



Real Stuff That Matters:

*An Introduction to Journal Writing
in Inclusive Settings*



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FOREWORD

For many of us growing up, our journal or diary was our closest friend. We wrote about our friendships, ideas, and even our first crush. In this resource for teachers, *Real Stuff That Matters: An Introduction to Journal Writing in Inclusive Settings*, VSA arts introduces the art of journal writing to students of all abilities.

Writing from personal experience, or journaling, is a valuable way to express inner thoughts and feelings in a private space. Through the pages of a journal, students can discover who they are and become better writers. And journal writing can be fun!

The lessons in *Real Stuff That Matters* are appropriate for all ages. These lessons feature suggestions to ensure that students, including students with disabilities, have opportunities to express themselves and their creativity.

Please look for our other resource books in this series: *Let the Light In: An Introduction to Writing Poetry in Inclusive Settings* and *Opening Up the Sky: An introduction to Creative Writing in Inclusive Settings*.

Sincerely,

Soula Antoniou
President
VSA arts

INTRODUCTION

There is a growing popularity of journal keeping, which provides an opportunity to expose students to creative ways of writing about how they are thinking and what they are experiencing. The key to successful journal writing is that ownership belongs to the person writing the journal and that a journal is a private space.

In this guide, the focus is on writing from personal experience. The lessons in this book are based on journaling, giving students the opportunity to expand their skills by writing about the topic they know best—theirself and their worlds.

When teaching journal writing, you will need to take a different approach than teaching other forms of writing. A unique feature of journal writing is the assurance to the students that the writing may be kept private—for their eyes only. This can be a powerful tool to unlock the written word for writing-phobic students. You will also notice that there are many places where students are invited to share. The teacher or leader will become adept at balancing these two needs.

Teaching *how* to write is omitted from this guide on purpose. Thoughts in a journal are seeds for writing—seedlings are fragile and require much care and attention, not criticism or revision. This guide focuses less on writing skills and more on developing expressive facility.

Teachers can certainly extend these writing experiences into work on editing, grammar, and spelling. This can be balanced with keeping the journaling experience personal and private, thus developing the writer's ability to use writing as a means of reflection, for decision making, and increasing self-awareness.

Because of the nature of journals, these lessons are principally geared toward older students. There are also suggestions for younger learners, so that teachers can initiate these students into the idea of keeping journals. And of course, teachers will think of many more extensions, adaptations, and learning links.

Students with different learning styles often find writing to be the most daunting of tasks, and the wide variety of experiences presented in these lessons offers an unparalleled opportunity for making writing a meaningful and satisfying experience. Finding ways to express oneself in the comfortable arena of one's own life can lead to a larger level of confidence about writing in general.

These lessons work just as well one-on-one in a tutorial as they do with a whole class or after-school group. They are adaptable for a wide range of settings, from adult programs to community youth workshops to typical classrooms.

As in all the guides in this writing series, there isn't a "correct" way to lead these lessons. Use the lessons that appeal to you and keep your own journal as you progress through the suggested activities. You might discover, along with your students, that not only is journal writing fun, but it is also a reflection of who you are and that person might just surprise and delight you!

Lesson Structure

Following the core lesson, in the section **One Step Further or Back** there are suggestions for expanding the lesson so that more time can be taken, or more attention given to certain aspects of the lesson. This allows teachers to consider the individual needs of the group and choose a focus and pace which will work best. The **Extensions** section includes suggestions for a variety of ways that the poetry or writing process can be enlarged and linked to other activities or classroom subjects. In both cases, these suggestions are not prescriptive, but simply offer examples. The possibilities are endless and much of the joy of teaching these lessons will be to see where they lead the teacher and students.

The **Including All Learners** section suggests adaptive approaches that illustrate a few of the many ways to make the experience accessible and satisfying for learners with disabilities. You will find practical information necessary for providing appropriate adaptations for specific disabilities, but should remember that much of successful inclusion depends on the creative problem solving of the teacher or workshop leader—and the participants.

You will find in the lessons three kinds of key points that are highlighted within boxes. **Links to Learning** highlights ways that the lesson's writing activities and extensions can tie into and enrich the core curriculum. **Let's Say That Again** emphasizes educational approaches that are vital to the success of the activity. **Lesson Learned** points to the insights gained into students' experiences, thought processes, and learning styles, which can come from the writing experience.

Mimi White has worked as poet in residence in a variety of locales since 1982. She has taught in public schools, settings for individuals with disabilities, residential facilities for seniors and for people with mental health disabilities, and community sites including churches, temples, daycare, and hospice care facilities.

Deb Stuart is a teaching artist whose discipline is children's traditional music and folklore. She has worked with students across the United States, in Central and South America, and in Europe as a residency artist and teacher trainer. Her training has focused on the integration of music into the classroom with particular emphasis on meeting the needs of all learners through arts-based approaches. Stuart has been a roster artist for the New Hampshire State Council on the Arts for 24 years.

LESSON ONE: YOU'RE THE EXPERT!

Too often journals are filled with entries of what's wrong, the "shoulds" and "could haves." So start with putting your best foot forward.

GOALS

To catalogue the student's skills; to look beyond the obvious athletic and artistic skills and include skills such as "good older sister" or "great at keeping still"; to rediscover a part of the self that may be hidden

HOW TO BEGIN

Using yourself as a model, list on the board all the things you are good at. Ask the students to help you. They will know all about your fine teaching skills and maybe something about your personality, such as you "tell great jokes," but you will need to fill out the list with other ways in which you are the expert. Try to be wide-ranging and inclusive. Noting the big and little, the common and uncommon skills will add depth to the picture of who you are.

INSTRUCTIONS

Remind the students that their journals are for their eyes only. What they write will be shared only if they wish to share. Also point out that you wrote your skills in short phrases, not complete sentences. This quick way of writing encourages the student to write more.

Give these directions orally:

- Make a list of all the things you are good at.
- Write fast; remember to include all the small or overlooked skills you have.

When the students have finished this individual exercise, have them pair up and give them the second set of instructions:

- Share with a partner what skills you are most proud of. Try to comment on what surprised you about yourself and what you heard from your partner that surprised you.
- Choose one thing you do really well and enjoy doing. Tell your partner exactly how you do this, what you do first, second, third, next, as if you were giving a recipe or instructions.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Here are some more suggestions and questions to stimulate your students' writing. Spend extra time talking about your list. You might explore the difference between being a good sister and being a fast runner. Which one is more satisfying; which one takes more work? When we are an expert at something, it usually implies that we have been taught this skill, practiced this skill. During the discussion phase, talk about the people who have helped teach you this skill. Did your grandmother teach you how to knit? Did your older brother teach you how to ride a bike? And finally, include in this phase of the lesson what it means to practice, commit yourself to doing something well, and what skills seem to come easily to us. How does what we do affect others?

Drawing oneself as the expert at something is another way to show what we are good at. Ask the students to draw a portrait of themselves in action with crayons or pencils (something that won't bleed onto the next page) in their journals. These might be displayed for a week or so for the students to see their friends performing something they are good at.

Another way to share what we are good at is through drama or action. Ask the students to create skits showing how to be a big sister or how to put together a model airplane. They can collaborate in pairs, writing a little dialogue for a five-minute lesson that they then teach to the class.

