

Resources for Caregivers: Nurturing Writers

Just as we are all readers, we are all writers. Writing allows us to express ourselves, to connect and share ideas across space and time, and to engage in professional, social, and civic activities. How can we help create and nurture confident writers who can clearly articulate their thoughts and ideas?

Foster a culture of writing

Just as you leave reading materials everywhere, leave writing supplies around the house, too. Make it easy for kids to create. When kids write, share and/or display their writing prominently. Equally important is for us to **feed kids' brains**: go for walks, flip over rocks to see what's underneath, read books, see movies, explore museums, bake a cake, try new foods, play new sports. Give them experiences to write about!

Read, read, read

We all know that when we practice doing something, we generally get better at it. The way to get better at writing is to write more. But it's also, more significantly, to READ more.ⁱ How can we write a beautiful sentence if we've never read one? How can we incorporate juicy words into our writing if we've never seen or heard them? All reading is fodder for stronger writing. Teachers often use mentor texts to show students new structures or strategies they may want to try in their own writing, and you can do this at home, too. When reading together, notice and discuss the choices authors make. "Wow, that beginning really pulled me in!" "The author chose super-fascinating facts!" "Don't you love that juicy word?"

Find an authentic audience

There's nothing like writing with a specific purpose and audience in mind to motivate young writers. Help show them that their writing has a purpose, and their thoughts and voices are important and valued!

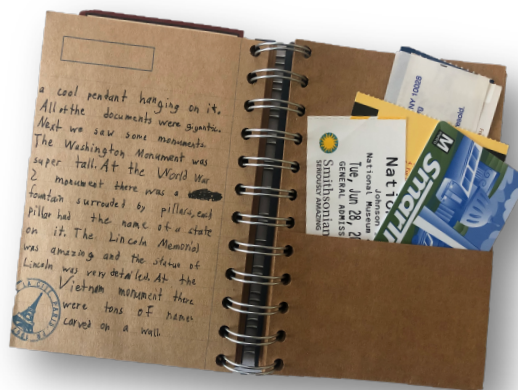
- Correspond with a pen pal.
- Write to an author or illustrator. Many will write back!
- Create written thank-you notes for gifts and other gestures.
- Write postcards from places near and far. Encourage friends and relatives to write to you, too! Postcards are fun, and their small size makes them easier to tackle.
- Write cards for birthdays or other holidays.
- Have your child write a persuasive letter to convince you to try a new food, go to the park, get a fish, etc.
- Start a neighborhood newspaper.
- Post kids' book or movie reviews on Bookopolis.com.
- Make a poster or brochure for a lemonade stand or other business, or for a cause your child cares about.

Make kids the author

When we write, we create something that wasn't in the world before. How empowering is that?! If your child makes books, keeps journals, or crafts comics, save them and share them with others (if your child agrees). These creations are time capsules of your child's creativity and the things that were important to them. Most kids love looking back on them when they're older.

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- It's a-OK for younger kids to illustrate their story but dictate the words to an adult. Drawing is an important stage in early writing.
- Try writing nonfiction, a "how to" book, or a fractured fairy tale. A project with an existing structure is often less intimidating.
- Write down a family story or use it as a springboard for a fictional story.
- Try a fun format: comics, accordion books, star books, etc.
- Write a story together. Let your child take the lead and offer suggestions as necessary. "What problem will your story solve?" "What facts do you think are most important and interesting?" Writing with friends can also be very motivating.
- Writing is rewriting; set up this expectation. Demystify the writing process by laying out the steps: ideas, rehearse/plan/organize, draft, revise, edit, publish. Books appear to have sprung fully formed, but that's never the case, of course. Showing draft after draft helps kids see that even "good" writers start a new story as "bad" writers. Author Melissa Stewart has several wonderful timelines and videos about the revision process and her oodles of drafts on her web site, melissa-stewart.com.
- Staple or tie pages together, use a sleeved binder, or have your book printed at a site like Storyjumper.com or Shutterfly.
- Shoot a trailer, commercial, or mini movie, all of which need... scripts!
- Keep a journal, or try fill-in journals. A special blank book and/or pen help show kids their writing is important.
- Have your child add to a travel journal when your family goes places. This results in a terrific keepsake later in life!



Make it fun

It's human nature to gravitate toward things that we find enjoyable or that make us laugh. Get the endorphins flowing to help create a positive association that writing = fun.

- Tell a progressive story around a campfire or fire pit—real or fabricated!
- Try Story Cubes or other storytelling games. Headbandz gets kids describing. Mad Libs gets the juicy words flowing and are silly, fun, and portable.
- Splash Magnetic Poetry across your fridge for impromptu composing.
- Host a poetry slam for family or friends!

^{i i} Trelease, Jim. *The Read-Aloud Handbook*, 7th edition. New York: Penguin Books, 2013