

I plan the first days in more detail than any other week of the school year. A lot has to happen. Kids will get to know each other and start to come together as a corps of writers and readers. They'll become acquainted with the space, how it's organized, and what it offers them in terms of materials, resources, equipment and options. Many of the routines and procedures of the workshop are established during the first week; so is my role as writer, reader, teacher and learner (Atwell, 1998, p. 118).

Rituals, Routines and Artifacts

Classroom Management and the Writers Workshop

The Writers Workshop is a literate community, and like other communities, it functions with certain predictable **rituals, routines and artifacts** (all will be discussed in detail later in this monograph). **Rituals** are prescribed ways of doing something in the Writers Workshop. **Routines**

describe the overall structure of the Writers Workshop. **Artifacts** refer to the objects that are central to learning in the Writers Workshop. All these factors — predictable structures really — allow students to be responsible for knowing what to do and allow you to use precious instructional time teaching — not

directing activities. From the first moment you meet your class, you will establish routines and rituals, and you will introduce the students to the artifacts in your classroom. It's important for you and your students to know what, where and when things need to happen in the classroom. Rituals, routines and artifacts are the knowledge students need to become a community of learners.

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Speaking to this issue of community, Donald Graves reminds us that children come to school from a variety of home environments. The classroom is yet another environment with its own expectations for the use of space and time. He writes, "If the classroom is not carefully designed and structured and continually adapted to meet the shifting social and learning needs of the community, then children's natural urge to express themselves will be thwarted" (Graves, 1991, p. 33).

In *Time for Meaning*, Randy Bomer writes about a secondary school language arts program that argues for predictable structures: "Because a predictable time to work is so important to the reading/writing life, I jealously, obsessively protect the regularity of workshop structures in my class" (Bomer, 1995, p. 35).

Students need ceremony, ritual, rite and celebration to make a community, says Ralph Peterson in *Life in a Crowded Place: Making a Learning Community*. It's not always easy to establish and continue the rituals and routines needed to form a community, but community formation depends on predictable structure. Peterson writes about the difficulties inherent in classroom life:

Life in classrooms is an intense social experience. For six hours a day, week after week, month after month, one teacher and anywhere from twenty-two to thirty-four students (sometimes more) live together in a space the size of a large living room. The older the students, the larger the furniture, the tighter the space. At best it is elbow-to-elbow living. Sometimes learning about reading, social studies and math is pushed aside because the complex problems of living together cannot be worked out (Peterson, 1992, p. 1).

The "complex problems of living together" can be worked through, or avoided altogether, by establishing rit-

uals, routines and artifacts the students can count on seeing and being part of each day. The environment becomes calm partly because it's structured and predictable — whatever trauma presents itself in the course of the day, there are procedures already in place to help students handle most situations.

Most important, firmly established and practiced rituals, routines and artifacts provide the classroom management structures that enable teachers and students to use class time productively. They also create a community that enables students to learn, move about the classroom purposefully, use all of the resources of the classroom efficiently, and to be independent and responsible. Teachers spend the first weeks of the semester teaching rituals, routines and artifacts in mini-lessons and reinforcing them until they become habitual.

Routines

Routines are all about the Writers Workshop structure. Routines help students know what they always do in the Writers Workshop. When we think about the routines of the Writers Workshop, we think about two kinds of routines. The first is the routine of the class structure, the approximately 60 minutes a day that are devoted to writing instruction. It is important for students to understand the routine of the Writers Workshop so they know that every day they will write. You establish this routine and constantly reinforce it through monitoring and mini-lessons.

The other set of routines is sometimes called "The Writing Process." It is the routine that students learn that leads them through the stages of developing a writing product — from planning to editing to sharing. Students learn this process and learn to manage it so they know when to share a piece of writing, when to edit and revise, and whether it is complete.

The Class Structure Routine

The Writers Workshop has the same basic structure every day. This structure is called the routine, or "what we always do in this class." Departures from the routine are so unusual that they call attention to a special celebration, performance or event such as a guest speaker.

Because the routine of the classroom accounts for how time is spent, a

routine communicates what is important. In the writing classroom, students spend the majority of their time working on their own writing projects. Writing is not something that students do just to fill up the time that is left after the teacher stops talking.

The workshop is a community of readers and writers, not just a collection of individuals working in isolation.

