

Annenberg/CPB

Professional Development Workshop Guide

Write in the Middle:

A Workshop for Middle School Teachers

An eight-part professional development workshop

Produced by Kentucky Educational Television

Write in the Middle: A Workshop for Middle School Teachers

is produced by
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About the Workshop

Overview

Write in the Middle: A Workshop for Middle School Teachers uses classroom video and insightful discussion to illustrate effective ways teachers can help their students become confident and proficient writers.

Middle school teachers from across the country share specific strategies they use with their students, and extensive video from each of their classrooms gives viewers an opportunity to see those strategies in action. The workshop explores several common themes that underlie effective writing instruction at the middle school level—creating a safe and engaging environment for young writers; providing meaningful and authentic reasons for writing; allowing student choice; using mini-lessons and writing models; and exploring innovative approaches like multigenre writing. Some workshops feature aspects of the writing process, such as revision and conferences, while others illustrate successful strategies for teaching specific writing forms such as poetry or persuasive essays.

If you're watching the workshop videos with other teachers or facilitating a group, you can use this guide as a resource for discussion points and suggestions for activities to do before, during, and after viewing. Check out the "Helpful Hints for Facilitators" on page 6 for more information on conducting group workshop sessions. If you're using the workshop for self-study, there are suggestions to help you optimize your viewing as well.

Workshop Descriptions

Workshop 1. Creating a Community of Writers

The first workshop session explores the ways teachers create environments that encourage and support young writers, and addresses how the developmental needs of young adolescents relate to the teaching of writing. Through interviews with experienced teachers and visits to their classrooms, the workshop illustrates strategies teachers can use to nurture and encourage middle school writers.

Workshop 2. Making Writing Meaningful

The second session visits the classrooms of six teachers to see how they use authentic sources and topics to prompt students to write about things that matter to them—subjects that relate to their lives, relationships, and communities. The writing focus may be the students themselves—their feelings, emotions, reactions—or it may involve outside forces that have an impact on their lives.

Workshop 3. Teaching Poetry

Many students—and teachers—avoid reading and writing poetry because it seems so difficult and foreign to their everyday experience. But for middle school students, poetry offers an unparalleled opportunity to explore feelings and emotions and to increase awareness of the power of written expression. In Workshop 3, we see two master teachers helping their students develop as readers and writers of poetry.

Workshop 4. Teaching Persuasive Writing

The fourth workshop session showcases fifth-grade and sixth-grade classes as they begin units on persuasive writing. The students have chosen topics that interest them—topics drawn from their experiences within their own communities. Now—with their teachers' help—they are learning the fundamentals of effective and authentic written persuasion.

Workshop 5. Teaching Multigenre Writing

Workshop 5 centers on multigenre writing, an eclectic approach to writing instruction that offers students a wide range of options for expressing ideas and communicating knowledge. The workshop session features two classrooms and two different units, one research-based and the other autobiographical. In both cases, having the freedom to choose the forms their writing will take fosters the students' creativity and increases their engagement in the process.

About the Workshop, cont'd.

Workshop 6. Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student

Because of the personal nature of writing, one of the best ways to teach the craft is to interact directly with individual students. Workshop 6 features five teachers conferring with their students, in both formal and informal settings, with individuals and small groups. And through interviews and discussion, the teachers reflect on their practice: planning effective one-on-one and group conferences, providing direction without taking over their students' writing, using conferences to assess student learning and communicate expectations, and dealing with classroom management issues related to conferencing.

Workshop 7. Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer

Peer responses provide a tremendous learning opportunity for young writers. These interactions provide students an audience for their writing as well as a source for valuable feedback. Through visits to four different classrooms, Workshop 7 explores various ways that teachers structure peer conferences, and shows the strategies teachers use to prepare their students to respond to one another's work, including using models of their own writing drafts.

Workshop 8. Teaching the Power of Revision

Workshop 8 shows classroom practices that help even reluctant writers see the power and purpose of revision. We visit three classrooms where students are applying mini-lessons to previously written pieces in order to improve leads, add dialogue, expand stories, or "explode" moments. We hear reflections on revision from teachers and students, as well as discussions among the teachers about dealing with student resistance to revision, planning mini-lessons, and other issues related to the revision process.

Teachers and Classrooms Featured in *Write in the Middle*

Now in her 12th year of teaching, **Jenny Beasley** (Workshops 2, 4, and 6) is a sixth-grade language arts teacher at Meece Middle School in Somerset, a town of 11,000 people in south central Kentucky. Meece serves approximately 500 students in grades 5-8. The school population is fairly homogeneous, although some Latino and Asian families have moved into the district in recent years.

