write beside them:
risk, voice, and clarity in writing with students

Penny Kittle

“Who dares to teach must never cease to learn.” ~ Cicero

“In 2008 our national graduation rate was 69%. In the prison population, 84% do not have a high school diploma. Regarding literacy skills: 43% of those at level one live in poverty, 4% at level five do. American classrooms have to change.”
~ from Alan Sitomer’s address to the NCTE convention, San Antonio, 2008.

“Between 1996 and 2006, the average level of literacy required for all occupations rose by 14 percent. Both dropouts and high school graduates demonstrate significantly worse reading skills than they did ten years ago.” ~ Kelly Gallagher, Readicide, 2009.

“When you’re teaching you’re going to see people who cut corners, don’t work as hard as they should, or just complain all the time about everything. I believe you’ve got to do what’s right, every single day of your life, even if the rest of the crowd isn’t. Teaching is about honor and goodness and mercy. It really is. And no one will be watching you most of the time. You either live up to the calling of this profession or you don’t, and most likely no one will ever know but you. But it matters because the kids are counting on you.”
~ from The Greatest Catch: a life in teaching. Penny Kittle, 2005

“If you think education is expensive, try ignorance.” ~ Malcolm X

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Time

Writing Workshop is predictable, so students plan for time to write and continue to imagine crafting when not in school.

The teacher:

• understands what time looks like: what writers do with time to work (list, work in notebooks, read, collaborate on writing, confer with others, draw, storyboard, observe, think, wonder, procrastinate)
• considers balance of study and teaching, so writers have time each day to work independently
• knows the needs of her writers so that constant observation and reflection during the workshop leads to lessons designed to advance what they need at the moment: when to draw them together, when to add something to challenge them, when to give them more time to work, when to push to the finish
• listens to student feedback about conditions, structures, and plans

What this writer needs...

• time to decide what to say. If there’s anything to say. Time to blast away, carving out an idea.
• time to breathe, relax, think, sketch. To make lists, to sift through all that was absorbed the day before and look at things more closely. To slow down and let my mind sort or sift or settle on something and gnaw away at it.
• time to count on. If something occurs to me during the day, I can store it away, knowing I’ll have time to write soon, and the idea will resurface then.

What other writers say...

• “We rarely ask our students: tell us what has to happen around here in order for you to be willing to study hard, think deeply, and take real pride in your work?” ~Robert L. Fried
• “Write fast–write badly–so you will write what you don’t yet know you knew–and so you will outrun the censor within us all.” ~Don Murray
• “Writing is like that, I realize: to hold the pen and wait, then start, is like holding a roll of film. Something will come; it will bring from the past. I wait deliciously. And the thing that occurs depends partly on how much I hunger.” ~William Stafford
• “People don’t know how hard it is to write, what a struggle to know what you want to say and then to say what you mean.” ~Jane Kenyon
• “The daily practice of craft sharpens the writer’s vision and tunes the writer’s voice. Habit makes writing easy.” ~Donald Murray
• “For me, writing is never linear, though I do believe quite ardently in revision. I think of revision as a kind of archeology, a deep exploration of the text to discover what’s still hidden and bring it to the surface.” ~Kim Edwards
I select out of all the possible moments in my life, some experience that has formed me. (Randy Bomer, *Time for Meaning*) When I make a choice, I commit to crafting my thinking, working through process towards the best writing I’m capable of today.

The teacher:

- can explain the choices being made right now in her writing life.
- understands why and how a writer can get stuck on one topic.
- can find topics in any genre because she knows her own territories so well and is willing to take risks.
- knows the futility of writing for no other purpose than to turn in an assignment—what that does to craft and joy and desire—and knows that voice comes from having something to say.
- knows that all writers make bad choices at times & can get married to their own words and unwilling to delete them...has felt that useless circling when an idea is going nowhere, but won’t let go.

What this writer needs...

- choice in subject and the choice to stay stuck on one subject until I decide I’m finished.
- time to find a topic that I’m committed to... if I zip by this, the writing suffers.
- time to craft what I’m thinking in more than one form: to imagine which form fits what I’m trying to say. Do I write a letter or an essay—a memoir or an ode? I start one, then another. Trust me.
- the choice to abandon an idea and start on another—to not bring every piece to completion.

What other writers say...

