

Download resources



Writing In the Air

How to teach young children to write and tell stories.

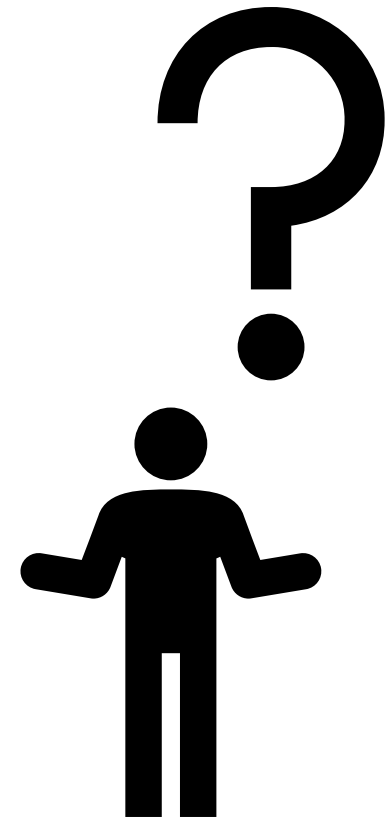
Let's tell a story together



KIM FIRMSTON

- **Currently the Alexandra Writers Centre Youth Program Director**
- **A decade plus in early childhood education**
- **Experience teaching youth 18 month to 19 years in literary arts and storytelling**
- **35+ years teaching experience**

**WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST
IMPORTANT THINGS TO DEVELOP
WHEN TELLING A STORY?**



WHAT ARE THE THREE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS TO DEVELOP WHEN TELLING A STORY?

- + CHARACTER
- + SETTING
- + PLOT

HOW TO EXPLORE CHARACTER

Character

- Goal, Motive, and Conflict
- Emotions
- Description
- Body Reactions
- Body Movements
- Character Senses

Method

- + Acting and guessing games
- + Looking, touching, listening, smelling and describing.
- + Learning about the character in a way that the student can put themselves inside the character's experience.
- + Drawing
- + Discussing

LET'S TELL A STORY ABOUT A PUPPY

Goal (What our puppy wants)

Motive (Why our puppy wants it)

Conflict (Why our puppy can't get it)

How does our puppy feel at the beginning of the story?

What does that look like when we see our puppy?

What does that feel like inside our puppy?

Can you act like our puppy?

What Sense (smell, taste, touch, hearing, seeing) is our puppy best at? Can our puppy use this sense to solve their problem?

LET'S TELL A STORY ABOUT A PUPPY

What are some other emotions your puppy can have?

Can you act them out?

What emotion would your puppy like?

What emotion would your puppy not like?

When your puppy is feeling an emotion they don't like, how can they make themselves feel better?

Can you act out your puppy feeling an emotion they don't like and making themselves feel better?

Can you draw your puppy and write the name you want to give them?

CREATING CHARACTER

Using A Character Sheet

You can either fill in a character sheet as a class or each student can fill in their own character sheet.

Encourage the students to make their own original characters.

You can even teach them about plagiarism at this point.

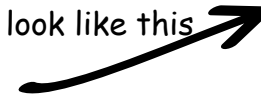
Keep in mind that kids learn through imitation and play, so start with actual characters or worlds that exist in media and slowly grow on the concept as they hit other developmental levels.

MY CHARACTER

My Character is a:

Their name is:

They look like this

A large empty rectangular box with a black border, intended for drawing a character.

They want (goal)

because (motive)

but they can't get it because (conflict)

LET'S TELL A STORY ABOUT A PUPPY

Character Sheet

You can use the character sheet for more than the main character. Side characters and even the antagonists can have a character sheet.

If the story has an antagonist

You can get your students to fill out a Character sheet about the antagonist.

Talk to your students about:

- What a protagonist is (main character)
- What an antagonist is (opposing character)
- That the antagonist doesn't have to be mean. Their job is only to stop our puppy from getting what they want.
- The antagonist can
 - Learn a lesson
 - Become a friend
 - Not give the puppy what they want but help them find a good replacement.

