

Reflections on Writing Workshop

Amy Harrison, First Grade Teacher

How do you motivate reluctant writers?

AMY: Usually a reluctant writer, in my opinion, is reluctant because they don't think they can do it. And maybe they don't think they can do it because what they have done in their life, they don't consider to be something they can write about. So in my classroom, I encourage reluctant writers by having them consider the things that they've done in their life as really important, and things that they should write about, and things that people want to read about. And so, any life experience is worthy of writing about.

How do you know where to start with writing workshop and where to go next?

AMY: I know where to start teaching and where to go next because I look at what the kids are doing. So if the majority of the kids, at this point in the year, already have, like, conventions, spacing, capitalization under control, then I wouldn't spend any time there. I really consider where they are at the time, and whatever, you know, the standards may be for the grade level, I'll cross-reference those, and just make sure that I'm meeting all those, I'm hitting all those, but also not spending lots of time on things that I feel like they already have under control.

How do you help your students build writing stamina?

AMY: I feel like we took baby steps to get there. We started out with storytelling as the foundation of all of our writing that we did—and even the storytelling timeframes were very short at the beginning of the year, and as the weeks progressed, those pieces of time got larger. And so then, when they were ready to actually put words down on paper, they were kind of used to what it felt like to be

engaged in that context for longer than five or ten minutes. They knew what it felt like. So then I would tell them, you know, you've already been storytelling with partners for twenty minutes; today, you're going to get a chance to take the stories that you've told and write them on paper. And it was almost like they naturally just did that, because they had spent so much time building their toolkit of stories to pull from.

How do you teach reading and writing together?

AMY: So, reading and writing are woven through the literacy part of my day, and part of the kids' day, because we engage in the same types of practices no matter what we're doing. So, using what they know—we do that in reading and in writing. Taking where they are, and, you know, pushing them to another level—that happens in both reading and writing. Using what we've done as a whole group to support some individual work. So, today we wrote the word "winter"; how do you think you would write the word "November"? It's the same ending as the word "winter." So, linking things that we've done across the morning, and connecting those things so that it doesn't feel like writing is here, reading is here, independent reading is here—so that they understand it's kind of all one big literacy experience.