

CHAPTER NINE INTEGRATING WRITING

INTRODUCTION

The GirlSMART Literacy Program was created with a focus on teaching reading using the components described in the previous chapters: Read alouds, *Qualities of Strong, Smart and Bold*, Guided Reading, and phonics instruction. Writing is an important component to developing literacy; however, due to time constraints of the program (one hour a day), GirlSMART has not created a stand alone writing curriculum. This does not mean that the teaching writing is ignored, rather writing is integrated into lessons using the components of the literacy program (Read Alouds, Guided Reading and phonics). This approach is an excellent model as it allows students to write about the books they hear (read alouds), the texts they read (Guided Reading) and to practice writing sentences using the words they are learning to spell (phonics). Giving students opportunities to write about the texts deepens their comprehension of these texts which is the ultimate goal of reading. Having students use spelling words they are learning in their writing provides a meaningful connection between the spelling activities and real-world application. Providing girls with opportunities to write reinforces the meanings of the words and allows the teachers to assess each girl's understanding of the word and their ability to use it in a sentence correctly.

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Writing is a necessary component in any literacy program and should never be seen as separate. In order to develop high levels of literacy, students need to be able to read words on the page easily (decoding and fluency), understand what they are reading (vocabulary) and solidify their understanding (teacher modeling, class discussions and writing). If the goal of literacy instruction is to create thoughtful readers who can think critically and comprehend age and grade appropriate texts, students must have many opportunities to internalize the new vocabulary and concepts learned. Students best learn and master concepts when they are actively engaged in the learning process. The three most common ways to ensure that students are actively engaged is to create activities that require output. Students must do something with what they have read. This means that they must talk, write or participate (act out, create a visual representation, etc.) actively.

In a classroom focused on literacy, writing must be included with targeted opportunities for students to practice orally and in writing new vocabulary and spelling words. In the beginning stages of literacy development (pre-school through first grade) a major focus of instructional time spent on writing focuses on phonics and spelling. This does not mean that teachers should not reinforce daily that the purpose of writing is to communicate ideas. **From second grade on, the focus of writing is to communicate**

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and convey ideas although new spelling patterns are taught and previously taught words are reinforced.

FOUR DOMAINS OF LANGUAGE

Language can be divided into four domains: **listening, speaking, reading, and writing.** It is useful to consider these domains when creating lesson plans. **All literacy lessons should include activities that reinforce the four domains of language.** For example, a teacher begins a read aloud by introducing students to key vocabulary. She says the words and the students repeat it. She also asks students to give definitions for words they know or to pair up with another student and create a sentence using the vocabulary words correctly. While reading the story, she pauses to ask questions. She gives opportunities for students to ask questions to clarify their understanding and she asks them to pair up to answer the questions she posed. For a post reading activity, she asks students write about what they read. Before asking students to do the activity, the teacher models it and gives several examples. While she models writing, the teachers calls on her students to read what she has written. Lastly, she assigns students to groups of 3 so that they can read what they wrote. The teacher may then call the girls back together to share their sentences with the class or answer additional questions about the story such as, “If you were in the same situation, would you react the same way Suzy did?” or “Do you like this story or the last story more?” “Why?” Before the discussion begins, the teacher should model two responses to the question. She should write sentence starters on the board such as, “I like the story we read today better (or title of story) than the story we read last week (or title) because _____.”

If you take a minute to categorize the activities into the four domains of language, you will see that students practice each domain of language many times throughout the lesson. **Every lesson should include at least 2 activities from each domain.** Please note the read aloud would be under the domain of listening and not reading since students are not actually reading themselves. In the case of the lesson discussed in the previous paragraph, students’ opportunities to read included: reading the vocabulary and definitions with their teacher and reading sentences that they and their classmates created. Although read alouds fall under the category of listening, they are vital to the literacy development of students; they expose students to new vocabulary, the exemplary expression and fluency of a strong reader, knowledge of the world, and story structure. Furthermore, reading high-quality, well-written books can foster a love of reading, excite the imagination, build background knowledge and foster critical thinking skills.

Each literacy lesson need not have an equal balance among the four domains of language. For example, compared to other components of the GirlSMART Literacy Program, read alouds will most likely have the most minutes in listening with less time

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allocated to reading, writing and speaking. Reader's Theatre will have more minutes allocated to reading than read alouds. Teachers need to be thoughtful about how they allocate time to activities that address each of these domains and the needs of their students. It is important to plan activities that strengthen students' weakest domains. For example, most English learners need more practice speaking than their native English-speaking counterparts. They need dedicated time to practice speaking with native English speakers about the books they have read. Teacher talk, teacher reading, group discussion and teacher modeling of writing activities should always proceed an assigned writing task. Listening to teachers read and class discussion help build students' vocabulary and understanding of the story which will make the writing task more productive and easier to accomplish.

RECOMMENDED WRITING ACTIVITIES

The recommended activities that follow have been selected due to the ease in which they can be integrated into the literacy lesson; they do not require extensive preparation. Additionally, these activities support an approach to writing that is integrated and focuses on communicating meaningful messages. For the 2022 GirlSMART revamp, an additional required writing activity has been added as part of guided reading, in which a sentence (containing words studied in a guided reading story) is dictated to students, and the students write the sentence.

