



Primary School Workshops - Mentor Roles During Story Writing Sessions

During our daily primary school sessions, mentors work in a team to deliver two-hour workshops in story writing to students ranging in age from first class to sixth class (ages seven to twelve years).

At Fighting Words, **everyone is a mentor and every mentor has a specific role.** The roles for each mentor during the workshop are described below.

PART 1 – GROUP WORK

Storyteller

This is the person who leads the workshop. They guide the students through their story, solicits ideas and characters and translates them to the typist. The storyteller should be inventive on their feet to process student suggestions in a way that fits them into the story. They should be able to guide the students in a good storytelling direction, be responsive to all student suggestions, but keep the students focussed on their story.

Sometimes this job is split between two people. For example, one person could lead from the welcome to the introduction of Editor McConkey. The other person can take over for the story writing.

List Maker – optional

If using a flip chart to keep track of ideas for the main character, best friend, greatest wish and greatest fear, the List Maker will write up the ideas on the flip chart to help the Storyteller.

Story Illustrator

The illustrator creates 2-3 drawings, i.e. the cover and 1-2 other illustrations, during the course of the session. The illustrator can add to the creation of the story and also call on students to give ideas or comment on the work in progress.

Other hints for the illustrator:

- Use either A3 or A4 sized paper, ordinary or watercolour paper, depending on the markers or paints you're using. Let the children see what you're doing as much as possible.
- Another member of the team will be assigned to keep track of the story for you and to bring the illustrations into the office to be scanned.
- The drawing can be quite broad because the Story Artist needs to create 2-3 drawings during the first half of the workshop session – a relatively short period of time!
- The students may continue to comment on and encourage additions to the drawing throughout the session.
- Make sure that there is as much colour as possible in each of the drawings - it really helps to make the illustration stand out in the book.
- If the story is about people (and it makes sense in the story's context), please reflect ethnic diversity in the characters.

Typist

The typist sits at the side of the screen, typing the story that the students dictate. Some notes:

- Always be seated before the students arrive and make sure that the computer is hooked up to the screen and the Word file for the day's class is open and ready to go.
- When typing, remember to make "mistakes" that the students can, and will, catch. For first class students, these mistakes should be content oriented, not spelling- or grammar-based mistakes. As the students get older, you can make spelling mistakes, etc.
- **Remember to take the sentences from the Storyteller** – she or he will indicate what goes on the screen. Avoid typing up what the children call out.
- Be sensitive to where the class is going. In all cases, there will be a preconceived notion of how long the book should be, but depending on the attention span of the class, the session may have to be adjusted.
- If the students are getting restless, get ready to bring the story to a cliff-hanger right away.

Helpers

Helpers make the experience more enjoyable for the children, and every job, no matter how small it seems, is very important to the smooth running of the session, and adds to the excitement.

The daily jobs for each session are listed below.

Set Up

Helpers should ensure that the beanbags are out on the floor. The coordinator can confirm how many beanbags are needed for a given session.

Pencils and crayons, as well lined and unlined paper, should also be placed on each table.

Name Badges

As the children arrive, there will be two helpers sitting at the desk at the front door. Each child will receive a name badge, i.e. a sticker with their name on it. Be friendly, welcome them and give them a name badge.

Coats

The children may remove their coats in order to see their name badges clearly in the photograph. We need helpers to hold the children's belongings until we enter the centre where we assist them in putting their coats on the hangers provided.

***Dublin Only - DO NOT HANG UP THE COATS UNTIL THE CHILDREN HAVE PASSED THROUGH THE MAGIC DOOR.**

At the end of the session, younger children may need assistance putting their coats back on. Even if they don't, we need at least one helper to ensure that children put their coats on and gather their belongings in an orderly fashion.

Photographer - Optional

After the children receive their name badge, they will go to the photographer, who will take their photograph with a digital camera. This photo is used to put on the back of their books.

Each child should sit on the chair provided and the photograph should be a headshot with the nametag clearly visible. Make sure the child has removed his or her coat.

After the children have come through the magic door, the camera should be brought to the office so the photographs can be scanned.

Magic Door

The children are ready to enter the centre – through the magic door! This Helper has the important job of releasing the catch at the bottom of the bookshelf. Be aware of where the children are standing, making sure little hands are kept away from the rotating door.

Please ensure that you've asked the children if everyone has a name badge and has had her/his photo taken before opening the door. Feel free to come up with a magic code word for opening the door, etc. – have fun with it!

Foam Fingers - optional

Two helpers operate the giant foam fingers. They are helpful for counting votes.

During the voting for main character, best friend, etc., the children will be asked to vote for their favourite option with their eyes closed. Any child with their hand open will receive a waggle of a foam finger.

Bear in mind that many students will actually like this!

PART 2 – Individual Writing Time

Following the group work part of the session, the students move to the tables to write their individual endings to the story. Each helper sits at a table with 2-3 students and chats to them about their work.

You should reassure students that spelling and grammar do not matter at this point; the story and ideas are more important. If a student does want to know how to spell a word, encourage them to use the dictionary, if time allows. The students will often want you to read their work or look at the pictures that they have drawn.

Encourage the students in everything, and always remember that the story is the most important thing – it's the child's prerogative as to what happens next, so ask them questions that might help them move the plot along but try not to dictate what they "should" write.

PART 3 – PUBLISHING THE STORY

Magic Wall (Dublin only)

Two helpers will "stand guard" by the magic wall after the children have finished writing their own endings and are ready to receive their finished books. Students will try to climb through the drawers and presses to see Editor McConkey (the cranky editor), so the helpers need to be on hand to make sure that doesn't happen, as well as reassuring the children that Editor McConkey is real and not a recording or on the radio, etc., which the students often think is the case! The helpers at the magic wall will also hand out the books.

Saying Goodbye

One helper will need to stand by the exit door to make sure that the children do not leave before the teacher is ready to go.

More about the Helpers

- Helpers should greet the students as they arrive and have a nametag, so students know who they are.
- They make sure that all the students have clearly legible nametags and that they are visible.
- Make sure the students have a place to sit and that they seem comfortable.
- Sit among the students if necessary. If there is a boisterous student, the Helpers can sit near that student to “neutralise” him/her (please note that this is very rare).
- If you see that one student has not been called on often or not at all and is trying to participate, try to indicate this silently to the storyteller.
- All helpers should be people who really enjoy working with students. They enhance the fun the students are having and the learning they are doing.

General Helper Duties

- We assign “ownership” of tasks like operating foam fingers and bringing them to the office before the workshop begins.
- Everyone should respect each other’s roles. You should not tell the List Maker how to do their job, and so on. Criticism and suggestions should come after the whole process begins, at the daily volunteer meeting following the session. Of course, people should be willing to ask for help if they need it.
- Remember, when helping students with their own endings, focus on the writing – what ideas might best help the story and further it along? It’s always the child’s decision, but if you have a suggestion that might help further the plot along, don’t be afraid to suggest it.