

**The Power of the Reading/Writing
Connection for Increasing Student
Achievement and Enjoyment**

with

Regie Routman

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Essential Conditions **for Self-directed Learning** **and High Achievement**

- Joy and confidence
- Focus on meaning, comprehension, and relevance
- High level of teacher knowledge
- High expectations for *all* students
- Whole school responsibility for achievement of *all* students

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Characteristics of High Performing Schools

- ongoing professional conversations (includes knowing and applying relevant research)
- massive amounts of reading and writing real texts (with little time on “stuff” and isolated test preparation)
- Interconnectedness of reading and writing across the curriculum
- focus on the “big picture” of purposeful learning, with skills embedded in meaningful contexts (includes explicit teaching)
- constant assessment *for* learning
- strong leadership, especially by the principal
- continuing coaching, collaboration, collegiality
- high expectations for all students
- ongoing demonstrations *for* learning
- interactive, responsive teaching styles that promote higher level questions and thoughtful conversations
- school wide common goals

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Based on 12 years of observations in week long school residencies

What to Look For: Focus on the Students

- **How self-directed are the students?** Do they self-monitor, self-direct, and self-evaluate? Do they know how and when to seek help?
- **Do students know and understand the expectations for the task(s)?** Are the tasks relevant, meaningful, and appropriate? Are the expectations high enough?
- **Can they tell you why they are doing what they are doing?** Do they understand and value purpose and audience?
- **Is the focus on high level comprehension and strategies that promote deep thinking?** How much time is spent at the “skills-in-isolation” level? Can they apply learning to new contexts?
- **Are they engaged in learning?** What do you notice about pacing, interest, time management, organization, dedication to the task?
- **Are they assuming increasing responsibility for the task(s)?** Who is doing most of the work? Do they have the necessary tools, strategies, and understanding to do the work?
- **Are there lots of opportunities for meaningful talk and interaction?** Is there partner work and small group work as well as whole class and independent work?
- **Are they taking pride in their work?** Is their content, revision, handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and grammar excellent?

Demonstrations

- Explain *why* you are doing what you are about to undertake.
- Think aloud as you are modeling so students hear your in-the-head processes.
- Only demonstrate as much as the majority of students are capable of doing at this time.
- Check to see if students “got” your demonstration. Have them say back to you what you did or what you expect them to do.
 - “What did you notice?”
 - “What did you see me do?”
 - “What can you try/do?”
- One demonstration is rarely enough.
- Include scaffolded conversations between you and one or two students before expecting students to write.
- Have students talk to each other before attempting the task.
- Be available to give help as students attempt what you have demonstrated.

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Shared Writing → Shared Reading → Independent Reading

- Welcome letter to new student
- Classroom procedures
- School alphabet book
- Class journal
- Letter (request) or invitation (to celebrate learning) to principal
- Fiction story
- “How to” Books
- Nonfiction content study-summary, picture book
- Appreciation letters
- Playground rules
- Lunchroom Etiquette
- Guide for substitute teachers
- Advice to parents of new babies
- Recipes
- Student survival handbook
- Class newspaper for parents
- New student handbook
- Reading pamphlet (why you need to read)--for younger students
- Memories of elementary school
- Book about teachers at our school
- Book reviews

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Poetry Writing at a Glance

1. Share kids' poems, and notice what student poets have done. (10-15 min,)
2. Write a poem or two in front of your students. (5-10 minutes).
3. Write a poem together. (5-10 minutes).
4. With the class listening in, orally brainstorm with several students about the poem they are about to write. (5-10 minutes)
5. Students independently write poems. (20-25 minutes)
6. Celebrate students' efforts in a whole class share. (10-15 min.)

Note: Aim for a 2-3 week focus on poetry writing. Based on your time constraints, the continuous cycle above can easily be spaced over multiple days.

Benefits of Poetry Writing

- builds immediate success for all students
- focuses on the joy of writing
- sets a positive tone for the classroom
- encourages experimentation with language and form
- de-emphasizes (initially) punctuation and "skills"
- teaches a powerful way to express personal voice
- fosters delight in rhythm, repetition, and word play
- teaches importance of titles, ending lines, word choice
- taps into students' interests and knowledge
- connects writing with reading
- frees kids up to write

Note: Once students know how to write free verse, they often choose to write poems when they are given free choice of topic and genre.

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What Feedback Can We Give This Writer?

- What did the writer do well?
- What would you say to this writer?
- What would you teach the writer at this time?
- What next step(s) would you suggest for this writer?
- If this writing is similar to other writing in the class, what might be the focus of your next demonstration writing or minilesson?

How do you get kids to write with genuine voice?

- Genuine topic and audience
- Time and opportunity to write
- Enjoyment
- “You have to know what you’ve just written.” REREAD!
- Demonstrate self as a writer.
- Write more short pieces.

Comments of K-6 teachers after a workshop on voice

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Teaching Students How to Write Book Reviews:

Moving to a Whole-Part-Whole Focus

Comparing expectations and skills and strategies taught through book reviews *before* moving from an isolated focus on the parts to *after* a change in beliefs and practices to a whole-part-whole focus.

Before—taught in isolation as separate parts:

- Rough draft
- Leads
- Editing
- Revision (isolated from rough draft)
- Main idea
- Publishing
- Title and author
- Conferencing

After—taught in demonstration lessons through teacher modeling, shared writing, conferencing, and read aloud. Whole/part/whole

- Immersion in the genre of book reviews
- Authentic audience
- Underlining title and author
- Main idea
- Leads, grabbing the reader
- Thinking aloud
- Constantly revising during first draft: rereading for meaning, getting stuck, adding, deleting, lassoing words to move them
- Word choice: "Every word counts."
- Recommendation for reader
- Conventions and editing (including spelling.) Be relentless.
- High expectations: kids writing the "must haves" list (rubric)
- Roving conferences
- Sustained 20-30 minutes of writing, might write several book reviews
- Sharing and celebration
- Creating a book review form
- Creating a system to organize our book reviews
- Publishing

by **Nikole Akerson**, teacher, grade 3, Westminster, CO, with Regie Routman

Fifth Grade Writing Lesson (Informational Essay)

Topics Taught During Modeled Shared Writing and Conferencing

- Follow-up ideas to use during free-choice writing
- Carats for insertions
- Ellipses (. . .)
- Rereading
- Reading your writing aloud
- Word choice
- Paragraphing
- Organization (introduction, facts/information, closing)
- Using bullets to organize
- Audience
- Moving writing around by lassoing and arrows
- Insertions
- Deletions
- Appropriate titles
- Repetitive writing
- Beginnings
- Endings
- Transitions
- Humor
- Making it sound like YOU wrote it
- Listening to other students' writing for ideas
- Reasons for conferencing