

Workshop 1

Building a Community of Writers

Video 1: Building a Community of Writers

Video 2: Teacher as Writer

How can you nurture and support the confidence of all students and help them forge unique writing identities? This workshop explores the essential characteristics of a successful writing community and shows examples of teachers who build community in their classrooms through a variety of ways.

“I think it’s amazing what kids can do at this age if we give them the chance. As teachers, we have to cherish the joy children get from writing because what matters most in our teaching is that we not only help students become better writers, we also help them to want to write, to love what they’ve created in words.”

—Jack Wilde, retired teacher and author of *A Door Opens: Writing in the Fifth Grade*

Learning Goals

In this workshop, you will explore how to:

- nurture a structured classroom writing community that fosters trust among students
- establish shared values about good writing, the work that writers do, and respect for others’ work
- participate as a member of the writing community by sharing your writing

Materials Needed

- Examine the Literature Response Chart (included at the end of this chapter and available as a PDF on the *Inside Writing Communities* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/elemwriting)
- Lesson descriptions and classroom handouts listed in the section Teachers and Lessons Featured in Workshop 1 (included in the Appendix and available as PDFs on the Web site)
- “About Writing: A Letter to Stacie” and “Children Can Write Authentically If We Help Them,” articles available as PDFs on the Web site
- Key Practices To Observe (included in the section Analyze the Videos and available as a PDF on the Web site)
- Journal or notebook

Facilitators: You may want to have several copies of the two articles available for participants without Internet access, as well as copies of Key Practices To Observe, Examine the Literature Response Chart, and the lesson descriptions and classroom handouts.

Prepare for the Workshop

To prepare for this workshop, you will review the strategies you already use and read two articles about establishing and building classroom writing communities.

Facilitators: Have participants complete these activities before arriving for the workshop.

What Do You Do? Notebook:

Writing communities are built around a set of shared values about writing and the work that writers do. Writing communities must also develop a set of shared values about how the community works. Think about your values and opinions about communities and writing. Answer the following questions in your notebook. Then reflect on your answers in terms of your own teaching practice.

- What are the characteristics of a successful community?
- Describe the characteristics of the communities you currently belong to.
- What are some of the structures, rituals, and routines that are present in successful writing communities?
- What is good writing?
- What do writers do?
- Do you think it is necessary for teachers to be good writers? Why or why not?
- Do you currently share your writing with your students? Why or why not?
- How do you think it can help your students to see you struggle with and solve your own problems as a writer?

Examine the Literature Assignment:

To complete this activity, use the Examine the Literature Response Chart found at the end of this chapter.

Read each article listed below, recording your ideas on the chart during and after reading. When you have finished, save your chart to submit as an assignment.

You can download PDFs of these articles on the *Inside Writing Communities, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/elemwriting.

About Writing: A Letter to Stacie

This article illustrates how using a letter format and the tender tone of a grandmother can provide a “big picture” look at a good writing workshop.

Dressel, Janice Hartwick. “About Writing: A Letter to Stacie.” *Language Arts* (National Council of Teachers of English) 82, no. 2 (November 2004): 95–99.

Children Can Write Authentically If We Help Them

This article explores how to help students connect writing choices with personal challenges and issues.

Graves, Donald. “Children Can Write Authentically If We Help Them.” *Primary Voices K–6* (National Council of Teachers of English) 1, no. 1 (August 1993): 3–6.

Analyze the Videos

Facilitators: When the workshop begins, you may want to spend a few minutes discussing the group's responses to What Do You Do? and the readings. You also may want to direct the participants' attention to the Key Practices listed below.

Key Practices To Observe

"Building a Community of Writers" and "Teacher as Writer" explore how to establish successful classroom writing communities. They feature commentary from experts on teaching writing at the elementary level as well as classroom illustrations highlighting the practices of several teachers.

As you watch, look for the following key practices:

- Teachers model respect for writing and writers.
- Teachers schedule adequate time for writing and writing instruction.
- Teachers provide multiple opportunities for community members to talk about their lives and their writing.
- Teachers and students assist each other with writing.
- Teachers design spaces, rituals, and routines to help nurture productivity and collegiality in the classroom writing community.
- Writers share their work and celebrate one another's writing successes.
- Teachers are active members of the community, writing alongside their students and sharing and taking risks with their own writing.

Teachers and Lessons Featured in Workshop 1

Descriptions of the featured lessons are included in the Appendix.

Video 1: Building a Community of Writers

- Jeanne Boiarsky, Third Grade
- Lindsay Dibert, Fifth Grade
- Silvia Edgerton, Fifth Grade
- Mark Hansen, Third Grade
- Nicole Outsen, Fifth Grade
- Latosha Rowley, Third Grade

Video 2: Teacher as Writer

- Silvia Edgerton, Fifth Grade
- Latosha Rowley, Third Grade, "Lessons in a Poetry Unit"
- Christine Sanchez, Third Grade, "Lesson on Word Choice"

Analyze the Videos, cont'd.

