

# Creating *Writers*:



## A Handbook for the First Six Weeks of Kindergarten

**By Jami Lauchner**

Bates Elementary School

River Delta Unified School District 2012

# Introduction

It is my goal to get my kindergarten students writing as soon as possible. I use various techniques and routines to get my students writing within the first six weeks of school. The following is a guide on how I establish some of our writing routines early in the school year and also how I try to take the "I can't" out of writing for my students.

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- California State University, Long Beach earning a B.A in Liberal Studies and teaching credential
- 2005-2006 Taught Preschool at Little Angels Preschool for 1 year in San Andreas, Ca
- 2006-Current Teaching Kindergarten at Bates Elementary School in Courtland, CA
- GLAD Trained



## Sample Daily Schedule

The following is my daily schedule. I believe it is important to provide daily opportunities for my students to practice writing. I also try to extend writing into other subjects.

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>8:30</b>        | <b>Bell Rings</b>   |
| <b>8:30-8:40</b>   | <b>Roll, Morning Song, Go over Schedule</b>   |
| <b>8:40-9:00</b>   | <b>Calendar</b>   |
| <b>9:00-10:00</b>  | <b>Math</b>   |
| <b>10:00-10:15</b> | <b>Recess/Snack</b>   |
| <b>10:15-11:45</b> | <b>Language Arts (Daily Message, Daily Phonemic Awareness, Read Aloud, Blending/Segmenting, Universal Access, table work)</b> |
| <b>11:45-12:25</b> | <b>Lunch/Recess</b>   |
| <b>12:30 -1:00</b> | <b>Writing/Writers Workshop</b>   |
| <b>1:00-1:30</b>   | <b>ELD</b>  |
| <b>1:30-2:00</b>   | <b>Science/Social Studies</b>   |
| <b>2:00-2:30</b>   | <b>SIPPS/Accelerated Reader</b>   |
| <b>2:30 - 2:50</b> | <b>Free Choice/Art</b>  |
| <b>2:50-3:00</b>   | <b>Clean-up</b>   |
| <b>3:00</b>        | <b>Dismissal</b>  |

## 26 Letters in 26 Days

In order to get my students writing, I find it is important to teach all 26 letters within the first 26 days of school. This allows the students to master the alphabet quickly and move on to higher-level skills earlier in the school year.

## Connecting each Letter to a Character and Motion

I make sure that as I introduce each letter's name and sound I also connect a character and motion to the letter. This helps to appeal to all learning styles and seems to create a quicker mastery of the alphabet. Your curriculum may already have a character and motion built into the program (Zoophonics) or it may be necessary to make-up the motion for each character. My district uses Houghton Mifflin and this curriculum already has characters for each letter (Aa= Andy Apple). I just adapted the curriculum to my adding a motion for that character.



## Using Students Names

Using students' names in order to introduce each letter provides a meaningful context to the students. The following is the routine I use to introduce each new letter.

Review all previously taught letters

**Show students the character version of the letter a.**

**TEACHER** Today our new letter is A. Say A.

**STUDENTS** A

**TEACHER** Again

**STUDENTS** A

**TEACHER** This letter is letter A, A makes the sound (ă) (show students the motion).  
Sound (ă)

**STUDENTS** (ă)

**TEACHER** Again

**STUDENTS** (ă)

**TEACHER** This is the character Andy Apple. He loves to eat apples. He makes the sound (ă) (show motion).

**Teacher points to the character**

**TEACHER** Who is this?

**STUDENTS** Andy Apple

**Teacher points to the letter**

**TEACHER** What is the name of the letter?

**STUDENTS** A

**TEACHER** What is the sound of the letter?

**STUDENTS** (ă) (with motion)

**TEACHER** Who is this (point to the character)?

**STUDENTS** Andy Apple

**TEACHER** Let's practice, A, (ă), Andy Apple.

**Have students practice the name, sound, motion a couple of times.**

**Show students Capital A.**

**TEACHER** This is capital A. Capital A has a slant line down, slant line down, and a line across the middle. Let's practice. A, slant line down, slant like down, line across the middle. (Have students pretend they are writing capital A in the air, on the floor, on their leg, ect.)" \*Repeat this process with lowercase a.

**TEACHER** Now, I would like to find out who has the letter **Aa** in their name.

**Hold up a name of a student.**

**TEACHER** Who's name is this?

**Have students make guesses.** Students will begin to recognize their name and classmates' names. If students are struggling to guess the name, give them a clue by saying the first sound and moving on the other sounds in the name until students correctly identify the name.

**TEACHER** Does (student name) have an **A**?

**Students will chant either "Y-E-S, spells yes!" or "N-O, spells no."**

Have the student come identify **Aa** in their name and place it on the **yes** side of the pocket chart.

If the student does not have an **Aa** just place it on the **no** side of the pocket chart.

After all names have been placed in the pocket chart, have students count the names with **Aa** and then count the names without **Aa**. Have students discuss if more students have the letter **Aa** in their name or more students do not have the letter **Aa** in their name.

