sound is spelled with these *two* letters, *s*, and *h*. So, whenever you hear that /sh/ sound, I want you to think of Shane's name, and how he spells it with an *s* and an *h*.

[Mrs. Clark walks over to the word wall and circles the *s* and the *h* in Shane's name so the children have a ready reference to this teaching strategy.]

After all the children's names that begin with single consonants, long vowels, and digraphs have been introduced, Mrs. Clark can introduce any remaining names that begin with short vowels. By this time, the class will have become somewhat accustomed to the sounds at the beginning of these children's names. However, she would not introduce any other words beginning with short vowels because short vowels prove much more troublesome for kindergartners and beginning first graders than digraphs or long vowels. Routman (1991) states, "Most kindergarten children and beginning first graders are...not yet developmentally ready [to hear and perceive isolated] short vowels" (p. 154); they are not ready to apply short

vowels correctly in their reading and writing until the end of the first grade. Additional research supports this point (Bear et al., 2000; Gentry & Gillet, 1993; Johnston, 1999; Temple et al., 1988). For example, I remember a first-grade teacher in the beginning of the year attempting to coax a child into identifying the isolated short vowel /i/ while trying to spell the word *bit*. The child was almost in tears as she tried various incorrect responses. Interjecting, I asked her if she knew the word *it*. She did, and her knowledge of the word family *it* solved the problem. As the first-grade teacher and I discussed this situation later, I explained that my thinking had been the same as hers until I read the research on the timing of teaching short vowels developmentally in kindergarten and first grade. (For more on teaching short vowels in word families, see “37 Common Rimes” in Appendix D.)

After the beginning sounds of all the kindergartners’ names have been targeted and the children understand the idea of sound matching through the use of the “Name Song,” other sound matching activities can be included in this time frame. Most kindergartners understand the concept of sound matching within two to four weeks, and then sound isolation can be introduced. (See Appendix A for phonemic awareness activities and a suggested progression for teaching them.)

Once most kindergartners can hear the beginning sounds in names and words and know how to use the “Alphabet Song” to find a letter of the alphabet, they can be asked to find and write the targeted letter during this time.

Some teachers, especially novice teachers, have found it easier to initially use the “Word Song” (Yopp, 1992; see Appendix A, p. 279, for lyrics) instead of the “Name Song,” because it gives them total control of which beginning sounds to choose. However, they eventually include the “Name Song” because children love it.

## **Phonemic Awareness Discussion**

Teachers need to encourage students’ *hearing* of individual sounds first, before asking students to write letters that stand for those sounds.

Kindergartners who have not been exposed to letters of the alphabet and the use of written letters (graphemes) may be distracted if asked to write letters before they have developed the concept of phonemic awareness (Chomsky, 1979; Clay, 2001; Elkonin, 1973; Yopp, 1992).

Using the terminology *starts with* when discussing letters that stand for initial sounds can be confusing to some students. Normally, I do not have a problem with this terminology when using the “Name Song”; however, when I was a literacy coach working with mostly English-language learners, I did. I used the “Word Song” as an introduction to my phonemic awareness activities because I was unsure of my pronunciation of the children’s names. The children appeared to be totally lost when I asked them “Who has a /b/ word to share with us?” However, I was able to resolve the problem by using Elkonin Sound Boxes (see chapter 4, p. 122).

When I first started working with the “Name Song” and phonemic awareness activities, I directed the students to listen for and match only beginning sounds in words because, initially, matching sounds is the easiest of phonemic activities, and hearing beginning sounds is easier than hearing ending sounds and far easier than hearing middle sounds (Clay, 1991). Children, on their own initiative, can transfer their knowledge of beginning sounds fairly easily to ending sounds, and eventually to middle sounds (Bear et al., 2000).

Because students should not be encouraged to write a letter that stands for a targeted sound until they have developed some phonemic awareness and either know the letter or know how to find the letter through the use of the “Alphabet Song” and their ABC strip (Elkonin, 1973; Yopp, 1992), teachers must be observant as to what individual students know. Kindergartners need to work diligently on hearing individual sounds in words and on learning to use the “Alphabet Song” as a tool because research has shown that relating visual letters to the sounds heard in words by children who knew their letters provides greater gains in phonemic awareness than when letters are not related to spoken sounds (Ball & Blachman, 1991).

Developmentally, it is much easier for children to go from sounds (which they are familiar with from learning to talk) to letters (which they are just learning) than vice versa (Clay, 1991).

To avoid confusion when talking to students about letters and their corresponding sounds, Holdaway (1979) suggests referring to letters as “standing for sounds,” rather than asking for the sound a letter makes or the sound of a letter (p. 117). For example, if I ask a classmate of Catherine’s to write the letter that makes the /k/ sound in Catherine’s name, the student might write a *K*. Because the question was phrased as it was, his answer would be technically correct. However, if I ask a classmate to write the letter that stands for the sound of /k/ in Catherine’s name, a *C* could be the only correct answer. Normally, approximations are allowed when a student writes independently, but in the case of classmates’ names, kindergartners will not allow approximations. Their names are precious to them and should be.

In the kindergarten classrooms where I have worked as a consultant in implementing writing workshop, most kindergartners demonstrate some knowledge of the alphabetic principle by writing with invented spelling at the end of October or November because their teachers also were committed to reading and understanding the research on reading (see chapters 1 through 3). However, in the handful of kindergartens and first-grade classrooms where I first worked as a consultant solely implementing literacy-rich reading experiences but not Getting Ready and writing workshop, it was not unusual for me to find at least 20% of the class to have little to no knowledge of phonemic awareness or the alphabetic principle at the end of kindergarten. I knew this to be true from having observed their one-day-a-week writing samples in writing centers throughout the year, and because I administered Clay’s Dictation Test at the end of the year. Needless

to say, I felt terrible about the results of this test (but they made me really think about the possible value of writing to reading). I also learned that these children (the 20% who had trouble with Clay's Dictation Test), have continued to struggle with reading and school—and some have even dropped out of school. Based on my experiences, the findings from a study by Lundberg, Frost, and Peterson (1988) are accurate: Poor readers entering first grade without phonemic awareness remain poor readers with little understanding of the alphabetic principle at the end of fourth grade if they still lack phonemic awareness training.

Of course, there are individuals who write using letters of the alphabet from the first day of school because they come from literacy-rich backgrounds. These children should be encouraged to continue writing letters, but they should use their alphabet strips as they form the letters to learn proper letter formation.

Ultimately, teachers need to be observant of children's stages of written language development and spelling to guide students' learning. (See chapters 2 and 3 for descriptions of these stages.)

