

The Reading Program - What It Is and Why It Works for Everyone

Creative Writing – The Measuring Tool

The Logical Progression

The logical progression of activities in the Reading Program ensures that each child will have the technical ability to read and to write. But what fun is learning to read or to write if all you ever get to read is what someone else tells you to read and all you ever get to write is what someone else tells you to write?

Reading and writing are not ends in themselves. They are tools that enable us to reach our own ends. Reading allows us to discover things others have written to share with us. Writing allows us to share our own discoveries, or adventures, or fantasies, or feelings with others.

The purpose of the Reading Program is to teach every child to read and to write without exception. The measure of the Program's success is not any child's ability to pass some technical test. The measure is how much each child enjoys reading and writing. Creative writing is the measuring tool for this. The creative writing process does not wait for mastery of skills. Mastery will occur over time, faster for some students and slower for others. Creative writing does not require mastery because it is itself a key component of mastery for every student – fast or slow.

Before students begin creative writing using letters and not stamps, they will have learned to write the 26 letters of the alphabet through the Handwriting Station that parallel the two and three-sound and phrase activities. At the same time students are learning to write letters for words beneath the sound-pictures on their Worksheets and Tiny Writing Cards at the transition level, they are also using the Sight Word Worksheets to learn to write and spell one-hundred sixty-one sight words that comprise approximately seventy-five to eighty percent of all the words in the books for young readers. Thus, by the time creative writing begins, the students can write words in letters, use their Decoding Charts to find spellings, and know how to write correctly more than two-hundred words.

Chalkboards or White Boards

Children using letters and not sound stamps for their creative writing proceed in one of two ways. The first way is for the child to draw a picture and then write about it. The second way is for the child to write about something and then draw a picture to accompany the words. Whichever way the child prefers, the story is written on either a chalkboard or a white board first. The chalkboard will be reference here, since white boards were not in common classroom use when the Reading Program was first published in 1985.

Children write on their chalkboards first so that any mistakes in spelling that are discovered can be corrected. It is only after the teacher (or later, another child) has reviewed and approved the chalkboard writing that the child copies what has been written onto lined writing paper.

Once the child has already created what is to be written on the chalkboard, he or she can concentrate entirely on the process of copying each letter in each word on paper as legibly as possible. What is written on the paper is an exercise in penmanship and is much more apt to appear in a readable form when it is placed in a book to be read by the other children in the class.

Writing Stories – Writing Books

When children first begin the free stamping of words, they either draw pictures for words they have asked the teacher to stamp out for them or think of their own words to stamp out and illustrate. The Tiny Writing Cards are introduced as an optional choice for children who cannot think of words to illustrate.

When children begin writing words with letters, use of the Tiny Writing Cards serves as the child's first experience in writing letters on paper to accompany illustrations of each card's words. The cards are used because the spelling of each word is guaranteed to be correct, so writing them out on a chalkboard or white board is not a needed first step.

However once actual creative writing begins, children are encouraged to write not just words, but stories. These stories will then be turned into books to add to the reading materials at the Books Station.

There are two different forms of books made from the children's creative writing stories. The first is the writing of each individual student. Collections of each child's writings and illustration are bundled together. A cover is added with that child's name on it, both stamped and written.

Each child's book remains at the Book's Station until that child's next collection of stories is ready to be bundled. The new book replaces the old and the older one is sent home with the child to be shared with his or her family members.

The second form is books made from the writings of all the children working at the creative writing level who have written stories in response to the same assignment. For example, the teacher may say, something straight forward like, "Please write a story about what you did over this past weekend" or more imaginative, like, what would you wish for if you had three wishes?"

All of the creative writing books are put together in the familiar format of the writing on one page and the illustration on the next. If the writing is placed beneath the illustration, children may pay more attention to the picture than the words. When the writing is on its own page, children's attention is focused on the words and the words provide a clue as to what may be expected when the page is turned.

The Tiny Writing Cards were first available as an option for children who could not think of words to stamp out. Children now asked to write stories may also need assistance of thinking what to write about. Suggestions of what to write about come from the students themselves. All the teacher has to do is ask the class as a whole what new things they can think that someone might write about. Thirty children in the room plus the teacher – thirty-one great resources for ideas on anything.

The best resource for any help needed in creative writing is every other child in class. The children who are first to reach the creative writing level receive the least support from their classmates because so few other children are at that same stage. However, this group of fastest learners has always needed less support.

The longer a child takes to reach the creative writing level, the more support from classmates will be available when he or she arrives. The children for whom this Reading Program was created will be surrounded by all the help they will ever need.

