

Writing Workshop

The session has several components and runs all year long except for a couple 2 week breaks to rest heads and wrists.

The Writing Period

A. Mini-Lessons

Each writing period begins with a mini-lesson. The lesson takes many forms but generally is about 10-15 minutes in length. The topic or activity is usually revealed through the student's writing as a general need among the students (eg. Sentence structure, word choice, paragraphing, leads etc.). Often early in the year the lesson may concern the writing process itself or the evaluation criteria to be used.

Often, the best mini-lessons, those which produce the most writing, are oral stories told by myself or other students, which cause the class members to make connections and access their memories. They begin to see themselves as story tellers who have rich and moving experiences to share from their lives.

B. Silent Write/Revising/Proofreading

During this part of the period the students silent write drafts of journals, stories and poems. Silence is essential to maintain the whole class's ability to focus on their task. The only talking would be the whispering between the teacher and an individual needing feedback or assistance. Often I will write as well if everyone is okay in an effort to model the activity.

As various drafts are completed, students will choose to revise a certain piece for submission and evaluation. Usually I assign at least a formally revised story, a journal and a poem each term but the students often want to produce more and have them marked. Those revising and proofreading alone will silently do so while those in revision or proofreading groups will do that task in the hallway.

Revising

The revising process usually takes place in a group led by an adult or skilled student who works with the group members to revise their writing. This collaborative act involves the students in carefully listening to peer's stories followed by each contributing questions, suggestions, ideas and compliments. All students receive a completed revision form where all feedback is recorded so changes can be made to the draft to improve its content, message and tone.

C. Sharing

At the end of each writing period students are given the opportunity to share with their group and with the whole class. The sharing session is very important because it further spreads writing ideas amongst the group and builds confidence through oral presenting. I sometimes kick things off by sharing myself.

Revising

Revising is the changing of a written piece to improve its quality, make it more interesting, moving dramatic and powerful. Students will self revise and group revise. At the end of the group session children are provided with a list of suggestions, questions, ideas and word options from a peer group. This sheet must accompany each submission.

Stories and Personal Writing

Beginning

Check for:

- *a unique, interesting, powerful Lead to "hook the reader" grab attention.
- *setting established, time and place described
- *mood is set (tense, happy, peaceful, scary, mysterious, etc.)
- *main idea, goal or conflict introduced

Middle

Check for:

- *words and language to make your thought and ideas clear
- *varied sentence starts and lengths to match mood
- *characters developed through feeling and thoughts being explained and dialogue
- *logical order of events - flows
- *missing information, or gaps in plot events, ask, "Is something missing?"
- *the problem is clear, sensible and developed in steps towards the solution

End

Check for:

- *sensible
- *all pieces are in place, no loose ends, unanswered questions, unexplained events
- *satisfying

Proofreading

The technical or correct aspects of the writing. This includes spelling, punctuation, grammar syntax, tense etc. Students self proofread, peer proofread and enlist the help of a parent or helpful adult. Their goal is to make their story error free before displaying or publishing a piece. A proofreading sheet must accompany each submission.

The Writing Process- Rennie's Class

Step 1 Prewriting: Planning, webbing, listing, viewing etc.

Step 2 Draft: Write your piece, double spaced, in pen.

Step 3 Self -Revise: Read over your work carefully to make sure it makes sense, says what you meant. Make changes to improve it.

Step 4 Revising Group: In a group with an experienced reviser, read story aloud to group, get feedback and then **Make Suggested Changes**

Step 5 Self Revise 2: A final, careful read to guarantee your written piece is the best it can be.

Step 6 Proofread: On your own and/or with help, fix all the spelling and punctuation (commas, periods, question marks, exclamation marks, Capitals, quotation marks, colons, semicolons, hyphens) errors.
Use Dictionary and Word Wall Sheets. Remember C.O.P.S.

Step 7 Good Copy: Write in pencil, double spaced or word processed. Be Careful, Do Your Best. No spelling errors, periods, Capitals or quotation marks missing.

Step 8 Self Evaluate: Use a writing quick scale to "mark" your story

Step 9 Hand In: In tray on teacher's desk

Step 10 Publish: Your final copy may be a hard copy, picture book, recorded accompaniment etc.

Writing Workshop:

So What?

When you share your piece of writing with an audience, think about this question. Ask yourself, So What? What I mean is, ask yourself; Why am I writing this piece? What do I want my audience to get from it or take away from it? Writers always write for an audience even if it is a journal or diary (writing to an older, future you). All writing is just recording in text what you would say if talking to or telling a story to someone in person. Since we don't talk gibberish but with a reason in mind, you must want to communicate your:

- *Thoughts/Feelings
- *Ideas
- *Opinions
- *Experiences
- *Creations

... with the reader.

So before you think about publishing, good copies and being “done”. Ask yourself the “so what”, why did want to write this piece, for who and what should they learn, discover or think about from reading it?

