

# Writing Together

## How to Build, Share, and Sustain Student Writing in Grades 3-5

**noredink**



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# Our Mission

**NoRedInk's mission is to unlock every writer's potential.**



# Today



Introduction



Reflection on Practice



Elements of Strong Writing Communities



Teacher Spotlight



Strategies for Building and Sustaining  
Strong Writing Communities



Feedback



# Reflection on Practice

- In your classroom, do students identify as "kids who are doing a writing assignment" or as "**writers**"?
- How would a visitor to your classroom during a writing lesson or writing block describe the room?
- When and how often do my students write alongside other students?



# **A Peek into Jimmy's Classroom**



Perspectives on Practice

## Help Me Out! Fostering Cohesion and Connection through Play(ful) Writing

Jimmy McLean

Fostering play(ful) writing in upper elementary classrooms can reestablish the cohesion and connection that are often missing across a school day for students.

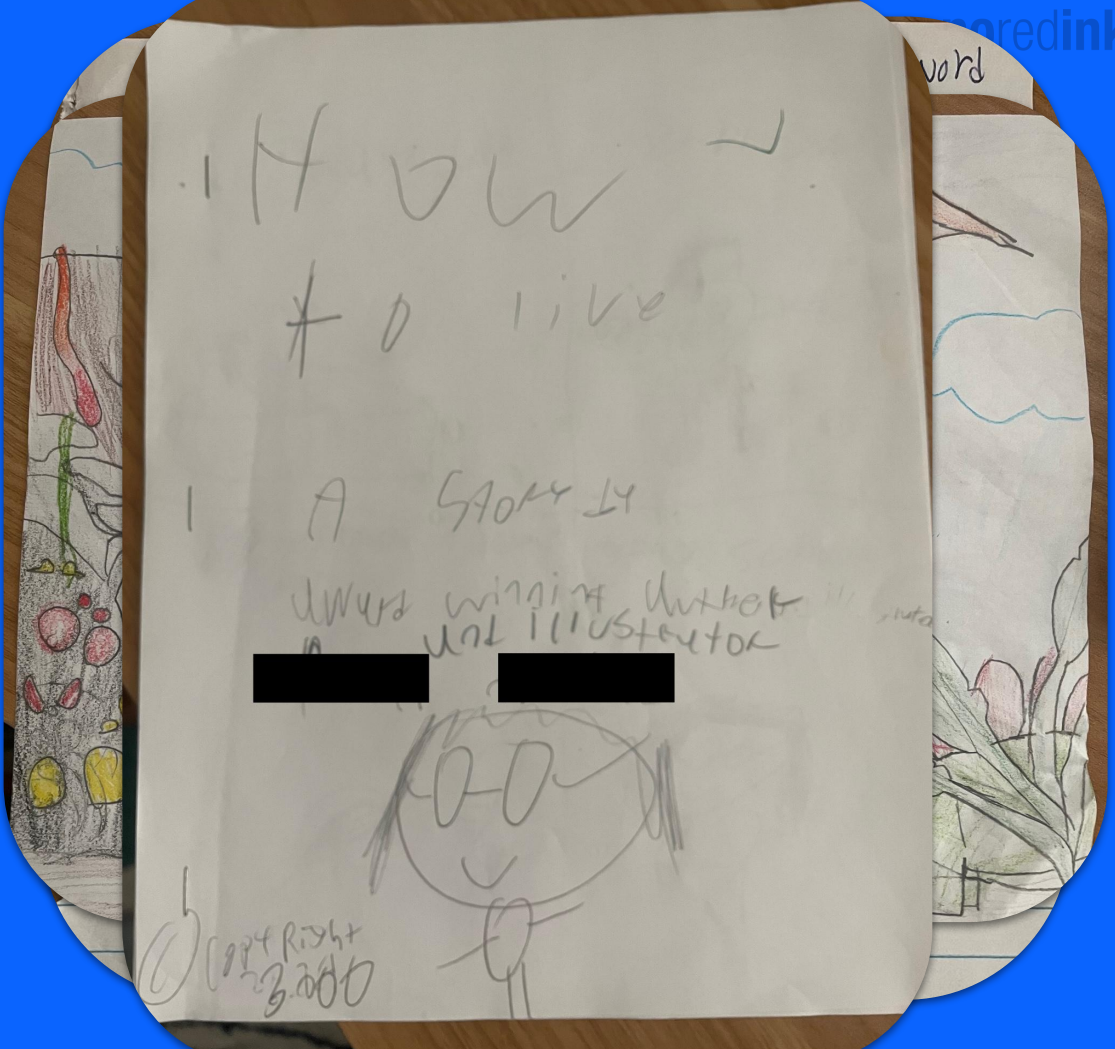
In an ongoing quest to raise test scores, the energy of literacy teachers in the upper elementary grades has become directed more toward students' "mastery" of discrete literacy skills than toward developing holistic readers, writers, and thinkers. Ellis and Bond (2016) rightly observe that progressive thinkers in education "argue that by reducing ideas to component parts, certain intangibles are lost in the process" (p. 122).

