

“Wow!” the teacher says to Mike. “Does anyone have a comment or a question for Mike?”

“I like when you said your blister was big as a Skittles,” one boy says, licking his lips. “I love to eat them!”

“You eat blisters?” one girl asks him. The kids giggle. Michael smiles.

“It must’ve been scary when the fire started,” one girl says.

“Kind’ve,” Michael admits. “After that my dad made a rule that one of the grown-ups had to watch the fire.”

As the students respond to Michael, the teacher is listening carefully to see how able they are to confirm what he has done. These kids are doing pretty well.

“Did Will put out both fires with the water?” one boy wants to know.

“No, just the fire in the dry leaves,” Michael replies.

“How did he know how to put out the fire?” one girl asks.

“He’s a fireman,” Michael explains.

“But he’s in high school, isn’t he?” the girl persists.

“Well, I think he’s like a volunteer fireman,” Mike tells her.

The girl nods. Her confusion is gone. But this teacher knows that oral clarity is different from clear writing. She decides to intervene and direct the student to look at that part of his draft.

“Michael, you answered those two questions and that cleared up our confusion,” the teacher says. “But I want you to go back and take a close look at that part. See if you have written it clearly enough, okay?”

Michael bends forward, rereading his writing.

In this scene we see that share time is for more than just celebrating student writing—it can be a great teaching time, too. Your role in this share session directs students to act in ways that will help them when they are conferring one-on-one with peers. Over time,

you'll want to talk explicitly about what makes for good response. The share session gives you a fine opportunity to model it.

The above example describes a whole-class share. Many teachers who work with older students opt for smaller response groups instead. When students begin drafting longer pieces it makes sense to give them steady response partners who can listen more regularly as a piece evolves over time. Of course, students need coaching in this response setting, too. If you begin with whole-group response, you'll find that students can often transfer the skills they learn in the larger setting to this smaller one.

The response group is an example of how you might fine-tune the share. But let's not get ahead of ourselves. For now, it's enough to remember this: kids need regular, predictable time to write. This is as essential as water and light to a plant. They need this time to establish purposes for their writing, and time to achieve those purposes. The more actively engaged students are, the more time you have to coach and instruct them as they grow as writers.

## Space

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Space affects us. It invites us to act. Consider how much time we spend creating comfortable spaces where we can do the work we love. Maybe you have a special place in which you like to write—the local corner deli, or the quiet of your office as you curl into an overstuffed chair. We think carefully about the space we need to

work, the tools we want at hand, our proximity to or distance from others. We need to bring that same considerate eye to the classroom as we design the space to accommodate the needs of twenty-five or so idiosyncratic writers.

There are certain physical requirements for a writing workshop. We include here the elements that we consider important, and thoughts on each to guide your decision-making process.

## **A Meeting Place**

You will need a gathering space large enough for your entire class to meet. You'll gather here for minilessons and whole-class response sessions. This might be the spot where you read aloud. It may be a large corner that is set up as a quiet place for students to stretch out on the floor to work. There will be times when you will want to pull students away from their desks to focus on group minilessons or individual students as they share their writing.

## **A Place for Materials and Tools**

Writers, like all craftspeople, need access to their tools. A writer's tools may include:

- Paper, pencils, notebooks, and computers for drafting
- Folders for keeping their work organized
- Scissors, tape, stapler for revising
- Dictionaries, thesauri, word lists, checklists, colored pens for editing
- Trade books for inspiration and technique

Where will these tools be stored? Some teachers establish a Writing Center, where students can go to retrieve necessary sup-

plies. This sounds fancy, though it doesn't have to be more than a small table in the corner of the room, or a cart that can be wheeled to the center of the room during workshop. There will be a steady stream of students coming from and going to this center, so think carefully about where you situate it.

Other teachers bring the materials to their students by placing caddies with most-frequently-used items at the center of student tables. You will find what works for you.

## Carefully Arranged Desks or Tables

There are a number of factors to consider here. First: comfort. We believe people need to be comfortable to do their best work. This means that young writers should have access to spaces in the room other than their own desks. Some students like to write on a clipboard as they stretch out on the floor. Others prefer working at a desk that is pushed off into a quiet corner. Ask your students to think with you about how the space should be used during writing time.

Consider your one-to-one conferences. Where will you meet to discuss an individual's writing? While some teachers assign a spot where students come to them, we strongly encourage teachers to go to the students for conferences (stay tuned for Chapter 5). A lot of good teaching takes place in teacher-student conferences. While conferences are designed for a particular student, you will find that nearby students will eavesdrop and also benefit. Cluster desks into groups of four or six so your teaching can spill outside the parameters of a single conference. Clusters of desks also makes it easier for students to ask for and receive help from each other.

Try to envision this space. Place your students in the classroom and watch how they move. Don't forget to put yourself there too. Can you picture yourself conferring with individual writers? Watch

as Scott moves from his desk to the Writing Center to get a sheet of paper. Can he move efficiently without having to squeeze through a crowd of desks? Where are the quiet spaces in the room? Where are the places that talk can occur productively? Does the room have enough texture that individual students can find the sort of spaces they need to feel comfortable?

Look on the walls. In one third-grade classroom students can look to the wall of their classroom library to find a reminder of how to choose a topic.

### ***Where Do Writers Get Ideas?***

Rereading their notebooks  
Browsing through literature  
Talking with a friend  
Revisiting old drafts

The best teachers leave traces of their teaching throughout the classroom. This encourages students to continue to practice particular habits of thought. Physical reminders also free the teacher from being the only source of information. Ann Marie Corgill hung this chart in her third-grade classroom, reminding children of the particular ways they can get help from their peers.

### ***How Can I Help?***

Rebecca: trimming the shrubs/sticking to the point  
Chelsea: creating believable characters  
David Sh: making comparisons/seeing likeness in unlike things  
Alice: writing poetry  
Meghan: effective leads  
Linley: effective endings  
John Br: editing for spelling  
Robert: giving helpful suggestions/comments

Angela: understanding and explaining the writing rubric

Bradley & Kelly: illustrating

Bobby, John Br. Hurly, Kelly: writing non-fiction with voice

Lydia: using watercolors

Look at the walls again. Is there evidence (student writing, author's quotes, etc.) of the important work that is taking place? When your colleagues come into your room, can they see how you and the students value writing? Can they learn about your students simply by "reading" the room?

The writing workshop is fueled by the unique and boundless energy of your students. Time and space contour the container that will harness that energy.

# Making It Work

*in the Classroom*

- ▶ Look at your weekly schedule. Find three to five time blocks of fifty minutes or more to devote to writing.
- ▶ If your schedule appears full to the brim, ask yourself: What lessons or other activities could the writing workshop replace? Are there times already devoted to writing or language work? If so, what purposes do these serve? Might they be better served with writers' workshop?
- ▶ Let your class know when writers' workshop will be.
- ▶ Ask your students to talk about what they need in order to make the classroom a comfortable place to write.
- ▶ Based on this input draw a map of the classroom and share it with them.
- ▶ In the early weeks of the workshop keep asking the question, "Have we created a comfortable place for writing?" Be willing to make changes along the way as you find what works for you and this particular group of students.