MY CHARACTER

My Character is a:

Their name is:

They look like this



They want (goal)

because (motive)

but they can't get it because (conflict)

World Building (Setting)

Genres

Kids understand genres. You just have to put their knowledge in the right words so that they can put a label and a definition on the concept.

Here's one way of explaining it:

Genres are the categories of stories. We use genre to help us understand the rules of the story without being told. Like if there are superheroes – we know that powers are going to be real.

HERE ARE SOME OTHER GENRES – Ask your students if they can figure out the rules for them.

- Fantasy – Magic, mythical creatures (fairies, dragons, unicorns), princesses and knights
- Science Fiction - technology, sometimes aliens and outer space, maybe even robots
- Spooky - Monsters, dark nights, and jump scares.
- Fable – This has a lesson at the end.
- General Fiction – this is set in the normal world.
- Animal Stories – Talking animals

World Building

Description – using senses

Sight – colours, shapes, height, textures, shininess.

Sound – volume, onomatopoeia, length of sound,

Smell/Taste (same words) – temperature, natural, chemical, texture

Touch – Hardness, sharpness, texture, temperature

Have the kids build a senses dictionary as a class or by themselves.

- Explore the classroom for senses.
- Make senses bags for touching, shaking, or smelling.
- Have a student describe an object and have the class guess or draw what they are describing.
- Play eye spy (nose spy, hand spy, ear spy) with descriptions.
- Show 3 pictures of different settings and fill in a sense dictionary for each one.

Senses Dictionary

| SMELL / TASTE | SIGHT | SOUND | TOUCH |
|---------------|-------|-------|-------|
| | | | |

Example



| SMELL / TASTE | SIGHT | SOUND | TOUCH |
|---|--|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Dirt Sweet Flowers Cookies Fresh Grass | Round Soft Pink White Green Brown Light Sunny | Buzz Chirp Whoosh Laughter | Squishy Velvety Soft Warm |

PLOT – What are the steps?

Hook – Start with something cool that shows off your problem.

First Conflict and the Result – Your protagonist tries to solve the problem. They fail and the problem gets worse OR they succeed and the problem changes. Things get worse.

Second Conflict and the Result – Your protagonist tries to solve the problem. They fail and the problem gets worse OR they succeed and the problem changes. Things get worse.

Climax

Part 1: ALL HOPE IS LOST – Your protagonist is definitely going to fail! How will they ever make it out of this?

Part 2: THE BIG SAD – Your protagonist is super sad and feels alone.

Part 3: CLEVER SOLUTION – your protagonist figures out a clever solution to the problem and puts it into action.

Resolution – What happens with your Protagonist. Do they get what they want or do they compromise? How does the story end?

Ways to Help Your Students Remember

Plot cards that some students can hold when that part of the story happens. They can even find the right card for the right part as they learn to read.

A character sheet on the smart board that your class can fill out together.

A giant senses dictionary for your class that you can put pictures and words on as well as objects which you can keep filling out as the year progresses. The kids can then look at the board and remember how to read and spell the description word they need.

Ways to tell the story with your class

I FORGET!

Your students love to be in charge, so let them! Create a character together and then use the outline to tell the story leaving out important parts by claiming you forgot that part of the story.

Ex: The ... I forgot what character we made, can you remind me? Right! Puppy!... The puppy was looking for ... Oh no! I forgot. What was the puppy looking for? How can we make it sound interesting?

ACT IT OUT

While you tell the story, ask each student for ideas for various parts then all together, act out the story as it happens. Point out the different parts of the plot and ask them what they think will happen. When the story goes to a new environment or genre, ask them for the senses the character would experience and the emotions they would have. Ask them how they are managing their emotions or if they aren't.

WRITE IT OR DRAW IT OUT

For your young story tellers you can use a long arm stapler to make small books for them to fill out (about 8 pages). For each page have them write or draw the part of the story in the plot outline. Before they do this, have them create a character sheet or two and a senses dictionary.