EXTENSIONS

To further explore this idea, students might imagine how to do something more inventive, such as “How to Sleep in a Spoon” or “How to Dream”—things that seem impossible or they have never thought about before. By contemplating the world and their place in it via the imagination, students open themselves to more ways of being in the world.

Narrative: A few years back I had a high school student tell me that he didn't write. Johnny only lifted weights and worked on cars. So I asked him if he could write me a poem titled “How to Eat a Car.” He said sure. And that was because he was an expert and the slight twist on the title allowed him to enter his imagination, bringing with him all the skills he had honed while working on cars.

Lesson Learned

The best adaptive practice in the world is drawing the student in by linking the writing to what the student loves best and feels most confident doing.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

Making the initial lists is an excellent writing task for students with learning disabilities. It allows the use of single words or short phrases that can then be developed into sentences and a short essay.

For students who are not verbal, using their communication systems to allow them to choose pictures or signs that show tasks and favorite activities can be a starting point for an aide, volunteer, or partner to draw up a list. Illustrations further enrich this. Allow all students who wish to do this to use sketches and pictures as part of their work.

Students with emotional disabilities often have struggles with self-esteem and may find it challenging to describe themselves in positive ways. Approaching the tasks in a relaxed way—using examples of very simple talents and skills and allowing humorous (although appropriate) answers—can get these students started in a way that is safe and will build confidence. Students can also work as a group with “appreciations” for one another, sharing what they see others

doing well. Students can add these to their lists and chime in with appreciations about themselves. These lists can be kept for some time before introduction in this writing lesson, so that they are familiar and comfortable.

Here is another example of a high school student who had a great skill and shared it in her poem, "How to Dance":

You must move to the beat.
Use your feet, wave your
arms, act like you're having
fun. You can do the butterfly
or be stupid and do the electric slide. Jump around and
bang your head so your hair flies everywhere.
Take your partner and do some flips or just
spin around together. Try to do the twist then
start to breakdance. Try to use different
styles like Spanish, Russian, Street, Polka.
Point your finger and move it around.
Do the shimmy or tootsie roll
or get on the floor and push it.

Once students have taken this inventory of skills, they can refer to it often in other prose pieces, looking over the list for subjects to write about.

LESSON TWO: SELF-PORTRAITS IN DISGUISE

How many people have wanted to be someone or something else? In this lesson students will explore how they see themselves and then have fun imagining themselves as something else.

GOALS

To enhance students' self-images; to observe themselves closely, then imagine what they might look like as something else; to see themselves through "new" eyes

HOW TO BEGIN

Gather some hand mirrors and, if possible, borrow a couple of full-length mirrors. These will come in handy when the students start to draw. Also, collect magazines with photographs of faces, in color or black and white. Tell the students that they are going to write about something that they brought with them. Let them guess what it might be. Someone usually comes up with "face." With the help of the students, list on the board all the face parts, starting with hair and ending with neck. Tell them they are going to draw a self-portrait and talk briefly about what that is.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Look at yourself in the mirror. Note the color of your hair, your eyes, the shape of your face, feel the texture of your skin. Look closely.
- Draw a self-portrait, but only draw half of your face as you really look. On the other side draw what you might look like if you were something in nature, like a tree or a garden; what you might be if you were a building; or what you might look like if part of you was an imagined dream world. Don't worry about matching up an eye for an eye. For example, one side might have a blue eye, but the other side might be the blue sky with clouds scudding across or a street winding through a city. This is a "surreal" picture, a more-than-real studying of what you look like. (It might be helpful to look at some paintings by Salvador Dalí to see the unique beauty in surreal paintings.)

- Think about how you look and how you have imagined yourself. Write in your journal why you see yourself as a river or a skyscraper or a field of wildflowers. Also, write something about how you see yourself for real. Is one view more pleasing than the other? How close are these two points of view?

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Before you draw, cut out the faces from the magazines, collecting noses in one pile, eyes in another, hair, and so on. Using these parts, have the students create collages of what they look like, adding whatever details they might like with their pencils and crayons. Alternatively, have students cut the faces in unusual ways and put them together in ways that surprise and delight. (Take a look at Picasso's work for inspiration.) Talk about the different features of the face and how everyone is unique and special.

Ask the students to imagine themselves as a landscape. Take them through a guided imagery lesson, asking the following questions: **“If you were not a person, but a landscape or seascape what would you be? Huge waves crashing on the beach? A mountain touching the sky? A garden with roses or tall sunflowers? Would there be a path leading to a river or a small clearing in the woods? Is it daytime or night time? What’s the weather doing? Is there anything in the sky?”** (This can be adapted for cityscapes as well, asking questions about skyscrapers, bridges, highways, etc.) Then ask the students to draw themselves as that piece of land. In their journals, they can write about why they see themselves as a bridge or a garden or a river.

EXTENSIONS

Often when people look at themselves, they do not like what they see. As a follow-up to this activity, ask the students to think about a part of themselves that they really like, something they could brag about. Maybe it's their eyes or their hands or their smile. Have them make a list in their journals of all the things they like about themselves and then choose one to write about. They might like to draw a picture to go with this writing. Encourage them to try writing a poem or a short piece of prose.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

This lesson can be simplified for younger learners. Self-portraits that are reflective of their developmental level can be a starting point, omitting the step of drawing one half real and one half imagined. Tracing the child on large paper from a roll can make full-body portraits, which may then be decorated by students through coloring and collage. Hanging up and talking about the portraits or the full-body pictures can include much discussion about what their portraits look like—who's tall, who has the longest arms, how they colored their eyes, their hair, what they chose for clothing, etc. Pre-writers, teachers, or volunteers can scribe a dictated paragraph of what the child sees. Then, in another lesson, the young students can imagine and draw themselves as something else, moving into a fantasy story about what it would be like to be something entirely different.

For students with physical disabilities this might be a challenging lesson. If there are students in a class for whom self-image might be problematic, imagining oneself as something entirely different might be the starting point, rather than a second step. This would be both fun and a safe way to picture and talk about oneself. The teacher can then find a way to move the lesson back to observing in a mirror.

LESSON THREE: GROWING IN IMPROBABLE PLACES

Mary Oliver is a wonderful poet whose journal, *Blue Estuaries*, inspired this lesson. She walks daily and writes in her journal about what she observes and experiences in her neighborhood.

GOALS

To observe nature closely, over a period of time; to make a habit of walking daily; to find something growing in a surprising or improbable place; to sketch what is observed and date each entry recording also the time and weather; to see growth in nature as a metaphor for all growth

HOW TO BEGIN

Start by asking students, “What grows?” The discussion may move from themselves, to trees, flowers, and then back again to pets and family. Encourage them to look beyond the obvious... buds to flowers, fingernails, hair, etc. When they’ve exhausted the list they’ve made, talk about how things change as they grow, getting taller, bushier, or fuller. Make a list of characteristics that help define things that grow. Bring in seed catalogues and share some of the Latin and common names for flowers and trees with which they may be familiar. End the discussion by briefly asking, “**What do plants need to grow? What do we need to grow?**”

INSTRUCTIONS

- As a class, take a walk around the block or around the school playground with journals in hand.
- Observe anything *small* that is growing. Sketch and date the sketch, noting the location (grass growing in a crack in the pavement, tucked inside a dead tree stump).

