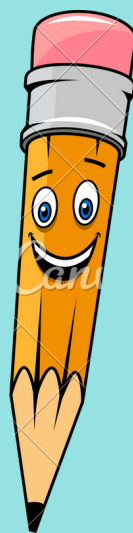


# CREATING ENGAGED WRITERS

A book by Ralph Fletcher  
Published 2017 by Heinemann



Through simple lists and examples, Ralph Fletcher proposes solutions for K-12 teachers to convince even the most reluctant writers to fall in love with writing.



A CENTRAL GOAL OF SCHOOL SHOULD BE TO  
ENGENDER A LOVE OF WRITING AND READING



This Book Will Help Students: Find Their Stride as Writers,  
Experience the Joy of Writing, and Define Themselves as  
Writers

## WRITING SHOULD BE FUN x methods for engaging students

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### WORKSHOPS



Workshops are simple and elegant tools to engage students and help them learn more about writing. A properly structured workshop includes three steps. 1. A minilesson (which should be the shortest step). 2. Writing time. 3. Sharing time. By allowing kids to pick what they write they feel an engagement and attachment to their work. Having an audience creates ownership and increases motivation

- Fun
- Inventive
- Everyone finds an audience
- attachment

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### SINKIES OR SWIMMIES



Creating engaged writers is about managing energy and motivation. Sinkies are techniques or approaches that reduce motivation, while Swimmies are activities that increase energy.

Workshops are a time for freedom, creativity, and expression. A flexible, open to experimentation, and exploratory setting leads to greater engagement. Flexibility is important because it prepares students for a variety of writing tasks later in life.

- Don't: Repeat essays every week
- Do: Make writing activities physical (walk around the building to look for ideas).
- Don't: Stifle kids with a lack of choice
- Do: Provide opportunities for free writing

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### FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

Today's writing classroom is based on faulty teaching assumptions. Be sure to avoid the following. 1. "A culture of compliance is preferable to a culture of engagement". In reality, choice must be fostered, not curtailed. 2. "Writing content trumps the teacher's knowledge about students". Skilled writing teachers must read and reread their students' energy level so they can teach at the point of their learning. 3. "Students learn to write through instruction, not play". Today's writers are kept on a short leash; instruction time should be balanced with goofing-off writing. 4. "Ownership of writing is irrelevant". Ownership is less about writing to fulfill criteria and more about investing in a project that has personal meaning. 5. "Writing instruction should be aimed at the future, not now". Ask yourself what kids need now and teach them that, not what they might need later.

- Allow choice
- Teach to students' needs
- Give time for literary "goofing off".
- Create projects that have personal meaning
- What do kids actually need now?

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### WRITING AS PLAY

Play and pleasure are inextricably linked. Writers should learn that creation is play. Teach students that they can turn ideas over in their head and examine them (like examining a toy), shake an idea out and see what happens (they don't need to know the ending), they can twist conventions or ideas and defy expectations, and they can connect ideas to other ideas just for fun.

- Don't rush the writing
- Be flexible-if an idea doesn't work in one genre, try another
- Teach students to expect to have fun
- Anything and everything can be interesting

## GREENBELT WRITING



Teachers find themselves trapped between a rigid curriculum and students who no longer love writing. Greenbelt writing is informal writing that is raw, unmanicured, and uncurated. In a sense, students should be given time for writing that is free and unguided-and most importantly, ungraded.

1. **Greenbelt writing teaches kids that writing is:**

- **Personal**
- **Passionate**
- **Joyful**
- **Whimsical**
- **Playful**
- **Full of choice and humor**
- **Reflective of the quirkiness of childhood**

## TURNING THE RELUCTANT WRITER



It's common for teachers to have reluctant writers-students who stare at blank pages and take days to compose even short passages. Greenbelt writing is a good way to give reluctant writers an opportunity to explore. Celebrate what the writer does. Providing a known audience is an easy way to help reluctant writers find passion for sharing with others. Finally, give reluctant writers MORE freedom, not less. Freedom allows students to find something they are excited about, and that excitement can lead them to write more.

**Ways to turn reluctant writers:**

- **Free-writing**
- **Journal-writing**
- **Writing in a favorite genre**
- **Collaborative writing**
- **Writing comics**
- **Writing about obsessions or hobbies**



Low-stakes writing is important because it builds muscles that strengthen other kinds of writing. Teachers need to respond differently than they would to traditional essay and argumentative writing assignments.

The writing workshop should be the home of low-stakes and experiemental writing in schools.

Joy Write is a fantastic book for teachers at every level, especially K-12. Fletcher propose using the writing workshop as the best tool to engage students and explains methods of making the workshop setting as productive as possible. His focus is the joy of writing. Writing should be play. It should be exploration. It should be fun. Through his suggestions and tips, teachers can help students shift their perspective and improve their craft.

While Fletcher discusses it to a degree, the one thing the book is lacking is the difficulty teachers might have in implementing some strategies. He mentions how even workshops have become clinical and oppressive due to rules from the state and districts, but offers few solutions to changing that problem from the top down. Even so, any teacher can find something of great value in Joy Write.

## THINGS TO CONSIDER

- Are you currently using writing workshops in your curriculum? If so, are you happy with the way writing is being taught? Consider "Greenbelt Writing" as a way of increasing engagement.
- When you teach writing, are you teaching children the rules or passion first? Consider that, according to Fletcher, students learn better when they find writing exciting
- There is no "one-size-fits-all" strategy to help children breakthrough into writing fluency. Be willing to experiment with various techniques before you find success.
- Informal writing can help students find their "voice".
- Technology-like blogs, social media, and even infographic websites-can make writing fun and less restrictive.
- Know your students. Pay attention to their moods and know when one technique works and one does not.