

## Using Picture Books to Inspire Young Writers

Through picture books, young children learn new words and expressions, and are introduced to a variety of writing styles, authors and illustrators. They also begin to build a “mental storehouse” of letters and words that they can use in their own future writing. As children hear favorite stories again and again, they develop the ability to retell stories in the correct order. They also develop a beginning understanding of the parts of a story: characters, setting, problem, events and conclusion.

Many books contain repetitive phrases or simple patterns that can serve as a model for children’s own stories. These “new” stories, or innovations, can be illustrated and made into individual or group versions of the original book. Following are descriptions of a few of the many delightful books that can be used to inspire young writers, and suggestions for using each book as a springboard for writing.

*Birthday Presents.* Rylant, C. (1987).

New York: Orchard Books.

Beginning with her birth, parents remember their daughter’s first six birthdays and how each was celebrated.

Illustrations appear as if they are photographs in an album.

Invite children to tell about their birthdays and how each was celebrated. Provide paper cut to 4” x 6” for children to draw pictures. Mount pictures onto blank pages. Ask children to tell you about each picture; write what they say under each picture. Put all pages together with a

construction paper cover and let children draw their self-

portrait on the cover, if desired. **Family Literacy Idea:**

Invite parents to bring in photographs of their child(ren). Provide simple materials such as blank paper and a piece of card stock for the cover and invite parents to make photograph albums. Parents write children’s sentences under each photo. You might use a digital camera to take a family snapshot for the cover or inside cover of the album. (If photographs are not available from the home, copies of ones taken of the child in the program could be used.)

*Dear Peter Rabbit.* ADA, A. (1994).

New York: Atheneum.

In this absolutely delightful book, well-known story characters such as the three little pigs, Goldilocks and Peter Rabbit, write letters to one another. Full-page illustrations accompany each letter. Use this book to talk about the purpose and format of friendly letters. Invite children to help you write a letter to their favorite book character(s). Using large chart paper, record as children dictate. At the writing center, provide plenty of blank paper and envelopes for children to write their own letters to friends (real or imaginary) and family members. Other books to use are *The Jolly Postman* by Ahlberg and *The Post Office Book* by Gibbons. This would be a good time to take a field trip to the post office to mail a letter home to each child.

**Family Literacy Idea:** Compile an address book of names and addresses of relatives and family friends. Let children see you write a letter. Invite children to dictate a portion of the letter and write his or her name. Mail the letter at a mailbox or post office.

*Father’s Rubber Shoes.* Y. Heo. (1995)

New York: Orchard.

Yungsu misses his friends in Korea. His dad tells him a story of when his father gave him a pair of rubber shoes—something he wanted to keep forever. Yungsu’s dad explains that he, too, wants to give his son something to keep forever. Invite children to tell about something they have that they want to keep forever. Children may draw and write, using their own personal script, following the discussion. **Family Literacy Idea:** Families may talk about items they have in their home that were given to them long ago. Photographs of these items could be made, and children could watch as adults record written statements telling about each item pictured. In addition, children will enjoy looking at old family photos and talking about their own family histories.

*Getting There.* Young, C. (1993).

Bothell, WA: Wright Group.

In this book, children are featured in illustrations with various vehicles. The simple repetitive phrase “I can drive a \_\_\_\_\_” appears on each page. Before reading the book, ask children to name as many vehicles as they can. Record on a large chart. Ask them to listen for the vehicles they named in the book you will read. After reading, use the list of vehicles given by the children to develop new pages for the book. Let the children illustrate their pages and compile into a class book. **Family Literacy Idea:** Families can record all of the kinds of vehicles they use to get places. They might also record the kinds of vehicles driven by family members and relatives. This information can be sent to school to be included in a class graph or chart.

*How Do You Know It's Spring?* Fowler, A. (1991).  
New York: Children's Press.

In this title from the "Rookie Read-About Science" series, important characteristics about spring are explored. Simple text and beautiful full color photographs taken of children from many different cultures and ethnic groups make this series an excellent choice for young children. Other titles include: *How Do You Know It's Winter?* *How Do You Know It's Summer?* *How Do You Know It's Fall?* Use these books to discuss the important characteristics of different objects and places. For example, in a unit on "Weather" you might discuss the question: How do you know it's raining? (snowing? windy?) In a unit on transportation, you might discuss the question: How do you know it's a car? (truck? train? airplane?) Record children's suggestions on large pieces of chart paper, one per sheet. Invite children to use a variety of art materials to create illustrations to accompany their sentences about the topic. Arrange into a wall display or compile into a large class book. **Family Literacy Idea:** Families can talk about the characteristics of their family or home and make a book using the steps discussed above.

*I Can Write.* Williams, R. (1994).  
Cypress, CA: Creative Teaching Press.

In this repetitive pattern book from the "Learn to Read" series, are photographs of children using writing in many ways. Before reading the book, ask children to think of all the ways and reasons they see people writing (i.e. Greeting cards, grocery lists, letters, etc.) After reading the book, invite children to select from among a wide variety of writing materials those that they wish to use during independent center time. Following this time, ask children to tell what type of writing they did, and what materials they used (chalk, crayons, paint, markers, etc) or type of writing conducted (cards, lists, home-made books, notes, etc.) **Family Literacy Idea:** Talk about the kinds of writing done by each family member both inside and outside of the home. Make a chart for each family to fill out showing how much people engage in each type of writing. Invite children to bring these back to school to share with each other. A large wall chart or graph could be used to compile the information.