The Writer's Notebook:
A Two-Sided Approach



Woodland School District

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Launching the Notebook

"Having the right tools in the writer's workshop is crucial. By tools, we mean anything that supports the ongoing work of the writers in our classrooms."
-Judy Davis and Sharon Hill

"Keeping a notebook is the single best way I know to survive as a writer."
-Ralph Fletcher

- First day/week of school, have students select/purchase their notebook to fit your expectations/needs:
  - ✓ Size and number of pages (typically, 100 pages is plenty)
  - ✓ Spiral vs. bound
  - ✓ Wide vs. college ruled
  - ✓ Portability for student and teacher
  - ✓ Storage in the classroom, if desired

- Invite students to personalize their notebook by decorating with photos, hand drawn pictures, words/phrases, cut outs from magazines/newspapers, clip art, or stickers. Could be specific such as: "A" side interests/hobbies and "B" side very important to you/close to your heart. Or, as student chooses. This step is critical to increases the "ownership" of the notebook.

- Applying clear contact paper or box tape to cover each side is recommended, so the notebook is durable throughout the year.

- Sometimes overlooked...make sure that the student's first and last names are CLEARLY labeled on the *front* cover. Having the label in the same location and on the front creates ease for identifying the owner. Also, if you teach more than one group of students, having the period or block number included helps!

- If possible, share your own Writer's Notebook and/or previous student notebooks to create interest. If not, then consider using a picture book (see RESOURCES list).

- One of the "rules" is that tearing pages from the notebook is NOT allowed at ANY time. This ensures that the notebook will last the entire school year.

"The writer's notebook differs from a journal. Encourage students to use the notebook to experiment with writing techniques as well as a place to record important thoughts, feelings, seed ideas, and dreams." -Ralph Fletcher

"A" Side: Teacher

"The focus for your teaching is on writing strategies, not writing topics."
-Kristen Painter

"If the notebook is to be a useful tool, it must be useful to the writer first, and the reader (teacher) second." -Aimee Buckner

- The "A" Side is teacher directed in that the information recorded comes from direct/explicit instruction, typically in the form of a mini-lesson.

- The mini-lesson recorded has a specific purpose and is called an "entry." An entry can consist of a procedure, trait, mode/genre, process, or any other concept related to writing. The entry is titled after the concept/how you refer to it. For example, "Ideas and Content," "Revision," or "Writing Group Procedures."

- At the beginning of the year, it is the teacher's selection in mini-lessons that creates the foundation/path/tone for the rest of the year.

- The notebook is ongoing, so one mini-lesson builds upon/relates to the previous. Once the mini-lesson is recorded, it is referred to again and again as a reference/support for the student.

- Once the year is under way, typically it is the need/status of the class as a whole which determines the selection of the next lesson.

- **Sample:**
  - Table of Contents: Entry Number, Entry Label, and Date
  - Notebook Rules (procedure)
  - Writing Atmosphere (procedure)
  - Mini-Lesson: Ideas and Content (trait)
  - Memory List (process)

"When a student feels confident enough to get something on the page, and loves the accomplishment of it, the first hurdle in teaching writing has been cleared. The correctness of the writing will come; be patient and enjoy the fruits of your teaching." -Kristen Painter

"B" Side: Student

"Keeping a notebook is a process. It's something that "gets" you-- leads you from one thought to another until you, too, experience the writer's joy of discovering something you didn't know you knew." -Aimee Buckner

"That's where the notebook comes in. It gives us a private place to write badly." -Ralph Fletcher

- The "B" side is student centered, in that the student determines the quantity and quality of what is written (often with a gentle nudge from the teacher).
- The purpose of the "B" side is to develop writing stamina, fluency, and variety.
- "B" side entries may consist of free writes (timed to build stamina), prompt responses (either direct or inspired by a mini-lesson), quote responses, and applications/practice of concepts introduced on the "A" side.
- Students are welcome to write on the "B" side on their own time, outside of class. If they choose to do so, it would be labeled "own time" and the date would be recorded.
- Students may continue from a previous entry. They label it as directed (e.g. Free write), then they add "continued" and the date of the entry it is continued from.
- For the most part, "B" side entries are first drafts, starts, or practice of strategies.
- **Sample:**
  - Memory Write
  - Author Share

"It (notebook) gives you a roomy space to record and explore what amazes, delights, disgusts, or appalls you." -Ralph Fletcher

Mini-Lesson Samples

"Too often with so much focus on gathering writing in the notebook, the notebook can take on a life of its own. We can lose track of the purpose of collecting in the notebook—the goal of publishing." -Judy Davis and Sharon Hill

- ***Procedure:***
  - Writing Atmosphere/Expectations
  - Notebook "Rules"
  - Retrieval/Storage in Classroom
  - Conferences with Peer/Teacher
  - Author Share/Chair
  - Grading
  - Publishing