Each class begins and ends with a whole-group meeting and has in between a sustained period when students actually write or read. Typically, the opening meeting contains a mini-lesson that takes no more than 15 minutes. After that, students work for 20 minutes or more. At the end, the closing meeting takes no more than 10 minutes. (Of course, these times will vary with the amount of time per day you can devote to language arts.) Every day this happens with only the smallest of variations allowed. Students soon learn that every day in the Writers Workshop they will spend most of the time working on their own writing. There are no "days off" when they can just sit back and watch. While they may have choices about how to spend their work time, they may not choose not to write.

This routine is difficult to establish. Students are not used to writing independently for 20 minutes or more every class period. Teachers are not accustomed to presenting lessons that consume only a small amount of the available class time. Elementary teachers often fill every block of time with some activity designed to keep students busy and engaged. Students go from center to center or activity to activity and never develop persistence by working on the same writing or reading project for a sustained amount of time. Secondary teachers often assign reading and writing to be done out of class and spend the entire class hour lecturing about how to read or how to write.

However, by establishing a predictable routine, a teacher actually has more time to teach. The mini-lesson and closing lesson presented to the whole class are only part of the workshop instruction. While the students are engaged in writing independently, the teacher moves around the class conducting individual and group conferences that address individual needs. The teacher can do this important conferencing only when the other students are fully engaged and know how to move from activity to activity or from individual to group work and back again.

The 60-Minute Writers Workshop Routine

Opening Meeting:
5–15 minutes

During this part of the Writers Workshop, you present a short five- to 10-minute mini-lesson to teach procedures, craft or skills. This mini-lesson is the first stage for helping students settle into the subsequent work period. The mini-lesson can be a lesson on writer's craft, a language skill or just a status check. You can set a focus for the day's writing. You then can dismiss your students to go to their tables or desks and begin writing. The entire time for the mini-lesson, including the time it takes to gather the students for the meeting and to end the meeting, should take no more than 15 minutes. For young students, the mini-lesson may be done while they sit on the floor gathered around you. Older students can sit at their desks and tables and look to where you present the mini-lesson.

Work Period:
35–45 minutes

During the work period, the students write individually, work in response groups or confer with you. After you train your students — through mini-lessons — about what to expect from the Writers Workshop, they always will know how to spend their time during the work period and what to do from one task to the next. For example, they will know that when they finish a draft, they automatically meet with their response groups to begin making notes for revision. You can let your students know that your expectations for them include that they know what to do, when to do it and how to move from activity to activity without prompting.

While students are working, you are meeting with small groups of two to four students or with individual students in conferences. You can provide small-group instruction in skills and craft because the other students know what to do during the work period; you will not (and should not) be interrupted by students wanting direction, by students who are off task or by students causing disturbance.

Establishing the work period is essential to the workshop's success. You must be firm; you must hold students accountable for using this time appropriately until they are able to work independently.

The routines of the work period are similar to the stages in writing — plan-

ing, drafting, responding, editing, revising and sharing. In primary grades, students may work on a new piece of writing every day. As students move into the intermediate and secondary grades, however, they are more likely to work on a piece of writing over several days. In the Writers Workshop, students most certainly will be working at different stages of writing. Some will be planning, some drafting, some needing response, some

How time is allocated communicates your core values; in the Writers Workshop, the routine communicates the value you place on student work.

needing teacher conferences, some editing and revising. Students may be working in pairs, in small groups or individually. This diversity works because you have taught the routines of the Writers Workshop. You hold your students accountable for knowing what the routines are and sticking to them. Eventually, students hold themselves and each other accountable for following the routine.

Closing Meeting:
5–10 minutes

The class ends with some sort of closure that brings everybody back together again as a group. This can be an author's chair, a read-around, a book talk or just the teacher referring back to the opening focus. If the class began with a mini-lesson on engaging opening sentences, the teacher might ask three or four students to read their opening sentences. Perhaps an interesting issue emerged from one of the conferences and the teacher asks a student to relate how the issue was resolved. The closing meeting may just be a reminder about homework or due dates for projects. However, the symmetry of having an opening and a closing meeting as a whole class and spending the majority of the time working in small groups or individually is important to maintain. The workshop is a community of readers and writers, not just a collection of individuals working in isolation.

Rituals for Room Arrangement

The classroom is organized and functional in respect to room arrangement as well as procedures and use of time. In an elementary classroom, certain places in the room are associated with the certain kinds of work done there. For example, you will designate a particular carpet or space as the meeting place, and whole-class meetings always are there. Another area may be designated for quiet reading or response groups. There may be an editing center with blue pencils and editing resources (dictionary, thesaurus, handbooks). Each center or area in the classroom has certain rituals associated with it.

Bomer, in *Time for Meaning*, writes that creating a classroom environment for reading and writing ...