**Review the letter again.**

**TEACHER** What is the name of this letter?

**TEACHER** A

**TEACHER** What is the sound of this letter?

**STUDENTS** (ă) (with motion)

**TEACHER** Who is this? (point to character)

**STUDENTS** Andy Apple

**TEACHER** Say A, (ă), Andy Apple.

**STUDENTS** A, (ă), Andy Apple

## Time to Practice

Often our curriculum does not offer enough time for the students to practice the new letter before having them complete a worksheet. The worksheet often has the students trying to write the letter on small lines using a pencil. For my students, this task proved to be very difficult. Many of my students come in with very little fine motor skills and using a pencil can be very frustrating. For that reason, I always provide time for my students to practice writing the letter using either gross motor skills or using a larger area to practice writing the letter. The following are some of the ways I have my students practice writing letters.

- Whiteboards:** Students are provided a whiteboard, whiteboard marker, and eraser.
- Chalkboards:** Students are provided a chalkboard, chalk, and eraser.
- Student Sandboxes:** Students are provided a paper plate with sand in it. Students use their finger to write a letter in the sand. Students shake the plate to erase the letter. (Sand can be colored by adding powder tempera paint)
- Chalk Outside:** Students are provided a piece of chalk. All students sit outside on the blacktop and practice writing the letters.
- Paint with Water:** Students are provided a cup of water and a paintbrush. Students sit outside on the blacktop and practice writing the letters using water as the paint.
- Shaving Cream:** Each student gets a small pile of shaving cream. Students rub the shaving cream into a small circle and then use one finger to write the letters.
- Paint in Plastic Baggies:** Students are provided one plastic baggie of tempera paint. Students are to lay the baggie flat on their table. Students use their finger to write the letter by pressing on the outside of the plastic baggie. Students rub baggie to erase.

I usually spend about a week with each different method. This gives me time to really establish the routine of using the materials. When I introduce a new routine I make sure to spend enough time going over the process of using the materials before letting the students practice.

I always review all previously taught letters before spending time on the letter of the day.

Here are some ways I review the letters:

- I say the name of the letter and they write the capital and lowercase form of the letter and then tell me the sound.
- I say the letter's sound and they write the letter and then tell me the name.
- I ask for only the capital form of the letter. Students say the sound.
- I ask for only the lowercase form of the letter. Students say the sound.
- I ask them to write the letters in ABC order.
- I say the letters out of order.

# Assessment

After I have introduced all 26 letters of the alphabet, I make sure that I individually assess each student to see what students are going to need more review. I make sure that I never assume that they will just "get it" over time. My goal of assessment is to get really specific data on the skills that they are missing and to invest time in re-teaching those specific skills to each student. I want to teach the alphabet to mastery within the first six weeks of school. The following is a sample assessment I would use at the end of my alphabet unit.

Student \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

|    | Character | Motion | Sound | Capital | Lowercase |
|----|-----------|--------|-------|---------|-----------|
| Aa |           |        |       |         |           |
| Bb |           |        |       |         |           |
| Cc |           |        |       |         |           |
| Dd |           |        |       |         |           |
| Ee |           |        |       |         |           |
| Ff |           |        |       |         |           |
| Gg |           |        |       |         |           |
| Hh |           |        |       |         |           |
| Ii |           |        |       |         |           |
| Jj |           |        |       |         |           |
| Kk |           |        |       |         |           |
| Ll |           |        |       |         |           |
| Mm |           |        |       |         |           |
| Nn |           |        |       |         |           |
| Oo |           |        |       |         |           |
| Pp |           |        |       |         |           |
| Qq |           |        |       |         |           |
| Rr |           |        |       |         |           |
| Ss |           |        |       |         |           |
| Tt |           |        |       |         |           |
| Uu |           |        |       |         |           |
| Vv |           |        |       |         |           |
| Ww |           |        |       |         |           |
| Xx |           |        |       |         |           |
| Yy |           |        |       |         |           |
| Zz | /26       | /26    | /26   | /26     | /26       |

# Universal Access

**Universal Access** is a key component to getting all my students ready to write early on in the school year. **Universal Access** provides me time to re-teach skills to my extra-support group, extend what I have taught to my on-level students, and challenge my higher students.

Before and after I assess my students, I make sure that I am giving them time to work at their level in a Universal Access group. I use my assessment data to properly place a student in a group.

