

Exemplar 7

Mini lessons in writing

It is through attempting to write that a child learns to write. If he/she is to improve as a writer these attempts should give the experience of using language in different ways and of experimenting with different aspects of language. It is through a process of trial and error, with the teacher as guide and facilitator, that the child will learn the skills of writing.

Mini-lessons can provide the means by which children can, as they write, learn to use language in the most expressive and effective way. These can take place in whole-class, group or one-to-one settings

Making scribbles and letters on children's pictures

The purpose of this lesson is to encourage groups of emergent writers to refine their marks on paper into conventional writing. The teacher talks to a group of about four to six children about their 'writing'. This may take the form of pictures which represent their communications.

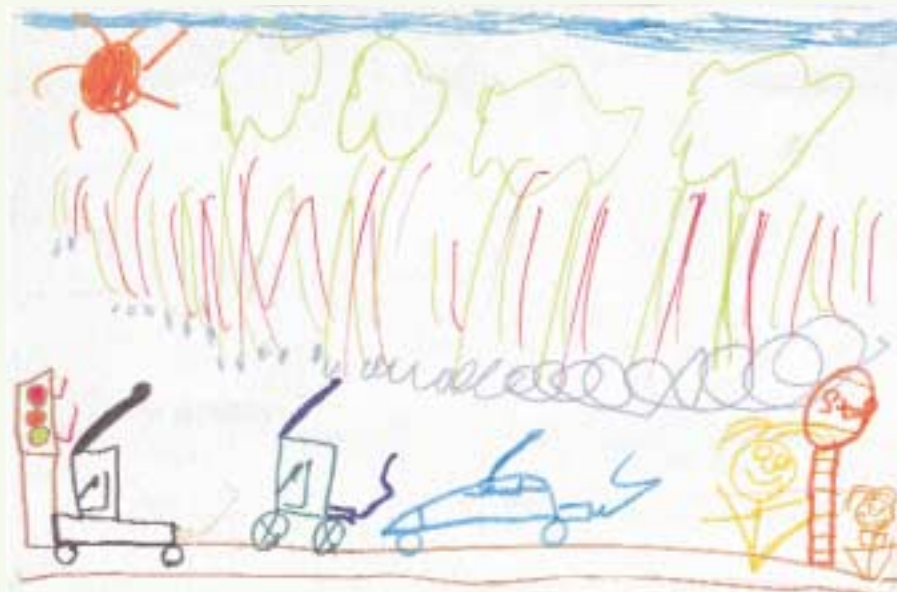
The teacher then encourages each child to tell what his/her picture is about and selects one picture which is, for example, about a birthday party. The picture might depict the party with friends, the cake, candles, decorations etc. The teacher then writes the following words slowly, sounding out each letter as he/she writes it:

'It was Hannah's birthday yesterday.'

As the teacher is writing, children in the group are encouraged to give the appropriate letters based on the phonemes into which each word is broken. The teacher will write the appropriate sentences for each child as they work on this particular piece or on a new piece.

Through this kind of lesson children are encouraged

- to use print in their writing
- to witness the teacher slowing down the saying of words in order to spell
- to see left-to-right orientation being put into practice
- to become familiar with the shapes of letters that are in their own names
- to give more detail in their pictures in order to make their message clearer to readers.



Very early writing may take the form of pictures.



The use of quotation marks

The purpose of this lesson is to explain the use of quotation marks and the conventions that circumscribe their use. This activity might be used from second class onwards.

The teacher can talk to the class about using the actual words people say in their writing. Through discussion he/she can lead them to see that using them can make the story livelier and get the message across more vividly.

The children can then look at books from the class library and look for places where the actual words of a character are used. A discussion can take place that will make children aware of one of the conventions that indicate direct speech in print.

The more obvious features should emerge fairly readily. When direct

speech is used, marks are put at the beginning and at the end of the words the character uses. They can be told that these are called 66s and 99s and that they are given these names because the shapes look like these numbers. 66s come just before a person speaks and 99s just after.

As children mature they can gradually be introduced to the terms 'speech marks', 'inverted commas' and 'quotation marks'. They can also be encouraged to notice that each time a new person speaks the writer goes to a new line.

The teacher can then either pick out examples of the use of quotation marks in different books and ask the children to look at them or, alternatively, ask them to pick out examples for themselves.

They could then be asked to redraft the piece of writing they are working on and to remember to use the 66s and 99s.

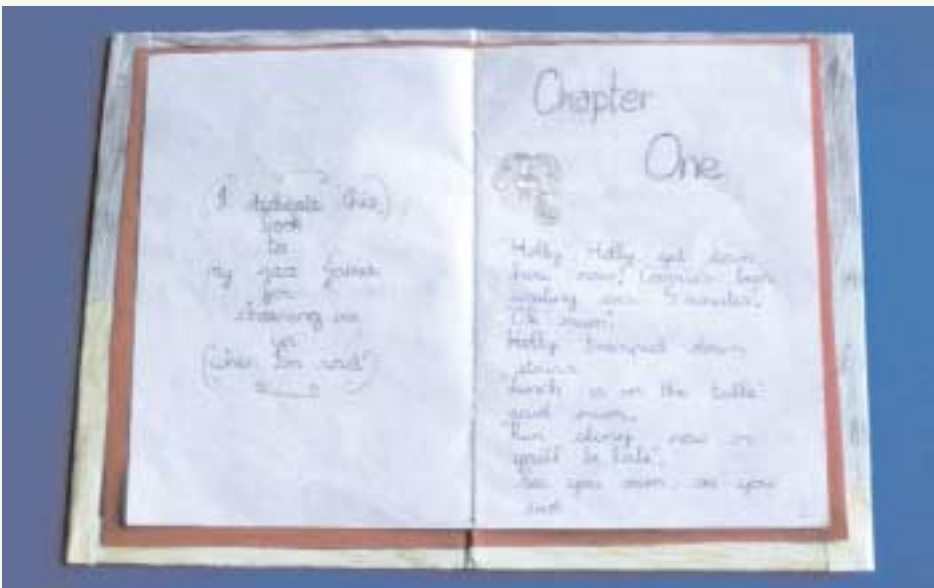


The use of adjectives and verbs

How adjectives and verbs are used when writing a description or a narrative is important. Children in fifth and sixth classes, for example, could be encouraged to enhance the expressive effect of their writing by using a broader range of verbs.

A child writing about walking through mud might, with or without prompting, use words like 'sticky', 'soaking', 'smelly', 'cement-like'. In a conferencing session on this particular piece of writing the teacher might suggest that the child should look at the experience in another way. He/she might say, 'Instead of describing what the mud was like, think about how it felt like to make your way through it.' This might guide the child to think about it from another point of view and elicit descriptions such as, 'I sank up to my ankles in the mud.' or 'It sucked as I tried to walk.' In this way the child can be made aware that the use of appropriate verbs can be just as descriptive, or even more so, than a litany of adjectives. Engaging a child in such a discussion can give him/her a better appreciation of how words can be used effectively.

After an exercise like this children could be encouraged to read their writing aloud and a discussion might take place on how different children used words in their writing. As part of such a discussion the teacher could help them to appreciate the functions of the adjective and the verb and how both can contribute in making writing more expressive.



Children should have the opportunity to engage with an extended piece of writing.