Getting Ready provides the training or teaching for students to learn two of Clay's (1991) important emergent reading behaviors: (1) phonemic awareness and (2) visual attention to the graphic cues of the letters of the alphabet. It is important for teachers to understand the research presented in this book (see chapters 1 and 2) so they are able to teach the alphabet and phonemic awareness activities in a developmentally appropriate manner within meaningful, playful activities that follow a developmental progression (see Appendix A for phonemic awareness activities and a developmental progression). Although it is necessary to teach children how to recognize the letters of the alphabet by singing the "Alphabet Song" and pointing to the letters as the song is sung, it is not necessary for them to learn all the letter formations before they begin to practice approximated writing. They can learn from trial and error as they attempt to communicate their thoughts in written language with the use of the "Alphabet Song" and their ABC strip in a writing workshop.

## Writing Workshop

While Getting Ready focuses on *teaching* phonemic awareness and the alphabet, writing workshop provides *practice* in these areas. Practice is essential, but it must be practice that children initiate themselves as they actively use their constructive minds to figure out what they need to know based on what they already know about written language. The teacher's challenge is to find out what each child knows and what his or her needs are as they attempt to figure out the alphabetic principle and put their thoughts in written language. As the teacher makes these ongoing observations, he or she provides guidance to the child's search for

understanding written language. This practice is best done within the process of meaningful writing in a writing workshop that is based on Cambourne's (1988) conditions of learning language.

This section begins with an outline of the first day lesson plan for writing workshop, just like the first section of this chapter began with an outline of the first day lesson plan for Getting Ready, and then provides the implementation, or written demonstration.

### **First Day Lesson Plan Outline for Writing Workshop**

#### *Teacher Demonstration and Minilesson (10–15 minutes)*

The teacher demonstrates his or her own writing while presenting and incorporating writing rules within the minilesson.

#### *Teacher Confers as Students Write (10–30 minutes)*

The teacher hands out unlined paper. (Unlined paper is the preferred writing material to begin with because the young child's manuscript evolves from his or her drawing. The child needs to be unencumbered by lines to draw freely [Calkins, 1994; Fisher, 1991; Morrow, 1989]. However, providing an assortment of paper as the year progresses is encouraged so the children can have choices; these choices often act as a catalyst for more writing [Calkins, 1994; Fisher, 1991].) Students can use the paper horizontally or vertically, and they can use their choice of markers or crayons to draw, write, or both. The teacher circles the room nudging and encouraging students to draw and write. The teacher helps students write their names and stamp the date on all papers, if necessary (see Figure 39).

**Figure 39. Teacher Conferring With Student**



### *Sharing in Author's Chair (15 minutes)*

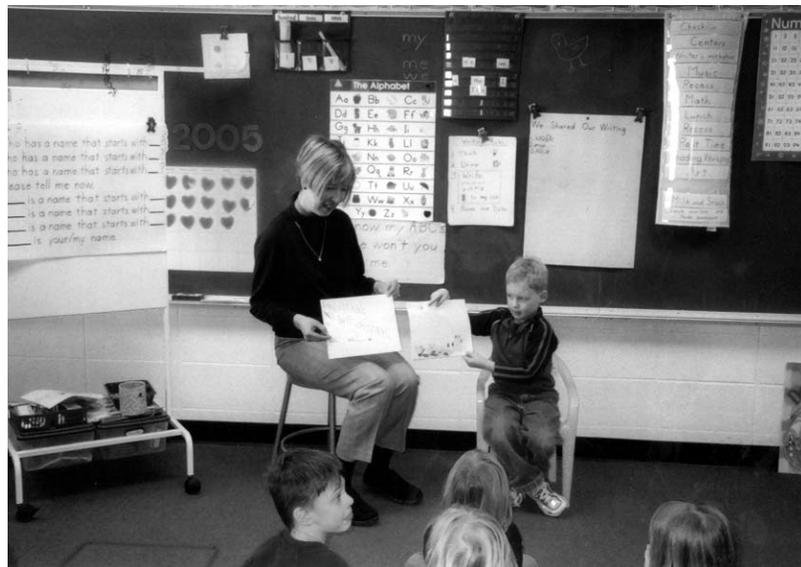
The teacher chooses two or three students who have done exemplary drawing and some form of writing to share their work with the class in Author's Chair (see Figure 40). It is important to choose good role models when beginning writing workshop, and eventually all students can have an opportunity to share.

Using this outline as a basis, I present an in-depth description and discussion of the implementation of writing workshop. Although this written demonstration may appear lengthy, the actual time it takes to conduct is usually no more than one hour. (Please note times given.)

The procedure for each part of the writing workshop (i.e., demonstration, conferring, and sharing in Author's Chair) is broken down into the following sections:

- Introduction
- Examples
- Conclusion

**Figure 40. Student Sharing in Author's Chair**



# Demonstration of First Day Lesson Plan for Writing Workshop

Teacher  
Demonstration  
and Minilesson  
(10–15 minutes)

## Demonstration Aim

Demonstration is a powerful way to learn and teach (Graves, 1994). Holdaway (1979) asserts that the easiest way to learn something is to watch someone who is good at it demonstrate how to do it.

## Demonstration Classroom Setup and Materials

Students are seated in the community circle. The teacher is seated near a large tablet of chart paper and has access to markers of various colors.

## Demonstration Procedure

### Introduction

Introduce writing workshop by showing kindergartners a book that you've read and discussed with them earlier. For example, I begin as follows:

Boys and girls, what do I have in my hand? [I show a book that I've read earlier.] Do you remember what we called the person who wrote the words [point to some words] in this book? [The children respond, "Author."] Does anyone remember what we call the person who drew the pictures [point to a picture]? [The children respond, "Illustrator."]

Kindergartners, you are all going to be given the chance to be authors and illustrators every day at this time. I'd like to show you some kindergarten authors' and illustrators' work from last year.

If you have some kindergarten writing samples from the first day of the previous school year, show a few and perhaps read one. You also can use samples from published materials. (See samples throughout this chapter.)