Guide to Video 1: Building a Community of Writers

Use this chart to help identify the pause points in Video 1. Zero your counter at the Annenberg logo at the very beginning of the tape. The entry points below are approximate.

Segment 1 (0:00-14:19)	Introduction (beginning at 00:51)	
	Interview (beginning at 03:07) Characteristics of a writing workshop	Isoke Nia
	In the Classroom (beginning at 04:16) Morning meeting	Nicole Outsen
	In the Classroom (beginning at 07:27) Circle time and morning routine	Latosha Rowley
	Interview (beginning at 09:35) Providing a safe environment for writing	Katie Wood Ray
	Interview (beginning at 11:52) Providing time for talking and writing	Isoke Nia
	In the Classroom (beginning at 12:22) Talking with a student about her writing	Jeanne Boiarsky
Segment 2 (14:19-end)	Interview (beginning at 14:19) Time for reflection and celebration	Katie Wood Ray
	In the Classroom (beginning at 14:43) Reflecting on the day's lessons	Lindsay Dibert
	In the Classroom (beginning at 19:12) Providing freedom during workshop	Mark Hansen
	Interview (beginning at 21:45) Establishing rituals and routines	Isoke Nia, Nicole Outsen
	Interview (beginning at 22:41) Sharing and celebration routines	Katie Wood Ray
	In the Classroom (beginning at 23:24) Celebrating student work	Silvia Edgerton
	Interview (beginning at 25:02) Teachers writing along with students	Lindsay Dibert
	Interview (beginning at 26:26) Honoring the community's words	Jack Wilde

Analyze the Videos, cont'd.

Video 1: Building a Community of Writers

Watch the 30-minute video “Building a Community of Writers.” If you prefer to watch the video in segments, you can stop it at the times suggested below or use the detailed Video Guide outline on the previous page to help you determine other places to stop for discussion. The Video Guide is also available as a PDF at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/elemwriting.

Answer the questions that accompany each segment below, jotting down your responses in a notebook or using them as discussion starters.



Providing Opportunities for Conversation (approximate times: 00:50-14:00)

In the first segment, fifth-grade teacher Nicole Outsen and third-grade teachers Latosha Rowley and Jeanne Boiarsky recognize the importance of classroom environments where students feel comfortable talking about themselves and their work. (Stop after the conference between two of Jeanne’s students.)

- What community-building strategies and practices do you observe during Nicole’s and Latosha’s morning meetings? How do these strategies and practices help the students grow as writers?
- Think about the two conferences from Jeanne’s classroom. What evidence do you see that she has created an atmosphere of safety and respect?
- How do you encourage your less talkative students to participate in classroom conversations?

Providing Time and Structure for Writing (approximate times: 14:00-end of video)

In this segment, several classroom examples illustrate how effective writing instruction requires a carefully orchestrated structure of rituals and routines as well as time to explore possibilities, reflect on lessons learned, and share and celebrate writing. (Play to the end of the program.)

- During the class reflection time, what do Lindsay Dibert’s questions, responses, and body language convey to her students?
- Mark Hansen says that students often are working out writing dilemmas even when they appear off-task. What teaching strategies or structures would help you balance freedom and control in your writing classroom?
- Share some ways in which you and your students celebrate and honor writing and writers.

Analyze the Videos, cont'd.

Video 2: Teacher as Writer

Watch the 30-minute video "Teacher as Writer." Apply what you have learned in "Building a Community of Writers" as you watch the extended video of classroom examples.

Answer the questions that follow each segment, jotting down your answers in your notebook or using them as discussion starters.



Christine Sanchez's Class (approximate times: 00:30-08:50)

Christine Sanchez talks about a piece she is writing for her mother and shares a story web she developed as a prewriting exercise.

- What characteristics of Christine's writing piece make it a particularly good model for her students?
- What specific writing skills or strategies does Christine model?

Latosha Rowley's Class (approximate times: 08:50-20:40)

Latosha Rowley shares a poem she has written about her baby to include in the body of poetry the students are studying as writing models.

- What aspects of a "writerly life" does Latosha model for her class?
- How do Latosha's students respond to her poem? What do their responses suggest about the effectiveness of teachers sharing their own work?

Silvia Edgerton's Class (20:40-end of video)

Silvia Edgerton models her thinking as she goes through her writer's notebook looking for ideas for a nonfiction piece.

- What evidence do you see that Silvia frequently shares her work with her students?
- What specific thinking processes does Silvia model?
- What guides Silvia's topic selection in addition to her notebook entries?

Extend Your Learning

Examine Your Practice

Many teachers are reluctant to write alongside their students or to share pieces they have written because they don't consider themselves strong writers. Read the following quotation, consider your own students, and answer the questions that follow.

"A teacher who doesn't feel comfortable with writing can be one of the best mentors for children. If you don't feel comfortable, just be honest. Teachers don't need to write so that kids see how to write well; that's what they'll learn from their reading. Teachers need to write so that children can see someone else going through the process and so that teachers will understand that process. If writing is hard for you, it puts you in a better position as a teacher because you understand what your students may be feeling."