- Observe something *large* that is growing—trees, shrubs, etc. Again sketch, date, and locate.
- Write something surprising that is observed, such as a dead tree with one live branch or flowers growing in a puddle of water.
- Do this every day, if possible, or on a regular basis such as once a week or over a period of time. Try to go the same time every day, perhaps during recess or in the afternoon when the students need to stretch a bit. Maybe focus on one season such as the spring or fall.
- Have students walk in their neighborhoods, if possible, and observe a place, over time, where something is growing in an improbable spot. Ask them to record what surprises and delights them. Students may wish to record what they were thinking as they walked around the playground or their neighborhoods. They may also include the people they saw regularly or sounds that became familiar, such as buses rumbling by or water rushing over rocks.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Before heading outside, you may want to germinate bean seeds (or other easy-to-grow plants) inside the classroom. Have students observe their own seeds, noting changes to the seed as it fattens and sprouts, then later changes as the tendrils and leaves grow. This is a great way to help develop their vocabulary. This would also be a good time to prepare the students for their explorations outside, talking about what tools to bring (like pencils and erasers), whatever items that may help them to sketch.

Links to Learning

This is an obvious lesson to link to science units on plants and germination. Students could also sketch their seeds as they grow. You could ask the art teacher or a local artist to present a lesson on “still life” and sketching, too.

Create a class terrarium with materials found on the walks or gather materials prior to the walk, like glass figurines. Mirrors can be added to create a world inside the glass casing. Start with a class journal, recording changes that are observed, also noting surprises and things that delight. Link this to a science unit about scientific observations. Look at Darwin's, Audubon's, or da Vinci's journals to see what they included as they worked on their theories.

EXTENSIONS

The students will most likely follow a route on their daily or weekly observations. With a wide variety of materials available, such as large and small paper, twigs, fabric, buttons, thread, glue, markers, crayons, etc., ask the students to create a map of where they traveled on their route, and document what and whom they passed. They could sketch this first in their journals, then enlarge the map in an art project that could be displayed along with their writings about where they found growing things in their neighborhoods. Again, you could start with a group map first, recording what was observed on the school walk, and then extend the idea to personal maps.

Additional questions for discussion might be, “**How do we grow? Where do we grow? What do we need to grow?**” Discuss these questions as a class, and then ask the students to write in their journals their private thoughts about what they need to grow. For older students, invite them to include, if they wish, what's missing from their lives, or just how they feel they're able to grow as human beings.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

For students in an urban setting, a focus on buildings and cityscapes may emerge. Then the questions become, “**What is needed for a building to grow, who can make this happen, what supplies are needed?**” Creating models of buildings made from blocks can follow this. This also ties in nicely with the extension suggestion of map making.

Again, students with learning disabilities or with limited language can benefit from the list making aspect of this lesson. These lists can be used for building vocabulary as well as for building reading and writing skills. As always, another person can serve as a scribe for a non-writer.

For students who are blind or have low vision, you will need to work with their vision consultant to structure the observation experience so that there is an appropriate tactile component. This experience is rich with possibilities for this kind of exploration. In this case, encourage using touch for all students in the group and work with words that describe the textures and shapes. A tactile approach will also work well for students with different learning styles.

Remember to make class walks appropriate for students who have walking disabilities or who use wheelchairs. It is important that they not trail behind or be excluded.

LESSON FOUR: LISTEN TO MY WORLD!

People often make note of what they see in the world around them, but what they *hear* tells them a lot about where they live. In this lesson students pay close attention to these sounds and write about how these sounds affect their lives.

GOALS

To learn how to listen closely; to pay attention to parts of your environment such as homes, schools, or neighborhoods; to discover how sounds can trigger memories

HOW TO BEGIN

To prepare the students for listening, read a few poems to them from *Knock at a Star* or a storybook, such as *Night Noises* by Mem Fox, *The Winter Noisy Book* by Margaret Wise Brown, or *Too Much Noise* by Ann McGovern. The poem “Splinter” by Carl Sandburg is about the very small sound the cricket makes and it asks the listener to *really* listen:

Splinter

The voice of the last cricket
across the first frost
is one kind of good-bye.
It is so thin, a splinter of singing.

(*Knock at a Star*, 68)

Not only is this a *thin* sound, but it's the *last* sound of summer. Even this small poem suggests ideas for writing—sounds that trigger endings, like leaving or taking, or maybe deeper losses such as a friend moving away.

After reading aloud and discussing the story or the poem you have selected, ask the students to keep very still and listen to the sounds

around them. Wait a full minute before you ask them to share what they have heard. Perhaps they heard children laughing, a door closing, or chairs scraping against the floor. Try to elicit a variety of sounds heard both inside the building and those traveling in from outside the classroom.

INSTRUCTIONS

- With your journal in hand, listen to the night sounds just before you go to bed. Listen for the sounds inside of your room, from the hall or the kitchen, and for outside sounds such as a dog barking, car brakes squealing, the wind rattling the window, etc. Jot these different noises in your journal. Try this every night for a week. At the end of seven days, write a paragraph or two, or a poem, about these sounds—including what fears or thoughts the sounds may have triggered. For example, the dog barking may have reminded you of your first pet who's now gone, or a door banging may have reminded you of the day your older sister left home.
- Repeat the exercise above, but this time note the early morning sounds (not as easy for those of you who are sleepyheads in the morning). Pay attention to the sounds of nature, rain, and wind, or maybe the birds chirping. This time when you write a poem or a small story, try to include the sounds of nature as well as the sounds of the house and the sounds of your family waking up. (With an urban setting, there will still be birds, wind, and rain as well as city sounds, but the student will have to sift them out.) Write how you feel and what these sounds do to you.
- If you can borrow a small digital or tape recorder, place it in the kitchen or other busy room where you live. Let the recorder run as long as possible, recording all of the sounds in that room. Play back the recording and listen. Make up a story that goes along with these sounds. Maybe you'll hear a baby crying, onions sizzling in a pan, or the phone ringing. Perhaps those sounds will get your imagination going.
- It's also fun to tape people talking or to catch phrases of conversations. Take your journal and go to the park or a local coffee shop and just listen. Write down as many phrases or bits of

conversation as you wish. You will hear speech patterns and phrases that get repeated over and over again. “Have a nice day” and “See you later” are common ways of saying good-bye, but there are also strange, wonderful ways of talking that you will hear. Try adding those words or lines of conversation into one of your stories.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Any of the suggested activities can be done as a whole class. As a group your class can record the early school sounds and the end of the day’s sounds, as well as the outside and inside sounds. Then students might write a short piece on what feelings the sounds trigger. For example, how does the principal’s voice make you feel, or the sound of the bell that ends recess or a class period? You can make a list of sounds you like and one of sounds that you dislike. The class could write a collaborative poem about each list. You could also list loud sounds and soft sounds, and then write about each list. Small children will love making animal sounds or pretending they are the wind or a small cricket. As a group, focus on sounds until you feel the students are ready to record the sounds in their world.

EXTENSIONS

The title of this lesson, “Listen to Your World,” suggests that place can be identified through sound and also demands that someone listens. Therefore, students who are willing and eager for someone else to hear their worlds might share these writing exercises. Some pieces of writing may sound like lists; others may focus on one sound that tells a whole story, while still others may be more playful, such as stories by young children pretending to be the animals they hear on their block—cats howling and dogs barking.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

If the class includes one or more students who are hard of hearing, talking about sounds needs to include many sounds that can be experienced close up and possibly with accompanying vibration. For

instance, students can explore what sounds can be made by tapping or rapping on their desks, walls, and windows. Making this experience available to all students will add an interesting dimension to the lesson. This can be an alternate way of observing for both the students with hearing loss and other students who choose to follow this route.