### Example

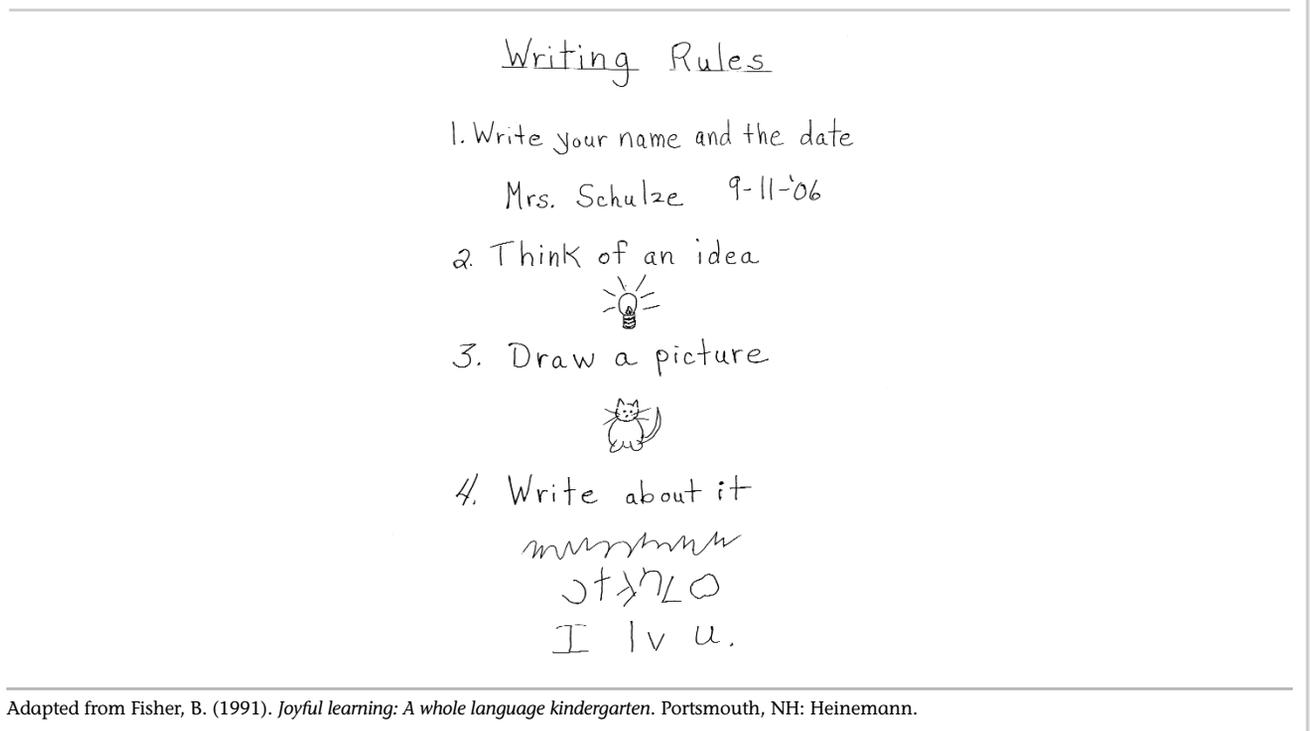
Now I'm going to show you how these authors and I know how to write.  
We followed the rules on this chart.

Display a chart with the writing rules (see Figure 41). Then decide what topic to write about, and as you write about it, demonstrate your thinking aloud. Point to the chart (when relevant) to show how it helps you write. The following example illustrates my thinking aloud:

#### *Step 1: Name and date*

Once my picture and writing are finished, I will want everyone to know that I was the author, so I want to write my name on my paper first so I don't forget. I am going to write it on the back of my paper, so it doesn't get in the way of my picture or writing. [I write my name.] I will stamp the date on the back of my paper, too. [As I use the date stamper, I inform the children that I will stamp the date on their papers, too.]

**Figure 41. Writing Rules**



Adapted from Fisher, B. (1991). *Joyful learning: A whole language kindergarten*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

### *Step 2: Think of an idea*

Now, I must think of an idea. [Pointing to my chart] I drew a light bulb [i.e., rebus print] for thinking on my chart because when I get an idea it's like a little light goes on in my head. Actually, a little light went on in my head yesterday about an idea, and I'm going to write about it now.

### *Step 3: Draw a picture*

Next, I must draw a picture of my idea. [I proceed to draw a picture of my cat, explaining what I am thinking about as I work.]

### *Step 4: Write any way you can*

Now I must write something about my picture. [I point to the fourth step on my writing rules chart where I have various kinds of writing demonstrated; I adapted this idea of demonstrating writing from Routman, 1991.] Then, I point to the personal cursive [scribbling]. How many children write like this?

[Several hands go up, and I congratulate them on being writers. Then I point to a random stream of letters including mock and real letters.]

How many of you write like this?

[Again, many hands go up and again I congratulate them on being writers. However, I do not take this count too seriously because I notice that several children have raised their hands twice. Finally, I point to some invented spelling.]

Can anyone read what I have written?

[Usually a few children can read the writing. I explain that some children write letters for sounds they hear when they write, and I slowly stretch out the sounds in the words.] This is a special kind of “kid writing” that I will help you all learn to do before you leave kindergarten.

[Before printing the words to my story in conventional spelling, I tell students the following.]

Children, I am a teacher who has gone to school for many years, so I write like this now. When you are older you will, too.

[As I print the words to my story, I read them out loud.]

My cat likes to sleep on my dog’s head. It doesn’t bother him because he really likes the cat and he’s so big!

[After I finish writing my teacher demonstration, the children and I read what I have written, and we discuss my story briefly. After one or two stories about students’ pets, I usually wind down the discussion.]

Children, you have the most wonderful stories to tell, and I want to hear them all. Do you know how we could do that? Save those stories in your head, because you are going to get to write them in just a few minutes, and then we can all hear them.

## **Conclusion**

After I have finished my teacher demonstration, I explain to the class that now it is their turn to be authors and illustrators. Ask them to raise their hands if they have an idea to write about. As the children respond with the *one* thing that they will write about, send them to their tables to draw and write. (Mrs. Richardson, a veteran kindergarten teacher, suggests that on another day, before the children go to their seats, the teacher should say, “Children, please turn to the person sitting next to you and tell him or her what you are writing about.”)

I like to ask the entire class what they will write about as a brainstorming technique on the first day of my writing workshop demonstration. Hearing what classmates are writing about helps stir students’ creative juices. However, on this first day I usually find one or two students who need additional nudging to think of an idea. A question I often use to initiate a simple conversation is, “What did you do last night when you came home from school?” When students mention something that they seem interested in, I ask them to draw and write about it. Talking about students’ pets and families also provides good writing material. It is very important to know your students, especially their favorite activities or hobbies.

## **Demonstration Discussion**

This first session of writing workshop may take a little longer than 10–15 minutes because you are establishing the guidelines for writing. It is helpful to display these guidelines or writing rules in the classroom so students can refer to them briefly as needed. In fact, many teachers leave this chart up all year.

