



Literacy Leads

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Sustaining Daybooks

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At this time of the year, daybook enthusiasm may begin to wane. But, it's a great time to jumpstart the notebook battery with some ideas for mature writers. Here are some that work for me:

- 1) *Reread your notebook.* Look for stories you started that you never finished. Now would be a good time to work on those. For example, look for patterns. Weave the stories together into a book of sorts. Maybe you find you've collected lots of facts. Time to make a Factoid Book. Maybe you have lots of family stories. Can you write short vignettes, link them together in a published format, and deliver to someone?
- 2) *Evaluate your daybook.* Set new, fresh goals like New Year's Resolutions. (See page 2 for the evaluation sheet I used with my 4th-grade students this year. The questions match the lessons I taught.)
- 3) *Bring in guest speakers.* I LOVE to invite children from other classes and even other grade levels to share what they've been writing. One time, my son (21 years old at the time) shared his "friend journal." He draws pictures of his friends and then writes entries about them. It immediately became all the rage. (See photo above.) One time an author visited. He writes about characters and, interestingly enough, what they carry in their pockets. He said that if he can figure out what a character carries in his pocket, he knows the character through and through. My writers copied him. No telling what an author may say to your students that will become the focus of many daybook entries!
- 4) *Introduce Partner Journals.* Students love to write letters. Giving them permission to write to one another in school is nothing short of miraculous! I ask my students to write to one another about the books they're reading or their arguments for/against a topic we're
- studying. The student writes; the partner writes - at the same time. They exchange journals and write back to one another. They can write again.
- 5) *Progressive Writing.* Project 2 photos on a screen. Assign students to work in groups of 4. They look at the photos and start writing whatever comes to mind. Some may start a story. Other may write expository. After 3 minutes, ask students to rotate their notebooks clockwise, reread what their group member wrote, and add on to it. Continue rotating notebooks until everyone has a chance to write. Give notebooks back to owners who mine the writing for new ideas to write about.
- 6) *Second-time journals:* Students choose to read a book they've already read a second time. I like the students to find a partner they can work with on this project. As they read, they look for the details they missed in the first reading: foreshadowing, metaphors, personification, points of view, characterization details, context clues, author's style, themes, and symbolism. They discuss their discoveries with one another.
- 7) *Introduce nonfiction pages.* Students pick a topic they're interested. Teachers can narrow the scope by asking students to pick within a social studies or science unit of study. They write out the questions they'd like the answers to. They research. They write their findings into a one page, nonfiction page, compete with drawings and other features of expository text.
- 8) *Model again.* Show students again how to do freewriting, daily pages, prepare for discussion. Now that "they're older," ask them what they notice. What would they recommend for making the entries more thoughtful, the daybooks more interesting?

9) *Review visualization.* Ask students to draw pictures of words, symbolize ideas, mind map whole units to prepare for tests, and as a way to focus on read alouds. Compare drawings. Using illustrations as a means to better comprehension is received well by teachers and is very popular with students.

10) Don't forget to buy the *2009 Children's Writers & Illustrator's Market*. I just checked and it is on Amazon.com. It tells children where and how to get their stories published...some for pay. This book never fails to energize my class!

Collaboration Corner

I'm so impressed with McKensey, a middle school PE teacher, who emailed me about writing, learning, and thinking which can be applied to ANY subject...

As I was watching my 7th-grade girls basketball team play yesterday, I realized how MUCH fast paced sports require critical thinking! They have to analyze their opponents, analyze their teammates, and analyze their own abilities all within a few SECONDS of play! I have really begun to 'question' my players (and students in PE) a lot more, thanks in large part to your stimulating prompts. I want them to figure their situations out themselves...and many of them are meeting the tasks wonderfully (or at least coming to ask me HOW to make those decisions). It's fun to see their creativity!

Also, knowing that so many of my athletes are visual learners, I've made 'playbooks' for them for this season – in which they can write whatever they need to in order to remember important things during practices and games. They can excuse themselves at any time to go and make notes during practices. It's fun to see the 'light bulb' click on for some of them as they write down what we run through in practices! So basically, thank you for making me question my teaching and instructing!

---McKensey

MIDPOINT REFLECTION

Look at your Daybook to answer yes or no to the following questions:

1. How many DATED entries are in your writing notebook? _____
2. Have you organized your daybook by writing page numbers on EVERY page or maintained a TABLE OF CONTENTS? _____
3. Do you keep a current TOPIC LIST? _____
4. Is it easy to read your Writing Notebook? _____
5. Can you find things when you need them? _____
6. How LONG is your longest entry? _____
7. Do you any patterns to your writing? i.e. favorite topics, structures of writing (genres) _____
8. Is there anything you've seen others try that you want to try but haven't yet? _____
9. On what page(s) did you try something really different --- writing that was a challenge for you? page _____ and page _____ and page _____ and page _____ and page _____
10. Pick one hard assignment you did this time and tell me (1) what it is and (2) why it was so challenging.

An **ENTRY** is the writing you do each time you open your daybook and write a new date. It might be a story. However, if you wrote one story over 4 days, that would be 4 entries.

Look back at your answers to the questions. Set 3 goals for yourself for 3rd Quarter that will help you deepen your comprehension and/or improve as a writer. Write a letter to someone who asks you how you're doing in school and explain the goals.