

# INTERACTIVE WRITING

Interactive writing is a collaborative writing experience for beginning writers in which the teacher guides students in the group-writing of a large-print text. Students participate in the composition and construction of the text by sharing the pen, physically and figuratively, with the teacher. The composition is read and reread by the group to make the reading and writing connection.

*“Interactive writing is a dynamic literacy event in which reading and writing come together.”*

*- Andrea McCarrier*

## **What does interactive writing look like in a classroom?**

A first-grade teacher has just completed a shared reading of the book, *Splishy, Sploshy*, by Joy Cowley. A large piece of white butcher paper is on the easel. The teacher and students talk through the creation of a sentence to summarize the story they just read. Students negotiate for wording and construction of the sentence. They first decide to write, “*Mrs. Wishy-Washy went scrub-a-dub on the Meanies.*” The teacher asks if that sentence tells the main things that happened in the story. More negotiations ensue. One student excitedly raises his hand and says, “Remember, she hung them out to dry!”

Another student says, “We need to add that.” Students continue to revise until they decide on, “*Mrs. Wishy-Washy went scrub-a-dub on the Meanies and hung them out to dry.*” Once the sentence is determined, the teacher quickly makes decisions about which teaching points to take advantage of as they occur—keeping in the back of her mind that more than two or three teaching points will be too many. This teacher decides to focus on capitalization and rhyming words. A student is asked to use a marker to help with the

writing of the sentence on the large paper. The student writes the first word, “Mrs.,” correctly. The teacher praises the student for looking at the word wall to spell the word correctly. Another student uses a pointer to point to the word, and the class reads it together. More students participate in writing the sentence as they are guided and assisted by the teacher and fellow students. Students read the text together as each word is added. A student writes “hug” instead of “hung.” The teacher guides the student to correct the mistake and allows the student to use white correction tape to fix the error. Some students sitting on the floor are getting a little restless, so they are instructed to write the word on the carpet or in the air while the student writes on the paper. Rereading what is written and focusing on teaching points continue. The teacher continues to share the pen with the students until the entire sentence is written. The completely correct composition is displayed in the classroom to become part of the read-the-room center.

***“The strength of the interactive writing procedure demands two levels of expertise. First, teachers need to know how to use the technique at a procedural level. Next, teachers need to refine the technique by making on-the-spot teaching decisions that are based on the immediate needs of the students with whom they are working.”***

*Voices on Word Matters, Fountas, 1999, p.26*



## **What materials, tools, and resources are needed to do Interactive Writing?**

In addition to a space to gather together and space to display written material, these materials and tools should be easily accessible for interactive writing.

- Easel
- Large white or light colored paper (butcher paper, light-brown wrapping paper, plain newsprint, large-size construction paper)
- Markers
- Correction Tape
- Magnetic Letters
- Magna Doodle
- White dry erase board
- Pointers
- Name chart (for reference)
- Word Wall
- Alphabet linking chart
- Word charts
- A collection of books for shared reading

## **When should Interactive Writing be used?**

Interactive writing is a powerful tool for beginning writers. Emergent Early Writers and Emergent Transitional Writers (generally grades K-1) should experience interactive writing frequently. In doing so, children learn concepts of print, spelling, phonics, and strategies for reading and writing. As students become Early Transitional Writers (generally late first-grade and second grade), they become more adept at writing independently. At this time, interactive writing may be used for specific purposes to meet the challenges of more complex writing (i.e., complex punctuation, complex sentence structure, vocabulary). The teacher may also use interactive writing to establish a community of writers (i.e., group thank-you letter).

## **What are the steps for Interactive Writing?**

- a) Provide a base of active learning experiences.
- b) Talk to establish purpose.
- c) Compose the text.
- d) Construct the text.
- e) Reread, revise, and proofread the text.
- f) Revisit the text to support word solving.
- g) Summarize the learning.
- h) Extend the learning.

*Interactive Writing*, McCarrier, 2000, p.73.

## **What are the benefits of Interactive Writing?**

- Children become apprentices, working alongside a more expert writer.
- Everyone in the group sees the process of producing a piece of writing.
- Children who read and write very little independently have a chance to see themselves as readers and writers.
- Students have a sense of control and ownership over the text.
- Students gain knowledge that can be used to create other texts.
- Students think about audiences for their writing.
- Most importantly.... students have fun doing it!

*Interactive Writing*, McCarrier, 2000, pp. 8-9.

Interactive writing lessons may begin to look more like shared writing as the teacher and students collaborate to create longer and more complex text. “As the children become more adept at writing, they will spend less and less of their language block time involved in the activity of interactive writing and more time in elements such as writing workshop.” (*Voices on Word Matters*, Fountas, 1999, p.35)

## **How can I use Interactive Writing?**

Writers need a purpose for writing and an audience. Use the learning experiences of the students to establish a purpose and audience to create written text collaboratively. Some examples are listed below.

- Create a shopping list.
- Compose a group story.
- Create a sign.
- Write a letter.
- Compose a set of directions.
- Respond to a survey question.
- Summarize or extend a story read in guided reading.
- Summarize or extend a story that has been read aloud.
- Label art or a classroom item.
- Record information from an experiment.
- Record information from a class study or research.

## **What are some helpful hints to help make Interactive Writing successful?**

- ✓ Use light-colored, oversize paper.
- ✓ Ensure paper is wide enough to fit an entire sentence.
- ✓ Guide students and take advantage of teaching moments.
- ✓ Keep the pace of the lesson fast. Young students get restless!
- ✓ Keep the entire group engaged.
- ✓ Feel free to increase teacher input if the lesson starts to bog down.
- ✓ Focus on the positive.
- ✓ Ensure the final composition is a correct model. All mistakes should be corrected.
- ✓ Display final compositions to create a student-generated, print-rich environment.
- ✓ Create class books that can be displayed in centers if space on the walls is limited.
- ✓ Make the activity fun and positive for the student!

**Where can a teacher find additional information for implementing Interactive writing?**

Button, K., M. Johnson, & P. Furgerson. Interactive Writing in a Primary Classroom. *The Reading Teacher* 49, 6: 446-454.

Dorn, Linda; French, Cathy; & Jones, Tammy. *Apprenticeship in Literacy: Transitions Across Reading and Writing*. York, Maine: Stenhouse Publishers, 1998.

Fountas, Irene C. *Voices on Word Matters*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1999.

Fountas, Irene C. & Pinnell, Gay Su. *Guided Reading: Good First Teaching for All Children*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1996.

McCarrier, Andrea; Pinnell, Gay Su; & Fountas, Irene C. *Interactive Writing: How Language and Literacy Come Together, K-2*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000.

Video: *Using Interactive Writing to Strengthen Your Student's Phonemic Awareness and Phonics Skills, K-1* produced by the Bureau of Education and Research. (800-735-3503).