In the beginning of the year, I present demonstrations with conventional spelling. However, as I see more and more kindergartners writing with developmental or invented spelling (around November), I ask

the students to help me use invented spelling to spell one or two words that are fairly easy to sound out during my writing demonstrations. I do not use invented spelling to demonstrate spelling high-frequency words because there is a danger that children may learn these words incorrectly (Routman, 1991). Sometimes I teach a high-frequency word in a minilesson if several children are using but confusing it. (See Appendix D for a list of high-frequency words for kindergartners.)

Minilessons that are based on the observed needs of the students should be brief and about only one thing. One minilesson will usually not suffice. I've found it works well to teach one new "needed" thing in a minilesson and briefly review something already taught in a previous demonstration. For example, if I've noticed that students are not referring to their ABC strips when they need to know how to form a letter, I will hesitate as I make a letter in my demonstration and ask the children where I can look to get help. They usually respond, "Look at your ABC strip!" I look, and then I make the letter. This takes less than a minute and serves as an effective review of a minilesson already taught. (For other minilessons for writing workshop, see chapter 6.)

When the teacher confers with the children, the teacher can expect them to demonstrate what they learned in procedural minilessons, such as writing rules, and certain strategy minilessons, such as using the "Alphabet Song" and ABC strip to find letters of the alphabet. However, this is not true for every minilesson taught—for example, a minilesson on titles may not be appropriate for a child to use that day during writing and conferring time because titles are usually written when children feel invested in their work and want to publish it. During conferences, the teacher needs to observe each child's needs according to his or her developmental stage in the process of writing (see chapters 2 and 3 for a description of these stages). These needs also should be addressed using what the child already knows about written language as a foundation.

---

## **Conferring Aim**

The first and foremost concern in a writing conference is to get the children talking and then really listen to them so teachers can help guide their attempts to communicate their thoughts in written language. As a byproduct of their desire to communicate in writing, kindergartners learn to interrelate Clay's (1991) four behaviors of emergent reading.

## **Conferring Classroom Setup and Materials**

### **Student Materials**

Kindergartners should be seated at their tables and will need the following items:

- One unlined sheet of white or manila paper, approximately 8" by 11", and access to more, if needed.

**Teacher Confers  
as Students Write  
(10–30 minutes)**

- One laminated name card for each child (many teachers like to use a tent card for this purpose) and an ABC strip with the letters of the alphabet printed on it as well as representative pictures of animals. Each ABC strip should be affixed as low as possible on the child's table or desk so it can be referred to as needed (see Figure 42); the strip should be kept in good condition or replaced if necessary because it is used throughout the school year.
- One set of thin colored markers per child.

Thin markers are the preferred writing utensil in the beginning of the year because kindergartners like them, they are easy to handle, and students do not need to erase (Calkins, 1994). Many young students spend too much valuable writing time erasing their good efforts when using pencils; therefore, thin markers are preferred initially until students understand the purpose of erasing. Also, students' writings show much of what the children know about print, so the teacher should see all their attempts (Clay, 1991). Because approximation is an important condition of learning, young students need to feel free to "explore with markers" and not be frightened of making mistakes (Calkins, 1994, p. 59). Later in the year, regular-sized pencils and pens can be introduced as writing utensils to provide more choice. Research indicates that beginner "fat" pencils are no better than regular-sized pencils for young children (Lamme & Ayris, 1983).

**Figure 42. Student Using Alphabet Strip**



## Teacher Materials

Teachers need the following items as they circulate around the room holding conferences with individual students:

- A clipboard with a Weekly Conference and Instructional Guidesheet form (WCIG; see chapter 7 for a detailed explanation and Appendix E for a template). The teacher uses this form to determine who to confer with on any given day. It is also used to record any immediate instruction from a previous conference that is necessary.
- A three-column chart, known as a CID form, to record observations, assessments, and evaluations. The three columns feature what the Child knows, what I know, and what I will Do (see chapter 7 for a detailed explanation and Appendix E for the CID template). One form is used per child conferred with on any given day.
- A small writing tablet or dry-erase board for demonstration purposes. I like to use a tablet when I model drawing something or printing a letter. I model only those letters that I see children struggling with; these are usually letters in children's names.
- Some sticky notes for recording in conventional print what the child has written in approximated print. Some teachers also like to use sticky notes for taking assessment notes. Then, these sticky notes can be transferred to the CID form later on.
- A stool with wheels to sit on while conferring. The stool is important because it helps teachers get down to the kindergartner's level as in a real conversation, and it is also very beneficial to teachers' backs and knees.

## Conferring Procedure

Because conferring is the heart of writing workshop, this section is quite detailed.

### Introduction

1. Encourage and guide children to write about topics from everyday moments of their lives. These are moments children know best. They often burst into the classroom every morning and tell the teacher about such moments with comments like "My tooth fell out," "I went to a wedding," or "Our cat had kittens." Once the children have each chosen a topic, the conference becomes a time to have them show you what they know about topic and print, and what they will do next (Graves, 1994).

During conferences, use the following questions, recommended by Graves (1994), to guide students:

- What is the picture or story about?
- Where did the idea come from?
- What will the student do next?

2. It is best to give the students a few minutes to start working before beginning conferences. Survey the room quickly to ensure that all students are engaged and working. After you observe that all students are working, you can begin conferences. If some students are not working, approach them, find out the problem, and try to guide them so they are more capable of handling the problem independently in the future. It is important for students to learn to be responsible (Calkins & Oxenhorn, 2003).

Usually there are a few students in the room who need a quick conference to help them remember what to do. I specifically tell these students to ask their neighbors for help, and I instruct their neighbors to be helpful. It is important to have some children who are strong writing models at each table to offer support (Routman, 1991). Soon after (usually one or two days), I teach a minilesson on “Adding Writing Teachers” (see Procedural Minilessons in chapter 6, p. 191).

3. On the first day, stamp the date on everyone’s paper. (This is something the children can do in the future, and this activity will be addressed with a future minilesson. See Procedure Minilessons in chapter 6.)
4. Once all the students are engaged in their work, concentrate on a few students for the day. For example, I divide the number of students in the class (20) by the number of school days in a week (5). The answer (4) becomes the number of students that I work with in a day. I am able to confer with each student in a week’s time using this formula. I fill out my WCIG form according to this formula.

For the children who struggle with writing, I may find I have time during conference time to provide some extra help. However, I do not want to deprive those who are more proficient of their conference time. If necessary, I provide extra time for struggling writers during lunch break or recess. If possible, I also train an aid (if available) or older student to help in this capacity during writing workshop.