If the class includes a student who is Deaf and communicates by American Sign Language, it would be interesting to offer a visual alternative. What can one sign suggest and where might that concept take you in your imagination? What body language do you observe from speakers who are some distance from you? This is an interesting question for all students.

Using a digital or tape recorder (with guidelines about not taping others' conversations without permission) could be a good tool for students with learning disabilities. Listening to the sounds or short snatches of talk they have recorded, then talking about what they hear and how it makes them feel or what it can make them imagine, can then be transcribed.

Narrative (from Mimi White): A sound from my childhood was the genesis of a poem. My mother's bureau ended up in my house when my parents' furniture was dispersed. The first time I opened my mother's drawer I heard the clink from the brass pulls and I was transported back to Newbury Street and the house I grew up in. This is the poem that the sound triggered:

My Mother's Bureau

The drawers slide to a close
and the brass pull rings.

*

My hair brushes my shoulders
and my long arms make windmills.

My mother is in the kitchen
stacking milk-glass bowls

into the maple cupboards.
They clink, not like cowbells,

more musical—
each sound a pebble sinking in a river.

*

They slip past light
to the water's bottom.

I wish my mother would turn
her face toward mine. I'd like

one word to carry
to the room's silence,

her voice from another place
far away from mine.

Her back a landscape
I sing myself to sleep in.

LESSON FIVE: THE STUFF YOU SAVE

Everyone brings back mementos from visits with family and friends—bus tickets, movie ticket stubs, napkins, etc. The stuff you keep is the basis for this lesson: saving it, creating art from it, and then finally using it as inspiration for writing. Think of the collage of objects as an autobiography of your life, telling who you are by what you save.

GOALS

To make art out of scraps or found objects; to know who you are by what you save; to let the writing be a natural extension of the visual art activity; to find a place to put all the junk you keep

HOW TO BEGIN

It might be best to start with a general discussion about what people save. Ask the students, “Does anyone save anything?” All the hands should go up. If not, ask a couple of leading questions. Ask them to write for five minutes in their journals ALL the things they collect and have collected over the years. They could add where they store this stuff and why they keep it. After they have had a few minutes to make their lists, let them share with the whole class or a partner. They might be surprised to find that others hoard the same things. This is a good time for the teacher to share his or her list and to think about joining in on this activity.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start collecting stuff at home. You might need a box for bigger objects, but you can also slip small, slim things right into your journal. Remind the students that spelling tests or letters from parents and friends can be saved. Nothing is too small or strange for this lesson.
- After there is enough stuff to work with, maybe a couple of weeks, share what has been saved with the class. Talk about the “story”

behind the objects, where they came from, who gave them to you, and why you kept them.

- Make journal entries about three favorite objects, or ones that mean the most to you. Include where each object came from, who gave it to you, why you kept it, and how you would feel if you lost it. Draw a sketch to go with each object.
- Using the flat pieces (postcards, letters, photos, poems, ticket stubs, leaves, etc.), create a collage on heavy construction paper. Black might be a great background for light or colored objects. Arrange and rearrange before you secure the pieces with glue. Write a story, poem, or a few paragraphs about this collage. Let the specifics in the work of art be the inspiration. Name the object. For example, “This letter from my best friend Abby, who moved to Texas,” could be an opening phrase. Use all the details in the design in your writing. Title your collage either before or after writing. Sometimes the title helps start the writing.
- With the heavier and more sculptural objects such as stones or branches, try making a mobile or three-dimensional work of art. During World War II, Pablo Picasso walked around Paris with his son looking for objects with which to create his sculptures. With a war going on, there was very little being produced in the way of art supplies, so he worked with what was lost or thrown out, and then scavenged for his work. This time, write about the new creation. Such objects as a tire, a piece of metal, an old shirt, and stones may be transformed into a doll, a bed, or even a sculpture of the night sky. Title your sculpture and start writing. You might include what you were thinking about as your creation took shape, what surprised you, and what you’d like to do with it now that it has been made.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Collecting is fun! Some artists even look in old junk stores for things to create her collages with: buttons, maps, letters from old typewriters, bits of old lace. Keep a class box. Encourage students to add only what they think is interesting—not just torn pieces of paper, but objects that might suggest another life, have little stories hidden

inside them. Ask the art teacher or a local artist to demonstrate how to put things together in an unusual way. Modeling first will help the students work more independently later.

Name the collages and the sculptures and talk about why these titles work. This is good first step toward writing. Accept any form the writing takes, whether it is a poem, a story, or even a short piece of nonfiction.

EXTENSIONS

Have an art show displaying students' collages of saved memorabilia. Get in touch with a local group that is focusing on sustainability or recycling. The student artwork could be sold with the proceeds going to local environmental programs. Perhaps the town hall or fire station would host the event. If students feel comfortable doing so, display their writing with their collages and sculptures. Leave a visitors' journal at a reception area where people can add their comments about the show. Encourage them to leave found objects for your students to use as they continue with their projects.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

This is a wonderful lesson for a wide variety of students as it can be done in very basic or more sophisticated ways. Collecting stuff is so much fun and appeals to virtually everyone. It is visual, tactile, playful, and endlessly satisfying. The use of objects and collected materials to stimulate language will be a helpful tool in including students with speech and language disabilities in this lesson.

Narrative: Stuart, a fourth-grade student with severe learning disabilities, was taken on an exciting trip overseas to visit family friends and tour several cities. The accompanying grandparent helped Stuart gather and save mementos each day—napkins from interesting restaurants, plane and tram tickets, brochures and programs, stamps and maps. Upon returning home, a looseleaf scrapbook of the trip was made with all these things, as well as writing and pictures. Stuart's classroom teacher set aside time for him to present his trip to the class using the large scrapbook pages to "show and tell" about his trip, passing the pages and memorabilia

around and telling what he had seen and done, using these as illustrations. Everybody observing was astonished at the outgoing, poised presentation—by a student who generally was silent and non-participatory. He even offered a question-and-answer period!

Lesson Learned

Having actual meaningful “things” as touchstones for his trip freed Stuart to share and feel confident about communicating his exciting experience.

LESSON SIX: WHO'S HOME?

Photographs serve many purposes: they make people think about the past and help preserve memories. Photos of family members—parents and grandparents, sisters and brothers—can be a warm reminder of who you are and where you come from.

GOALS

To use photographs as a vehicle for remembering and recording; to learn a few photographic skills; to discover connections you have to others and to places

HOW TO BEGIN

As in the last lesson, you could begin with a book. Sharing *The Family of Man* would be a fine way to begin, as this collection of photographs is a gathering from around the world of all the life experiences we go through, from birth to death, from friendship to war. *Something Permanent*, photographs by Walker Evans with poetry by Cynthia Rylant, tells the story of America's Great Depression through the eyes of people who were living through it. This book is a suitable introduction for children 10 years and older. There are books based on photographs for young children as well. *Someone Special Just Like Me* is the story of a preschooler with disabilities, told through photographs.