- “With help, students are able to discover topics they deeply connect to and dig to find out more about these connections. This process makes their writing more honest, and also helps them think through the parts of their lives that are important to them. For some students, it might be the first time they realize that there are important subjects in their lives. Helping them take themselves seriously is crucial for them as writers and as maturing human beings.” ~Lucy Calkins
- “Boy writers need time and real choice in order to get comfortable and find their stride. Before we push or prod them to write this or that genre, using this topic sentence or that concluding paragraph, I say let’s get out of the way and make space for boys to write their own subjects, including their own characters, plots, drawings, and jokes. This means creating classrooms that are less about us and more about them.” ~Ralph Fletcher
- “There is only one story of our lives and we tell it over and over again, in a thousand different disguises, whether we know it or not.” ~Pam Houston
Writers need feedback, not evaluation. (Donald Murray) Listen first. Listen to what I need help with, then encourage me with attention to my ideas and the possibilities in my work. Help me see differently.

The teacher:

- listens first. The writer knows more about the piece than the teacher.
- articulates what is working and why, helps a writer see the smart moves made in his piece
- plans for conferences, organizes workshop time to allow for a few minutes beside each writer
- teaches students how to confer well with each other: outlines hurdles and possibilities; practices
- values the response of students to her work; listens, records, and uses feedback from students in her drafts and shows students how it helps her consider her purpose, her audience, & her choices in craft

What this writer needs...

- gentleness. I’m giving you a draft I’m not sure of; don’t crush me
- to believe in the possibilities of this piece
- tell me where my writing falters and where it sings, show me what is missing and what feels complete
- show me how you follow my thinking, see my experiences, respond to my ideas

What other writers say...

- “I must create a climate in the writing conference in which students can hear what they have to say so they can learn to listen to their own writing.” ~Donald Murray
- “Be brief; for it is with words as with sunbeams, the more they are condensed, the deeper they burn.” ~Robert Southey
- “Writing isn’t playing King of the Mountain. When I sit down to write literature, all my teachers gather behind my chair and I can hear their snickers. All my classmates together with all the writers I admire, dead and alive, gather around. I can’t write for this crowd. I can’t write literature. I can only write this page. For myself. Making it as true and as graceful as I can.” ~Donald Murray
- “Reread with a pen or pencil in hand. Read aloud. Feel the words in your mouth. Listen. Your sense of how language should sound is a great ally. You’ll hear when words make music; you’ll hear when they’re discordant. Make adjustments if you need to and be amazed and fulfilled at how well you are writing, honing language, tinkering and tuning. Cross out words. Move others around. Write anew in the ample margins and between the lines. You are crafting, creating.” ~Tom Romano
Writers notice, imitate, create. We need to analyze the craft of writing, unpacking its construction and using that thinking to more carefully craft our own.

The teacher:

- reads voraciously, collecting texts that show delights in language and structure
- shows her process in the genre: thinking aloud about finding an idea, deciding how to organize it, then struggling through a draft and revisions, searching for meaning, refining voice. This model of process provides a map for students to follow when stuck; this is show not tell teaching.
- unpacks the construction of a text: can explain how the parts work together to create the whole
- understands the power and possibility in imitation
- uses published texts as well as student texts as models

What this writer needs...

- vision for how others work
- vision for what I might write about and how to do it well
- vision for voices in genre--the use of satire or hostility or wise gentleness in story, essay, and poem
- to read a variety of writers in one genre so my mind expands with possibility
- to see that my ordinary life is alive with topics

What other writers say...

- “I challenged the children to use their writing time to write about topics they believed only children could write well about. They relished the challenge, they owned the turf. They trusted that they had important things to say. They breathed the details.” ~Shelley Harwayne
- “End or begin a workshop by filling the room with lines of student language. Hear language, see language, say language, feel language, in order to help students write with voice, authority, and passion.” ~Karen Ernst
- “Style is a matter of vision, not technique.” ~Marcel Proust
- “Trust language. It lies within, ready to lead you. All those years ago, before you were praised or corrected, before you were shown the niceties of communication, language quickened in you. That fierce human need to name and say launched words. Remember that. And be brave on the page. Be a warrior with words. Trust the gush of language. Exercise self-generosity.” ~Tom Romano
Expectations

I expect everyone to write well; I believe every student will. I have deadlines for each unit, so that writing moves from notebook to last draft, and there is an urgency in workshop each day.

The teacher:

• sets regular deadlines so students work towards completion
• knows (by conferring) where each writer is in the process—who needs nudging to meet the deadline—who needs help—who is ready to move on to another project
• celebrates the hard work of completion
• finishes a piece herself (not every unit) so she feels the challenge and terror of deadlines—of letting go of something that still isn’t all you want it to be
• submits work for publication so she feels the weight and limitation of evaluation

What this writer needs...