A Quote from Curriculum Chapter 12 - Don't Take Our Word For It

Name: Sheila Okin

State: California

Number of years using the program: 1

Grade: K-1

".....One day I overheard my students discussing how everyone in our class is a teacher. This is how one student explained it to his classmate...'You are not a teacher who tells people what to do. You are a teacher who helps people to learn.'....."

Spelling Words

The process of creative writing consists of deciding what to write and then writing it. The "writing it" part now requires students to write words with letters and not sounds. A student writing the word "meet" in sounds will stamp:



A student writing the same word with letters might write "met" using the first spellings for all three sounds from the Decoding Chart. Or the

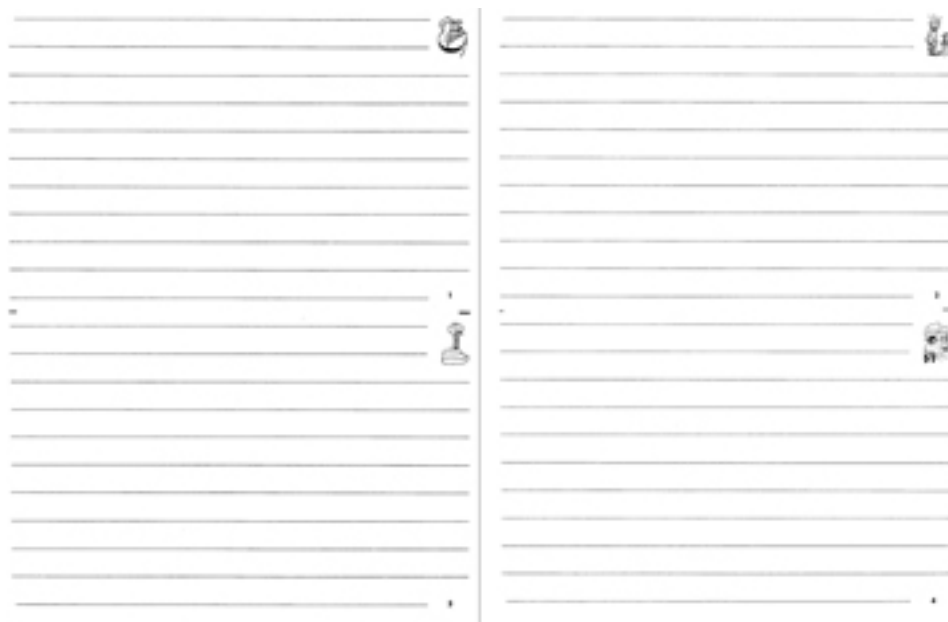
student may remember seeing the word “meat” written below the word’s sound-images on a transition level worksheet and write “meat” instead.

Students are taught that whenever they need to spell a sound in a word that has many spellings and they do not already know how to spell that word, to ask the teacher what spelling of the sound to use. In this case the teacher would say, “If you mean “meet” like I am going to meet someone, you use the two-star spelling of the sound. If you mean “meat” like I eat meat, you use the yellow or second spelling of the sound.”

The class as a whole knows the spellings of hundreds of words and any student can ask, not just the teacher, but any other student for help with any word at any time.

Spelling Notebooks

There are words a student may want to write that are beyond that student’s ability to hear each of its sounds. A student may want to spell “tyrannosaurus” for example and have difficulty in sounding it out.



The first four pages of the Spelling Notebook are pictured above. Blackline masters for creating the Spelling Notebooks are included with the Program and are also downloadable from the Center’s website. The Spelling Notebook is each student’s last resort in figuring how to spell words for creative writing assignments. If a student cannot spell a word and all other possibilities have been exhausted, the student opens his or her Spelling Notebook to the page for words which begin with that sound and brings the Notebook to the teacher. The teacher then writes that word in the student’s Notebook.

The Measure of Success

As I said earlier, the measure of the Reading Program's success is how much each child enjoys reading and writing. As evidence of the Program's success, below are three of the teacher evaluations of the Reading Program that were already included in [Chapter 12 – Don't Take Our Word For It](#).

Name: Sharon Riggs

State: Alabama

Number of years using the program: 2

Grade: 1

"..... In fourteen years of teaching Kindergarten and first grade this is the first program I've seen where all children succeed in reading and at their own rate. The program creates an excitement in learning to read and helps children to develop a love for reading at an early age....."

Name: Sally Terrill

State: Idaho

Number of years using the program: 4

Grade: K

"..... The children are writing reams - and use the program constantly. We stamp out words daily - and spelling lessons occur naturally....."

Name: Barbara Lencke

State: Georgia

Number of years using the program: 2

Grade: K

".....We have no non-readers and the excitement in our class over their reading ability is fantastic. Rest time is now reading time as we try to find more time to read due to student interest.....I couldn't be happier, and I've been teaching for 23 years....."