**“Problems
make good
subjects.”**

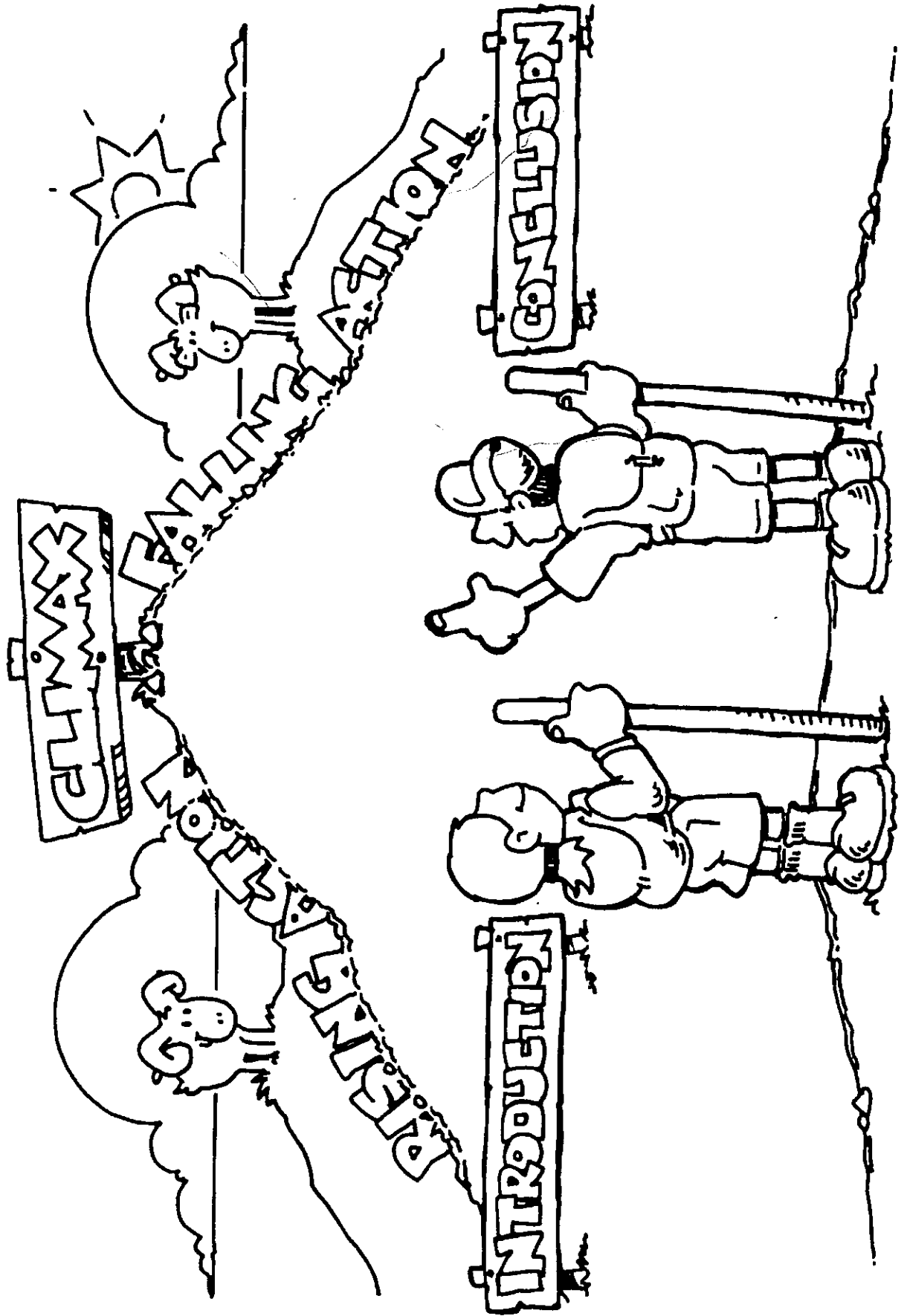
– Donald Murray



QUESTIONS FOR MEMOIRISTS

- What are my earliest memories? How far back can I remember?
- What are the most important things that have happened to me in my life so far?
- What have I seen that I can't forget?
- What's an incident that shows what my family and I are like?
- What's an incident that shows what my friends and I are like?
- What's an incident that shows what my pet(s) and I are like?
- What's something that happened to me at school that I'll always remember?
- What's something that happened to me at home that I'll always remember?
- What's a time when I had a feeling that surprised me?
- What's an incident that changed how I think or feel about something?
- What's an incident that changed my life?
- What's a time or place that I was perfectly happy?
- What's a time or place that I laughed a lot?
- What's a time or place when it felt as if my heart were breaking?
- What's a time with a parent that I'll never forget?
- What's a time with a grandparent that I'll never forget?
- What's a time with a brother or sister that I'll never forget?
- What's a time with a cousin or another relative that I'll never forget?
- Can I remember a time I learned to do something, or did something for the first time?
- What memories emerge when I make a time line of my life so far and note the most important things that happened to me each year?

Story Plot Mountain



THE RULE OF THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS

In a narrative, the reader needs *someone to be with*. If the narrative is a short story, the someone is the main character. If it's a memoir, the someone is you, the writer.

Knowing your—or your main character's—thoughts and feelings is crucial if a reader is going to be able to participate in your story. Personal reflections—thoughts and feelings—help make a story engaging: interesting to read and vicariously experience. And personal reflections in narratives are often the source of the best *so what's?*—the themes and significances of your experiences or those of your main characters.

From now on, try to include thoughts and feelings as you draft. But if you discover that you needed your first draft to get the details of the narrative right, then revise for thoughts and feelings by going back inside the story and discovering and capturing your or your main character's responses to unfolding events.

When you revise for thoughts and feelings, you can insert asterisks at the points where readers might wonder, use a numbered list for creating notes of thoughts and feelings on a separate sheet of paper, or attach spider legs: strips of paper on which you've written thoughts and feelings to be included in the text in the next draft of the story.