• due dates... or else nothing ever leaves my notebook
• time to think between drafts so that the writing revises in my mind, free of tools and responses
• the pressure of an audience waiting—nothing gets me writing like an afternoon writing group meeting
• personal goals like fifteen minutes a day of writing or a finished piece as a gift for someone else

What other writers say...

• “There is an hour when the work, at last, must be passed in and the writer revealed. Writing is never completed: the process of revision, reconsideration and editing goes on until the final deadline is met.” ~Donald Murray
• “To write you have to set up a routine, to promise yourself that you will write. Just state in a loud voice that you will write so many pages a day, or write for so many hours a day. Keep the number of pages or hours within reason, and don’t be upset if a day slips by. Start again; pick up the routine. Don’t look for results. Just write, easily, quietly.” ~Janwilliam van de Wetering
• “Finish. Submit. Many have talent. Some begin; few finish. The field is left to those of us who have little talent and great stubbornness.” ~Don Murray
• “Trust the process. If the process is sound, the product improves.” ~William Zinsser
• “Write every day. Set time aside: a heroic hour or a vital five minutes... though you may not consider yourself a writer, you write. That’s what matters. You are one of the meaning makers. You know writing from the inside. You can teach others.” ~Tom Romano
Research-based writing teaching
from the work of Donald Murray

*People don’t know how hard it is to write, what a struggle it is to know what you want to say and then to say what you mean.*  Jane Kenyon

1. **Teach process not product.** The traditional English class appropriately deals with a product—finished writing. The writing class deals with unfinished writing, writing that is in the process of discovering meaning. Students must have the time to pass through the same stages of prewriting, writing, rewriting, and editing which writers have to pass through to achieve the products we examine in other parts of the English curriculum.

2. **Write yourself.** The writing teacher prepares for the writing class by using his or her own language to examine and share experience. The teacher understands the writing process because the teacher experiences it.

3. **Listen to your students.** The center of the writing course is the conference in which the student evaluates the draft and the teacher responds to that evaluation. Students who are experiencing the process understand it better than we can. They know what is going well, what isn’t going well and they can, with our coaching, see how to improve their writing—to move closer to their meaning.

~Donald M. Murray, 1977.

In the teaching of writing, the quality of work that the children do has everything to do with the teaching they receive. When we give children rich environments for learning to write *and* wise, assertive one-to-one coaching, children regularly produce work that is breathtaking. The good news is that the skills of strong teaching are within reach for all of us. ... when we see good writing, we know the explanation lies not in a child’s genes but in the instruction the child has received.  ~Lucy Calkins, *The Nuts & Bolts of Teaching Writing*
“One of the ways that I engage students in writing on a continuous basis is through *quick writes*. Several times a week, at the beginning of class, I put a short piece of writing on the overhead projector and ask the students to do a quick write. A quick-write is a 1-3 minute written response to a short piece of writing ...in which I ask students to either write as quickly as they can all that comes to mind in response to the work, or to borrow a line (one that I suggest or one of their choosing) from the work and write off (or from) that line.”


**Why Quick Writes?**

Research shows that the following instructional techniques, all of which apply to quick writes, encourage better writing. The writer should:

1. Write frequently.
2. Concentrate on main ideas.
3. Reread what one has written.
4. Organize one’s writing.
5. Support claims with supporting details.
6. Use a distinct and recognizable voice.

Reasons for your students to practice writing quickly:

1. **You learn to work from a stimulus.** Your students’ work with quick writes will help them lasso a fundamental idea and develop it, then wrestle it to the ground. It prepares students for standardized tests.
2. **You learn to get off the mark quickly.** With practice writers get their ideas moving more quickly. Their first line moves closer to the emotional center of the piece.
3. **You begin to recognize your natural sense of organization.** Practicing quick writes helps you organize your thinking around meaningful topics in a variety of ways.
4. **You can identify the emotional center of a piece and provide supporting information.** Quick writes become a laboratory for teaching writing essentials.
5. **You connect conventions to context.** Since quick writes lead authors to topics they care about, they will more likely attend to conventions as they write and refine the text.

~Donald H. Graves & Penny Kittle, *Inside Writing*, Heinemann, 2005
Rereading a Quick Write

My first rereading (which happens soon after I’ve written) should be to read the piece and to indicate those words and phrases that I like. Traditionally, most writers are taught to first look for what they did wrong, making the first rereading a negative experience. We suggest the opposite.