5. Conferring with students should only take a few minutes per student (Graves, 1994). A “focused vision” is the key to conferring (Stiggins, 2001, p. 65). This focus requires setting teaching goals. The two goals that I target to guide my conference (as well as my assessments) are the following: First, guide the student to communicate a message. This is the key to engagement. The student’s language abilities, attitude, and ability to follow procedures will affect his or her ability to communicate a message. Second, once the student has an idea to communicate and is talking freely about it, help him or her develop the alphabetic principle so the student’s writing will communicate a message on its own. To develop the alphabetic principle, the student will need to learn how to interrelate the other three of Clay’s (1991) four emergent behaviors—which are phonemic awareness, visually attending to graphic cues, and concepts of print—with his or her language abilities.

6. When conducting conferences, I have found the following comments and advice helpful (Calkins, 1994; Graves, 1994):

- “Tell me about your picture or drawing.” The young child rehearses for writing by drawing; initially the drawing is far more important than the writing.
- “Where did you get such a good idea?” Ask this question, then listen to and show interest in the student’s topic, and get the student to talk more about the topic so he or she becomes really interested in it, too. The first entry point into writing is a simple conversation, with the child leading the conversation (Graves, 1994).
- Repeat students’ words to them. This is a good way of showing interest, enhancing your correct understanding of what was said, and also reinforcing the proper pronunciation of words to the student in a positive way.
- If there is something you don’t understand in the child’s picture or writing, ask the child about it. For example, I remember an occasion when I thought a child had no writing on his paper because all I saw was a drawing, so I asked him if he could show me his writing. He flipped his paper over and showed me his writing on the other side. I also learned to ask, “Can you tell me about your picture?” rather than guess what the picture is about, because many times I have guessed incorrectly and this has created a negative note to the conference. In addition, if children have no writing on their papers, it is important to ask them about their pictures. Often their responses lead the teacher to see a relationship between the objects that were drawn and a possible story that they can encourage the child to write about. Teachers need to encourage children to be excited about telling the stories in their lives in print so they will work hard and be engaged in the laborious task of learning to encode.
- “What are you going to do next?” When the child tells you, respond with delight and interest and say, “I’ll be back to see what you’ve done later.” This comment has allowed me more time to confer without interruption. Teachers do not need to watch children do all their work. Teachers can discuss students’ incomplete work and come back to check their completed work later.

7. Do not be unduly concerned about taking anecdotal records this first day or week, other than recording what the child tells you he or she wrote if you cannot read the writing. (I record this transcription on a sticky note after the conference. When I photocopy the student’s writing sample later in the day, I also photocopy the sticky note on the back side of the sample.)

Once conference routines and procedures have been established and children understand them, concentrate on taking observational or anecdotal records between conferences directly on the children’s CID

forms. Also, if several children are struggling with the same problem, make a note of the problem on your WCIG form for a possible minilesson.

### **Examples**

Focus on what children can do (strengths) to teach their needs (weaknesses) based on the two goals previously described. The following examples illustrate first-day conferences and brief observations and assessments. (See chapter 7 for more information on assessment and evaluation.)

#### *Billy's Conference:*

Billy appeared to be busy at the beginning of the workshop, but when I first came to confer with him, he had nothing on his paper.

Me: Billy, will you tell me everything that happened from the time you left school until you went to bed yesterday?

Billy: I got off the bus at my house. Me and Buddy played for awhile.

Me: Who is Buddy?

Billy: He belongs next door; he's a dog.

Me: What do you and Buddy do when you play?

Billy: We roughhouse.

Me: Would you like to draw and write about the dog and roughhousing?

Billy: Yes.

[After five minutes, Billy's paper is still blank.]

Me: Billy, why is your paper blank?

Billy: I don't know how to draw a dog.

Me: Close your eyes and try to picture Buddy.

Billy: I can't.

Me: Look around the room for a picture of a dog. [I attempt to put the *responsibility* on him.]

[Billy sees a picture of a dog, but he says he still can't do it. I take note of the words *try* and *praise* to record on Billy's CID form later.]

Me: Billy, we can always try to draw a dog. You know, I don't think I've ever drawn a dog either, but I'm going to try right now.

[I demonstrate drawing a quick, rough sketch of a dog by using mostly circles and loops on my tablet. Next, I ask Billy to try. Hesitantly, he puts his marker to his paper and begins to draw, and I praise his effort as an interesting dog begins to appear. Then I tell Billy that I will check with him later to see his finished dog. When I return, Billy has finished his dog, but a student next to Billy says that Billy's dog doesn't look like a dog.]

Me: I think Billy has a great-looking dog. See, it has four legs, a head, ears, eyes, and a tail, and to tell you the truth, I like it better than mine [showing my drawing next to Billy's].

[I do not allow other students to criticize attempts at drawing and writing; in fact, I do not allow negativism of any kind. Every attempt is precious and a beginning to something better. As Calkins (1994) says, "Teachers must delight in what youngsters do and...respond in real ways to what they are trying to do" (p. 70).]

[Billy smiles shyly. Billy continues to work on his picture the next day, adding a pheasant and more detail. I ask him about the pheasant and he tells me, "Me and Buddy walk the corn fields and chase pheasants." I respond by saying, "That is a really interesting thing to add, Billy." Then, I guide him to hear the /b/ sound at the beginning of his name and form the letter B. (We make plans to work on the other letters in his name later; B is a good start.)]

By the end of the year, Billy can draw dogs better than anyone in the room. Because his interest in dogs was encouraged and his efforts praised, Billy became interested in writing and became a writer and a reader. (See Figure 43.)

*Billy's Assessment:*

Billy had great difficulty coming up with a topic; I think he was afraid to try. After leaving Billy, I briefly recorded on Billy's CID form the following: *Try, Work on topic choice, and Needs lots of encouragement and praise.* Concerning

**Figure 43. Billy's Sample**



the alphabetic principle, I recorded, "Can't hear sounds or write letters, not even in name. Help him form a *B* & do some form of writing tomorrow." I translate these brief notations later in the day to complete statements on Billy's CID form.

When I confer with Billy in the future, I will help him expand on his drawing and written language, and I will spend a little of the conference time helping him hear individual beginning consonant sounds through sound matching. For example, I may slowly say *pheasant* and then say that *pheasant* has the /f/ sound in the beginning. Then, I would ask Billy if he could hear that same sound in the beginning of different words such as *farm*, *phone*, and *dog*. (I also use iteration, if necessary, to help students with responses.) When Billy can hear isolated beginning single consonants, and when he gains the ability to use his ABC strip to find letters of the alphabet, I will ask him to write letters. Now it is too soon, although we will work on writing his first name. I have expectations of Billy and I know with my guidance and Billy's self-directed search, they will be met.