As an upper elementary literacy teacher with experience in both departmentalized and self-contained settings, I agree, and I contend that two major intangible elements are lost when learning is segmented into detached skills and learners are isolated or divided into multiple classes or groups: cohesion and connection. By cohesion, I mean the sense that everything in a school day fits together and makes sense to the child. By connection, I mean the sense that children belong together and share a commitment to the community. When elementary-aged children are tossed about in a sea of subjects, programs, interventions, and mastery checks, they lose the cohesion that sustained, transdisciplinary inquiry and meaningful relationships bring about. When they are grouped and regrouped, pulled out and pushed in, students can lose the sense that they belong to any one community within the school.

For years, teachers and scholars have demonstrated that play(ful) writing is a powerful way that children build communities and

negotiate relationships in their schools and classrooms. Anderson (2002) analyzes how young writers mediate classroom relationships through curricular writing activities. Dyson (2013), Wohlwend (2009), and Yoon (2013, 2014) each highlight how fluidly dramatic play and social relationships become part of the writing curriculum as students respond to their teachers' invitations to write. A classic example is Dyson's retelling of "The Pine Cone Wars," where children draw on the events of a shared recess game in their formal classroom writing activities. As Yoon advises, children, by nature, will write and create beyond the reductive requests of a mandated curriculum (2013, 2014). Other scholars have built on these studies to argue that bridging play and writing can contribute to students' interest and confidence in curricular writing tasks (Brownell, 2021; Sanchez, 2024).

It is hard to imagine such a relationship between play and writing in the contemporary upper elementary literacy curriculum, though. Mandated literacy programs and formulaic writing assignments increasingly make up the formal, academic literacy experiences of elementary students, and creative or personal writing is swept to the side. The message is that fanciful, imaginative, or silly writing is unwelcome in the writing classroom. Rather than composing brilliant worlds and collaborative fiction during the writing block, students must save their creative energies for recess or, worse, beyond the school



## Kindergarten - 2nd Grade



imaginative



playful



collaborative



## 3rd - 5th Grade



structured

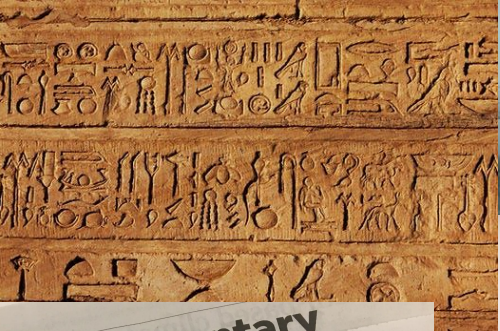


skill-focused



assessment-driven

# Writing is a social activity.



# Writing communities support...

- motivation
- identity development
- collaboration
- risk-taking



# Elements of Strong Writing Communities

## Strong writing communities...

- Foster belonging and trust among writers
- Feature predictable routines and structure
- Honor each writer's' voice
- Support both independence and collaboration



# Teacher Spotlight



**Aziza Basha**

- 5th grade teacher at Cannaday Elementary in Mesquite, TX
- Pursuing Master's in Literacy Leadership