Here are the different components of my **Universal Access** time:

- The students are working at their level
- 3 groups: Extra support, On-level, and Challenge
- 30 minutes, 3-5 times a week
- Use teacher, parent volunteer(s) and teacher's aide to lead the groups
- Train parents and aides on how to teach each skill

Here is a sample of what each group might be doing at the beginning of the year:

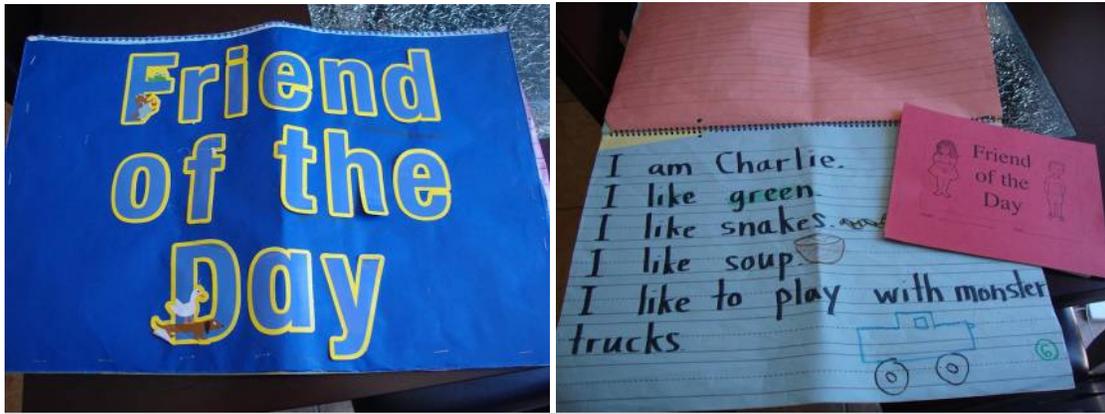
**Extra Support:** Review all letters and sounds. Put all letters in order.

**On-level:** Review all letters and sounds. Practice writing the beginning sound in a word.

**Challenge:** Review all letters and sounds. Practice blending and segmenting CVC words.

**Note:** I try to stay away from worksheets during this time. Instead I use a variety of manipulatives, games, and whiteboards.

## Friend of the Day



**Friend of the Day** is another way I introduce some of the concepts of print and explore the use of students' names a little bit further.

Here is the routine for **Friend of the Day**:

Read all the previous stories we have written in the **Friend of the Day** big book.

I pick a new **Friend of the Day**. I give the students clues so they can guess who is the **Friend of the Day**. (For example, "It is a boy," "He has black hair," etc.)

After students make a correct guess, the **Friend of the Day** comes to the front of the classroom.

I ask student their name and ask them to spell if for me. I demonstrate how to write the sentence I am (student's name).

I discuss various concepts of print as I write and ask students to help me spell the words.

Students then take over the interview by raising their hands to ask the following questions about the **Friend of the Day**.

What is your favorite color?

What is your favorite animal?

What is your favorite thing to eat?

What is your favorite thing to do?

As I write out each of the **Friend of the Day's** responses, I ask the students how to spell certain words and to help me sound out words. I also make sure to teach high frequency words, spacing, capitalization, and punctuation.

Students chorally reread the interview.

We make observations about the appearance of the **Friend of the Day** (i.e., hair color, eye color, color of clothes, etc.)

All students go back to their tables and are given a white sheet of paper.

Students write their name on the bottom of the paper.

I then tell students to write the name of the **Friend of the Day** at the top of the paper. I guide them on the correct formation of each letter.

I use this opportunity to do a guided drawing lesson of how to draw the person.



I require all students to use the correct colors and follow the directions because I want to take the "I can't" or "I don't know how" out of drawing so it will not be a roadblock to writing in the future.

I staple a cover and all the drawings together for the **Friend of the Day** to take home.

# Color Books

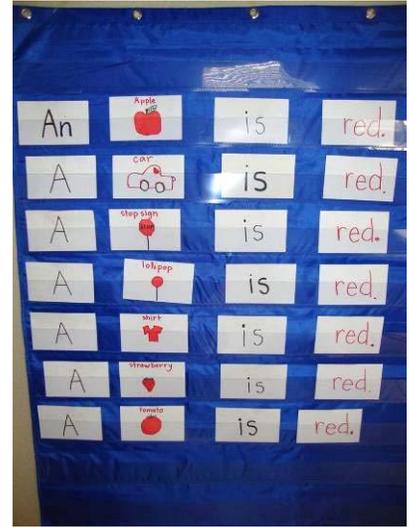
I use color books to during the first six weeks of school to teach various components of writing. Each week focuses on one color and follows a routine that enables the students to make their very own color book that they can read and take home. The following outline follows our weekly routine for a new color.

**Monday:** Introduce the new color by reading a book that focuses on the color. (For example red = Clifford book) Do a classroom search for the color. Have students label the things they find with a post-it with the color name. Then have students brainstorm a list of other objects that are red. Write the list on chart paper or white board. Focus on blending and segmenting the words.

**Tuesday:** Pick 6-8 objects from the list on which to focus. Use the following sentence frame for each object:

A \_\_(object)\_\_\_ is \_\_(color)\_\_\_.

Write each word of the sentence on an index card. Arrange the index cards in the pocket chart to make 6-8 sentences. Have students chorally read the sentences. Call on individual students to come up and read a sentence from the pocket chart. Focus on tracking, spacing, capitalization, punctuation, and High Frequency words.

