



*"Tomorrow is the first blank page of a 365 page book. Write a good one."  
— Brad Paisley*

The beginning of a new year has a different meaning when you are an elementary teacher. January 1st does not reflect a new start, but rather a new semester. The majority of us will return to the same classroom filled with the same students. Reflecting on this idea as I packed up Christmas decorations, I decided that the New Year isn't a new start for teachers, but rather an opportunity to tweak our current practices. What wonderful idea did we start the year wanting to employ which has slipped by the wayside? What expectations and goals for students have I let go of, caught up in the busyness of daily classroom life? How can I balance my home and school life? What is the best way to take care of myself and be my best for my students?

A personal goal I have is to keep my expectations high for my students. As the days get busier, I feel the tension between "get it done" and "get it done well." It can become exhausting to continually expect students to demonstrate their best learning and effort. I recently came across the following blog post about student expectations. These teachers are an inspiration to me as I look at my New Year tweaks to my instruction.

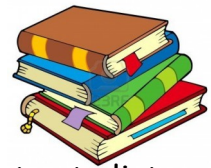
<http://blog.findingdulcinea.com/2011/04/want-to-empower-students-expect-more-of-them.html>

### Writing in Response to Text

Students are now ready to transfer their writing skills to text they have read. As we require our students to respond to text in writing, we ask ourselves the following questions before we have students complete this new task.

- Are my directions and expectations clear to my students? Have I written a prompt which explains to students the **format** of their writing, the **topic** of their writing, and **what is expected** in their written response?
- Is the text **interesting** for the students? Will the reading be engaging for the majority of my class?
- Is the text **accessible** for my students? Will my students be able to read the selected passages?
- Do my students **possess the necessary skills** to complete the assigned task? Do they have the skills they will need in order to be successful?

## Book Nook



### Bear Has a Story to Tell by Philip C. Stead

Bear has a story to tell, but all his friends are too busy preparing for winter to listen. As he helps his friends prepare for winter, he is worried that no one will stay awake to listen to his tale. This picture book is a perfect way to introduce personal narratives to students of all ages. *Write Now—Right Now* contains a planning tool for narrative writing.

[https://www.amazon.com/Bear-Story-Tell-Philip-Stead/dp/1596437456/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1483327467&sr=1-1&keywords=bear+has+a+story+to+tell](https://www.amazon.com/Bear-Story-Tell-Philip-Stead/dp/1596437456/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1483327467&sr=1-1&keywords=bear+has+a+story+to+tell)

### One for the Murphy's by Lynda Mullaly Hunt

Written by the author of Fish in A Tree, this thoughtful novel tells the story of Carley, a 12 year-old girl who unexpectedly becomes a foster child. She is placed with the Murphy's, who welcome her into their busy, loving family. Slowly, she lets down her guard, allowing herself to care for these people. Her world again turns upside down when her mother wants her back. This novel works well as a read-aloud with older students, as the characters are well-developed and empathetic. The book opens the door to great discussions with your students.

[https://www.amazon.com/One-Murphys-Lynda-Mullaly-Hunt-ebook/dp/B0064VIKD8/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1483327814&sr=1-1&keywords=one+for+the+murphys+by+lynda+mullaly+hunt](https://www.amazon.com/One-Murphys-Lynda-Mullaly-Hunt-ebook/dp/B0064VIKD8/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1483327814&sr=1-1&keywords=one+for+the+murphys+by+lynda+mullaly+hunt)

### Picture Day Perfection by Lindsay Petlak

This delightful picture book tells the story of a boy who wants to take the worst school picture ever! All students will be able to relate to his hysterical antics. Click on the link below for ideas on how to use this text to practice visualization skills.

<http://www.scholastic.com/teachers/top-teaching/2014/10/picture-day-perfection>

## Inspiring Websites

At times we all need a little inspiration! Two of our favorite go-to websites are:

[ReadBrightly.com](http://ReadBrightly.com) You will receive recommendations on books for all ages, along with advice on everything from parenting tips to increasing empathy in teenage readers.

[babbledabbledo.com](http://babbledabbledo.com) This website is filled with creative art and science projects that are engaging for students of all ages. Many of the projects come with a "how-to" video which is perfect for your visual learners.