*Kara's Conference:*

Kara has drawn a picture of her sister and herself playing on a swing set, but she has no writing. After talking to Kara about her drawing, I say, "While I'm here, I'd like you to put some writing down, Kara. What do you want to say?" (I thought Kara could write with invented spelling because of my observations of her in the classroom and during Getting Ready.)

Kara: Me and my sister and my dog went to the park and we went on the swings and we had fun.

[In the future, I plan to guide Kara in writing a sentence or two; however, because of my prior observations of Kara, I feel this might be too difficult initially. First I respond with interest to what Kara has said.]

Me: That would be a lot to write Kara. If you could write only one thing about your picture, what would that one thing be? [It is important for teachers to remember to use the words *one thing* rather than *one word*. Most kindergartners do not understand the concept of word in the beginning of the year.]

Kara: Swing set.

Me: Swing...set. [I say it slowly repeating her words drawing them out like pulling taffy or bubble gum.]

Me: [handing her a marker] Try writing it.

[She writes *C t*.]

[I would accept whatever she writes, but I am thrilled with this close approximation. I believe Kara thinks of swing set as one word, so she wrote the beginning and ending sounds that she heard in *swing set*. The spaces between words in print do not correspond to actual pauses in oral language (Ferreiro & Teberosky, 1982). This example should

remind us all as teachers to always look for the logic in a child's approximations because there is usually logic to it.]

Me: [in a delighted manner] How did you know how to make both those letters?

Kara: 'Cause I know my ABCs. [This makes sense when you compare the initial sound of /c/ and the initial sound of *swing*. Teachers should accept such attempts, which is a condition of approximation. At Kara's young age, guessing a c for an s is an excellent try.]

As the year progresses, with more visual knowledge of words through immersion and exposure to meaningful print in our classroom, Kara will come to understand that some letters have more than one sound and that spelling requires visualizing the word as well as listening to its sounds. (See Figure 44 for this sample of Kara's work.)

*Kara's Assessment:*

I did not need to write on a sticky to remind me of what Kara said. Her writing of *C t* and her picture were enough. I did record on her CID form the following: *talkative, needs focus as far as communicating message, said she knows her ABCs, and can hear sounds*. After Author's Chair (see p. 173 for a description), I also recorded on my WC IG form what Kara had said she was going to add to her piece tomorrow: *I'm gonna write about running home in the rain*.

**Figure 44. Kara's Sample**



## **Conclusion**

At the end of the writing session, students are asked to hand in their work. Make sure all students have their names written on their work; I write the names of those children who can't write their names. Normally, I only photocopy and save the work of student I conferred with on any given day. However, on the first day of writing workshop, I make a photocopy of *all* the children's dated writing samples and save them in my evaluation file portfolio to demonstrate writing progress from day one to the end of the year. Also, whenever you make any future observations outside of writing workshop that pertain to students' writing strengths or needs, record such information on a sticky note and place it in the student's file.

## **Conferring Discussion**

On this first day of writing workshop, my main concern is that everyone is working and understands the procedures. Students should do some form of writing as well as drawing. Accept whatever they put down. Have students refer to the various forms of writing displayed on the writing rules chart to remind them they are all writers. Congratulate them on being writers no matter what form they use, and when they have written something, ask them to read their approximated writing with their fingers.

After a conference, you probably will have observed and recorded several "needs" (mostly procedural) on your WCIG form under possible minilessons that you will have to address within the next few days (e.g., students stamping dates on papers, encouraging students to help each other, trying, handling interruptions, finding a more expedient way for students to get their paper to write on). Most of these minilessons deal with handling procedures with responsibility (see chapter 6 for minilessons on procedures).

In addition to procedures, content usually needs to be addressed, too. As I confer with individual students, my main goal is to encourage them to compose and communicate a message in writing in "whatever way they can" at first. Children can compose before they learn to write (Temple et al., 1988). Composing is thinking and creating, and kindergartners do it all the time (Temple et al., 1988). I try to guide them to tell me their thoughts about their personal experiences to develop their "voice," which is the driving force behind writing (Graves, 1994).

Kindergarten teachers are sometimes surprised that some children who initially knew a lot about print do not necessarily write easily (Clay, 2001). Writing is complex; there is a lot to learn. It is also laborious. All writers need to receive positive response for their retellings of experiences to develop voice and be engaged in writing.

Also, all writers struggle with trying to keep their focus—that is, trying to stay on the one topic they've chosen to write about without wandering to secondary topics. When conferring with young writers you should work with them to ensure that their pieces are about one thing so they make sense,

which explains why it is useful to ask each child to tell you about the one thing that his or her picture or story is about (Calkins, 1994).

As I guide kindergartners in composing and communicating a message in print, I work toward my second goal of encouraging each child to practice interrelating Clay's (1991) four emergent literacy behaviors. When children can isolate the individual sounds in their oral language and know how to use their ABC strips to try to find representative letters, I guide them to use the alphabetic principle. In their desire to record their thoughts, students learn to write readable print.

As I confer with students, I keep these two goals in mind. I usually do not write anything during a conference, but I take a few minutes between conferences to record any pertinent information that applies to these two goals—or anything else that I think is important. (I do not rely on the photocopied sample of the child's work to be enough to refresh my memory.) In the beginning of the year, this usually includes recording what the child stated that his or her approximated writing said.

In the spirit of appreciating the developmental writing process, the teacher needs to applaud approximated intent as a written message. This will help kindergartners move to a point where they talk about print in the same manner that they talk about their drawing, and they will then come to the realization that print represents their oral language (Clay, 2001; Temple et al., 1988).

---

Without an encouraging audience, there is little reason for writers to try to develop their abilities to communicate in written language. Writers need readers.

Guidelines on conducting an Author's Chair, which teaches children how to listen to and look at text include the following:

- Classmates should be asked to listen carefully as authors describe their pictures and tell their stories so classmates can tell the author what they *remember*. Also, encourage classmates to remember as many of the actual words the author used as possible.
- Classmates should *comment* on what strikes them in a piece. Encourage classmates to talk about anything they particularly liked and why they liked it.
- Classmates can ask *questions* to learn more about the author's work and possibly extend it. These questions should always be put in a "positive light"; the teacher must often help the questioner to do this. (Graves, 1994, p. 134)

### **Author's Chair Aim**

To celebrate, praise, and help extend young authors' attempts to tell about the personal experiences and episodes in their lives.