Jenny teaches two 90-minute blocks of reading and writing and one 50-minute class of writing, with an average of 25 students in each class. Like other language arts teachers in Kentucky, she is responsible for helping her students develop pieces for the statewide Writing Portfolio, which is assessed at the fourth-, seventh-, and 12th-grade levels. Her approach to this mandate is to incorporate the state portfolio requirements into a student-centered approach that allows her sixth-graders to write about subjects they find important and relevant to their lives.

Gloria Hamilton (Workshops 1 and 2) teaches eighth-grade language arts at Crozier Middle School in Inglewood, California, an urban community located just south of Los Angeles. The Inglewood Unified School District serves a diverse population of approximately 18,000 students. Nearly 1,300 sixth-, seventh- and eighth-grade students attend Crozier, with class sizes ranging between 25 and 30 students. About two-thirds of the students are Latino, and another 33 percent are African American.

Under California standards, eighth-graders are assessed in the areas of narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive writing. They also must master the conventions of written and oral English. Like other middle-level teachers in California, Gloria plans her curriculum to make sure her students are working toward meeting these standards.

Vivian Johnson (Workshops 1, 2, 3, 6, and 7) teaches eighth-grade language arts at T.A. Dugger Junior High School in Elizabethton, a small eastern Tennessee town near the Virginia and North Carolina borders. The school is housed in a 60-year-old building, and 30 to 40 percent of its students are on free or reduced-price lunch.

About the Workshop, cont'd.

Vivian teaches three two-hour blocks, with an average of 29 students in each class. In 2002, Tennessee's writing assessment was moved from the seventh to the eighth grade, so Vivian is involved in preparing her students for the state test. However, her emphasis remains on the writing/reading workshop and on imparting her own love of language to her students.

Velvet McReynolds (Workshops 1, 7, and 8) is a seventh-grade language arts teacher at Simmons Middle School in the small suburban city of Hoover, Alabama. Located a short distance south of Birmingham, Hoover is a prosperous community with a fairly homogeneous population, both economically and ethnically.

Approximately 1,000 students in grades 6 through 8 attend Simmons with an average class size of 20. Like other seventh-grade language arts teachers in Alabama, Velvet is charged with preparing her students for a statewide writing assessment in descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive writing.

Damond Moodie (Workshops 1 and 2) teaches language arts to eighth-graders at Roosevelt Middle School in Oakland, California. Approximately 1,100 students in grades 6 through 8 attend Roosevelt. The students come from a wide range of backgrounds, and many are second language learners.

Damond's classes average about 28 students. His curriculum is designed to prepare students for California's writing assessment in narrative, expository, persuasive, and descriptive writing. Damond is also committed to helping his students recognize the power of writing to effect change, both in their personal lives and in the world around them.

Mary Cathryn Ricker (Workshops 1, 2, 5, 6, and 8) teaches the seventh grade at Cleveland Quality Middle School in St. Paul, Minnesota, which serves approximately 550 students in grades 7 and 8. More than 80 percent of Cleveland's students are on free or reduced-price lunch, and over 70 percent are second language learners—including many Hmong students whose families come from Laos.

Mary Cathryn has taught at Cleveland Middle since 2000. Before coming to St. Paul, she spent several years teaching in Camas, Washington and in St. Cloud, Minnesota. She also spent a year in Seoul, South Korea teaching at an English language academy and in a local high school. During that year, she traveled to several Asian countries, including Laos, so she has a special awareness of the culture and needs of Cleveland's Hmong population.

Laurie Swistak (Workshops 5 and 6) is a fifth-grade teacher at Cranston-Calvert Elementary School, a small, diverse school in Newport, Rhode Island. Cranston-Calvert serves approximately 280 students in grades K-5, half of whom are on free or reduced-price lunch. Laurie teaches language arts to gifted and talented fifth-graders who come to Cranston-Calvert from across the district. Her additional responsibilities include teaching social studies to all fifth-graders and math to her homeroom class of 22 heterogeneously grouped students.

For the past few years, Laurie has worked with Dr. Camille Allen, an education professor at nearby Salve Regina University. Dr. Allen's students act as mentors for Laurie's language arts students during their multigenre unit.

Allen Teng (Workshops 1 and 2) is a seventh-grade language arts teacher at Will Rogers Middle School, located in south Los Angeles County. Rogers Middle serves a highly diverse population of seventh- and eighth-graders: 60 percent are Latino, 19 percent are African American, 10 percent are white, and 11 percent represent other ethnicities. The average class size is 28.