Another way to begin is to ask the students to bring in some photographs of themselves, their family and friends, and places they may have visited. Make sure they have permission to bring in photographs that their families may treasure, and spend a few minutes talking about how to handle and look at photographs (holding pictures by their edges and keeping them in a flat, clean place for storage).

To focus a discussion you might create a specific assignment: **“Bring in a photograph of someone who has changed your life.” “Find a picture of yourself and someone else and think about your relationship and what it means to you.” “Choose a setting or**

scene that you think is beautiful.” This will get the students thinking about themselves in relation to the photographs. Young students could bring in a baby picture and talk about the ways in which they have changed and grown over the years.

As in the last lesson, you might like to create a class photograph box. This should include pictures that can be used by everyone. Magazines are good places to look, as well as any personal photographs that do not have emotional attachment. (They might be used in later class projects.)

INSTRUCTIONS

- With these photos in hand, ask the students to write about each one. Any question you ask to focus the activity should have other questions embedded in it, such as, **“Why is this picture beautiful to you? What is beauty? Do you only take pictures of things that look pretty? Why?”** For younger children the questions would be simpler. **“What do you like about this picture? How do we feel about the things we like?”** *Something Permanent* addresses some of these questions and might be a good place for a follow up discussion with older students on what we choose to “make permanent.”
- Borrow a camera that is easy to use, or see if you can buy or ask for a donation of a couple of disposable cameras. A local library or high school may have equipment that is free to residents of your town. After talking with your students about how to use the camera, talk about what you are going to photograph. Decide as a class what you would like to record. You could start with a walk around the school’s neighborhood. Each student could snap two pictures (one may not come out) of something she or he thinks represents the school and its surroundings. Or students may wish to capture the people of the neighborhood: the firefighters, the greengrocer, the florist, the people playing chess in the park, etc. Sometimes recording the things that are not pretty—trash, broken windows, weeds, etc.—tells a different story, one that your students might like to tell.

- After the photo shoot, ask the students to record in their journals why they took their particular pictures. Ask, **“Why was it important to you to have a record of that person or scene? What angle did you take it from? Straight on? To one side? Up close? What were you trying to do? Why is taking a picture different than making a sketch?”**
- Share the developed pictures. Compare what they were trying to do with how the picture came out. Find something in each photograph that was surprising, or maybe disappointing. See if the unexpected shot has more to tell than had been expected. Ask the students to refine their journal entries and expand upon what they see in their developed pictures.
- Tell the story of your life through photographs. First talk about the ways in which we tell our life stories—through family, first experiences, places we have lived—and ask the students to think about how they would like to tell their life stories, in maybe a unique way. Since my husband climbs mountains, he might choose to tell his story through photographs of the peaks he has climbed. Maybe a student might wish to tell his or her story through photographs of pets or close friends. This goes back to the beginning activity where the students needed to decide what they wanted to record of their school and their neighborhood. Taking a picture, or creating a story through photography, is a deliberate act. After the story is told in pictures, ask the students to write the story in their journals, giving it a title and going beyond the collection of images, if they wish.
- Work with photos that inspire. Ask the students to find any photograph that inspires them from any place they wish, such as magazines, books, art galleries, museums where postcards of art may be purchased, or the class photography box. Talk about what the word “inspire” means. Check the dictionary. This will help the students select something that they can write about with thoughtful attention. Allow the students ample time to talk about their selections, sharing them with other students. This might be a good time to share *Something Permanent* or another book that pairs photographs with writing. When all the pictures have been shared

(this may take a few days), ask the students to write about anything in their pictures that they would like.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

There is no one best way to begin this activity. If there is a local photography exhibition, such as a spot in the local library or historical society, start there. Let the students see photographs that have a focus or a purpose behind them. You could also start with a visit to a local photography store or, if you are lucky, a visit to a darkroom or studio where a professional photographer works. Hearing an artist talk about what inspires the pictures and why they were taken in the first place helps the students realize that this is a thoughtful process.

Self-portraits also make a fine start. This could follow from the lesson “Self-Portraits in Disguise.” Students could dress in something that shows “who’s at home” and another student could snap their picture. They could then write about who they are as they appear in the photo. **“Why the big flowery hat or the baseball cap or the all-black outfit?”** **“How is that you?”** All of these are good questions to initiate writing.

EXTENSIONS

These lessons could culminate in an exhibition of the students’ writings and photographs. The stories told in photographs could be shared with family and friends, while the photographs that inspire or the shots of the school and its neighborhood might be displayed at the local library. Keep a camera on hand and document the show with more photographs and a visitor’s journal. Ask the visitors to respond to the show so the students can learn about the impact that their art has on others.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

Working with photographs and magazine pictures of familiar people is an excellent tool for students with learning and cognitive disabilities. The familiarity of family photographs can provide much opportunity

for language and writing. With young children and students who have difficulty writing, a “give and take” with a volunteer or aide can be transcribed and worked into sentences and paragraphs for either the class book or an individual journal.

Narrative: Althea Haropulos, working as a visiting artist, conducted a photography residency with students who had a variety of disabilities ranging from moderate to severe. Inexpensive large-format cameras were obtained through a small grant, and a photo supply company had donated film. The very first lesson consisted of taking lots of time to look through a wide variety of magazines with high-quality pictures, to select ones that students liked best, and to talk about why they liked them and what made them “good” photos. Students were allowed to select two or three pictures to cut out and keep, and then had the opportunity to use a variety of pre-cut mats to “frame” portions of their pictures, to notice how selecting a portion of the pictures changed what was important and what could be emphasized. The next step was to take pretend pictures with filmless cameras to practice framing scenes, people, and objects. Only after this very deliberate process did actual photography begin. The culminating show of actual work, called Another Way of Seeing, was exciting and excellent—and received a lot of attention in community settings where it was exhibited.

Let’s Say That Again

Taking **plenty** of time really pays off! As in Haropulos’ residency, the preparation can be more important than the actual taking of pictures and, in the end, provides the best opportunity for language and learning.

LESSON SEVEN: WHAT HAVE YOU LOST?

Poet Naomi Shihab Nye and photographer Michael Nye published a wonderful anthology of poems and photos titled *What Have You Lost?* The book's title brings to mind both memories of childhood and dreams for the future.

GOALS

To honor what has been lost by writing about it; to continue exploring photography and writing; to honor through the act of remembering

HOW TO BEGIN

Begin by asking the students, "What have you lost?" It could be a recent loss or one from several years back. Tell them they may include all sorts of things, from smallest of things to the most important, including teeth, pets, grandparents, old houses, keys—anything that is now gone. As they share their losses, write them on the board.

With older students, you may wish to read Elizabeth Bishop's poem "One Art," a *villanelle*¹ that speaks directly of loss, from the trivial to the very serious and profound.

One Art

The art of losing isn't hard to master;
so many things seem filled with the intent
to be lost that their loss is no disaster.

Lose something every day. Accept the fluster
of lost door keys, the hour badly spent.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

¹ A *villanelle* is a French form of poetry consisting of 19 lines and four stanzas. The first line and the third line of the first stanza are repeated in the following stanzas in an alternating pattern. Also, there are two rhyme schemes. The middle lines of each stanza rhyme and the first and last lines of each stanza rhyme.

Then practice losing farther, losing faster:
places, and names, and where it was you meant
to travel. None of these will bring disaster.