KINDERGARTEN AND FIRST GRADE

Students entering kindergarten usually are at the late Emergent Stage or early Letter Name-Alphabetic stage of spelling, (a spelling stage identified in the *Words Their Way* spelling program) although there may be students in the middle and late Letter Name-Alphabetic Stage as well. There is therefore a heavy focus on penmanship and spelling simple words during kindergarten and early first grade. In addition to creating activities for basic penmanship such as tracing letters and writing letters, teachers should also create opportunities for students to communicate their ideas about a book or topic. Since many students are at the Emergent Stage, "writing" can include drawing pictures that convey a student's ideas. As students begin to write, teachers should focus more on the message rather than on the form or spelling accuracy.

As students enter the Letter Name-Alphabetic Stage (usually middle of kindergarten up until first or second grade), teachers can create activities that allow students to practice their penmanship and convey a message. The activities that follow are recommended for students at the Letter Name-Alphabetic Stage (primarily kindergarten and first grade). Please note that it is essential that the teacher MODEL the activity first. They

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model slowly and “think aloud” as they write in front of students. Below are developmentally appropriate writing activities for kindergarteners and first graders:

- Ask students to copy a sentence related to story that includes sight words.
- Have students draw one picture and write 1 to 2 sentences about it. It is best to assign a drawing that is related to a story that was read. For example, draw a picture of your favorite character or part of the story.
- Have students draw a sequence of 3 to 4 pictures and share their stories orally with other students or share their sentences for each picture to the teacher who writes them below each picture.
- Teach students about capitalization, periods, and the use of finger spaces between words. Reinforce these concepts when you read (especially big books or chants on chart paper).
- While reading a big book, a chant, or a poem (on chart paper) the teacher can count the words on the page and ask students to identify capital words and periods.

Language Experience Approach

The Language Experience Approach is an excellent strategy for students at the Emergent and Alphabetic-Letter Name stages. Students are asked to create a story from their own experiences. Each student dictates the story to the teacher who writes it down. The teacher and student practice reading the story. The Language Experience Approach is an excellent activity for struggling readers and English learners. There are many excellent articles and video clips on the internet about Language Experience Approach (LEA). These resources can guide teachers’ implementation of LEA. Below are the general guidelines:

1. A wide range of possibilities exists for the creation of LEA books. It is important to allow students several choices on broad topics to ensure that they pick a topic they are passionate about and one that they know well enough to talk about. In addition to creating an original story, you may ask students to create recipes, develop a “how to” book, plan for or record an activity, or summarize a previously read story.
2. The teacher should introduce LEA by implementing a “think aloud” and modeling an example of telling a story and then writing it down. She or he may want to do another example with the whole class. This can be done by calling on different students to contribute one or two sentences to a LEA book created by the entire class.

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3. When a teacher works one on one with a student (which is the most common and effective approach to LEA), the teacher asks the student to dictate the story (or other text) and she or he begins recording the text for the student. The teacher should write and then read aloud exactly what the student says. This approach is intended to demonstrate to children the match between what they say and its written form, and to develop other print concepts.

4. Use children's names as much as possible because their own name is one of the first words children learn to recognize. This practice helps to maintain children's connection to the experience and subsequent reading.

5. Vary the type of record that you create. The written product of your experience might be made into a big book, a bulletin board, or an illustrated chart.

SECOND AND THIRD GRADE

Most second graders enter school at the Letter–Name Alphabetic Stage while most third graders enter at the Within–Word Pattern Stage. Second and third grade students have had substantial exposure to reading and writing. By second grade, students are expected to write narratives that move through a logical sequence of events and write for different audiences and purposes using multiple paragraphs. They are expected to have knowledge of story structure (setting, characters, plot) and there is a continued focus on spelling, penmanship, punctuation, and grammar.

Although these students are more independent writers than first and second graders, **teacher modeling before a writing activity is always recommended**. You may choose to use some of the activities below to integrate writing in your classroom for second and third graders:

- Refer to the *Strategies that Work* book to create short writing prompts in response to the read aloud stories.
- Teachers can integrate the *Qualities of Strong, Smart and Bold* by asking students if the character in a read aloud possessed or did not possess some of the SSB qualities. After class discussion, students can write their argument. If necessary, use a paragraph frame.
- **One only chain game:** Ask one child to start a story and the next will read it and add the next portion. For beginners, try one-word increments. Intermediate or advanced players can take turns by writing sentences or groups of sentences.
- **A visual scene:** Present your writers with a unique, detailed or curious photo. Busy scene photos with people work best. After giving the students a chance to

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examine the photo, ask them to write a paragraph that answers the following question: What is the story behind this picture? Encourage students to create a story that describes *who, what, where, when, why, and how* the scene came to be. Background information is not necessary but could be helpful to some students. If you have a large population of English learners it is highly recommended that you brainstorm vocabulary they would need to know ahead of time to be able to write about the prompt and pre-teach them these words.

- **Journal jar club:** Have students suggest or write topics on paper. Put the paper in the jar and randomly draw topics to use for a 10 minute writing activity. Students can write about a personal experience, a story or an informational piece. Include time to have students share and/or read their journals.
- **Graphic organizers:** Use graphic organizers to give students ideas and organize them for writing. Brainstorm ideas related to a topic and then have students organize their ideas in a graphic organizer. You can find countless blank graphic organizers which cover elements of the story on the Internet. Example sites include:

<https://freeology.com/graphicorgs/>

<https://www.eduplace.com/graphicorganizer/>

<https://www.edrawsoft.com/share-graphic-organizer.php>

- **Paragraph frames:** For struggling writers and English learners it may be necessary to create paragraph frames to ensure that the students can complete the assigned writing task. Below is an example of the paragraph frame:

Sample Paragraph Frame

Bats are unusual animals for several reasons. First, _____

_____. Second, _____

_____. Third, _____

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_____ . Finally, _____

_____ .