We want students to appreciate their first words and to feel the possibilities in their lines. Students need to be shown how to do this, not told, and shown not once, but every time we write.

There are many thoughts in your mind as you reread your writing. Consider modeling one or more of the questions below for your students. They need this model of your thinking in order to understand how to reread their own writing to dig for meaning.

- What do I like?
- What are some words that I like?
- Is there a sentence or a phrase that I like?
- Are there places in my writing where I have more to say?
- Where does my piece really start?
- What sentence sounds the most like me?
- What is my wish for this piece?
- Where do I find emotion in the piece that shows my personality?
- Where is the heart of the piece?
- Where can I feel the energy in the piece?
- What may not belong?
- Where am I telling something that would be better to show?
- What happens if I move the heart (the place that shows what the piece is most about) to the start?
- Have I followed a natural order? What happens when I change the order?
- Where are the claims that require details to support them?

You will discover many of your own questions in rereading in different genre. As you journey into your own writing, you will find rereading your writing in front of students to be a natural modeling of the writing process you use. Your students can even become comfortable with their own rereading process and volunteer to share their own thinking while rereading for the students on the overhead. We need many models of writing process, and your classroom is full of possibilities.

What’s in a writer’s notebook?

I encourage my students to conduct fieldwork on their own cultures and themselves.
Together we can take dictation from the world.
Kim Stafford

Life….mine
Lists of all kinds of things: stuff I need to buy; people I need to talk to; memories that come to me in a rush of sensory images that launch me back in time
Notes to myself, reminders to do things or write about things
Emotions…anger, sadness, excitement, wonder
Memories “Every vivid memory holds some essential truth about your vision of the world.” Kim Stafford
Fragments of life that strike me (“that’s weird…”; “why did that happen?”)
Drawings: especially when I can’t write anymore about something but I’m still thinking about it…sketches like a storyboard to organize my thinking
Photographs, postcards, receipts, messages, notes from friends
Questions and sometimes answers
Quotations that make me think and respond, “Yes, that’s exactly how I feel.”
Song lyrics
Secrets
Doodling & responses to quick writes or other writing exercises I do with my students in class (a place where I experiment)
Scratch outs, cross outs, messy writing, notes in the margin of a page, sideways writing
Attempts at poetry; playful language
Writing pieces I abandon because I lose interest or have no confidence in
Writing prompts I create: things I think will help my students write
Story, essay, novel titles
First tries with a genre I’m not comfortable with
Practice descriptive writing: detailed sketches of people and places
Ideas for my classes, my new teachers, my own kids—things I want to say or do
Lesson plans
Things other people say that strike me as important or stupid or that I don’t understand
License plates (4U2NV) that make me want to respond, noticing my world
Books I’ve read and what I thought about them…sometimes I stop reading and copy a section and respond to it, then go back to reading
Visuals: plate, heart, hand…with related words for memories or ideas for writing
Poems I love
Sometimes journal-kind-of-entries, but usually not that orderly

Life

The world is busy, but the mind tenacious.
The writing life is all about faith in a fragment.
Kim Stafford
Digging Deeper

What’s buried beneath a first draft? What we learn from rereading...

I learned this exercise from Donald Graves. Begin with the phrase “I remember” and write for five minutes with as much detail as possible. I write:

I remember trying to stay awake as our car tossed side to side with the curves of Wilson Road, Dad gripping the steering wheel with both hands, me holding the thermos and an open cup of black coffee ready to pass to him when the curves evened out into an unspillable stretch of road. The coffee smelled old and bitter and looked like it was scooped from a puddle; it never tempted me. The headlights worked like two searchlights to separate the creepy darkness in the trees by the side of the road from the path we could see ahead. The trick was to have a line in the water as gray morning light began to crawl across the sky. Steelhead bite at dawn. The big ones even earlier.

Soon we were stepping into the river in our boots, careful to make as few ripples as possible. Don’t wake the fish: they’re smarter than you think, Dad would whisper, a smirk prickling the side of his mouth, his blue eyes dancing as they met mine. I scooped pink salmon eggs out of the jar he handed me and forced the hook inside. Who’s hungry? I wondered as I held the line and let the bait swing behind me. I tossed it into the deep water.

Now I reread the moment and look for words or phrases where there is more to say. I find Dad, coffee, creepy darkness, river, fish. I take one of those and put it at the top of a blank page and write freely from that word. Today I choose Dad.