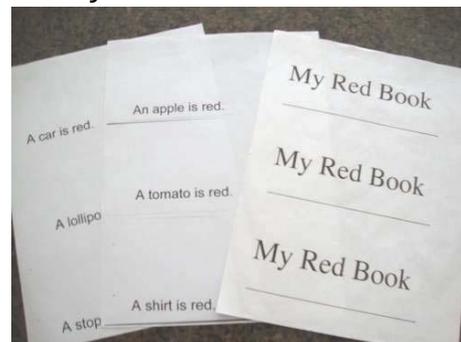


**Wednesday:** Have students reread the sentences in the pocket chart. Next, play a game of **Fix Up my Mix Up**. In order to play have the students close their eyes. Then mix up the order of the words in a sentence. Have the students read the mixed up sentence. Call on a student to come up and fix the sentence. Have students chorally read the correct sentence. Have the volunteer mix up the next sentence and then repeat the processes until all sentences have been mixed up and fixed up.

**Thursday:** Play **Fix Up my Mix Up** again.

**Friday:** Students will make their own color book to take home. Copy the Title of the book on colored construction paper. Staple 6 pages that have the sentence frame (A \_\_\_\_\_ is \_\_\_\_\_.) typed on the bottom of the page. Have students fill out the missing words and then draw the picture of the object.

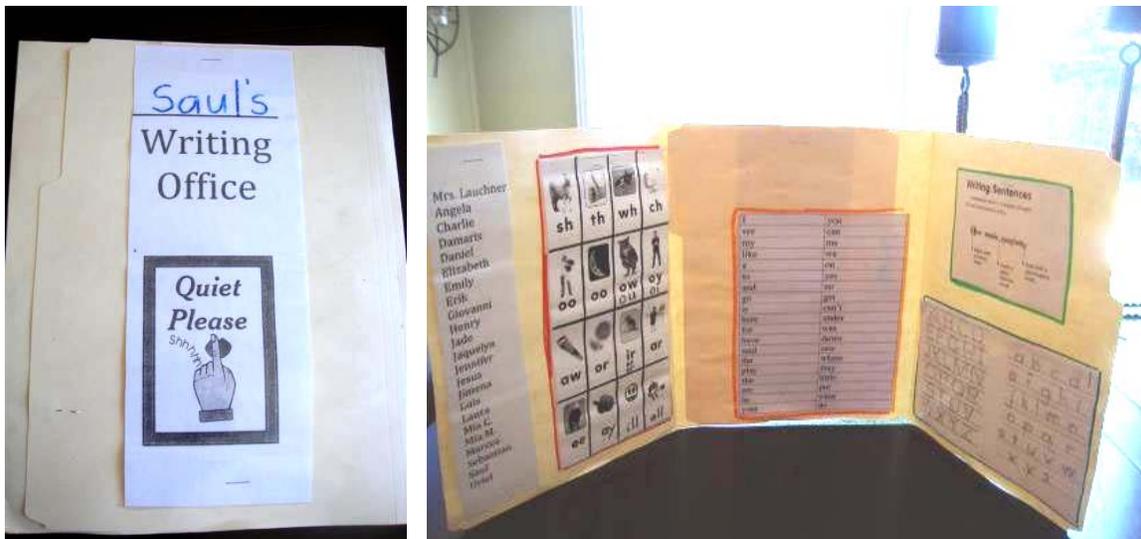
- \* Lesson can be adjusted to the level of students' capability. At the beginning I type out the whole sentence and students just draw the picture. By the time I am introducing the 6th color, I expect that the students can write the whole sentence and draw the picture.



# Journals

I introduce journal writing at the very beginning of the year. I start the journal time by sharing about 3 different student journal entries and discussing why I think these students are superstar writers. I usually focus on skills that I want more students to start demonstrating. For example, I might show a student's journal entry and discuss how they use the guideline to form letters correctly.

I find that by showing student work the other students are more motivated to produce that same kind of work. Next, I tell the students what I want them to write about for the day. I usually pick a topic that we have been studying and include high frequency words that I know the students are familiar with. For example, one my very first journal activities would be the sentence I am \_\_ (name) \_\_\_\_. I know that students are familiar with capital I because of Friend of the Day. I also know that I will be able to show them how to sound out (am) and finally I know that most of my students will be able to write their name. I will demonstrate how to write the sentence and discuss various concepts of print as I write. I will have students orally practice the sentence that they will be writing in their journal. I will also discuss how I want my picture to match my words. When I feel that most students will be able to complete their journal with little assistance I have them go to their tables and put up their writing office.