Rogers Middle is part of the Lawndale Elementary School District, comprised of 6,000 students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Like other English teachers in the Lawndale system, Allen is responsible for preparing his students for the District Writing Assessment and for helping them meet or exceed California's writing standards.

Jack Wilde (Workshops 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8) has taught for more than 34 years. He's presently a fifth-grade teacher at the Bernice A. Ray School in the small town of Hanover, New Hampshire. Jack's students are primarily middle class, with little ethnic or racial diversity. He does have a small number of second language learners—mostly children whose families are associated with nearby Dartmouth College or the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Medical Center—and his heterogeneously grouped classes include students with learning disabilities.

About the Workshop, cont'd.

Jack and another fifth-grade teacher share the responsibilities for teaching two groups of approximately 20 children. Jack teaches language arts to his own homeroom and math to both classes while his partner is in charge of science instruction. The arrangement helps the children get ready for the sixth grade and the challenge of working with several different teachers.

Workshop Components

On the following pages you'll find discussion points and suggestions for activities to do before, during, and after viewing each workshop video. Whether you're watching as part of a group of teachers or on your own, this guide will provide detailed information on each workshop session, including the specific content featured and the lengths of classroom, interview, and discussion segments as well as the best times to stop the tape for discussion and activity breaks.

Each workshop session has a suggested format and a guide to discussion and activity breaks:

Background Reading

Before coming to the workshop sessions, you should prepare by reviewing the Web materials for each workshop at www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/, including "Key Practices To Observe" (also available in this guide) and reading the articles provided in pdf versions under "Related Reading."

Discussion and Sharing

Workshop sessions begin with questions or activities centered on the background reading and/or your own teaching practice. Spend about 15 minutes discussing these with your colleagues before watching the video.

Watch the Video

This workshop guide, also available under "Support Materials" on the Web, provides specific points to pause each of the eight 60-minute videos, along with suggested discussion questions. When you add in these discussion breaks, the total watching time for each video expands to 90 minutes. (See "Facilitator's Outlines" on the next page for more information.)

Going Further

Spend another 15 minutes following the videos discussing some of the questions provided in this guide or doing a suggested activity.

Homework

Complete your exploration of the Web pages for the workshop session you just watched—looking at teacher materials and student writing samples, listening to audio files, and/or printing out resources. Record any comments or responses in your workshop journal to share with your colleagues. You should also begin doing the background reading for the next workshop session.

Resources

A bibliography of relevant articles and books is provided for each workshop topic and is available in this guide and on the Web in an HTML version and as part of the "Support Materials."

About the Workshop, cont'd.

Facilitator's Outlines

The Facilitator's Outlines are charts designed to help on-site workshop leaders easily identify the pause points in the "Watch the Video" section of this guide. They provide start and stop points along with brief summaries of the content for each program segment.

The segments in each workshop video generally fall into three categories:

In the Classroom

Authentic classroom video demonstrating the practices featured in the workshop sessions.

Interviews

Interviews with the teachers who are featured in the classroom, their students, and other writing experts.

Teacher Discussion

Discussions among the teachers about their classroom practice and their general philosophies about teaching writing to middle school students.

Workshop Web Site

The workshop Web site (www.learner.org/channel/workshops/middlewriting/) features many resources to support *Write in the Middle: A Workshop for Middle School Teachers*. Except for the teacher reflections, all Web materials are available in pdf format so you can print them out and use them for discussion or future reference. Web features include the following:

Interactive Practice: Respond to Student Writing

This unique and interactive feature enables teachers to observe and respond to student writing and compare their responses to those of another teacher. Web users have the opportunity to respond to three drafts of student writing—an editorial, a personal narrative, and a poem.

Materials for Workshop Sessions

- "Support Materials," a downloadable pdf of this guide
- Unit and/or lesson plans
- Teacher reflections (audio files featuring comments from the teachers)
- Samples of student writing
- Forms and handouts used in the lessons
- Related reading (full-text articles that support the workshop)
- Additional resources (a bibliography of articles and books on each workshop topic)

Channel-Talk

Workshop participants can share ideas with colleagues online by joining an email discussion list. To subscribe, go to Channel-Talk on the workshop Web site.

About the Workshop, cont'd.

Workshop Journal

Participants are encouraged to keep a journal for the duration of the workshop in order to fully participate in the before- and after-viewing activities as well as to keep a record of those teaching practices they want to remember or specific strategies they want to try in their own classrooms. It's also a place to jot down ideas that arise from the discussions with colleagues or from their own reflections. From time to time, participants will be asked to share their responses to the workshop's content with colleagues.

