

REACHING **the** **Reluctant Writer**

**FAST, FUN INFORMATIONAL
WRITING IDEAS**

Mike Artell



Maupin House

Reaching the Reluctant Writer

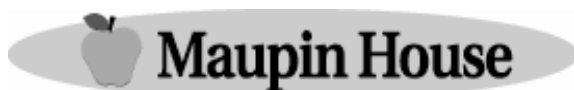
Fast, Fun Informational Writing Ideas

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*Publishing Professional Resources
That Improve Classroom Performance*

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About the Author



Prepare: Advise the school’s media specialist that your students will be studying “About the Author” copy on the dust jackets of several books, preferably autobiographies. Ask the media specialist to choose some developmentally appropriate books that include interesting information about the author on the dust jackets.



Discuss: After students have studied the “About the Author” text, ask them to identify the different types of information included, such as the authors’ birthplace, profession, awards they have received, etc. Also, point out that “About the Author” text is generally written in the third person, even if the book is an autobiography. Then, tell students to count the number of sentences that appear in the dust jacket information, and explain that “About the Author” text merely highlights and summarizes interesting author facts and details.

Next, compare photos of authors from several book jackets and discuss the similarities and differences between them. Do the photos differ if the author is known as a serious or silly person? In addition, ask students to describe the different fonts used in the “About the Author” texts. Do “serious” autobiographies feature non-serif fonts, or do “silly” books include fonts that are looser or more embellished?

Writing skill: Use supporting details

As students write about the person they know best (themselves), they’ll reveal hobbies, interests, backgrounds, and other interesting character traits that help readers “flesh out” or visualize the writer. The ability to develop characters through the use of supporting details is important when writing biographies or fiction. Once students learn to write about their own character traits, they can apply that skill to writing about other people or characters.

About the Author



WRITE

Write: Students will compose “About the Author” text that would appear on the dust jacket of their autobiographies. Dust jacket information should be one paragraph in length and written in the third person. Encourage students to include supporting details about themselves that are specific and descriptive. For instance, the statement, “John likes to play guitar. John has one sister and a dog,” could be embellished with descriptive adjectives to read, “John’s favorite hobby is playing his Fender™ electric guitar. He has an older sister who is always telling him what to do and a seven-year-old black lab named Wrecks.”



DRAW

Draw: Students will draw self-portraits to include with their dust jacket information. Resist the temptation to let students use photos of themselves since hand-drawn portraits more accurately reveal a student’s self-perception. Students can create simple black-and-white line drawings or full-color portraits.

ASSESSMENT

- ✓ Did the student participate in the class discussion?
- ✓ Did the student write “About the Author” text in the third person?
- ✓ Did the student’s “About the Author” text provide some interesting or amusing information about the student rather than just “dry” facts?
- ✓ Did the student use supporting details to flesh out the autobiographical information?
- ✓ Did the student make a good faith effort to draw a self-portrait?

Advice Column



PREPARE

Prepare: Cut out advice columns, such as “Dear Abby,” from your local newspaper or from magazines for young people. If possible, try to collect advice columns that are presented in a letter format. Then, bring the samples you gathered to class and pass them around to your students.



DISCUSS

Discuss: Read one or two of the advice columns aloud to your students and discuss the different emotions expressed by writers, like grief, anxiety, fear, angst, etc. Encourage students to share who they go to when they need advice and why they find that person helpful. Then, point out that advice columnists typically have relevant professional credentials or are popularly recognized for their commonsense guidance.

Next, note that most writers solicit advice in the form of a letter, and challenge students to name the different parts of a letter, such as the greeting, body, and closing. Also, mention that some advice columns discourage writers from submitting their names, and indicate any clever examples of how writers veil their identities (e.g., “Sincerely, Confused in Baltimore”). Finally, explain that advice columns in magazines and newspapers must fit within a specific, fixed space, which means writers seeking advice must present their problems in as few words as possible.

Writing skill: Letter-writing

This exercise allows students to practice their letter-writing skills, as students are challenged to compose letters with a greeting, a body, and a closing. In addition, students will gain a better understanding of voice as they adopt the first person point of view to express the woes of a famous folk/fairy tale character.

Advice Column



WRITE

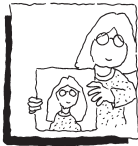
Write: Students will pose as folk/fairy tale characters, such as Little Red Riding Hood or Goldilocks, and write a letter to Mother Goose asking for advice on how to solve a problem. Students' letters must include a greeting, body, and closing and establish the reasons for their characters' distress. Also, encourage students to be creative and "think funny" when assuming different voices and brainstorming clever monikers to "conceal" their character's identity. Here's an example:

Dear Mother Goose,

My two stepsisters make me do all the work. My stepmother hates me and says I can't go to the ball. What can I do?

Sincerely,

Lonely in the Castle



DRAW

Draw: Students can embellish their letters with borders, fonts, and spot art that reflect their character's persona or situation. For instance, Cinderella's letter could be covered in soot smudges or Goldilocks's letter might be decorated with porridge stains and strands of yellow hair.

ASSESSMENT

- ✓ Did the student participate in the class discussion?
- ✓ Did the student clearly state a problem for which the character needs help?
- ✓ Has the student used humor in any way in the letter?
- ✓ Has the student identified the character to Mother Goose in an interesting or unusually descriptive way?
- ✓ Did the student embellish the letter with borders, fonts, or spot art representative of the chosen folk/fairy tale character?