**Rachelle Higgins**

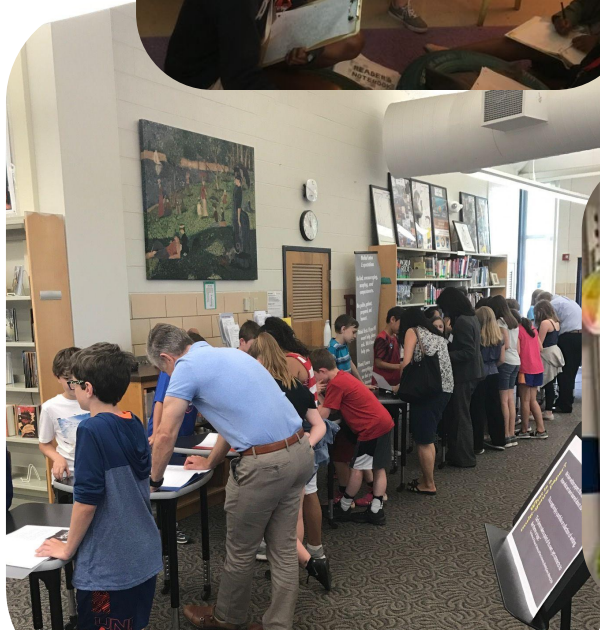
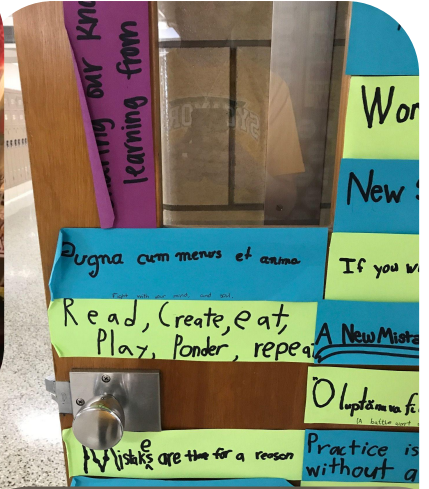
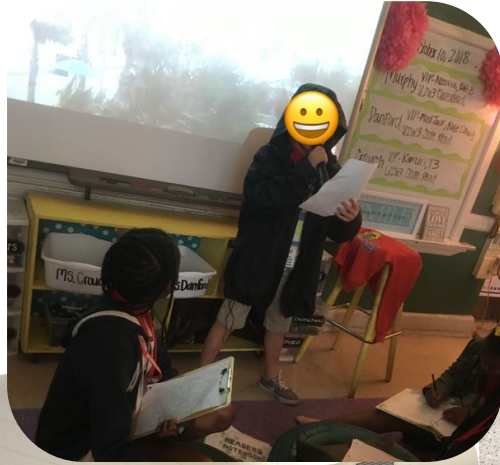
- 4th grade teacher at Lakeside Elementary in Coppell, TX
- Master's in Elementary Education from Old Dominion University



