**Writing Assignments Connected to the Curriculum**

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*“Reading makes a full man, conference a ready man, and writing an exact man.”* Francis Bacon

**Why write?** Writing is important for developing…

1. Thinking skills—it helps the student understand concepts and make applications of subjects under study.

Writing and thinking go together; careful thinking and careful writing feed on and develop each other.

1. Ability to express oneself—it helps the student use words effectively, and practice writing in various forms.

**General Comments/Suggestions**

1. Writing is one of the hardest skills to teach, because it cannot be drilled, memorized, or checked with an answer key. Consequently, it is often neglected.
2. When asked to write, students often wonder “what to write about.” Most writing assignments can grow out of what is already under study in the curriculum. This answers the question of “what to write about,” allowing the student to focus on “What form will the writing take, and how will it be developed?” If a writing class is held separately from the other subjects, the assignments can still focus on what was recently studied in one of the core subjects.
3. Writing activities need not be lengthy or polished. Just as a brief sketch can help develop visual concepts of structure or design, so can a rough draft help the student develop articulate thoughts. Some assignments can be evaluated as “drafts,” giving the student credit for thinking well. Others can be selected for revision, proofreading, and polishing off as a “finished product.”
4. Provide frequent models for whatever you want students to learn, such as the use of specific nouns and verbs instead of relying on adjectives and adverbs.

Example: Billy mumbled a reply and dashed outside. Vs. Billy answered unclearly and went quickly out the door.

1. When evaluating student writing, point out what they have done well, or areas in which they have improved. When pointing out areas needing improvement, give specific suggestions and examples to show them what they can do to improve their work.
2. When assigning a grade to writing…
3. Focus on the skill being taught.
4. Always consider effort and previously expected performance.
5. If the piece is to be proofread, revised and polished as a finished product, consider that work separately as part of the score.

***Following is a list of basic school subjects with suggested writing topics associated with each.***

**Reading**

Writing assignments fit naturally as part of reading or literature classes.

1. Summarize a selection read. A summary does not “re-tell.” Rather, it captures the overall content of the selection with well-chosen details. Summaries can be long or short, depending on their purpose.
2. Add to a story, or rewrite a story ending.
3. Write a character sketch. Paint a word picture of a character by referring to his/her actions, reactions, words, attitudes, and reputation.
4. Compare and contrast characters (lists or paragraphs).
5. Write the theme and plot of a story in one sentence each.

*Hare & Tortoise—*Pride will eventually embarrass you. (theme)

A proud rabbit loses a race to a turtle. (plot)

*Fox & the Grapes—*People make up logical excuses for their inabilities. (theme)

A fox who couldn’t reach grapes said he didn’t really want them

because he supposed they were sour. (plot)

1. Write a friendly letter to a character, perhaps giving advice or asking questions or

giving your opinion on what he / she did.

1. Book reports
   1. Fiction: Summarize plot, describe the main character, point out theme, tell something you learned.
   2. Nonfiction: Explain the topic of the book and some things you learned.
   3. Biography: Describe the character, some problems he overcame, who helped him, an interesting incident, and what was accomplished in his life.

**Literature**

Quality literature deals with people living in the midst of the universal conflict of good and evil in the world. It illuminates the good, right, pure, and just, distinguishing it from the evil, wrong, corrupt, and deceitful. It shows how people relate to truth by understanding, submitting, and grappling with it or by rejecting, ignoring, denying or testing it. Whether it is biography, fiction, essay, or poetry, it illustrates truth and has value beyond any useful or “utilitarian” purpose.

Concepts such as loyalty, trust, revenge, or greed, are often illustrated within stories or chapters of longer works. These can be identified, interpreted, and used as illustrations or a springboard for a broader composition topic.

1. Interpret characters’ actions: “what makes them tick.” Explain why they do what they do, or predict what they’ll do in the future. Or predict what they’d do in another situation.
2. Write from a different perspective by choosing a different viewpoint or different time or character as the focus for the same story.
3. Choose an outstanding aspect of the story and model it, such as the opening sentence, word choices, sentence structure, themes, character, surprise ending. *Modeling is one of the most effective ways of learning*.
4. Write parodies of conversations, maxims, or poems. *Parody is another form of modeling*.
5. Read a group of selections of a particular type; then write an original piece following that style, such as a devotional poem, limerick, hymn…
6. After reading an essay, list things you agree / disagree with, and explain why you disagree.
7. After reading a biography, list the events that influenced the person. Then list significant events and people that influenced your life.
8. Copy a quote and explain, interpret or write about it as a theme. *“Example is better than precept.”*
9. Write a list of things you’d like to ask a character; then write what you think he’d answer.
10. Allow students to simply respond to a piece by writing thoughts, impressions, and comments.

**Bible**

1. Paraphrase parables, proverbs, teachings, prayers.

Prov. 16:18 “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

*A proud person is likely to do something that gets him into trouble and shame.*

2. Re-tell stories.

Try a different character’s perspective or different point of view.

The fiery furnace as recounted by Daniel, king, witness, or spouse of one who threw him into the furnace.

Prodigal son as told by the father, elder brother, mother, or a friend.

1. Write definitions of terms (love, joy, pray, worship, holy) or a short parable in which a person’s actions illustrate the meaning of the term. Remember: abstract nouns are titles for stories.

They have little meaning to someone who cannot illustrate them.

1. Write questions to ask a Bible character. Imagine and write their answers.

Did Daniel see any angels in the lion’s den?