I lost my mother's watch. And look! my last, or
next-to-last, of three loved houses went.
The art of losing isn't hard to master.

I lost two cities, lovely ones. And, vaster,
some realms I owned, two rivers, a continent.
I miss them, but it wasn't a disaster.

—Even losing you (the joking voice, a gesture
I love) I shan't have lied. It's evident
the art of losing's not too hard to master
though it may look like (Write it!) like disaster.

(from *Geography III* by Elizabeth Bishop. New York: Farrar, Straus
and Giroux, 1976)

INSTRUCTIONS

This lesson can be initiated in a number of ways. Here are some ideas.

- In your journal, write a personal list of anything you have lost. Write fast and let the list be random, jumping over time and mixing the losses up. Share any of the losses you'd like with the person sitting next to you. Comment briefly on what surprised you, what the two of you may have in common.
- Now choose something from your list you'd like to write about in more detail, remembering as much as you can about the object/person/place/time. When you write, try to bring the loss back to the present time, feeling the presence of that person or thing. (With people, you might include things they said or a small detail of what they looked like.) Describe what or whom you lost in detail. Then write about how it feels to have this missing from your life. If it's a person, you could write your journal entry in the form of a letter, as if you were talking to them or to somebody about them.

- Sometimes we are afraid of losing things or people. Sometimes we have to move or fear that we might not be able to stay where we live. Sometimes it's a more general fear: we don't want to grow up, become a teenager, or we are afraid of losing a best friend. Write a journal entry about something you don't want to lose. You may wish to start with a general list, as you did in the last exercise, then focus in on one idea. You might add what you could do to overcome this fear. If you feel comfortable, share this entry with a friend.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

Loss is painful. Be respectful of students who may not want to write about it. Keep the losses easy and light if need be—teeth, books... even losing one's way around the school or in a big store is frightening but less difficult to share than a death or a divorce in the family. Share small things you have lost with the students, including what you lost at their ages. This may make them feel more comfortable sharing their losses. Remind them that the journal is private and no one will read it without their permission.

Drawing a picture is also a good place to start, before beginning the writing—maybe the house or village they grew up in, an old dress that was loved, a field where the student played hide-and-seek. Also bringing in old photographs of grandparents or pets who may no longer be alive is a gentle way to share loss. It's also fun to look at yourself when you were younger and think about what is lost—that blonde hair, those chubby legs, the shyness, etc.

EXTENSIONS

A book much like the one Nye assembled would also be a fine extension for this lesson. The students could select a journal entry and a piece of art to accompany it. Placing the book in the school or town library would help others with their losses and enlarge the community of people who have had this experience.

Usually loss needs to be shared with others who have experienced it. If family has not viewed the students' journals, this might be the time

to do so. With the student's permission, ask them to bring writing from their journals home, share an entry with a family member who has experienced the same loss, and ask that person to write in the journal their memory of this person, or time, or place. These entries can range from the simple and humorous to the more profound. In the former case, student and family can have fun sharing a loss that was silly or where something turned up in an unexpected place. In the latter case, this written dialogue may encourage the student to speak more fully about what he/she has been experiencing.

Merrilyn San Soucie, a fabric artist, uses old fabric and fabric given to her by others to create some of her quilts. When her father died, she sewed and quilted a shirt created from old shirts and ties that her dad used to wear. This quilt was a way of honoring and remembering her dad and a way to grieve. Another quilt was inspired from material given to her by four close women friends, one of whom is no longer alive. Perhaps a "childhood" quilt could be designed from old clothing, with a journal entry tucked into a pocket or sewed on with a button.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

This lesson will need to be very carefully thought through by the teacher or group leader. This will be particularly true when working with a group that includes children with emotional disabilities. It can actually be done very light-heartedly by focusing on such subjects as "forgetfulness" and funny stories of things lost and found (or never found). Stories of pets or loved objects that were both lost and found can have exciting and triumphant endings! For children with a history of traumatic loss, this lesson may act as a "way in" to the subject of what they've really lost. It may even act therapeutically for them and help ease their trouble by bringing it out into the open.

For younger students, the instructions should be simplified into larger group exercises. For example, listing what students lost could be a class effort. The children could talk about the kinds of things that are easy to lose and the kinds of things that would not be easy to lose. It's easy to misplace the car keys but not so easy to lose the car, for example! Likewise, a pet mouse is easy to lose, but what if your pet were an elephant?

LESSON EIGHT: WHAT IS HOME?

Have you ever used the expression “I feel right at home?” Have you ever moved and wondered when your heart might catch up with the rest of you? Do you dream about a house by the sea, or in the mountains? When you remember back to your childhood home, do you see yourself looking out from the fire escape or hiding under the kitchen table? “What is home?” and “Where do you feel most at home?” are questions this lesson raises.

GOALS

To explore what home means; to find a metaphor that stands for home; to recreate childhood abodes that have the “feeling” of home; to discover the connection between the imagination and memory, where one begins and the other takes over

HOW TO BEGIN

Start by asking what home is. Explain that you aren’t asking for a general definition, but that you want the students to give you a dictionary definition of home—meaning, if you looked “home” up in the dictionary, what would the definition be. This is called denotation, the literal definition. Write all the answers on the board and see if the class can agree to one basic definition. Then ask the class for words that they associate with the word home. You might hear “mother,” “yard,” “safe,” and “kitchen.” Home may suggest these other words, or act as their secondary meaning. This is called connotation. Beginning with a discussion that opens up the idea of home will aid the students in their later work as they explore their personal definitions of home.

One good book that focuses on the idea of home is *HOME: A Collection of Poetry and Art*. In it, poems that explore the theme of home are paired with drawings, paintings, photographs, and quilts. Taking the time to look closely at some of the poems and artwork will stimulate the students’ imaginations, stirring thoughts about what home is beyond its basic definition as a shelter against the elements. There are lots of books about home for young students.

INSTRUCTIONS

These lessons try to approach the theme from several angles. You will need to decide on the best place for you and your students to begin. The following offers some different options.

- Draw a floor plan of your childhood home. Don't worry if you leave out some rooms, or if the plan is not "accurate." Your memory will tell you everything you need to know and draw. If you have room, do this in your journal; otherwise, a large sheet of white paper will work well too.
- Locate yourself in the home and draw yourself into the floor plan. Maybe you are looking out your bedroom window, or you are sitting on the stoop outside the front door.
- Share your plan with a partner, adding any details that you had left out. Explain why you located yourself where you did.
- Start writing in the present tense, as if you were actually in the spot you have placed yourself in your drawing. For example, "I am under the covers listening to the rain hit the roof," or "When I sit on the stoop, it's always to get away from the noise of my sisters and brothers!" Try to include all that you can see, hear, and smell. You might include what you are thinking or wishing, too.
- Draw a picture of your mother's or grandmother's kitchen. Use crayons if you'd like. Add something that was *never* there, such as a cat or a huge black stove—anything you can imagine! Make a list of all the things you have but did not draw, such as cow-shaped salt and pepper shakers, a plate of fried chicken on the kitchen table, a birthday cake with candles lit, your grandmother at the stove, etc. Also add to this list any foods that you recall loving. Write a story that takes place in the kitchen; maybe it will begin with a memory. See if you can find a place for the imagined detail. This story starts in a real place, but could end up in an imagined setting. Mixing what is real with what you can imagine adds energy to a piece of writing.
- In your mind, picture a view out of your window. What window do you like to look out? Is it the hall window, or the attic, or the view

onto the apartment building across the street? See yourself at this window. What can you see and/or hear out the window? Is it nighttime or daytime? What kind of weather is outside your window? When do you like to look out the window? If someone looked in your window, what would he or she see? Write a short poem or prose piece pretending you are looking out your window. Include how you feel as you sit there and what you are thinking about.