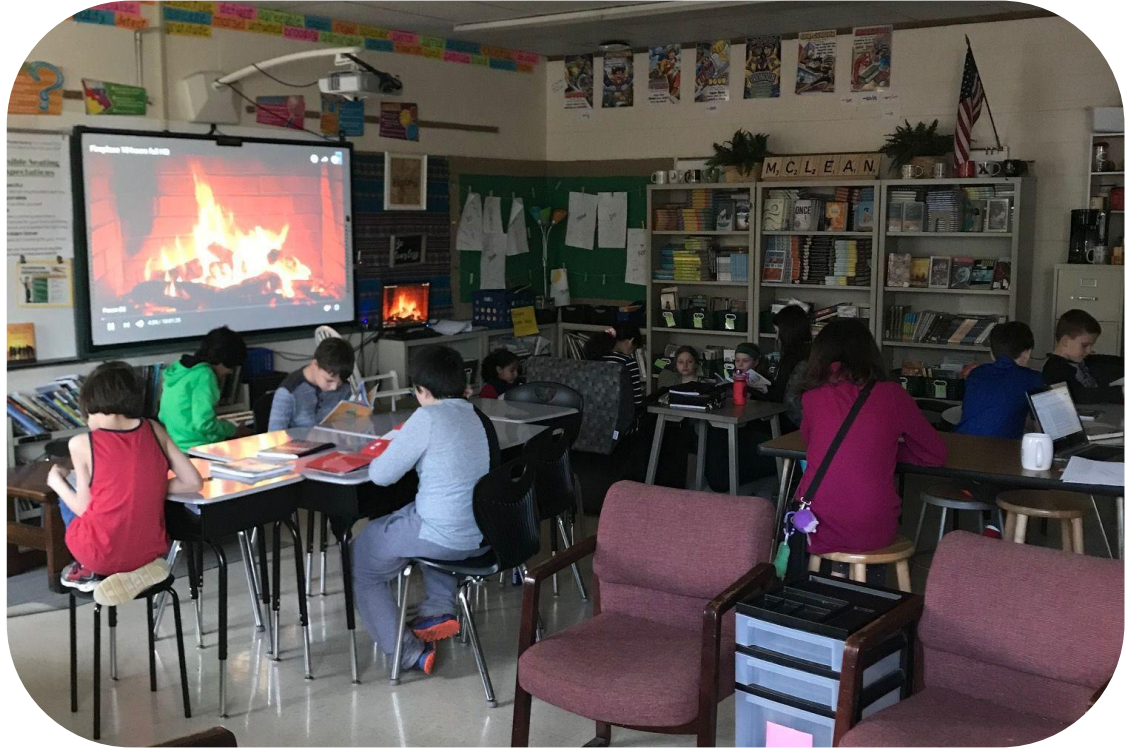
# Teacher Spotlight

# **Strategies for Building and Sustaining Communities of Young Writers**

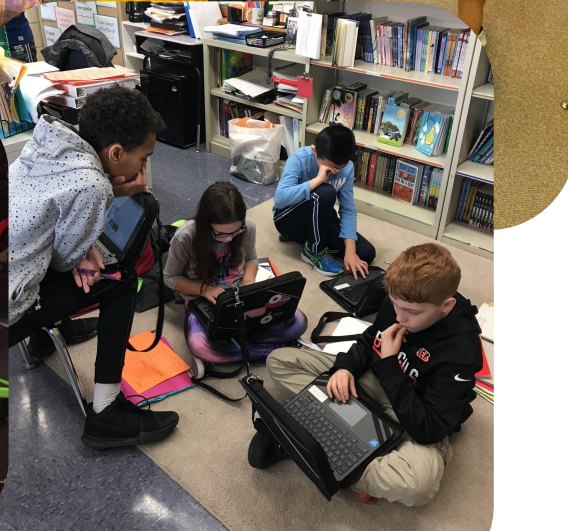
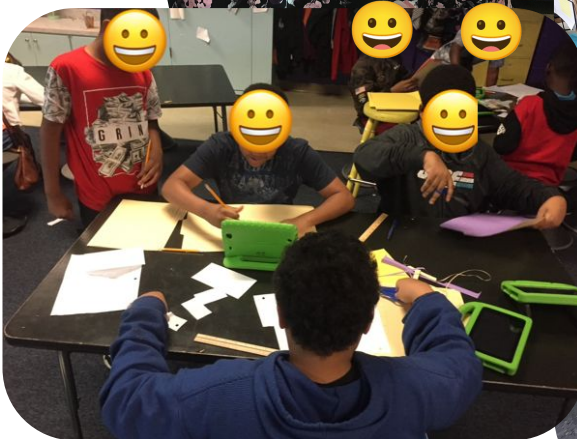
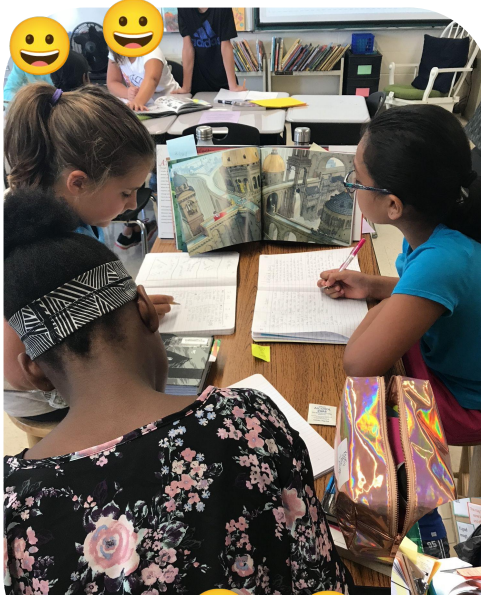
# 1. Make Writing Public