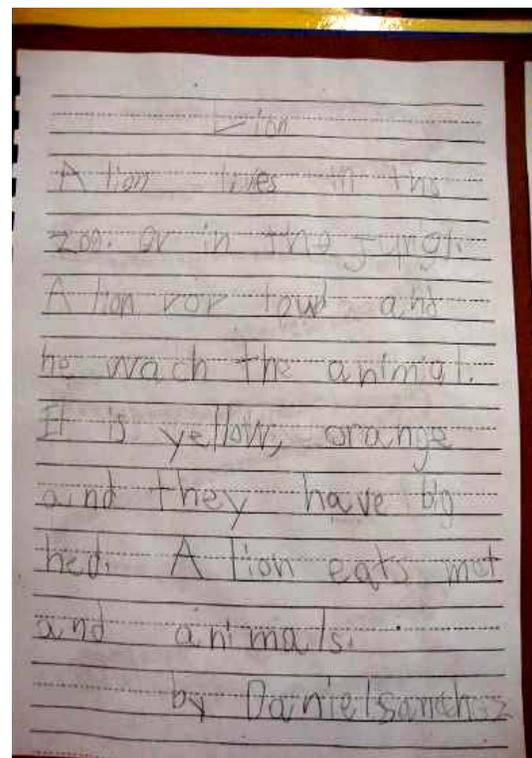
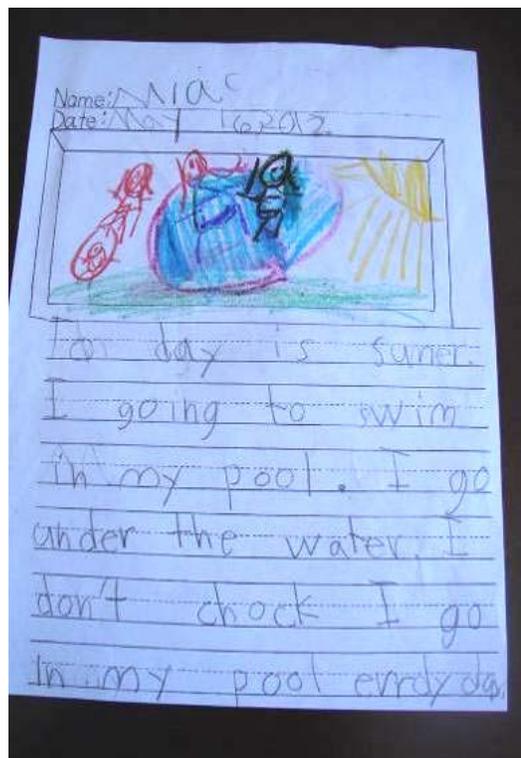
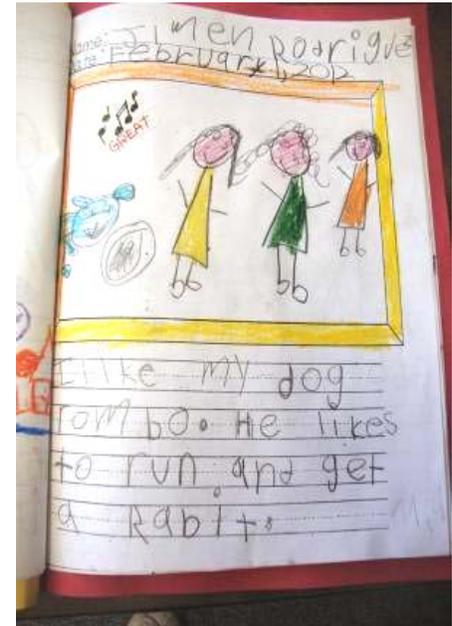
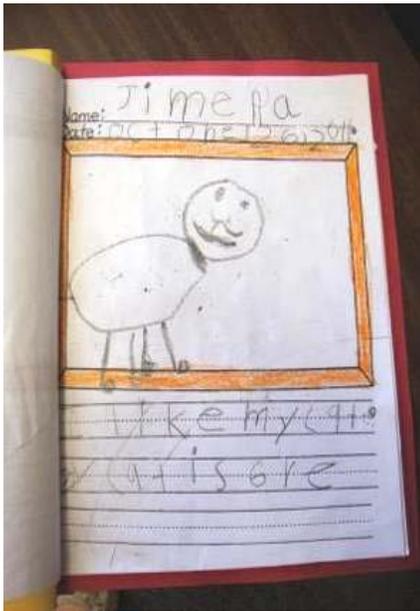
(Each student's **Writing Office** includes a class list, letters and sounds, high frequency words, and a guide for spacing, capitalization, and punctuation.)

Students can begin their journal with the picture or the sentence.