- Where do you feel most at home? Think of a space that is not your real home, but maybe still feels like home. Perhaps some place in nature like the sky, a tree, the beach, the local art museum, a park bench, or a large crowd. Create this place with stuff from the box of material that you used in the “Stuff” lesson. Combine these materials to make a collage or a diorama. You could also paint a picture of this place. Then write why this spot feels like home to you.
- Where will your home be 20 years from now? Imagine this place and draw a picture of it using any materials you like—paint, crayons, pencils, fabric, twigs, stone—anything! Write about who you’ll be 20 years from now and why this is your home of the future. How is this home different from the one you live in now? What makes you feel at home in this new place?

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

After the discussion about home, pass out drawing paper and ask the students to draw something that has the spirit of home, but does not look like a house or an apartment. It could be a design, or an abstract representation that gives the sense of being at home. Also talk about colors. Would home be colored in reds or light blues, or in blacks and whites? This might be the right time to ask where in nature, or in the world at large, they feel at home and ask them to draw that place. Some people would draw the mountains and others would draw a busy intersection in New York City. Share these pictures as a class. Then ask the students to each draw a picture of their real homes or to take photographs of them. Display each student’s first drawing alongside the second and compare the two, and talk about how the real picture differs from the imagined, while finding common elements

as well. Then ask the students to write a journal entry where these thoughts are explored.

Younger students will enjoy learning about animal houses. Science texts and children's books are a good place to begin. *Henry Builds a Cabin* is a new children's book that retells the story of Henry David Thoreau's life in the Walden woods through the eyes of a bear. It focuses on the early spring and summer days when Thoreau was building his cabin. If it's spring, you might go on a nature walk in search of nests. Maybe there is a beaver pond and home in your neighborhood. Talk about the shapes and materials these are made out of. Think about why the animals live where they do and ask the students to relate this to where they live. You can also expand this idea to other cultures, present and past. Look at homes such as caves, igloos, teepees, and why these homes suit the people who live in them. Why do yours suit you?

Links to Learning

There are many ways to tie this writing to social studies and science. Students can examine how homes are constructed in other countries and cultures. Examining and studying animal habitats, as suggested above, make for a great connection to nature studies.

EXTENSIONS

Look more closely at compound words that include the word "home" or "house." Housework, homework, homestead, homesick, homeless, hometown. These words suggest new meanings or connotations for the word "home." Before beginning a discussion, ask the students to brainstorm words in their journals. Then ask them to write an entry for each word or to draw a sketch for what that words mean to them. They may need questions to start them off, such as, "**When have you felt homesick?**" "**Where do you feel that in your body?**" "**Have you seen homeless people?**" "**Have you ever worried that you could become homeless?**" These words can be the genesis of broader lessons that take the students beyond the boundaries of their own homes.

Links to Learning

The opportunities for dictionary and vocabulary studies linked with this writing are many. It takes the looking up of words out of the abstract and into an exploration linked to students' personal experiences and feelings.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

Students with cognitive disabilities can enjoy the many visual and tactile suggestions for ways to go about this lesson. They could create visual representations of their homes by drawing or using magazine pictures for collage. A volunteer or aide can then scribe their descriptions of home or of an imaginary place to live in their journals for them.

The chances of there being a child in foster care in a class are high, and some classes will include children who come from a shelter or a relative's house, whose families are currently homeless. The teacher or group leader might want to start this lesson with a less personal way to look at houses and homes—animal homes, houses around the world, different kinds of shelters (camping tents, cabins for construction workers, ice houses for fishermen).

While this is less personal, and therefore less immediately meaningful for students, it is also a much safer way for some to approach this topic. Then the teacher can approach students' individual experiences with sensitivity, allowing students to write about the topics of house and home without as much sorrow and anxiety.

Links to Learning

There are so many good pieces of children's literature that have been written on this topic. The classic *Little House on the Prairie*—or any books from Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House* series—is a wonderful example. In the former, it is the house itself that needs to move. In the latter series, the long history of a family that moves again and again is a favorite.

LESSON NINE: WORDS YOU WANT TO SAVE

Did you ever hear the expression “A penny for your thoughts”? That might be what poet Elizabeth Kirschner was thinking when she coined the phrase, “nickel notebooks.” Kirschner does not keep a daily journal, but she does record poems and good thoughts about writing in a simple notebook. She says that writing someone else’s poems by hand lets her feel the cadence and tone of the poem in a way that reading the poem cannot convey.

GOALS

To save words, poems, excerpts from stories, bits of language that you like; to practice writing in someone else’s style; to learn to read more widely; to create a storehouse of quotes that could be inspiration for future writing

HOW TO BEGIN

Thus far, you have saved “stuff” to slip into your journals, sketched something growing in an improbable place, made many lists, drawn pictures, and attached numerous photos together. Now, you are going to be thoughtful about finding words that we want to save—words that inspire or make you happy (or sad), or say something in just the right way! Below are several ways to think about words, where to find them, and how to keep them safe.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start a reading journal, or make a section of your general journal for this purpose. Keep your journal with you when you read stories or poems. When you read a line or passage that you want to save, copy it into your journal, noting the author and title of the book. Try this for science reading as well as history or biography. Reading widely will stimulate your own writing.
- When you are reading newspapers or magazines, even cereal boxes, if you see words or phrases that you like, cut them out and

paste them into your journal. Then write something using some of your favorites.

- Try word collages. As a class, brainstorm favorite words, words that you like to say, such as “zipper” or “plunk”; words that are long and fill up your mouth, like “macaroni.” Try listing all of your favorite color words, or your favorite place words. Any theme will work: weather words, friends’ names, names of flowers or birds, etc. Then make a collage with these words. Mix the cut-out words with words written in your own handwriting. See if these collages inspire a piece of journal writing.
- Collect personal words. Letters, report cards, autograph books, notes left on the kitchen table, messages, awards, and even birthday cards are full of words we may wish to keep! These can be slipped into your journal, envelopes and all, or phrases can be copied and treasured later on. These words could inspire a journal entry about the person who wrote you the letter, or gave you the award, or they might trigger a memory of the day your friend wrote in your autograph book. It’s fun to come upon these words months or even years later. Then the memories will rush back, perhaps with a poem or story attached, that you could write in your journal.
- Bring your journal to school, to the dentist, to the local grocery store, to your friend’s house. Ask the people you see during the week to write something in your journal. They can write whatever they wish or you could give them directions, such as, **“Write an early childhood memory,” “What are you most afraid of?” “What does home mean to you?” “What is your favorite story about food?”** Read these entries in a quiet place, at the end of the week, and see what resonates with you. Who would you like to respond to? Is there something you’d like to share, such as your fears or your definition of home? Write a response in your journal, then bring it back to these places and friends and share what you have written.
- Eavesdropping is not a crime if it is unavoidable to overhear the talking that’s happening right around you! We have all overheard bits of conversations that arouse our curiosity. Often what is left out of the story stimulates the imagination. **How are the two people who are talking related to one another? Who will win**

the argument? Where do they live? Are they just passing through town? Write down some of the dialogue in your journal and then go to a quiet spot to create a story using the information that had been overheard as the kernel of the plot.