Other learning you can add

A Counting Book (Math) – *Ex Puppy is looking for their bone. They find 1 bugs. They find 2 cats. They find 3 ghosts OH NO!*

A Colour Book (language/science) – *Ex Puppy is looking for Girl at the fair. She has a green coat. Is that balloon green? No! It's red. Maybe Puppy can tie it on their waist and fly up to get a better view.*

A Touch Book (Language) – *Ex: Gluing in things that have different textures that look like the things they represent, such as a green scrubber for prickly grass or a piece of fun fur for a small soft mouse. This is a good way help students find description words.*

A Cook Book (Science - measuring) – *Ex: Stuffy was trying to make pancakes. They needed one cup of flour. Oh no! The flour spilled! What could puppy do? – and then put the recipe at the end of the book and get the kids to make it at home with their stuffed animal and their guardian, taking photos to glue in their book.*

A Travel Book (Language/Science/Geography) – *Have the character try to find something across areas you are learning about such as the rain forest, the desert, Jupiter, or the capitals of Canada. Use your senses dictionary to describe each place and then have the kids write about their character in each location. You can even act it out. They love pretending to get on transport!*

Wherever you can, add an element of storytelling to make the lesson memorable.

Students at this age love to play and play make believe. Telling a story out loud, acting it out, or putting it into a verbal puppet play is a great way to have them practice the elements of storytelling without having to worry about the writing, grammar, spelling, and motor skills part. Once they get a handle on writing, you can expand the verbal storytelling by asking them to use the story they just acted out or told as inspiration to write their own story. The more they practice the better they will get at creating characters, describing worlds, and understanding plot.

The AWCS And You

How our writing centre can help you
and your students.

The logo for AWICS (Alexandra Writers' Centre Society) is presented within a white rounded rectangle on a dark teal background. The letters 'A', 'W', and 'S' are rendered in a dark teal, serif font. The letter 'I' is replaced by a stylized illustration of three books of varying heights and colors (tan, brown, and dark brown) standing on a dark teal shelf. The letters 'C' and 'S' are also in the same dark teal, serif font.

AWICS

ALEXANDRA WRITERS' CENTRE SOCIETY

The central text is flanked by decorative graphic elements consisting of three white, stylized, overlapping shapes that resemble the pages of an open book or a fan, positioned on both the left and right sides of the text.

JOIN US AND MENTOR A
PASSION FOR WRITING

WHO WE ARE

The Alexandra Writers' Centre provides a friendly and encouraging environment for writers of all skill levels and ages. So whether you have a couple of hours or a few weeks, are a beginner or been writing for years, we have something to pique your interest.



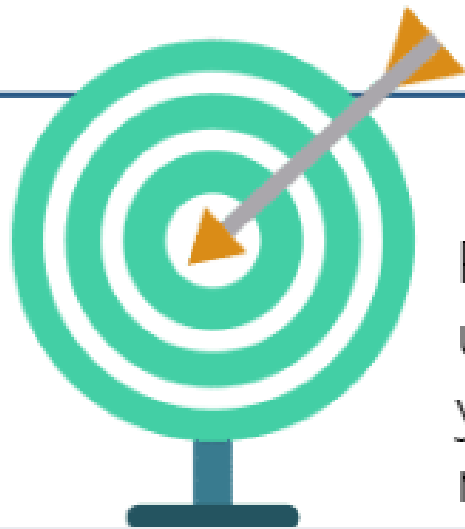
MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS



- 25% discount on classes and workshops
- 1 free visit with our Writer in Residence
- Free drop-in programs
- Guest Speakers, Author Discussions, and Members Only programs
- Free access to our Literary Salon

J. MICHAEL FAY SUBSIDY PROGRAM

Based on the philosophy of writers supporting writers, the J. Michael Fay Subsidy Program is available to anyone who finds themselves in financial need.



HERE FOR TEACHERS

Flexibility is the key to success. Work with us to design a program individualized for yourself, your teachers', or your students' needs, time, and budget.

PD DAYS FOR TEACHERS AT YOUR PLACE OR OURS

Develop your literary skills in a no-fail atmosphere — then take what you've learned back to the classroom along with great resources to share.



AWCS IN THE CLASSROOM

By building students' literary toolbox, we support writing, journaling, and storytelling development from the early grades all the way to the grade 12 classroom.



GROW A PASSION FOR WRITING

With so many after-school programs to choose from, as well as summer camps, workshops, and events, we help youth grow a passion for writing.

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