## Journals: Tips for Creating Independent *Writers*

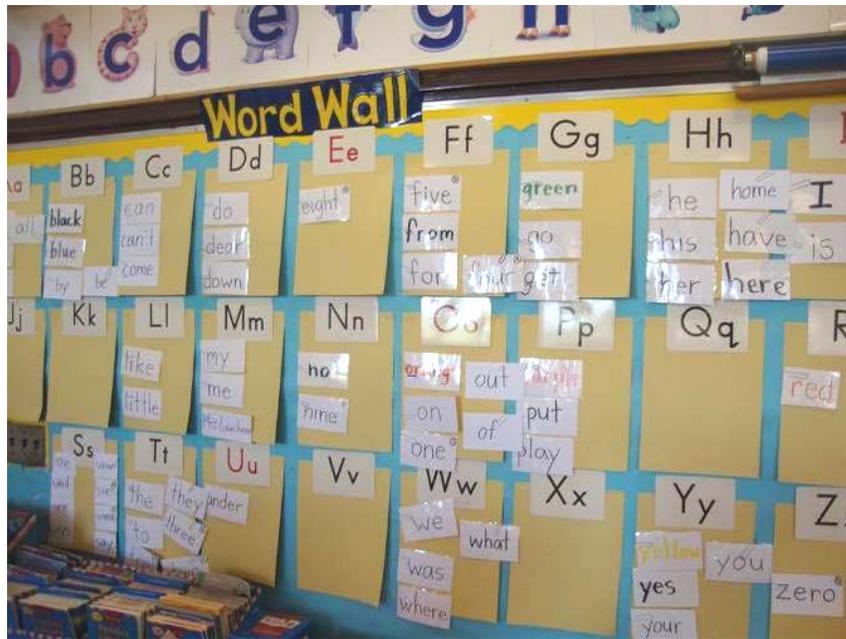
- I try to avoid the question “How do you spell...” by reminding students to use their HFW list, the Word Wall, our classroom walls or to sound it out. I will rarely spell a word for a student.
- I really want to focus on creating independent writers so I never write a sentence frame for the students to copy. I do not want them to start to rely on copying as a form of writing. After I have demonstrated my journal I will remove it from view.
- I always make sure that I establish “writing time” as a quiet activity. I put on soft music and encourage the students to whisper during this time.
- I also establish a certain amount of time that I want the students to be writing. I do not allow any student to say, “I am done.” Instead I will teach the students how to add more details both to their writing and picture.
- I increase the number of lines on the journal writing paper as the year progresses. I have noticed that the more lines I provide the more the students will write.
- I end the journal time by sharing each of the students’ journals with the whole class. This time also provides the students with an opportunity to finish up if they are not done or to make any corrections to their journal after it is read. (For example, many students will notice that they forgot a period or need to start with a capital.)
- I save one journal entry from each student per week. I use the saved journals to track progress and to be able to give the students a yearlong journal at the end of the school year.
- I make sure the students know that if they would like to write about a different topic than I suggested that that is just fine with me.

## Sample Journal Entries



## Word Wall

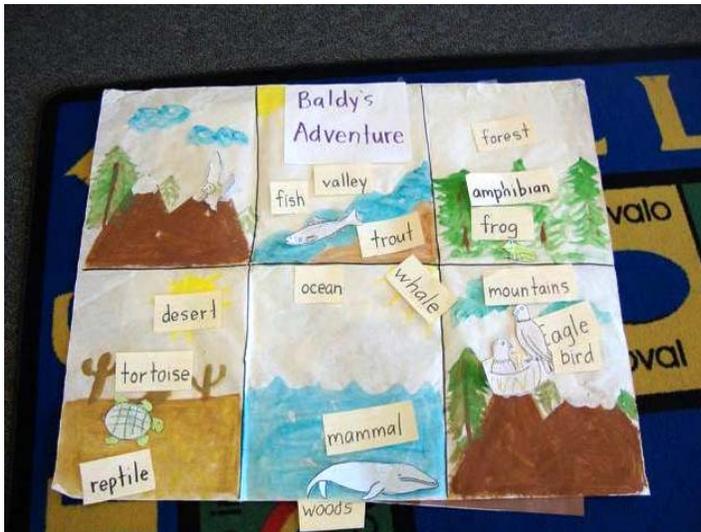
The word wall is a resource students can use to recall high frequency words that have been taught. I often refer to the word wall when I am writing in front of the class. I notice the more I use the word wall the more the students use the word wall. I also make sure that the words are held in place by paper clips. This allows students to take the word back to their table or for me to take it off their word wall during a lesson.



## Making New Vocabulary Accessible

One important component of getting my students to write is to make sure that they have the vocabulary and experiences to do so. Most of my students are second language learners and come to kindergarten with little to no English. It is not only my job to teach them to write but also to give them the vocabulary to do so. I use various strategies to make sure that new vocabulary is accessible and that students have many opportunities to use the new vocabulary, and that the vocabulary and concepts are at a high level. On the following pages I have shown a few ways I make our classroom a print rich environment.

## Narratives/Story Boards



I often turn the read-alouds from the curriculum into a narrative or a storyboard that I can revisit and display throughout the theme.

I have found that the students are more engaged in the story when I read it in a narrative form and it also provides opportunity for written task. In order to make a narrative for a story I just draw/paint/cutout the various background and characters or I photocopy the pages from the book to create the narrative.

Reading the narrative/storyboard it leads to many different writing opportunities for the students. With the narrative posted, I will have the students help post vocabulary on the storyboard. Since the narrative/storyboard stays up on the wall, the students can then use the narrative/storyboard as another resource for vocabulary and spelling in their own writing. Another writing projects that stems from the narrative/storyboard is a story map.

