

WORDPLAYS AND WORD WAYS: FIRST STEPS IN CREATIVE WRITING

LANGUAGE ARTS GOALS FOR GRADES 3 - 6

Learning to appreciate language
 Learning to use the tools
 Learning to relate to the world

I. Developing an appreciation for language

A. Read - read - read!

B. Talk and listen (see page 3)

C. Become aware of the uses--and power--of everyday language

D. Steps in learning to write:

Paragraphs, short essay, short narrative

Poetry - brief and structure (haiku, diamante)

Captions - simple description, brief narrative (see p. 3)

Dictation (formal storytelling)

Casual storytelling

II. Learning to use the tools (grammar)

A. Scope of elementary language studies:

Parts of speech and basic sentence structure

Mechanics (punctuation, capitalization, spelling)

Paragraphing

B. Choosing a grammar program

Consider your child's personality and learning style:

Does she enjoy the structure and sense of accomplishment from completing exercises in a workbook?

Does he learn best when he can use his hands (or stand on his head)?

Does she challenge every assumption and have to argue with you?

Does he come to understand a concept by talking it over and putting it in his own words?

Some programs are structured, others are more hands-on, still others involve lots of interaction between teacher and student. Children need exposure to all types of learning, but for basic subjects like grammar, keep their natural proclivities in mind.

- C. Integrate grammar with actual writing as much as possible

The language arts scrapbook

III. Learning to relating to the world

- A. In general, keep writing non-subjective in grades 3-6.

- B. Three rules for writing assignments

1. Make it relevant.
2. Be specific about what you want.
3. Focus on the subject

- C. Possible assignments

Simple narratives - personal experience, fictional plot, witnessed incident

Imaginary dialogues and personifications

Simple, structured poetry

Factual reporting in content areas: science history, social studies, Bible, etc.

Imitate familiar written forms: newspaper features, advertising, instructions

RESOURCES:

A child's Thesaurus
 Any well-written book or story
 Cheaney, *Wordsmith Apprentice*

SOME ORAL KEYS TO EFFECTIVE LANGUAGE EXRESSION:

1. Storytelling. Make a practice of telling about incidents in your day, and encourage your children to do the same. Strive for detail in your account, and ask for details in theirs--colors, sounds, actions. This helps young children learn something of sequence, vividness, dialogue and other elements of storytelling, even before they learn to write.
2. Captions. Encourage children to describe the pictures they draw while you write the descriptions. Ask questions to draw out the details: How big? What does it sound like? Who is this? How old is he? Write the captions in complete sentences, of two or three sentences apiece.

Other ideas: label family vacation photos making use of the children's own memories--they'll be priceless in years to come. Or have the children look through magazines or newspapers for pictures on a particular theme, such as "Love" or "Fun" or "Favorite Things." Paste these in a book or a collage, with one-sentence captions for each. (Older children might be able to look for more abstract themes, such as "Sorrow" or "Hope," and write descriptions of a paragraph or more.)

3. Critical judgment. Encourage use of precise words when talking about movies, books or TV shows. The next time your child (of any age) says, "That was a great movie!" try to determine what was so great about it. Was it exciting? Funny? Sad? Did you like the characters? Which one did you like best? Why? Try to find words to express quality other than "good." (Don't overdo this if your child is reluctant to share feelings or has trouble coming up with qualifying words--but it's a useful exercise at least now and then.)
4. Brainstorm some strong action verbs to indicate movement, such as "amble," "race," "strut," "spring," "prance," etc. Ask one child to act out one of the action verbs while the others guess what it is. Obviously, older children are likely to have a better vocabulary and more verbs at their disposal, but little ones will pick up the words quickly.
5. While driving, comment on the words used on billboards and other advertising media. Ask for suggestions of words that would help sell the product, and words that wouldn't. Where are the words more important than the pictures, and vice-versa?
6. Make up a story together, using interesting pictures cut from a magazine. When the outline of the story is in place, ask the child to dictate it to you while you write what he says. Ask for details about color, size, physical characteristics and descriptions, etc. Include dialogue ("What does she say now?") and strong action verbs. These stories may be written in book form, using the pictures as illustrations.

OR, the children can pose their toys and/or pets and take pictures of them to illustrate a story. If they have trouble making up plots from scratch, suggest a re-telling of a familiar story, using their toys (for example, G.I Joe and Strawberry Shortcake as Hansel and Gretel, with the family cat as the witch). After the pictures are developed or printed, the child or children can dictate the story to you.