

Writing For Pleasure At The Kitchen Table

Billy Bean is a primary school teacher and parent.



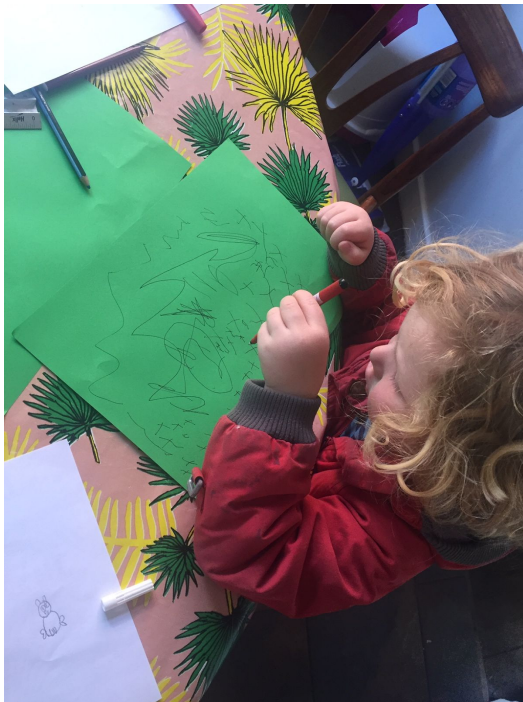
Every morning, myself (39), Maisie (8), Archie (6) and Hank (3) meet at the kitchen table to write. We have been using a *Writing For Pleasure* approach (Young 2019) and the kitchen table has become our writing workshop. We usually start by talking about what's in our writing journals, reading books and drawing. Archie has spent time creating his own *Inspired by...* pieces (Young & Ferguson 2020) based on his love of funny books like *Mr Gum* and *Bunny Vs Monkey*. He's also crafted his own mini-series of comics. He usually tries his ideas out on us before he sets out to write them and we offer our opinion. Some have even been written in full collaboration.

Archie has also been given some writing from school to do. He had to read a fact-file about firemen... and then write a fact-file about firemen... He wasn't motivated by the prospect replying: 'I don't know anything about firemen.' His emphasis on the 'I' was so interesting to me. He was right. He had a whole information text about firemen which he had just read and understood. The knowledge he was referring to is different to what adults think of. What he was actually saying was 'I don't care about firemen.' The knowledge is within the text he has read, not within him. I asked him what he would rather be sharing information about and he immediately replied: Ghostbusters. Then it hit us! We need to write a fact-file about Ghostbusters. We came up with a plan and the teaching really began. He wanted his information text to represent his very best writing and he soaked up all the knowledge I could share with him about how to craft a great one. With this slight but significant adjustment, his view of what writing was for changed. It was like teaching a different child. Instead of being listless and indifferent, he felt empowered and excited.

We publish all our writing onto our bookshelf but recently we've been thinking about where else our writing can go once it's ready for public consumption. Archie has been preparing his piece on the computer; creating illustrations, headings and fact boxes. We've discussed

publishing possibilities: sending it to family, the school library, the local book shop, our friends' houses, and even guerilla-style placement into the local library. All have been incredibly exciting for him. Sitting at the computer yesterday, he announced to us all: 'this is going to be the best book I've ever written!'

Maisie has always been a highly-motivated writer. She has a character called *Viola Mickleton* who she has been writing regular little vignettes about for months now. We spent time looking through them and decided she deserved more of a story. This was where I could start teaching. I shared with her the six common story arcs. She decided on an S shape. She plotted the existing anecdotes she'd written onto the line. She then came up with some new events. I was pleased to have introduced her to a whole new way of planning. When she started drafting, she chatted things over a lot, particularly with her mum. There was a lot of drawing of the characters too. She really took her time exploring the possibilities of where the plot could go. At this very moment, she is sitting next to me, with a hot drink and biscuit, typing up her manuscript.



Hank is an active member of our writing workshop too. Over the past few weeks, he has gone from being completely uninterested in writing, to being a prolific 'mark-maker' and drawer (Bissex 1980). Everyday, I give him a little booklet (sheets of A4, folded in half and stapled at the spine). He imitates his siblings' working - making drawings and marks as he tells his stories out loud. He is influenced by our stories. Sometimes he draws and asks us to tell the story. However, he will often correct us. That or he takes over all together. He encourages me to draw and participate too. The narratives loop between us. The reader and author are constantly swapping.

Every morning, I sit at that kitchen table and I'm genuinely excited. We are a true (albeit small) community of writers talking and crafting texts, making suggestions that will improve our compositions, and producing writing that will go out into the world once it reopens.

Advice on *Writing For Pleasure* at home:

- Write together everyday.
- Talk, draw and share and then talk, draw and share some more.
- Think about where you want your writing to go once it's finished.
- Write about what you're reading, watching, playing on the computer, or your favourite toys and games.
- Write about what you're knowledgeable and passionate about.
- Write about moments and memories you've all shared together.



References

- Bissett, G., (1980) *GNYS AT WRK: A child learns to write and read* London: Harvard University Press
- Young, R., (2019) *What is it 'Writing For Pleasure' teachers do that makes the difference?* The University Of Sussex: The Goldsmiths' Company [Available: www.writing4pleasure.com/what-is-it-writing-for-pleasure-teachers-do-that-makes-the-difference-research-report]
- Young, R., Ferguson, F., (2020) *Real-World Writers: a handbook for teaching writing with 7-11 year olds* London: Routledge