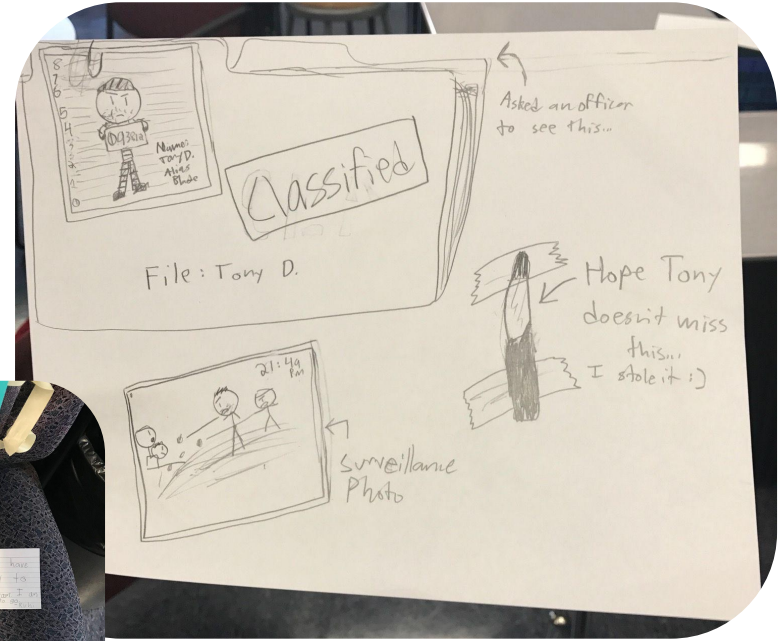
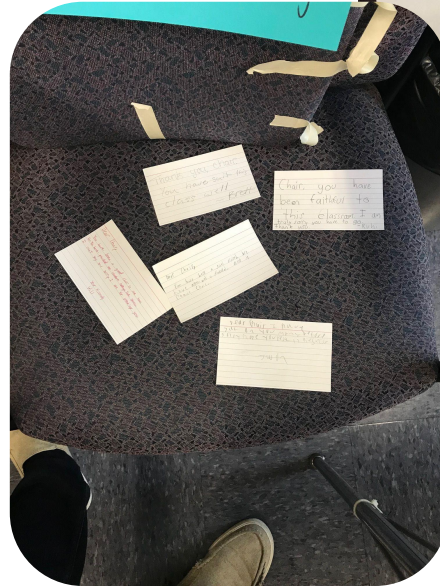
## 2. Protect Time for Open Writing



# 3. Encourage Collaborative Writing



# 4. Value Playful and Non-academic Writing



# Fluency & Fun Quick Writes

Choose from a variety of **categories** to engage students!

Assignment Library > Daily Writing

Search all content

Short response prompts for fluency and fun

Create Your Own

Featured

Most Popular

Picture Prompts

Academic and Personal Reflection

Science and Social Studies

Artificial Intelligence and Writing

Quotes for Reflection

Fluency and Fun

Fingers and Exit Tickets

Building

Analysis by Chapter

Filter by grade level

**Most Popular**  
🕒 10–15 minutes each

🌐 **One World, One Backpack**  
Imagine you're leaving on a trip around the world tomorrow. You can only bring one backpack. What will you pack, and why?

🎨 **This Is Me**  
Describe your face. Challenge yourself to write as many details as you can.

🔴 **Big Red Button**  
Write a story that starts like this: "I always wanted to push that big red button. Yesterday, I finally did."

🎬 **Fun and Famous**  
Which job would be more fun? Why?

- movie star
- YouTube star

🐜 **Import-ant Questions**  
Imagine you could shrink to the size of an ant. Where would you go, and what would you do?

## Writing Together

Build, Share, and Sustain Student Writing in Grades 3-5

### Strategies for Building and Sustaining Writing Communities

**Make Writing Public** – Sharing drafts, peer feedback, and teacher modeling builds authentic audiences that boost motivation and writing quality.

**Protect Time for Open Writing** – Dedicated time for self-directed writing builds fluency, stamina, and independence.

**Encourage Collaborative Writing** – Writing with others strengthens ideas, feedback, and overall thinking.

**Value Playful and Non-Academic Writing** – Playful writing builds fluency, voice, and ideas that support academic writing.

### NoRedInk Fluency & Fun Quick Writes

Tools like NoRedInk's high-interest **Fluency & Fun prompts** invite students into low-stakes writing that focuses on idea generation and expression. They also serve as entry points for discussion, collaboration, and community-building.

**Ready to get your students writing?** Assign one of the Fluency and Fun Quick Writes below to your students!

#### Menu Makeover

Imagine that your school wants some fresh lunch ideas. Convince the cafeteria to serve one of your favorite foods.



#### Time to Hit Pause

Do you agree with the idea below? Why?  
*Kids should only watch one hour of TV a day.*



#### Toy Store Sleepover

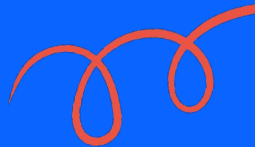
Imagine you're having a sleepover with friends at a toy store. Write a short story about your night.



Looking for more prompts? Check out NoRedInk's full [Fluency and Fun prompt library](#).



**Kids need a**  
**voic**



# Feedback



bitly