1. Write an original psalm or some proverbs.
2. Write original songs or poems about Bible events or teachings.

**History & Geography**

1. Compile a list of facts about a historical figure:

Background, work, ideals, accomplishments, character qualities, reasons he / she should (not?) be included in our history books. (Alexander the Great, Galileo, Martin Luther, Ben Franklin…)

1. List: what makes a good\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(president, inventor, leader, explorer, etc.)
2. Write a mini-biography of a historical figure.
3. Write an imaginary journal entry for an important historical figure.
4. Introduce us to a typical person of that age—how they lived, what they thought, how they worshiped and worked, what they wore…(For example, a European peasant in the Middle Ages.)
5. Advice column—what would \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ say to this question? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

What would Ben Franklin say about using computers?

What would Alexander the Great say about having a democratic government?

1. After studying historical events (which are usually deeds of an individual or a group of individuals),
   1. List or describe some details.
   2. Explain the background, problems, issues, and results.
   3. Make charts or diagrams.
   4. Write a “news article” about the event.
   5. Compare to current events. Find common threads.
2. For current events, first read an article or look at a photo; then write a response:
   1. Questions for the person.
   2. What the student thinks.
   3. Imagine how various people will be affected by this event.
3. Imagine you are a legislator. Write a law. Explain the situation that requires the new legislation. Try to foresee some problems or complications the new law might create. Describe how it will be enforced. Perhaps explore alternatives to actual historical approaches.
4. Explore “other roads that could have been traveled” Suppose…

The Mennonites stayed in Europe; there were no interstate highways; or Germany won WWII.

1. Research and report on the origin and development of some group or organization such as…

Red Cross, Peace Corps, MCC, CAM, Grange, National Cancer Society, KKK, Committees of Correspondence…

1. Develop a travel brochure outlining a tour of a foreign place or well-known local area. Use information from reference books, travel literature, or coffee table books. Develop an itinerary, lodging details, meals with menus, prices, transportation arrangements, special problems. This would be a good group activity.
2. Somewhere in the world, right now, someone is…(describe kinds of activities)

Picking coffee in Kenya, riding a camel in Saudi Arabia, working deep inside the earth in a gold mine.

1. List facts or describe life during time periods or eras.

Religious persecution in Europe, frontier days in America, Great Depression in the U.S.

**Science & Health**

1. A “biography” or “day in the life of”
   1. An animal, bird, fish.
   2. Body organ, system, or red blood cell.
   3. Drop of water as it moves through the water cycle.
   4. Tree or other plant.
2. Directory of diseases or ailments such as pneumonia, tuberculosis, malaria, tetanus. Include the causes, symptoms, treatment methods, and any unusual information associated with the disease.
3. Write directions—how to…

Identify a tree, graft a tree, build a kite, wire a switch, or balance a menu.

1. Create a table of contents for a book about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_(how to build a windmill, the life of a butterfly, the cause of earthquakes, how airplanes fly, the life of a penguin, caring for pet birds.)
2. Science fiction

Imagine changes in the future—transportation, communication, work, housing. (Life with self-driving cars.)

1. Design, carry out, and record results for an experiment.

Or replicate a classic one (falling objects, pendulum swinging).

1. Make a list of specific questions for interviewing a specialist—

Meteorologist, botanist, pharmacist, surgeon, etc.

1. Sketch an item: a bone, digestive system, engine, birds, etc. Label the parts and define each.
2. Summarize the key points from a lesson or chapter or unit.
3. Explain a law, theory, or discovery in your own words, as you understand it.

Newton’s laws, Pasteur and pasteurization, Einstein’s relativity.

1. Tell “how it works.” Use diagrams and explanations.

Manmade machinery. Natural processes: volcanoes, storms, photosynthesis, combustion.

**Math**

1. Write clear, illustrated directions for solving a problem.

Adding fractions, subtracting with borrowing, using a calculator…

1. Write word problems using classmates and local community / environment.
2. Have the “square” introduce his family and their relationships.

(Quadrilateral, trapezoid, rectangle, parallelogram, rhombus.)

1. Create a menu with reasonable prices. Make up several meals from it within a certain price range.
2. List some daily activities that require the use of numbers, explaining briefly how they are used.
3. Explain carefully, with examples, the differences between…
   1. even, odd, and prime numbers.
   2. decimal and common fractions.
   3. subtraction and division.
4. Explain and illustrate the main things a chapter of a book teaches.
5. Write a math lesson for a textbook in conversational style, with examples.

**Art**

1. Write about an art print: what you see; what the artist is showing; your general impressions.
2. Write a character sketch or story based on a person in the illustration.
3. Write about your own drawing as you do it—flip it over occasionally to add commentary, interpretation, or frustrations.
4. Write captions or mottos for pictures.
5. Write a poem to interpret or respond to a photo, similar to *Ideals* publications.
6. Make scrapbook pages on a theme. Get-well, seasonal, animals, wonders of creation.
7. Create a poster for current events, subject under study, Bible related subject, or any theme.

**Music**

1. Write additional stanzas to a song, continuing the theme of the original.
2. Write a chorus based on a Bible verse or a saying.
3. Write a refrain to an existing song that doesn’t have one.
4. Write a song using a common tune to help learn rote facts such as states, math facts, parts of speech.
5. Write nature songs celebrating birds, clouds, rain, harvesting.
6. Write a song on a topic such as family, friendship, or memories.
7. Celebrate events—recess, year end, hikes.
8. Paraphrase hymns for understanding.
9. Write songs for activities like jumping rope or working.

**Miscellaneous Comments--**

*How to Write*:

1. Alone, in pairs, or in small groups
2. With pencil or word processor
3. Dictate to someone or on a voice recorder

*Where to Write*:

Classroom, outdoors, in a quiet place

*Evaluating and Grading*:

* 1. Grade some writing (all need not be graded)
  2. Grade for the targeted skill or assignment
  3. Sometimes grade the presentation only

*Publishing*:

Read aloud, post on bulletin board or wall, print in newsletter, have students read to each other in pairs, read to parents, exchange with another school, make a booklet…