

## Getting Students Started in the Processes of Writing

Kylene Beers is a noted educator exploring ways to help struggling students become proficient readers and writers. In an interview for this project, she talked about struggling writers and how teachers can help them over the anxiety of a blank page.

### Transcript

"Actually, I think that when you've got a blank page, anyone can be a struggling writer. I just finished some writing I was doing. And I promise you I was great struggling writer. Because I didn't know what I wanted to say. I had ideas, but I didn't know how to get them down.

"So, the first thing I think it's always important to remind kids is that anyone at anytime can be a struggling writer. It has nothing to do with prior accomplishments. It doesn't have anything to do with scores on standardized tests. It has to do with your ease of putting down on the page what you want to put down right then.

"That said, when I'm a struggling writer or when I'm working with kids who think they struggle all the time to write, there are a couple of things I do in the classroom. Or I encourage teachers to do.

"Number one, make the page smaller. If I've got a big 8 1/2 X 11 sheet of paper in front of me and I'm looking at it, sometimes I'm seeing not just that first line. I'm seeing the whole page. So, if I'm working with kids that really have trouble and their trouble is because how much they've got to write, make the page smaller. Give them a 3 X 5 index card. If that's too big, give them a post-it note. So the first thing I do is take away some of the fear of how much do I have to write?

"Another thing I like to do with kids is give them a very specific thing to write about. When kids really struggle with getting ideas out there, sometimes if I can give them a prompt that's a question, so that I'm starting by answering the question, that just gives them that running start.

"Another thing I tell kids to do is to always stop their writing in the middle of a sentence. So, when I'm done for the day, I just get part of that sentence going and I stop. When I

come back the next day, I'm re-reading. I read that sentence. I'm like, 'Oh, yeah.' And I go on.

"Now, do I sometimes forget where I was going? Yes. And then I write and who knows where this sentence is going to end? But at least I've sort of got an entrance into where I'm going. So, it's all about making the page accessible to the kid. And, so you make the page smaller. Or you give them prompts that give them entrées onto the page. Or you show them how when they want to quit, they don't have to finish the thought. They don't have to finish the chapter if they're trying to write something that long. They don't even have to finish the paragraph. They need to finish in a place that gives them an entrée the next day."