Helpful Hints for Facilitators

If you're leading an on-site group of teachers watching the workshop, here are some guidelines to help you conduct a successful workshop.

- Make sure your television is large enough and located in a spot where all the participants have a good view, and that your VCR is in good working order.
- Spot-check the videotape ahead of time to make sure your copy is good, and cue up the tape to the beginning. You might want to use the Facilitator's Outlines provided in this workshop guide to become familiar with the pause points.
- Review the entire guide prior to the session, and make copies of the materials participants will need so they will be available at the workshop. Also provide some paper and pencils or pens.
- Review the materials available on the Web to see if you want to print anything out for participants or direct them to some specific Web resource.
- Before the first session, provide the participants with copies of the first reading assignment or send them to the Web site to print it out for themselves. Ask them to bring a journal and a pen to the first session.
- During the workshop, keep an eye on the time to keep the discussions before, during, and after viewing on schedule.
- Consider talking notes on the discussions for future reference and/or to share with participants.
- Encourage participants to continue their discussions with colleagues from other sites on Channel-Talk, an email discussion list available on the workshop Web site.

Materials Needed

Before each workshop session, read the "Key Practices To Observe" and the following articles (located under "Related Reading" on the Web pages for the individual sessions). You also may want to bring copies of these materials to the sessions for the participants.

Workshop 1: Creating a Community of Writers

- "Developing the Craft of Writing in the Sixth-Grade Classroom" by Judith K. Eggemeier in *Primary Voices K-6*, Vol. 7, No. 4, April 1999, pp. 23-32.
- "Minimizing Writing Apprehension in the Learner-Centered Classroom" by LaVona L. Reeves, *English Journal*, October 1997, pp. 38-45.
- "Nancie Atwell's *In the Middle* and the Ongoing Transformation of the Writing Workshop" by Marcy M. Taylor in *English Journal*, September 2000, pp. 46-52.
- "The Young Adolescent Learner" by Fran Salyers and Carol McKee. (This summary of the developmental characteristics of middle-level students was commissioned for *Write in the Middle*.)

About the Workshop, cont'd.

Workshop 2: Making Writing Meaningful

- "Writing To Think Critically: The Seeds of Social Action" by Randy Bomer in *Voices From the Middle*, Vol. 6, No. 4, May 1999, pp. 2-8.
- "Promoting Academic Literacy With Urban Youth Through Engaging Hip-hop Culture" by Ernest Morrell and Jeffrey M.R. Duncan-Andrade in *English Journal*, July 2002, pp. 88-92.

Workshop 3: Teaching Poetry

- "Literature as Invitation" by Robert Probst in *Voices From the Middle*, Vol. 8, No. 2, December 2000, pp. 8-15.

Workshop 4: Teaching Persuasive Writing

- "Turning Ripples Into Waves: Convincing Kids They Can Make a Difference" by Paige Passis in *Voices From the Middle*, Vol. 6, No. 4, May 1999, pp. 11-18.
- "Writing the *Real* Persuasion" by Patricia Grabill in *English Journal*, December 1992, pp. 60-62.

Workshop 5: Teaching Multigenre Writing

- "Exploring the Past Through Multigenre Writing" by Sirpa T. Grierson with Amy Anson and Jacoy Baird in *Language Arts*, Vol. 80, No. 1, September 2002, pp. 51-59.

Workshop 6: Responding to Writing: Teacher to Student

- "Conferring: The Essential Teaching Act" in *The Writing Workshop: Working Through the Hard Parts (And They're All Hard Parts)* by Katie Ray Wood, with Lester L. Laminack, pp. 155-171.
- "The Art of Response" by Deborah E. Crone-Blevins in *English Journal*, July 2002, pp. 93-98.

Workshop 7: Responding to Writing: Peer to Peer

- "Peer Response: Teaching Specific Revision Suggestions" by Gloria A. Neuberg and Sally J. McNelis in *English Journal*, September 1990, pp. 52-56.

Workshop 8: Teaching the Power of Revision

- "Motivating Middle School Students To Revise and Edit" by Angela M. Conner, with Margaret R. Moulton in *English Journal*, September 2000, pp. 72-79.
- "The Writer's Toolbox: Five Tools for Active Revision Instruction" by Laura Harper in *Language Arts*, Vol. 74, March 1997, pp. 193-200.
- "To Grammar or Not To Grammar" by Constance Weaver, Carol McNally, and Sharon Moerman in *Voices From the Middle*, Vol. 8, No. 3, March 2001, pp. 17-33.