When I was home in April we were preparing for a garage sale and their move to a more convenient house. It was time for clearing out and casting off. Dad said he wanted to sell all of his fishing gear. I didn’t want to hear it. I knew it was coming: an end to fishing. He stood in the driveway with the now familiar clear tubing wound around one hand. He lives on oxygen now, but I still see us on the water. He tried to sell me—did I want a fly rod? A heavy steelhead rod? Would I like his old vest with something in each pocket? I blinked quickly and looked away. I chewed on the inside of my cheek and watched as he showed me again how to make the line dance when you hold a fly rod. His body relaxed as he felt the line floating toward the water. And I tried to learn it this time, to not be distracted by cars rushing by on the street behind us or the sorrow rising in my throat. I still had him standing beside me in the driveway on a lovely afternoon; I could still learn this, before it’s too late, but it was his ghost I felt move through me, calling me back across the years to the water.

Suddenly I know there is more to say and I want to write. I want to think and plan how I might write this; I want others to know what I’m trying to say. I’m not sure what the piece will look like—I have no concept of genre—but I have something to say about the gift of time with people we love and the heartbreak of losing that time. Once I have an idea, I can find a form. This process of getting to the heart of what we want to say to the world is at the center of motivating writers to dig into the hard work of making meaning.
Favorite Quick Writes

Writing notebooks are reassuring because it is easier to start from something rather than nothing. In notebooks, writers feel free to be awkward or polished, silky or sullen. To try opinions without commitment: without anyone watching. Notebooks are dedicated to perpetual sketchiness, and that’s their charm. ~ Alice Fulton

A poem a day builds vocabulary and figurative language

“Days” by Billy Collins... if you could go back to one day, one moment, which would you choose?

“When I Was Young in the Mountains” by Cynthia Rylant... when I was young on Belmont Street...

“Oh Turning Ten” by Billy Collins... you might write about a favorite birthday or memories of age 10

Sketches, letters, responses, or thinking on paper... but always in response to a piece of literature or a poem. I never ask students to write from a prompt or ‘story starter.’

Trace around your hand, fill it with memories of what you’ve touched, held, loved

Fill a heart shape with the music that lives in your heart, songs connected to moments you love

Choose an article from the newspaper, read aloud and respond with your thinking

A letter to someone you treasure; a letter to someone who annoys you; a letter to ask for something

Capture a conversation you overheard this week; capture the sounds of your house

Sketch your room, your backyard, your neighborhood, your classroom, your favorite hiding place

Things you wonder about; questions you’d like to ask the principal, your parents, your best friend...

Slow down time, show every detail you can recall; compressed time, like 100 moments on the school bus

Think of a favorite photograph and tell the story of that picture and why it matters to you
Snow Day

Today we woke up to a revolution of snow, its whistling wind over everything, the landscape vanished, not a single mouse to punctuate the blankness, and beyond these windows

the government buildings smothered, schools and libraries buried, the post office lost under the noiseless drift, the paths of trains softly blocked, the world fallen under this falling

In a while I will put on some boots and step out like someone walking in water, and the dog will porpoise through the drifts, and I will shake a laden branch sending a cold shower down on us both.

But for now I am a willing prisoner in this house, a sympathizer with the anarchic cause of snow. I will make a pot of tea and listen to the plastic radio on the counter, as glad as anyone to hear the news

that the Kiddie Corner School is closed, the Ding-Dong School, closed, the All Aboard Children’s School, closed, the Hi-No Nursery School, closed, along with -- some will be delighted to hear --

the Toadstool School, the Little School, Little Squirrels Nursery School, Little Bears Pre-School, Peas-and-Carrots Day School, the Tom Thumb Child Center, all closed, and -- clap your hands -- the Peanuts Play School.

So this is where the children hide all day, These are the nests where they sitter and draw, where they put on their bright miniature jackets, all darting and climbing and sliding, all but the few girls whispering by the fence.

And now I am listening hard in the grand silence of the snow, trying to hear what those three girls are plotting, what riot is afoot, which small quill is about to be brought down.