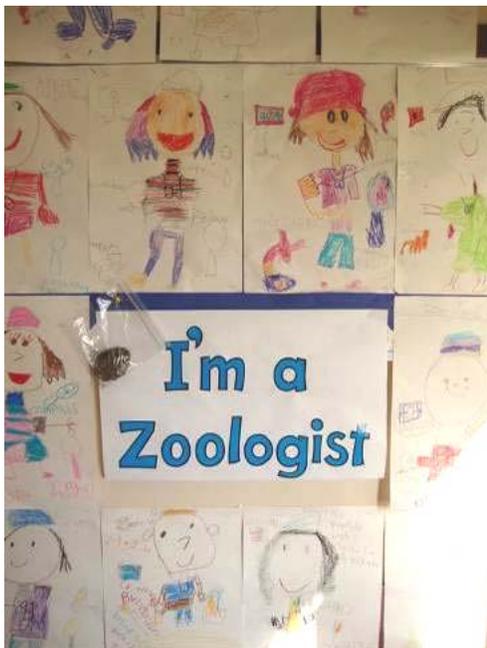
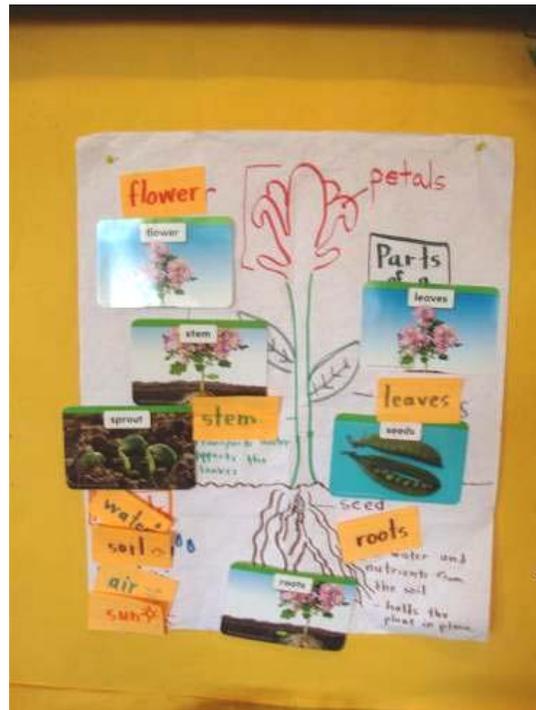
Students help to create a story map on large chart paper. When the class first starts writing story maps it more of a "share the pen" process where I call on students to help write CVC words, posted vocabulary words, or help with capitalization and punctuation. As the students' ability levels increase, they are able to fill out more and more of the story map on their own.

### Sample Story Map Frame

|                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| <b>Title:</b>      |                 |
| <b>Characters:</b> | <b>Setting:</b> |
| <b>Beginning:</b>  |                 |
| <b>Middle:</b>     |                 |
| <b>End:</b>        |                 |

# Pictorials

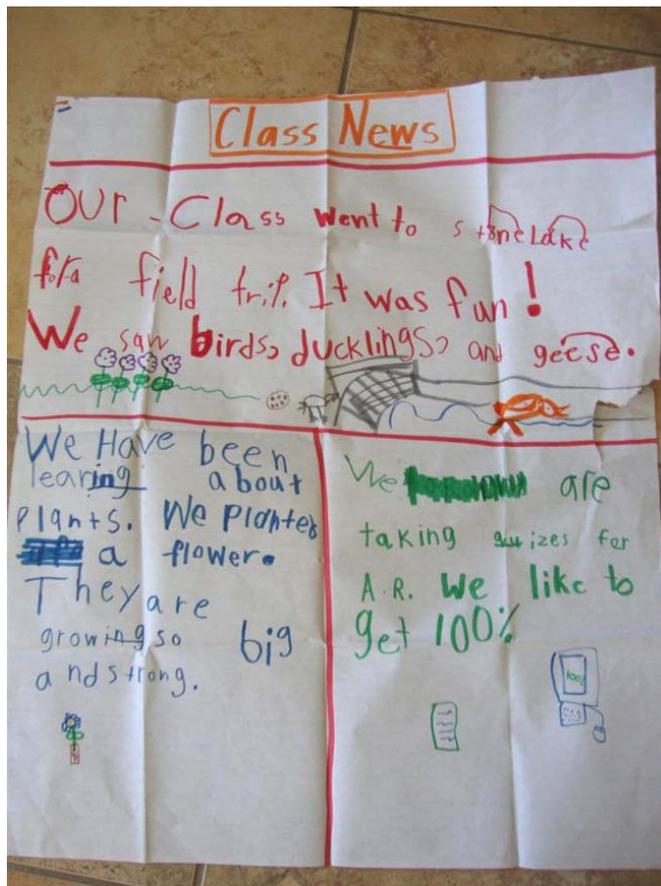
Pictorials help to me to create a print rich environment and give students access to high-level vocabulary. I first draw the picture with light pencil and then trace it in front of the students. I will revisit the pictorials often and add information as the students learn more on the subject. Students often access the vocabulary on the pictorials to enhance their own writing.