ONE STEP FURTHER OR BACK

The best place to start is in looking for words that you wish to save, such as birthday greetings or a story you wrote that you really love. Other assigned suggestions can follow later. Tuck an envelope (or several envelopes) into the journal as a safe place to keep special words. Creating a journal just for these words is also a fine place to begin. You can refer to the *VSA arts* creative writing resource *Opening Up the Sky*.

Referring back to the “Seven-Word Spill” lesson in the *Let the Light In* poetry resource is another way to link earlier lessons with journal writing. In this lesson seven words are the seeds for a poem. Decorating the cover of a simple journal is a way to personalize the journal before the writing begins. By naming the journal, the student begins to use words in a meaningful way, claiming the space in between the pages as his or hers.

EXTENSIONS

Phrases or words can be seen as subjects that look strictly at their meanings, and as objects, which acknowledges their shapes and their meanings. Using words as your material for collages, paintings, weaving, or quilts takes them out of the context of story or conversation and allows them to be viewed in a new way. Repeating a meaningful phrase adds cohesion and design to a work of art. A class song might be organized around favorite words and phrases. When the words saved are taken from their safe place in the journal and brought out into the world, the students will be sharing something of value with others and seeing the validation of what they love.

INCLUDING ALL LEARNERS

There is much potential for language development for students with learning disabilities or for emerging or struggling readers in this lesson. Using words as treasures, students can transform a word search into a real adventure.

Links to Learning

This lesson can be a wonderful adjunct to vocabulary studies and spelling lessons. Students for whom these are difficult areas can learn that words are fun, personally meaningful, and can be special friends. Finding funny, unique, interesting-sounding, really long words makes for a good treasure hunt. Looking at words that sound alike or that start the same way can be fun and educational to explore.

Travis' Story

Travis was at the end of fifth grade, reading on an early second-grade level and barely able to write at all, when he was homeschooled with intensive tutoring for six months to give a boost to his academic performance.

It was a struggle for Travis, who had low vision and significant speech and language delays, to write even a sentence of a few words. Casting about for ways to both develop writing skills and to break his severe writer's block—his strongly held conviction that he simply couldn't do it—his tutor hit on "speed writing." He had been earning colored blocks assigned a point value to spend on special activities and he was offered the highest count, a 10-point red block, for the following exercise.

Every morning, five minutes were set aside for "speed writing." Travis sat at the computer and the only stipulation was that he had to write without pause for the full five minutes to earn his points. He had to write words but they didn't have to be sentences and spelling didn't count. But he couldn't pause.

He was delighted at this "easy" way to earn points and was eager to do it the first day. In his *first* five-minute session he produced a string of words that ended in a full phrase that actually made sense. By his

third session he was writing entirely in sentences of a sort. Interestingly, he wrote about himself and what was happening around him. And he thought it was fun! Very early on, when the five minutes were up, he'd say, "I need a little more time to finish." His first phrases were simply about what was happening in his life—sitting in the kitchen with Dad, going riding, skiing. Then he moved on to things he *wished* were true, like owning a horse.

After about two weeks he learned to spell-check his writing and to look at content. Three months later he was writing at a third-grade level with confidence and pleasure. This project marked his growth, in six months, from a first-grade writing level to being a functioning writer. It was a turning point where he left behind forever the "but I can't write" fears. In addition, his reading level at the end of this time went from early second to end of fourth grade. This was certainly due to the strategies involved specifically in reading skills, but clearly reflected his discovery that writing and words could be meaningful and satisfying. He rejoined his class in school able to work much closer to grade level and remained with them through middle and high school.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Recommended children's books

Brown, Margaret Wise. *The Winter Noisy Book*. Illustrated by Charles G. Shaw. New York: HarperCollins, 1994.

Fox, Mem. *Night Noises*. Illustrated by Terry Denton. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989.

Grimes, Nikki. *Jazmin's Notebook*. New York: Dial Books, 1998. (Set in Harlem of the 1960s, this story focuses on a 14-year-old girl who shares her life through poems and journal entries; fiction.)

Johnson, D.B. *Henry Builds A Cabin*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002. (Gives a view of Henry David Thoreau's house at Waldon Pond, looked at through the eyes of a bear.)

McGovern, Ann. *Too Much Noise*. Illustrated by Simms Taback. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1967.

Moss, Marissa. *Amelia's Family Ties*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company, 2000. (A 10-year-old girl travels alone to California to get to know her estranged dad and meet his new family.)

Moss, Marissa. *Amelia Hits the Road*. Berkeley: Tricycle Press, 1997. (Ten-year-old Amelia travels with her mom and sister.)

Moss, Marissa. *Luv, Amelia*. Middleton, WI: Pleasant Company, 1999. (Correspondence between two best friends with real flip-open envelopes.)

Moss, Marissa. *Amelia's Notebooks*. Berkeley: Tricycle Press, 1995. (Nine-year-old girl's thoughts covering moving, sisters, friendships. All *Amelia* books are reproduced in notebook facsimiles with drawings, maps, letters, and sketches.)

Reference books and anthologies

Bell, Anne Olivier, ed. *The Diary of Virginia Woolf*. Vol. 1. New York and London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977. (Woolf was an English writer who wrote 30 diaries during her married years. They are collected in a five-volume set. They reveal how the habit of keeping diaries can have an impact on fictional work as well.)

Bishop, Elizabeth. *Geography III*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976.

Carroll, M. David. *The Year of the Turtle: A Natural History*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1996. (An artist and naturalist observes the yearly cycle of the freshwater turtle. Carroll has written several other books in this same genre.)

Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*, Boston and London: Shambhala, 1986. (Writing prompts that work well as journal prompts. Goldberg has written several books that help jumpstart writing.)

Hillesum, Ety. *An Interrupted Life and Letters from Westerbork*. Henry Holt, NY: Owl Books, 1996. (The adult counterpart to *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Hillesun died at Auschwitz in 1943.)

Hall, Donald. *Lifework*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1993. (Autobiographical. Shows how work, life, writing, and living are entwined.)

Kennedy, X.J., and Dorothy M. Kennedy. *Knock at a Star*. Illustrated by Karen Ann Weinhaus. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 1985. (An introduction to poetry for children and teachers.)

Nye, Shihab Naomi. *What Have You Lost?* Photographs by Michael Nye. New York: Greenwillow Books, 1999.

Oliver, Mary. *Blue Estuaries*, New York and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1995. (Award-winning poet Oliver writes prose pieces that combine poetry and journal writing. Her reverence for nature shines through.)

Rylant, Cynthia. *Something Permanent*. Photographs by Walker Evans. New York and London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1994.

Soto, Gary. *Neighborhood Odes*. New York: Scholastic text, copyright Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992. (Poems that praise the daily life in Soto's Berkeley, California, neighborhood, in English and Spanish text.)

Truitt, Anne. *Daybook: A Journal of an Artist*. New York: Penguin Books, 1982.

Tymorek, Stan, ed. *HOME: A Collection of Poetry and Art*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1999.



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