Billy Collins

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Read aloud.
Identify favorite phrases or lines. Respond with your own description using the five senses; you might write about snow or cold as Billy Collins did. Find a place in your quick write where you can make it better. Pass your writing to someone nearby who will read and comment on your work.
The Writing Conference

How can I help you?...
Tell me about what you’re doing as a writer at this moment...
Why did you decide to do it that way?...
I want to let you inside my head as a reader...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conference Architecture</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>listen</td>
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<tr>
<td>Listen to the writer and think about what the writer is trying to say in the piece. This also means I listen to what the writer understands about the weaknesses in the piece, so I don’t waste time telling the student what he already knows.</td>
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<tr>
<td>decide</td>
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<td>There are usually many teaching possibilities that become apparent even in a short writing conference. I name the writing moves I see happening. I want students to know the name for the craft they are learning &amp; using. I’m teaching a writer not a piece of writing, and offer what I think is the lesson this writer needs most in order to move forward.</td>
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<tr>
<td>teach</td>
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<td>I stay focused on one thing I want this writer to learn. I am assertive: ‘here’s what I want you to think about or try’—and then I give examples from authors they know or my own writing where I have wrestled with the same thing. I want the student to leave the conference knowing how to do what I suggest, but the decision to use the strategy is in the writer’s hands.</td>
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<td>encourage</td>
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<td>Don Murray said you should always leave a writing conference excited to get back to the writing. I make a point of commenting on what is working in the writing, what made me think and wonder. I talk about great lines, great words, smart writing moves. I try not to assume the writer knows what is working in the piece.</td>
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This architecture is based on the work of Lucy Calkins, 2006 & K. Bomer, 2010.

Follow a schedule for conferring and get to every student (if possible) before you go to one student for a second time...keep records

Move out into the class so students eavesdrop on each other’s conferences
Students learn the language of how to talk about writing from the teacher and will use it in their conferences with each other

Teach the writer, not the writing

Bring your writing notebook with you so you can talk about what you’re doing as a writer when it works in the conference—they need to see the teacher as a writer.
**Storyboarding** to organize and revise writing

**Proficient readers**
- spontaneously & purposefully create mental images while & after they read
- use images to immerse themselves in rich detail as they read
- use images to draw conclusions, to create distinct & unique interpretations of the text, to recall details significant to the text, and to recall a text after it has been read
- adapt their images as they continue to read
- understand how creating images enhances their comprehension
- adapt their images in response to the shared images of other readers

~from *Mosaic of Thought*, by Ellin Keene & Susan Zimmerman

**Visual Tools for Differentiating Reading & Writing Instruction:**
*Strategies to help students make abstract ideas concrete and accessible*
by Roger Essley, with Linda Rief & Amy Rocci, Scholastic, 2008.

**Storyboarding helps writers:**
- think through the moments or scenes in a story, imagining details as they sketch
- determine importance before writing, focusing the story prior to drafting
- tell the story and solicit feedback from conferring partners to revise the ideas for clarity or add details or moments that are missing before drafting
- find the most important scene in the story (to stretch this out) as well as to consider irrelevant details or scenes that can be cut before drafting
- see the whole story before writing
- organize a large topic like a relationship, a place, or an idea
- imagine how scenes can work together & to see scenes as movable parts
- learn how to collect ideas even before determining what the focus of the writing will be
- understand the process used in composing digital movies, layering sound, text, video, and images to tell a story or persuade an audience

**Elements in the storyboarding process for a narrative:**
- think of a story you want to tell (it is easiest to start small with one event or happening)
- imagine the moments in that story as scenes in a movie, remember and sketch details
- sketch the moments (use stick figures and a few words) that tell the story beginning to end, including a ‘so what?’ box for why you are telling the story or what you learned from it--this is not great artwork, just playful prewriting
- cut the storyboard into pieces so you can imagine different ways to tell the story; find one that feels right to you
- use your storyboard to help you tell the story to someone else; your partner should pay attention to where essential details might be missing or ideas need clarification
- revise your storyboard to add moments or delete those that aren’t necessary
- write the most important moment in the story first, stretching out the details to make this scene come alive; the scene can come later in your story, but write it first
- consider which moments from the storyboard add depth to the story and write those
- confer with a partner to share your writing and solicit feedback, then revise your writing until it tells your story just the way you want it

Teachers... create a storyboard for one of your stories: play, revise, rethink, and write it. Have fun!
Eleven Elements of Effective Adolescent Writing Instruction

Writing Next: Effective Strategies to Improve Writing of Adolescents in Middle and High Schools, a report to the Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2007.

This report identifies 11 elements of current writing instruction found to be effective for helping adolescent students learn to write well and to use writing as a tool for learning. It is important to note that all of the elements are supported by rigorous research, but that even when used together, they do not constitute a full writing curriculum.