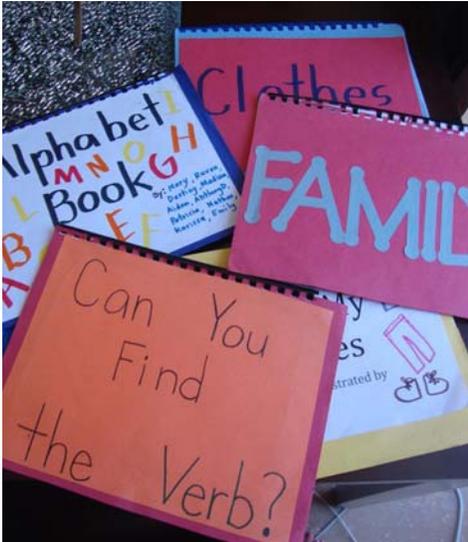
## Class News

Another "Share the Pen" writing project the students participate in is publishing the Class News. I have students help recall things we have been learning in class or fun activities we have done recently. We turn their ideas into our Class News.

After the students generate ideas to write about we divide a large piece of chart paper into sections. At the beginning of the year I am doing most of the writing and will call on students to help with some letters and CVC words. As the year progresses, the students become the main writers of the Class News.

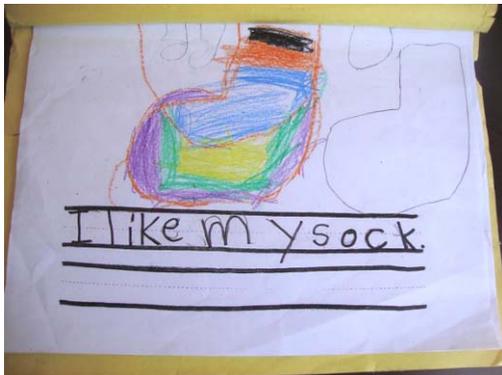
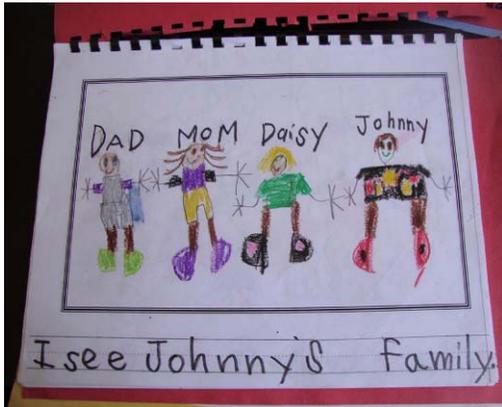


## Class Books

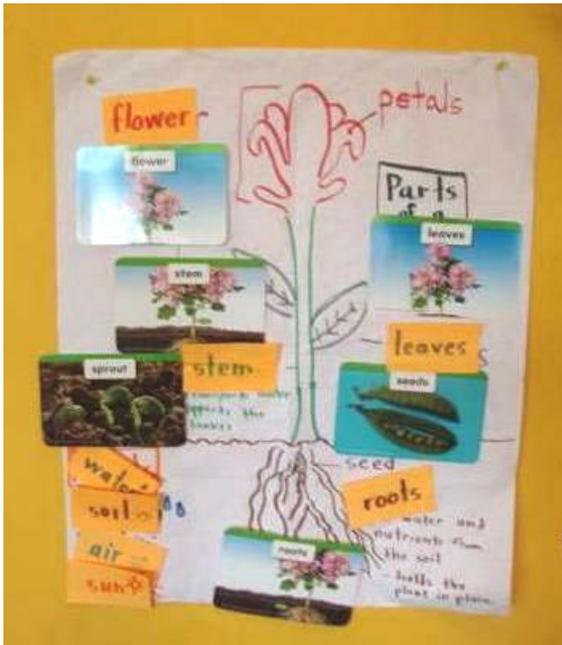


After I have created a theme word list I like to create a class book on the theme. I will have the students orally practice the sentence they are going to write for the book. I also have them find the word on the word list they will need for their sentence. Since the students have already had so much practice reading the word list it should not be too hard for them to create their sentence.

I collect all the pages for the book and make a cover. I then read our class book to the class and add the book to our library. Students really enjoy revisiting these book and take pride in their written abilities.



## Theme-based Word List



When I start a new theme I always open the theme with a word list on a large piece of chart paper. I will call on students to help me create the word list.

For each theme-based word we add to the list, the students will help orally blend/segment the word and then I will draw a small picture to go with the word. We will continue to add words to the word list throughout the theme. I make sure that we revisit the word list daily. I use the word list to build and develop many of the phonemic awareness skills.

Here are some ways I revisit the word list:

- Beginning Sound
- End Sound
- Change a sound
- Rhyming Words
- Blending Sounds
- Segmenting Sounds
- Singular/Plural
- Vowel Sounds
- Syllables