

1

The Teacher and Creative Writing

Why teach writing? If someone has the gift, won't he write anyway?

True, there are born writers. Some people seem to have it “in them” to write. But even a born writer needs guidance. Consider gifted people in other fields. A person who has a green thumb isn't born knowing which plants are weeds and which are flowers. He doesn't automatically know the best time to plant every vegetable and flower. Someone had to teach him. The person who can make anything mechanical work wasn't born knowing about gears and engines. He had to learn some basics.

So it is with writing. Without guidance, some students never will learn to write. Without guidance, some will—somehow. But your teaching will help them all.

In one sense, writing cannot be taught. Your role as the teacher is similar to that of parents whose baby begins to talk. They cannot talk for the baby, but they encourage, help, and praise the child's effort. They know baby talk is a highly important step in the child's speech development.

You also guide and encourage your class of writers. Focus on helping them feel comfortable putting their thoughts on paper, on helping them realize they can express themselves in writing. Encourage each child to perceive his environment

and assess his feelings accurately. Lead him to record his perceptions on paper in his own words, arranged to his liking. Guide him in thinking creatively—thinking like a writer.

How can I teach children to think creatively?

Creative writing comes from creative thinking. Creative thinking is something too many people never do. Too often people are too busy to observe the world around them, too busy to notice people and places and happenings.

Help students see the beauty and action around them in everyday life. For example, on the playground you might ask, “How does this weather make you feel?” or “How would you describe the sky today?” “See that truck going by—what kind of sound is it making?”

Add your own ideas, not as the final word, but only as another opinion. “Look, those clouds look like they are in a hurry.”

Or talk about something you see and try to find a story in it. A piece of paper goes blowing across the ball field—imagine what it might be. Is a neighbor burning trash? Did someone lose an important assignment?

This incidental method of stimulating imaginations should be brief and informal—simply a part of casual conversation. Yet it serves to sharpen the students’ powers of observation and makes them think creatively about the world around them.

Creative writing comes also from honest and free expression. Help your students learn this. In your own writing and as you compose with your students, write freely. Don’t employ trite, empty words or shroud the vibrancy of honest

thought in watered-down expressions. Watch their eyes dance as they imagine themselves using words so effectively.

Treat and view your students as bona fide writers. They may or may not be future writers. But they are writers now.

But I'm not a writer—I can't teach writing!

Most people, if asked, would say the same: “I’m not a writer.” Yet a writer isn’t a special somebody with a halo on his head and a stream of golden words issuing from his pen. A writer is one who writes.

And anyone can write. Again, most people say they can’t. But every person has a wealth of experience, a lifetime full of thoughts and people and happenings that could fuel his imagination and start him writing if he tried.

Are you sure you’re not a writer? You’ve never written a letter, never taken notes on a sermon? You do not need to be a published writer to be a writer. A writer is one who writes, one who uses writing to express and communicate his thoughts.

You *are* a writer. And you need to be. If you expect your students to learn to write, you need to write too. The same steps your students will follow will work for you. Become a writer.

Begin by writing with your students. If you do not, you communicate a double message. On the one hand, you’re saying, “Writing is very important—I expect you to learn to write well”; on the other, “Writing isn’t really that important—I never write.” Writing with your students tells them you believe in what they’re doing.

This doesn’t necessarily mean you should write every time your students do. It does mean that they should know you write, that they can sense that writing is important to you.

When you are a writer, you will be better equipped to guide and advise students in their writing. You will meet the same problems they meet, and therefore be able to help them with confidence. You will find the same satisfaction in a finished piece and a job well done.

At times you will have questions. You will feel unable to go on. You will need wisdom that you do not have. But as a Christian teacher, you have a source others do not. Use it often: “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (James 1:5).

2

The Student and Creative Writing

The first thing you must remember as you teach is this: you are not teaching *writing*; you are teaching *students*. There is a difference, and keeping that difference in mind will make a world of difference in your teaching.

Don't teach this book. Don't teach your own ideas. Teach your students.

What do I need to know about students to teach them to write creatively?

First, know and believe that every student is a creative being, and has the potential to become a creative writer. He is created in God's image and has the ability to think. Without that ability, no one can write.

Know that a student comes to school with his thinking skills in working order. He can tell a story using natural language, gestures, and dramatization. He can use language well.

Yet, unless he has been taught, he will not know how to write. He may act paralyzed when asked to do something so simple as tell what he did over summer vacation. But know that this is not an indication of his true ability. He needs time; he needs teaching; he needs a patient teacher who will supply that teaching and foster his writing and thinking skills.