1. **Writing Strategies**, which involves teaching students strategies for planning, revising, and editing their compositions

2. **Summarization**, which involves explicitly and systematically teaching students how to summarize texts

3. **Collaborative Writing**, which uses instructional arrangements in which adolescents work together to plan, draft, revise, and edit their compositions

4. **Specific Product Goals**, which assigns students specific, reachable goals for the writing they are to complete

5. **Word Processing**, which uses computers and word processors as instructional supports for writing assignments

6. **Sentence Combining**, which involves teaching students to construct more complex, sophisticated sentences

7. **Prewriting**, which engages students in activities designed to help them generate or organize ideas for their composition

8. **Inquiry Activities**, which engages students in analyzing immediate, concrete data to help them develop ideas and content for a particular writing task

9. **Process Writing Approach**, which interweaves a number of writing instructional activities in a workshop environment that stresses extended writing opportunities, writing for authentic audiences, personalized instruction, and cycles of writing

10. **Study of Models**, which provides students with opportunities to read, analyze, and emulate models of good writing

11. **Writing for Content Learning**, which uses writing as a tool for learning content material.
Knock Knock ~Daniel Beaty

As a boy I shared a game with my father. Played it every morning 'til I was 3. He would knock knock on my door, and I'd pretend to be asleep 'til he got right next to the bed, then I would get up and jump into his arms. "Good morning, Papa." And my papa he would tell me that he loved me. We shared a game. Knock knock.

Until that day when the knock never came and my momma takes me on a ride past corn fields on this never ending highway 'til we reach a place of high rusty gates. A confused little boy, I entered the building carried in my mama's arms. Knock knock. We reach a room of windows and brown faces behind one of the windows sits my father. I jump out of my mama's arms and run joyously towards my papa only to be confronted by this window. I knock knock trying to break through the glass, trying to get to my father. I knock knock as my mama pulls me away before my papa even says a word.

And for years he never said a word. And so twenty-five years later, I write these words for the little boy in me who still awaits his papa's knock.

Papa, come home 'cause I miss you. I miss you waking me up in the morning and telling me you love me. Papa, come home 'cause there's things I don't know, and I thought maybe you could teach me. how to shave; how to dribble a ball; how to talk to a lady; how to walk like a man. Papa, come home because I decided a while back I wanted to be just like you. But I'm forgetting who you are. And twenty-five years later a little boy cries, and so I write these words and try to heal and try to father myself and I dream up a father who says the words my father did not.

Dear Son,
I'm sorry I never came home. For every lesson I failed to teach, hear these words:
Shave in one direction in strong deliberate strokes to avoid irritation
Dribble the page with the brilliance of your ballpoint pen. Walk like a god and your goddess will come to you. No longer will I be there to knock on your door, so you must learn to knock for yourself.

Knock knock down doors of racism and poverty that I could not. Knock knock down doors of opportunity for the lost brilliance of the black men who crowd these cells. Knock knock with diligence for the sake of your children.
Knock knock for me as long as you are free, these prison gates cannot contain my spirit. The best of me still lives in you. Knock knock with the knowledge that you are my son, but you are not my choices.
Yes, we are our fathers' sons and daughters, but we are not their choices. For despite their absences we are still here. Still alive, still breathing with the power to change this world, one little boy and girl at a time.

Knock knock
Who's there?
We are.
Point B ~Sarah Kay (Don't miss her speech on TED.com)

If I should have a daughter, instead of Mom, she's gonna call me Point B, because that way she knows that no matter what happens, at least she can always find her way to me. And I'm going to paint solar systems on the backs of her hands, so she has to learn the entire universe before she can say, "Oh, I know that like the back of my hand."

And she's going to learn that this life will hit you hard in the face, wait for you to get back up just so it can kick you in the stomach. But getting the wind knocked out of you is the only way to remind your lungs how much they like the taste of air. There is hurt here that cannot be fixed by Band-Aids or poetry. So the first time she realizes that Wonder Woman isn't coming, I'll make sure she knows she doesn't have to wear the cape all by herself. Because no matter how wide you stretch your fingers, your hands will always be too small to catch all the pain you want to heal. Believe me, I've tried.

"And, baby," I'll tell her, don't keep your nose up in the air like that. I know that trick; I've done it a million times. You're just smelling for smoke so you can follow the trail back to a burning house, so you can find the boy who lost everything in the fire to see if you can save him. Or else find the boy who lit the fire in the first place, to see if you can change him." But I know she will anyway, so instead I'll always keep an extra supply of chocolate and rain boots nearby, because there is no heartbeat that chocolate can't fix. Okay, there's a few heartbreaks that chocolate can't fix. But that's what the rain boots are for. Because rain will wash away everything, if you let it. I want her to look at the world through the underside of a glass-bottom boat, to look through a microscope at the galaxies that exist on the pinpoint of a human mind, because that's the way my mom taught me. That there'll be days like this. ♫ When you open your hands to catch and wind up with only blisters and bruises; when you step out of the phone booth and try to fly and the very people you want to save are the ones standing on your cape; when your boots will fill with rain, and you'll be up to your knees in disappointment.

