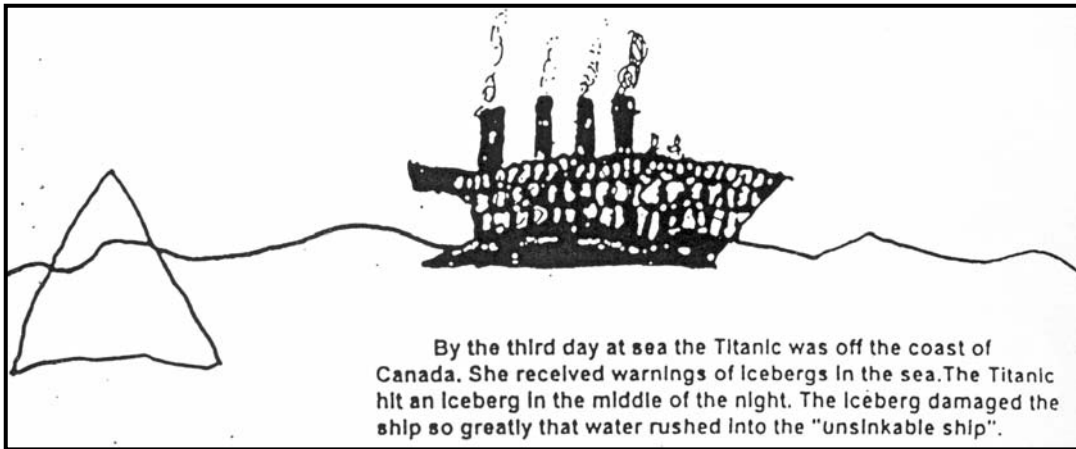


Writing Together in my Primary Classroom



by
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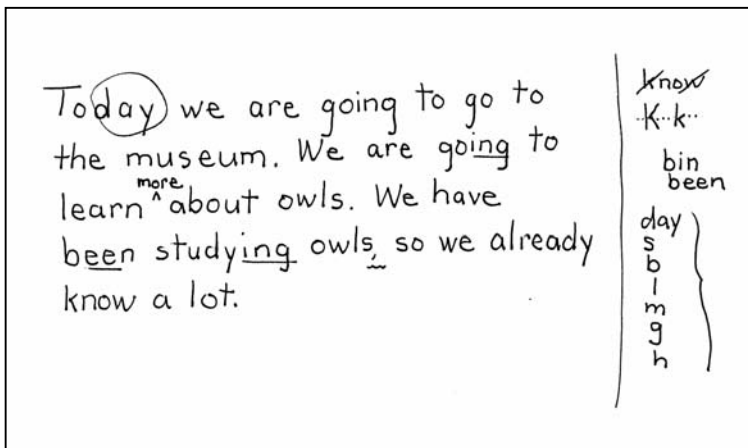
Writing Together in My Primary Classroom

I
by Linda Pierce Picciotto

Perhaps the most important thing I do to help my early primary students to learn to write and read is to write short messages with them. This enhances their progress in reading and helps them to become aware of the many facets of writing in a non-stressful way. Children at all levels of development benefit from and enjoy these writing experiences.

After the students have gathered on the carpet in front of the easel blackboard, we decide what sentences we will write. Usually the subject is something we have done together, an event we are looking forward to, or something funny that happened at school. Sometimes we compose a poem, write a thank-you letter, or write about a book I've read to them. When classmates have birthdays, we write about those students. The more interested the students are in the subject, the closer attention they will pay to the exercise.

As I print the words of our chosen sentences on the board, I encourage my students to spell along with me and to answer aloud my questions about spelling and punctuation. Not all are ready to respond orally, but



everyone listens and watches. As the younger students gain experience, I'll be hearing their voices, too. As we work through our sentences, I explain how our language works: rules of phonics, punctuation, rhyming words, irregular spellings, formation of

the letters, and the like. I give mini-lessons as we proceed. I even throw in word derivation when I think they'll find it interesting [*Remember the French word 'beau' in 'Il fait beau?' Here it is in 'beautiful!'*] and we talk about root words [*What's the root word of 'beautifully'? Beautiful!*]. We make "word family" lists off to the side or substitute letters in a word to transform it into another word. I pay heed to the students' attention. If I see that they are no longer focusing, I move right along to finish the sentence without extra "teachable moment" discussions.

there is at least one of those in each word. The more advanced students begin to see what words I've chosen or what letters are needed to complete some words, so they can guess appropriately. Less advanced students can pick a random letter and still feel good about participating. They soon learn that "x" is probably not a good choice...a lesson in probability!

Near the end, many students (and adults in the room!) will be able to read the message. No one is allowed to say it aloud, but I tell them that they can give me a little wave to let me know that they figured it out. If a less-advanced student's name is called toward the end, I give them a chance to ask for a suggestion from a friend so they can feel good about saying a letter that will help complete the puzzle.

Missing Letters

_t _s _ v_r_
 w_rm d__ t_d__.
 _t f__ls l_k_
 s_m m_r!

(Consonants only -
It is a very
warm day
today. It

I write a sentence on the board, leaving out all of the vowels or leaving out all of the consonants.

Students discover that often they can read the sentence without vowels before we even begin!

Ou_ a_a_y__i_
 __a__ _a__ow_
 _o _u__! l_i_
 _ow _a__e__ _a_
 __e o_a__e _a__e.

(Vowels only -
Our amaryllis
plant has
grown so much!
It is now
taller than
the orange
table.)

We ____ see ____ buddies
 ____ afternoon. __ will __
 outside to ____ a ____
 together.

(Leaving out every other
word -
will
our
this
We
go
play
game.)

Sometimes I'll leave out every other word, leaving a space so we can add the word later. Learning to predict what missing words might be by using context clues is one skill we want to teach to beginning readers,

so this is a very useful exercise, and the students enjoy working together on this puzzle.

When our notes are complete we can begin to work on the text of the book. Each page can be a chapter. We reread the notes together and then form good sentences using the information. I'm careful not to do too much in one sitting, so it takes many sessions to complete the book.

Sometimes I type out the finished product with large letters on the computer using landscape aspect, and sometimes I print it neatly on large pieces of paper which I can staple together to form the book. Each page will be illustrated by students in one way or another. Sometimes they work in groups and sometimes I use individual drawings to make collages. If students have completed line drawings for the illustrations, can produce small books so each child can have a copy. Often the level of reading is fairly high, but students can usually read the books to their families because they are so familiar with the material.

The Great Blue Heron

