



Growing Writers Into Readers

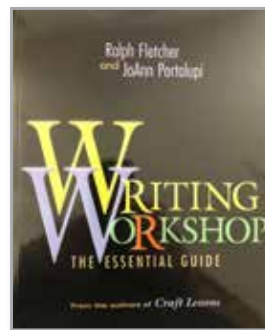
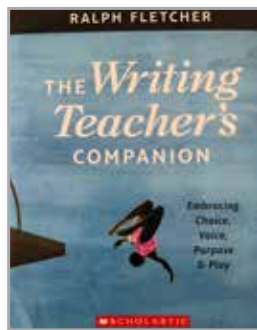
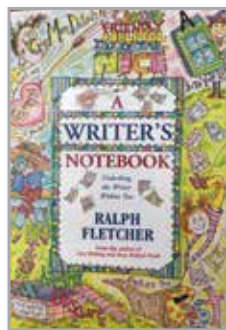
by RALPH FLETCHER

Reading needs writing. Many young children enter the world of reading through the door of writing.



LITERACY CHAMPION: RALPH FLETCHER

Ralph Fletcher is a mentor to writing teachers and young writers everywhere. He frequently works with young writers in schools, and speaks at education conferences all over the world, helping teachers find wiser ways of teaching writing. Ralph is the author of many bestselling teacher professional books including *The Writing Teacher's Companion: Cultivating Voice, Choice, Purpose and Play* (Scholastic); *Joy Write: Embracing High-Impact, Low-Stakes Writing*; and *Focus Lessons: How Photography Enhances the Teaching of Writing* (Heinemann). Students know Ralph as the award-winning author of *Fig Pudding*, *Flying Solo*, *Twilight Comes Twice*, *The Writer's Notebook*, *Marshfield Dreams: When I Was a Kid, Also Known As Rowan Pohi*, and *Guy-Write: What Every Guy Writer Needs to Know*.



One to Know: Why Reading Needs Writing

Most very young children—kids 3 or 4 years old—cannot read. And yet if you invite them to write they'll eagerly pick up a marker and start writing. Often their early writing makes us smile because it's full of inventive "errors." You'll likely see more drawings than actual letters or words. Early writing may be look a lot like scribbling.

A bit later the child may start to "sound out" words ... often using the first letter. So FIRETRUCK gets written as an *F*. That's great.

Sammy loves dinosaurs. When he picks up a book about dinosaurs he can't yet read the words. He can't read difficult words like STEGOSAURUS or TYRANNOSAURUS. But when he writes about dinosaurs he can write a *T* for TYRANNOSAURUS, and an *S* for STEGOSAURUS.

This is such an important point: Writing gives Sammy access to words he can't yet read.

Do you want to encourage your child to read? Well, then, encourage the child to write. You may feel ill equipped to guide your young writer, but don't worry. You can do it. Here are a few guiding principles.

- **CHOICE.** Let the young writer steer the boat. Encourage the child to make decisions. *What are you going to write about? What kind of paper will you choose? Are you going to make any drawings?*
- **IDENTITY.** We want children to be able to say: *I am a writer.*
- **PLEASURE.** Make it fun!

When children start writing they quickly discover that writers must make decisions all the time. (*How will I start? What will I include? What colors do I need?*) This understanding will be helpful when they read because they'll begin to understand the author, too, had to make decisions. *I wonder why he chose that title? I wonder why that illustration is in color but that one is in black-and-white?* This understanding will help a child read as an insider, a member of the reading club.

When young children see themselves as writers they develop a sense of confidence. They will reinvest that confidence as they start to read.

What to Do

- Look for low-pressure, everyday opportunities for kids to write.
- Provide material: blank paper of different sizes, markers, etc.
- Be positive. Find something to praise.
- Let your child see you writing.
- Help your child think of a natural audience of his/her writing. If the child writes a story about Grandpa, send the writing to Grandpa.

More to Know and Do

- Be thoughtful about how you respond to young writing.
- Look at a children's writing as early talk.
- Expect lots of developmental spelling ... don't fixate on correcting spelling errors.
- Respond to the meaning of what the child writes and not the spelling.
- Enjoy your child's writing!

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