**Sharing In  
Author's Chair  
(15 minutes)**

## **Author's Chair Classroom Setup and Materials**

Students should be seated in the community circle. Select two or three authors for the day to bring their writing to the circle to share with the class. These students should be seated in a special chair labeled "Author's Chair." The teacher should hold their papers until and after they share in the first sessions of Author's Chair. However, as the year progresses, children can be taught to be responsible for holding their own papers.

## **Author's Chair Procedure**

### **Introduction**

1. Ask three students with whom you have conferred that day to share their work at the end of writing workshop. Authors must give their permission to share. Sometimes kindergartners do say no in the beginning of the year, but once they understand the procedure, they all want to share.
2. Before the first author takes his or her seat in the Author's Chair, model or role-play the sharing procedure. Read something you have written. Prior to reading, tell the group the one thing that your piece is about to reinforce the idea of focus, or main idea (Graves, 1994). After reading, ask the group, "What was the one thing that my piece was about?" (If an answer is incorrect, refer to your piece and reestablish its focus.)
3. After teacher modeling, the first author can sit in the Author's Chair, show his or her picture, tell what the piece is about, and talk about it. The teacher sits next to the author and usually holds the author's picture (so it is high enough for all students to see) as the author points out and describes objects in it. The teacher should help to help students identify relationships between objects to help develop a sense of story.

The author should also be guided to point out any writing on his or her paper, and the teacher should laud the author's efforts. Praising these first attempts at writing by young authors helps generate more writing by the rest of the class.

4. After discussing focus, the author gets to choose classmates who raise their hands to tell him or her what they remembered and then what they liked about the piece. If classmates wonder about something in the picture, they can ask questions about it, but this questioning must be handled in a positive manner. (I usually remind authors that what their classmates remember is what they especially liked.)

Although the teacher sits next to the author and helps out as needed, the teacher becomes part of the audience. As part of the audience, the teacher should raise his or her hand and wait to be called on by the author in order to serve as a role model in remembering, commenting, and questioning in a positive, celebratory manner.

## Example

Following is an example of Kara's first day in Author's Chair.

[Kara sat in the Author's Chair and I sat next to her, holding her paper high enough for all to see.]

Me: Kara, will you tell the class the *one thing* that your writing is about?

Kara: It's about me and my sister swinging.

Me: What made you think about swinging?

Kara: I saw some kids swinging on the swings this morning.

Me: Class, it will be your job to listen very carefully to everything Kara tells us about her picture and her writing. When she is finished, we are going to tell her what we remember about her story.

Kara: This is the swing set in the park, and this is me and my sister swinging. This is my dog, and this is the grass, and this is the sun. And this is some clouds.

[Kara does not point out her writing, so I do.]

Me: Kara, can you read what you wrote here?

[I notice she has added another word on her own (*Me*) since I conferred with her. Kara points to her words (*ME Ct*) and reads "My swing set." If Kara had been unable to read her words, I would have helped her.]

Me: Kara, that is so wonderful that you were able to write this word all by yourself [pointing at the word *me* on the board to indicate *my*]! And class, look at Kara's beautiful letters, don't they look like the letters on our ABC chart?

The class all agrees the letters are good. (If a child in the class happens to know the correct spelling of the word *my* and points this out, I would favorably compare Kara's close approximation of *me* letter by letter to *my*. However, this would be highly unusual, because this kind of approximation [i.e., *me* for *my*] is quite common in the beginning of kindergarten. Therefore, I just praise the good approximation as if it were the real word.)

Me: Kara, will you ask the class what your piece is about? [She does.] All right Kara, you can be the teacher and call on the children whose hands are raised?

[After establishing the focus, the class tells Kara what they remember about her story. Some children repeat what others say.]

Me: Class, I want you to listen very closely to what your classmates are saying to Kara. It isn't very interesting for Kara or any of us to hear the same thing said again.

[Kara calls on Timmy.]

Timmy: I like the swing set.

Me: We usually remember things that we like about the author's picture or story. Tell, me Jimmy, why do you like the swing set? [I ask Timmy to tell us why he likes the swing set to encourage making connections. Also, "I like" becomes meaningless and trivial when a reason does not accompany it.]

Timmy: I got a swing set at home, and my Dad swings me on it.

[Kara calls on Andrew next.]

Andrew: I like your dog. I drew a dog in my picture, too.

Amy: I like your letters. They look good.

If a child had not said this, I would have. Teachers must give positive praise to get children to do the laborious job of hearing individual sounds and then searching for the appropriate letters on their ABC strips.

After the children had done a good job of remembering what Kara had told them and made comments that revealed their connections to her piece, I tell students they can ask Kara some questions.

Me: Class, if there is anything about Kara's picture or writing that you would like to know more about or don't understand, you can raise your hand now and Kara will call on you. [Kindergartners often do not understand the meaning of the question at first, but with modeling by the teacher and time, they eventually get the idea.]

Cody: Why do you have a dog in your picture?

Me: You'd like to know more about Kara's dog? [I rephrase this question more positively to prompt Kara to add description to her writing.]

Kara: That's my dog, and he likes to go to the park with me.

[After raising my hand like the other kindergartners, Kara calls on me.]

Me: Kara, I noticed that you drew some interesting puffy black clouds in your picture. Can you tell me why they are black?

Kara: It started to rain when we were at the park. The clouds got black and we had to run home.

[I repeat to Kara all that she said in Author's Chair in an effort to scaffold and build her story.]

Me: So, you, your sister, and your dog went to the park. You and your sister swung on the swing set, but it started to rain. And you all had to run home. My, that was quite an experience, and it makes a very interesting story! Kara, would you like to write some more tomorrow about this story?

Kara: Yes.

Me: What will you write? [It is important to establish what students intend to write so they have a better chance of remembering.]

Kara: I'm gonna write about running home in the rain.

Me: I think that would make your story even more interesting Kara. Class, do you think this would make Kara's story even more interesting?

They all agree it would. Kindergartners are very susceptible to their teacher's suggestions. This knowledge can be used to influence kindly behavior.

I record Kara's addition idea to her story on my WCIG form so I will remember to remind Kara about this addition tomorrow. However, if she doesn't wish to follow through on her idea, it will be her choice.

Many teachers have asked me if they should have the children clap after an author has shared. I think clapping is acceptable if Author's Chair has been handled in the way I described. However, if children simply get up, show their picture and describe what's in it with no interaction from the class and the teacher—that is, no remembering, commenting, or questioning to help writers grow—clapping can become a meaningless ritual.