## Writing In Math

More and more, students are being asked to explain their math reasoning in writing. This type of writing demands specific skills from our students. A resource we use is Think It, Show It Mathematics by Greg Denman. [https://store.schoolspecialty.com/OA\\_HTML/xxssi\\_ibeGetWCCFile.jsp?docName=V2182275](https://store.schoolspecialty.com/OA_HTML/xxssi_ibeGetWCCFile.jsp?docName=V2182275)

A four quadrant template, often called a Translation Task, helps students organize their thinking. Students begin by dividing a sheet of paper into four quadrants. The quadrants are labeled: Problem, Picture/Model, Equation, and Explanation.

Begin with a math problem that is easily solved by your students. The initial focus is on students' written explanation, not on the math. Copy the following example in the quadrant labeled *Problem*.

Problem	Picture/Model
Equation	Explanation

*Bob the bus driver begins his morning route with an empty bus. At the first stop, he picks up 6 passengers. At the second stop, 2 people get off the bus and 4 more people get on the bus. On the third stop, 5 passengers get off and 3 more people climb on-board the bus. How many people are on the bus at the end of the third stop?*

Students will now work on the model/picture portion of the math problem. Remind students that the focus of drawing a picture is to help them solve the problem. Using a symbol to represent the people or drawing a quick sketch is best! Their drawing / model must illustrate their thinking as they solve the problem.

Ask students to study their sketch. What equation might you use to represent your model?

It is now time to write the explanation. This is a good time to discuss writer's purpose, as this writing should be clear, concise, and include each step of the process.

**Opening sentence:** Begin your explanation with a summary of what the problem is asking you to solve. *This problem is asking how many people are on the bus after the third stop.*

**Following sentences:** You need to write a sentence for each step of the problem. To help organize their thoughts, students might number the steps in either their pictures or equations. Based on Denman's work, students always begin their explanation with the phrase: *To solve this problem.*

*To solve this problem, I knew that there were 6 people on the bus, so I began with 6. To represent the first stop, I subtracted 2 and added 4, making a total of 8 people. Next, I subtracted 5 from 8, which equaled 3 passengers. I added the final 3 passengers for a total of 6.*

**Conclusion:** This sentence answers the question. Taken from Denman's book, the concluding sentence begins with the phrase: *Therefore I know:*

*Therefore I know there were 6 passengers on the bus at the end of the third stop.*

### **Written Response Example:**

*This problem is asking how many people are on the bus after the third stop. To solve this problem, I knew that there were 6 people on the bus, so I began with 6. To represent the first stop, I subtracted 2 and added 4, making a total of 8 people. Next, I subtracted 5 from 8, which equaled 3 passengers. I added the final 3 passengers for a total of 6. Therefore I know there were 6 passengers on the bus at the end of the third stop.*

## Poetry—Point of View

Many reading skills can be taught through poetry. Point of view is one such skill.

*"New Year's Resolutions"* by Bruce Lansky

Students find this poetic story of New Year's Resolutions hysterically funny. When asked who is telling the poem, your students will quickly identify the poem is told in first person. It will become interesting when you ask the students to identify the age and gender of the author, using specific examples from the text to support their answer.

[http://www.kidsgen.com/rhymes\\_and\\_poems/ny\\_resolution.htm](http://www.kidsgen.com/rhymes_and_poems/ny_resolution.htm)

*"The Year in Preview"* by Greg Pincus

This poem takes a very different look at the possibilities of a New Year. Again, ask students to identify the age of the person telling the poem, using text to support their answer. Students can also compare and contrast these two poems. What attitudes do the authors share? How are the two authors different in their approach to the New Year?

<http://gottabook.blogspot.com/search?q=year+in+preview>

*"Bliss"* by Eleanor Farjeon

This poem is told from the point of view of a pet dog. The poem is an excellent way to help students understand that the author does not necessarily need to be a person. Find a copy of the poem on the next page!

We wish each of you a Happy New Year!

We love to talk writing! If we can ever be of service or you'd like to chat, please email us at [darlene-and-terry@writenow-rightnow.com](mailto:darlene-and-terry@writenow-rightnow.com)

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

To view grade level samples, locate additional newsletters and read blog posts, visit:

<http://www.writenow-rightnow.com>

*The Write Now—Right Now Writing Program is now being used in 35 states and four provinces. How can we be of help to you in your classroom?*

"Bliss"

By: Eleanor Farjeon

Let me fetch sticks,  
Let me fetch stones,  
Throw me your bones,  
Teach me your tricks.

When you go ride,  
Let me go run,  
You in the sun,  
Me at your side.

When you go swim,  
Let me go, too,  
Both lost in blue  
Up to the brim.

Let me do this,  
Let me do that—  
What you are at,  
That is my bliss.