- ***Traits:***
  - Ideas and Content
  - Organization
  - Voice
  - Word Choice
  - Sentence Fluency
  - Conventions
  - Presentation

- ***Process:***
  - Prewriting
  - Using Graphic Organizers
  - First Draft
  - Revising
  - Editing
  - Final Draft

- ***Mode/Genre:***
  - Narrative
  - Response to Literature
  - Persuasive
  - Research
  - Expository

ASSESSMENT/GRADING

"Writing represents a kind of freedom, but kids will never know that if everything they do is investigated or judged." -Cynthia Carbone Ward

"Learning to write requires that we first splash around in the medium and overcome our fears. It requires practice and positive reinforcement, rather than the intimidation of constant criticism." -Cynthia Carbone Ward

- Checking/Grading/Commenting on Notebooks after the first few entries on both the "A" and "B" side sets the stage for the remainder of the year
- Encourage proper layout/redirecting is critical at the start
- Comment on content/connections/questions, rather than "correcting"
- Make notes in the margins/at the end of the entry/with a post-it
- Points (if you feel inclined to grade):
  - -See Next Page
  - -Used in the past, typically once every trimester/quarter
  - -Student highlights/marks ONE entry on the "B" side that they would like the teacher to thoroughly read/provide specific feedback

"Too much focus on the grade can be a major impediment to the writing process. Students need to find their own voices, learn their feelings, and tend to their craft without always anticipating a judgment on the other end."
-Cynthia Carbone Ward

WRITING NOTEBOOK CHECK

"A" SIDE

Points	Title	Date
/5	Table of Contents -Entries #1-12	
/10	Notebook Criteria -rules, A-side, and B-side	9/18
/10	Writing Atmosphere -looks, sounds, and feels	9/18
/20	Ideas & Content (trait) -definition, features, hints, and glued mini-poster	10/9
/10	Celebration List -criteria for a celebration -celebration list 5 or more	10/15
/15	Narrative (mode) -definition, features, and examples	10/17
/20	Organization (trait) -definition, features, I need to practice..., and glued mini-poster	10/18
/20	Leads -definition, types, glued glossary of good beginnings, and glued leads/hooks/flashlights	10/22
/15	Transitions -definition, purpose, and glued list	10/23
/20	Revision -definition, requires, evaluate, action, and glued quick tips	10/26
/10	Conventions (trait) -rules and glued mini-poster	10/29
/15	Editing/Color Code Sheet	10/29

"B" SIDE

(Highlight <u>one</u> entry for Mrs. T. to comment on)

Points	Title	Date
/5	Design Write (5)	9/20
/10	Freewrite (10)	9/26
/10	Celebration Write (10)	10/16
/10	Freewrite (10)	10/19
/10	Freewrite (10)	11/7
/10	Freewrite (10)	11/9
/5	Freewrite (5)	11/14
/10	Prompt Response (10)	11/16

Total: _____/245=_____

Comments:

MODIFICATIONS/ NOTES

- ELL Students: The "A" side can have notes photocopied and students can fill in blanks with academic vocabulary, as appropriate.
- Special Ed. Students: The "A" side can have notes photocopied and they highlight bullets/key words as they are covered during the lesson.
- Special Ed. Students with a disability such as Dyslexia can type their notes for the "A" and "B" side on an Alpha Smart or the computer, then print and glue into notebook.
- Students who were absent are required for all information presented. They can copy "A" side information from the teacher's notebook, the recent overheads/copies, or a reliable peer.
- If going on Travel Study, students can take their notebook with them to complete writing assignments on the "B" side.
- New students have a notebook w/photocopied "A" side entries glued into a new notebook, so that they can see the information that has been presented in class. This helps them transition into the writing climate of the classroom, which connects them to the academic vocabulary used by the teacher and/or peers.

RESOURCES

Teacher:

Buckner, Aimee. *Notebook Know-How*

Burkhardt, Ross M. *Writing for Real*

Davis, Judy and Sharon Hill. *The No-Nonsense Guide to Teaching Writing*

Fletcher, Ralph. *Breathing In Breathing Out*

Painter, Kristen. *Living and Teaching the Writing Workshop*

Ward, Cynthia Carbone. *How Writers Grow*

Student:

Baylor, Byrd. *I'm in Charge of Celebrations*

Brown, Margaret Wise. *The Important Book*

Fox, Mem. *Wilfrid Gordon McDonald Partridge*

Moss, Marissa. *Amelia's Notebook*

Amelia Writes Again

Max's Logbook

Schotter, Roni. *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street*

Websites:

www.ttms.org

Excellent resource for 6 traits ideas/lessons AND reading. Handouts available in primary and intermediate language

www.middleweb.com

Notebook rubric. Writing notebook ideas/lessons/prompts