And those are the very days you have all the more reason to say thank you. Because there's nothing more beautiful than the way the ocean refuses to stop kissing the shoreline, no matter how many times it's sent away. You will put the wind in winsome, lose some. You will put the star in starting over, and over. And no matter how many land mines erupt in a minute, be sure your mind lands on the beauty of this funny place called life. And yes, on a scale from one to over-trusting, I am pretty damn naive. But I want her to know that this world is made out of sugar. It can crumble so easily, but don't be afraid to stick your tongue out and taste it.

"Baby," I'll tell her, "remember, your momma is a worrier, and your poppa is a warrior, and you are the girl with small hands and big eyes who never stops asking for more." Remember that good things come in threes and so do bad things. And always apologize when you've done something wrong. But don't you ever apologize for the way your eyes refuse to stop shining.

Your voice is small, but don't ever stop singing. And when they finally hand you heartache, when they slip war and hatred under your door and offer you handouts on street-corners of cynicism and defeat, you tell them that they really ought to meet your mother.
Cruel as It Is, We Somehow Go On

Sometimes, the earth is cruel.

That is ultimately the fundamental lesson here, as children wail, families sleep out of doors, and the dead lie unclaimed in the rubble that once was Port-au-Prince.

Sometimes the rains fall and will not stop. Sometimes the skies turn barren and will not rain. Sometimes the seas rise and smack the shoreline like a fist. Sometimes the wind bullies the land. And sometimes, the land rattles and heaves and splits itself in two.

Sometimes, the earth is cruel.

And always, when it is, we do the same thing. We dig ourselves out. We weep and mourn, we recover and memorialize the dead, we rebuild our homes. And we go on. This is the price of being human. And also, arguably, the noblest expression.

Sometimes, the earth is cruel, and you have no choice but to accept that as part of the bargain called life. And when it is your turn to deal with it, you do.

But what if it's always your turn?

Surely some homeless, dust-streaked Haitian can be forgiven for thinking it is always Haiti's turn this morning, two days after the poorest nation in the Western Hemisphere saw its capital city smashed by the strongest earthquake it has ever known, a 7.0-magnitude monster. Surely, the rest of us watching from afar, experiencing tragedy and devastation from the comfort of desk chairs and living room couches, are tempted to believe the same thing.

Bad enough, Haiti is wretchedly poor. Bad enough it has a history of political instability and colonialism, of being ignored by the major powers when it is not being exploited by them. Bad enough, all that, yet at the end of the day, those are disasters authored by human hands, by human greed, human corruption, human economic predation.

Sometimes, though, you have to wonder if the planet itself is not conspiring against this humble little nation.
After 1994, when Tropical Storm Gordon killed several hundred people, after 1998, when Hurricane Georges swept away over 500 lives, after 2004, when the rains of Tropical Storm Jeanne claimed over 2,000 souls, after 2005, when Hurricane Dennis took 25 lives in July and Tropical Storm Alpha snatched 17 in October, followed by Hurricane Wilma which stole 11 more, after the double whammy of Hurricanes Fay and Gustav in 2008 killed over 130 people and destroyed over 3,100 homes, after all that, comes this latest insult -- and a death toll officials cannot begin to even imagine. Perhaps as many as 100,000, they were saying on Wednesday.

Sometimes, the earth is cruel. To crawl the planet's skin, scanning for tornadoes in Oklahoma, charting storm tracks in Florida, running from wildfires in California, is to understand this in a primal, personal way. It is to breathe a prayer that begins, ``There, but for the grace of God . . .'' It is to write relief checks, donate blood, volunteer material and time and to fear, even in the doing, that these gestures are small against the need, inconsequential against the ache of a people whose turn seems never to end.

But what else are you going to do? As the playwright put it, your arms too short to box with God. Even less have we the ability to answer the question that burns the moment: Why are the most vulnerable repeatedly assessed the highest price?

We are hamstrung by our own limitations, so we can only do what we always do, only send prayers and help. And watch, staggered by the courage it takes, as Haitians do what human beings always do, the thing at which they have become so terribly practiced.

Dig out. Weep and mourn. Memorialize the dead. Rebuild. Go on. And show the world once again a stubborn insistence on living, despite all the cruelties of the earth.

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