—Katie Wood Ray, consultant and author or co-author of five books on teaching writing, including *The Writing Workshop: Working Through the Hard Parts (And They're All Hard Parts)*

Guiding Questions Notebook:

Reflect on the quotation from Katie Wood Ray and consider your own students. Then write your answers to the questions below in your notebook. If you are working in a group, share your responses.

- Is it necessary for a teacher of writing to be a "great" writer? Why or why not?
- How can it help students to see you struggle with and solve your own problems as a writer?
- How comfortable are you with sharing your own writing with your students? With others, in general?

Try an Activity

Personal Reading and Writing Inventory Interactive:

Go to the *Inside Writing Communities, Grades 3–5* Web site at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/elemwriting

In this interactive, you will evaluate your own experience and attitude toward writing. The questions will guide you in an inventory of your reading and writing preferences and offer ways for you to add more writing to your life, in and outside of school.

Put It Into Practice

The videos, activities, and readings in this workshop illustrate how predictable routines and rituals in a writing workshop foster feelings of safety and community. Now apply what you have learned to develop rituals that you can use in your practice.

New Rituals for Your Classroom Assignment:

Use the readings, activities, and video examples in this workshop to brainstorm three daily writing workshop rituals or routines that can help your students generate ideas for writing topics or feel more confident about sharing their writing.

Be sure to include the following:

- the name of each ritual;
- goals and benefits of using this ritual in the writing workshop;
- any challenges you may face in implementing each ritual and how you might respond; and
- the expected outcomes of each ritual.

When you have finished, save your written work to submit as an assignment.

Reflect on Your Learning

What Did You Learn? Assignment:

Summarize what you have learned about building a community of writers from the experts' statements, classroom examples, and the readings and activities in this workshop. Use the questions below to guide your thinking. When you have finished, save your written summary to submit as an assignment.

- Which classroom practices from the two videos reflect what you currently do?
- Which practices or ideas are new to you?
- What changes, if any, do you plan to make?
- What support and/or resources will you need to implement these ideas?

Assignments

If you are taking this workshop for graduate credit, submit the following assignments for Workshop 1: Building a Community of Writers:

1. Examine the Literature

Read two articles about building a community of writers and complete the Examine the Literature Response Chart.

2. New Rituals for Your Classroom

Apply what you have learned in this workshop to developing rituals and routines that can help your students generate ideas for writing topics or feel more confident about sharing their writing.

3. What Did You Learn?

Write a summary of the ideas and strategies you explored in this workshop.

Related Resources

Web Resources

The Balanced Literacy Classroom

<http://www.teachingmatters.org/literacy/morton.htm>

This site offers a virtual tour of a balanced literacy classroom.

National Writing Project

<http://www.writingproject.org/>

This site has a wealth of professional development resources for teachers of writing at all levels.

Scholastic

<http://www.scholastic.com/>

This site provides resources for teachers, specific to grade level and subject area, including information on and by authors published by Scholastic.

SmartWriters.com

<http://www.SmartWriters.com/>

This site features interviews with children's writers, writing contest links for young writers, classroom resources for teachers and librarians, and a directory of children's authors and illustrators who are available for school visits.

WritingFix

<http://www.writingfix.com>

Sponsored in part by the National Writing Project, this site features interactive writing activities to engage all types of learners.

Related Resources, cont'd.

Print Resources

Davis, Judy, and Sharon E. Hill. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing: Strategies, Structure, and Solutions*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. ISBN: 0325005214

The authors use specific how-to details to describe the organization of a successful yearlong writing workshop.

Freeman, Marcia S. *Building a Writing Community: A Practical Guide*. Rev. ed. Gainesville, FL: Maupin House, 2003. ISBN: 0929895134

This easy-to-use, comprehensive guide focuses on setting up an effective writing workshop for young writers in grades K-6.

Harste, Jerome, Kathy Short, and Carolyn Burke. *Creating Classrooms for Authors and Inquirers*. 2d ed. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996. ISBN: 0435088505

This book explores how to set up supportive classrooms in which children become real readers, writers, and inquirers.

Hindley, Joanne. *In the Company of Children*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 1996. ISBN: 1571100105

The author offers a practical, useful examination of her own experience teaching a reading/writing workshop in her third-grade classroom.

Morgan, Bruce, and Deb Odom. *Writing Through the Tween Years: Supporting Writers, Grades 3-6*. Portland, ME: Stenhouse Publishers, 2004. ISBN: 1571104062

A case study explores how the authors (both teachers at the same school) returned to their roots as writing workshop teachers and re-inspired their students to write.

Ray, Katie Wood. *What You Know by Heart: How to Develop Curriculum for Your Writing Workshop*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002. ISBN: 0325003645

This book demonstrates how teachers can use their own experiences reading and writing to shape their writing curriculum.

Workshop 1: Building a Community of Writers

Examine the Literature Response Chart

Title	Big Ideas	Notes and Questions
1. About Writing: A Letter to Stacie		
2. Children Can Write Authentically If We Help Them		