... is not just a question of decoration, answerable by throwing up a few posters and bringing in a few plants. I do those things, but I don't think a superficial attention to place addressed the real need. A pleasing sense of place arises in part from spaces organized to be constantly in use by the people who work there ... So I plan the classroom arrangement based on, first, the activity I anticipate will be carried out there and, second, the message the arrangement might send to the students (Bomer, 1995, p. 29).

The room arrangement of the writing classroom reflects the work that the students do in the class. Your classroom may have desks or tables. If there are individual student desks, they can be arranged according to the work that is to be done. Students will be doing three basic kinds of work:

1. Participating in whole-group meetings

Students will need to face the front of the room to see and hear the presentation. It may be that a discussion is facilitated by a clustering of students — often on a rug or the floor — at a particular place in the room.

2. Writing and reading

Students need individual space for reading and writing. Some students are comfortable sitting on the floor to read, and you should consider allowing this. During individual reading or writing time, the classroom noise level is low so that students can concentrate, but you may be conferring with individuals or small groups and some movement may be allowed so that students can work together.

3. Meeting in response groups with three or four other students

Students can push desks or chairs together or move to specified tables for group meetings. These group meetings are always purposeful. The groups may be formed according to a particular task (students who need to proofread for spelling with peer assistance), or groups can be stable throughout a project or given time period (a group of two or three students working to produce an author study).

Some students struggle with this freedom of choosing the topic for their writing, but it is a necessary struggle if students are to develop independence as writers.

In deciding how to arrange the desks or chairs in the classroom, consider how to accommodate all of these activities.

In addition to desks or tables, the classroom will need the following:

- a classroom library;
- a place for reference materials — dictionary, style books, thesaurus, etc.;
- a place to display student work — bulletin boards or walls;
- a place for student folders/work collections;
- an overhead projector and screen;
- chart stand and tablets; and
- a place for supplies — paper, pens, blue pencils, highlighters, staplers, glue sticks and tape.

Also, you will need a desk or table with places for students to file work ready for checking, pick up make-up assignments and set up conferences.

Classroom Artifacts

The Writers Workshop has certain artifacts — objects that are central to learning. Each artifact is a part of the classroom routine and has rituals associated with it. Following are some of the artifacts of the class.

Standards

Some schools, districts and states have established performance or achievement standards for students. These standards should be displayed in a prominent position in the classroom for easy reference during the Writers Workshop because activities and lessons are related. Students should learn the standards and be able to explain how their work relates to them. They should use the language of the standards to describe and evaluate their own and their peers' work, and you should use the same language when creating assignments.

Teachers also use the standards to develop writing assignments. While students are generally responsible for choosing their own topics, teachers usually assign a specific genre. For example, you may determine that the class will write reports and create mini-lessons based on the standards and strategies that are used by report writers. Students then select topics based on their own interest and knowledge.

On occasion, you may want to have students respond to an on-demand prompt as a practice for a standardized state test. You also may give students a specific topic to explore in their sourcebooks in preparation for a longer writing assignment. However, you rarely will have all students writing on the same topic or using such strategies as "story starters."

In the author and genre studies, students are given writing tasks that also allow for some choice of a precise response or topic. Some students struggle with this freedom of choosing the topic for their writing, but it is a necessary struggle if students are to develop independence as writers.

Collections

Collections of student work are artifacts of the Writers Workshop. Each student has a work-in-progress folder and a finished work folder to collect pieces of work as evidence of progress toward writing proficiency. The collection is a part of each student's evaluation for the semester. Rituals for organizing the collection, for reflecting on and evaluating the work, and for turning the collection in for a grade will be understood by every student because you have taught these rituals through mini-lessons.

Rubrics

Rubrics, a set of criteria for evaluating student work, are developed and given to students prior to completing projects so that students know exactly what they are expected to do and how their work will be judged. For most assignments, the rubrics are specific to the assignment and often are developed with the students' collaboration. However, for each genre of writing, rubrics can be based on the standards so that teachers can realistically assess

Charts and Posters

Many of the mini-lessons and much of the oral discussion of the class will be captured on charts and posters and displayed for future reference. For example, as an author study is proceeding, students may chart certain literary features across several texts by that author. These charts are posted and referred to as the author study proceeds. The posting of the chart or poster in the classroom places value on the mini-lessons and the oral work of the class, and it is a model for students to use as they develop individual written projects.

Students need the time to discover the greatness of writing, the joy of communicating. They need the time to experiment, explore or occasionally explode.

their students in light of the standards. Rubrics should be posted in the classroom or copies placed in students' notebooks and referred to throughout an assignment.