



***It's the little details that are vital. Little things make big things happen. John Wooden***

We are in the midst of planning a daughter's wedding. As she wanted a DIY wedding, we have been very involved in all the planning and creation for this special day. An overall theme was picked, decorations were chosen, and my sewing machine has been working overtime. For months, we have been focused on the big picture for the big day. As it draws nearer, however, I find myself focused more and more on the details. Do we want place cards? What music should be played? What shoes will I wear? The details are becoming vital.

Details are essential in a classroom. As I have co-taught with my student teacher this semester, I have watched her grow in managing the details of a successful classroom. How do I want this learning engagement to happen? What is the best way to pass out materials? What should students do when they say "I'm done!" Details are vital to a well-run classroom!

Details are also vital in student writing. It is the details that make our writing interesting to our readers. The details paint the pictures. We all know that merely asking students to put more detail in their writing is pointless, they need to be shown how to achieve this skill.

### **Primary Students**

- The most interesting word in any sentence is the verb. Young writers often choose the most basic of verbs when writing. What better way to stretch students' verb choice than through the use of an animal picture book. A wonderful source is National Geographic Little Kid's First Big Book of Animals ( part of the National Geographic Little Kids First Big Books Series.) Show students the back cover. Focus on the picture of the polar bear. Write the sentence frame on the board: *The polar bear \_\_\_\_\_*. As a group, brainstorm what the polar bear might be doing. Students will frequently complete the sentence *The polar bear sits on the ice*. While the verb sit works in our sentence, it is not very detailed. Let's stretch our writing and think of more interesting verbs. *The polar bear plops on the ice*. *The polar bear thinks while he sits on the ice*. *The polar bear crouches on the ice*. Practice this skill with other animal photographs found in this wonderful children's book.
- Students can add details and interest to their writing through the use of color words. At your local hardware store, collect a variety of paint swatches which are in different color families. Tape a color swatch onto a piece of chart paper. Pass out the chart paper and paint swatches to tables by color, with one table getting blue swatches, the next getting green, etc. As a table, students need to write down as many ideas of objects as they can that is that color. For example: the blue table might write blue like a swimming pool, the sky, a robin's egg, etc. After a few minutes, have the students switch tables until everyone has had a chance to rotate to each table.

## Intermediate Students

- Verbs are the essential words in almost every sentence! Simply changing the verb to a more interesting choice adds pizzazz to any sentence. To practice writing exciting verbs, use simple text from picture books. The book whose mouse are you? by Robert Kraus works well to practice this skill. Take a line from the book such as the mouse's response, "inside the cat." Turn this phrase into a complete sentence—*The mouse is inside the cat.* How might we change the verb to make the sentence more interesting? *The mouse is tumbling inside the cat.* Now, what details can we add to better paint a picture for our reader? *After being eaten by the cat, the mouse is tumbling in his stomach.* Can we also change *being eaten* to a more enticing verb? As students complete their new sentences, compare the completed writing with the author's original text! Another book that works well is The Important Book by Margaret Wise. When using The Important Book, we use only the beginning line. Students can then add their own details to the opening line of each example. For example: *The important thing about the wind is that it blows.* How can we change this? Can the wind howl, or whisper, or sing? Students can alter the verb and then paint a picture for the reader through the use of details. A new sentence might be: *The important thing about the wind is that it sings through the young trees in the forest, rustling leaves in beat to the music.*
- The use of specific color words adds interest and detail to our writing. Provide students with a copy of the multi-shaded paint chips found at your local hardware store. Discuss that every sample on the chip is a similar color, merely a different shade. Give students a few minutes to label each paint shade sample with a simile. For example: *as green as young grass, as green as pine needles, as green as a scummy pond, etc.* Students will choose their favorite color simile and complete the simile with the use of details. For example: *as green as young grass peeking through the ground on a bright spring morning.*
- For a variation, have each student tape one paint chip sample to the top of a piece of paper. Students will write a simile using that color on the paper. After a minute, students will pass their paper to their left and students will write a simile for the paint chip they now possess. Continue until the papers return to their original owner.



Additional ideas and activities can be found in the *Write Now Right Now Writing Program*.

Visit: [www.writenow-rightnow.com](http://www.writenow-rightnow.com) for more information and lesson samples.