### **Conclusion**

First, it is a good idea for teachers to ask the child what the one thing their story is about to establish focus, and then ask children where they got their idea for their choice of topic, as I did when I asked Kara, "What made you think about swinging?" A question like this helps other children to understand how they can get ideas for their writing. Graves (1994) suggests that "other children may be better sources than the teacher for thinking of entry points into writing" (p. 275). Next, asking about relationships between objects in a picture or simply mentioning objects in the picture, as I did when I told Kara I had noticed she had drawn some black clouds in her picture, can sometimes extend the story. Last, but most important, praising any print is a good way to get more.

Author's Chair could go on all day. Time limits are important. Many teachers set time limits for each author in discussing his or her writing; five minutes per author is customary. Some authors spend too much time choosing a classmate to ask them a question or tell them something they remembered. If this is the case, students are not using their responsibility well, and the teacher may have to intercede with a comment such as, "I will count to three, if you haven't chosen someone by then, I will have to."

Because everyone wants to share and usually teachers only have time to allow three authors the privilege on any given day, the teacher can hold up some writing samples from children who did not get the opportunity to sit in Author's Chair, and these children—or the teacher—can quickly tell one or two important things about their work. Routman (2000) also

promotes a Quick Share; she likes to use it when minilessons and conferring run over the allotted time for those students “who have worked hard, done something well, or tried something new” (p. 256).

Mrs. Clark used a Quick Share when she wanted to highlight Jeremy’s creative use of perspective in his drawing (see Figure 8, p. 64). She asked Jeremy to show his picture as she pointed out how he had tried to show perspective in his picture by drawing those things that were close as larger and those things that were far away as smaller.

Calkins (1994) suggests that in addition to sharing and supporting a finished work in Author’s Chair, the teacher can teach the class how to help an author who is puzzled or stuck in the writing process during Author’s Chair, too. To do this, the teacher should role-play helping the author get ideas with his or her writing as the class watches. (The class can give input, too.)

Authors who have already shared can sign their names on a chart entitled “Authors Who Have Shared.” When the chart shows everyone’s name, a new chart can be started, or teachers can choose to laminate the chart so it can be erased and used again. Thus, the chart serves as meaningful print and helps the teacher and classmates keep track of who has shared so far. Teachers also can keep a record of who has shared on their WCIG forms.

## **Author’s Chair Discussion**

Author’s Chair is a time to celebrate the things the author has done well and to require students to listen carefully to the author’s piece. Share sessions can become boring and formulaic if children do not think long enough to understand the text before they ask questions. That is why Graves (1994) suggests that children work through the “remembers” (p. 134) and comments before the teacher allows questions. The young audience tends to get “remembers” and “reminders” mixed up. Because they are egocentric, kindergartners tend to tell about their own experiences that were stimulated by the author’s experience. Graves (1994) tells of how a young author solved this problem; after he’d finished reading his text, he said, “Okay, remembers, reminders, then questions....and only two reminders” (p. 134).

Teachers do have to help out with reminders. When children give lengthy reminders, tell those children that they can write about those ideas tomorrow, and then steer them back to the author’s piece. Eventually, with guidance, lengthy reminders will surface in independent writing time rather than in Author’s Chair.

Graves (1983) lauds questions that teach. Graves defines good questions as “those that provide surprises for both child and teacher” (p. 107). When teachers model asking good questions, students understand that only questions that help the audience learn more about the author’s picture, and eventually the author’s story, are worthwhile.

For example, as a literacy coach, I remember asking such a question of Austin, a young author. He had written about catching a fish, but his writing lacked voice. I asked, “How did you go about catching that fish?”

Austin said, "I casted in my line and said 'Come to Papa.'" The entire classroom erupted into laughter.

I asked Austin to put those words down, just as he had said them to us right then, so he wouldn't lose them. He did, and the next day Austin added those words to his piece. Later he shared this revised version in Author's Chair. The children laughed almost as hard as they did the first time they heard it, and Austin beamed proudly.

Temple and colleagues (1988) suggest that when children ask questions of the author,

They are participating in a most important part of the composing process. By answering the questions, children are forced to sustain their topics, to tell more, and yet more. With encouragement and regular opportunities for asking and answering questions, children will eventually be able to ask (themselves) their own (questions) as they write. (p. 217)

As a literacy coach, I have heard many kindergarten children say, "I know they [classmates] will ask me this," as they add on to their piece. They have learned a very important question to help guide their writing that good authors usually depend on: "What more will my reader want to know?"

Classmates' questions need to be handled carefully; the teacher must strive to make questioning positive. There are children who will ask insensitive questions. Sometimes young authors handle these questions well; however, if the young author falters, the teacher should provide a response. Author's Chair is about building self-esteem as a writer and person.

Author's Chair, along with guidance from the teacher, can help children develop a sense of self-esteem and good social skills that are often hard to develop in the classroom context. For example, one girl, who was new to the school, wrote that she didn't have any friends and she felt sad. Her classmates responded with wonderful comments that made her feel better, and one student gave the best comment of all. She said, "I'll be your friend."

Another girl had written about her grandfather dying and how much she missed him. The children were very sympathetic and shared similar stories, and the girl felt better. One child asked, "Did you feel bad?" When the girl said she did, the child responded, "I feel bad, too."

It is important for teachers to ensure that all comments are appropriate. This is an excellent time to teach children how to be kind and helpful to one another. Appropriate questions, comments, and remembering what the author said are all ways for the young author to get response or feedback during Author's Chair, a necessary condition to learning literacy. The teacher is instrumental in making this response or feedback appropriate and positive. It is this kind of response that encourages young authors to want to communicate the happenings in their lives through writing while practicing Clay's four behaviors of emergent literacy, which enable authors to become early writers and readers.

## Summary

This chapter has outlined and provided in-depth descriptions and demonstrations of a first day lesson plan within the two structures of “Getting Ready” and writing workshop. Getting Ready focuses on teaching children the alphabet and phonemic awareness; writing workshop allows children the time to practice hearing the sounds in words and writing the graphic cues of the letters of the alphabet, while interrelating them with Clay’s (1991) other two emergent reading behaviors—language abilities and concepts of print—in the process of learning to write. An important point to remember from Getting Ready is that children should not be expected to write in invented spelling until they have a basic ability to hear individual beginning sounds in words (i.e., phonemic awareness) and can use the “ABC Song” and alphabet strip to find most letters of their choosing. Important points to remember from writing workshop include the following: (1) Teacher demonstrations of her/his own writing are essential to the young child’s process of writing; (2) while conferring, teachers should observe each child’s writing needs and teach these needs from the foundation of what each child knows; (3) teachers and classmates must learn to appreciate and praise approximations; and (4) while Author’s Chair is a place to celebrate what the author has done, it is also a place to teach the young writer to grow. Chapter 6 provides additional ideas on how to teach the young author to grow through minilessons.