

Unstructured Literacy Play: The use of independent literacy stations based on imaginative cognitive tools to help early intermediate students develop their voice as writers

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*And I changed my heart*

*Words found play, play found its ink*

*Still wet, my heart beats*

## Table of Contents

## Introduction

Ms. Payson .....	4
The Classroom .....	7
Research Question .....	8
The Challenge .....	12
Ending Note .....	12

## Literature Review

Early intermediate writers .....	14
Independent Student Activity .....	15
Student Engagement .....	16

## Methods

Participants .....	17
Class Discussions and Individual Surveys .....	18
Stations and Classroom Environment .....	19
Alliteration, Rhyme, and Rhythm .....	20
Hero Journey .....	21
Malarkey .....	22
Jokes, Puns, And Idioms .....	23
Metaphor .....	23
Imagery .....	24

## Results

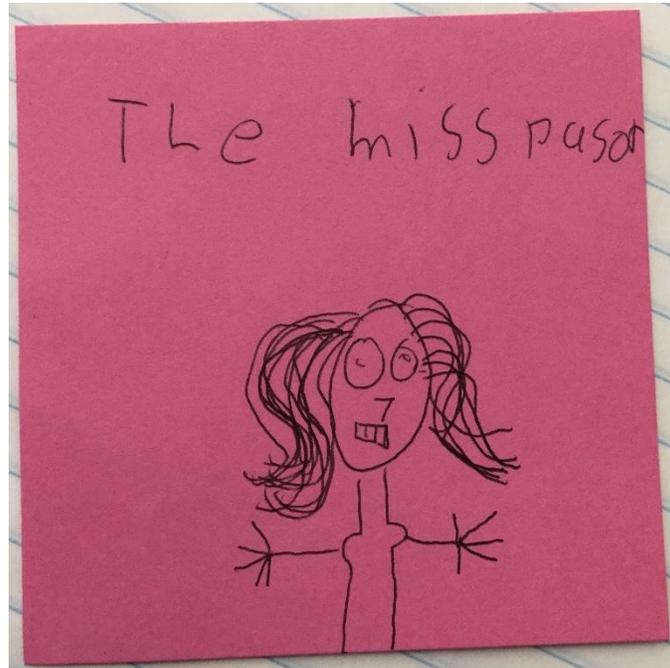
Individual Surveys .....	24
--------------------------	----

Stations	
Alliteration, Rhyme, and Rhythm .....	27
Hero Journey .....	29
Malarkey .....	29
Jokes, Puns, and Idioms .....	30
Metaphor .....	31
Imagery .....	31
Independent Student Writing .....	32
Personal observations .....	36
End-of-Unit Class Discussion .....	37
Conclusion	
Student Writing .....	38
Independent Work .....	38
Student Engagement .....	40
Research Question .....	42
Where do we go from here? .....	44
Closing Notes .....	48
Works Cited .....	49
Appendices .....	51

## Introduction

*And I changed my heart*

*Ms. Payson*



### The Set-Up...

It is my opinion, and I tend to think I am right, that writing saves lives. Not a 'literal' saving, the kind I leave up to the capable hands of doctors and the Avengers, but the kind of saving where children realize that their words have power and that their life stories are worth telling. Not only do movies with benevolent white women and troubled youth back me up, but I (a white woman) have my own story to share with this as well (that involves troubled youth).

My journey to being a teacher starts in elementary school where I stated my intentions to be a teacher. My mother was a teacher and due to her plans, all my best friends' mothers were teachers as well. I also happened to love my teachers. My 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher had us create a paper machè dinosaur so large we could sit on it. My 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher was a 30-year-old hippie who played the guitar and taught us Woody Guthrie songs. My art teacher in high school would lie to

other teachers and tell them I wasn't in the art room when I skipped their class to paint. He also let me stay late at school unsupervised to create my own glazes which in hindsight was rather unsafe. I even ended up with a positive memory with a teacher whom I did not get along with initially. He was my gym teacher and gym was mandatory until grade 10. I applied to do my grade 10 gym class as a self-directed extracurricular activity as to take more art classes and he enthusiastically agreed, most likely eager to not have the sarcastic, moody art student in his class anymore. I ended up with a B+ in that class for playing California kick-ball with my friends on the weekend.

However, all this went up in smoke when I entered university. I fell in love with psychology and the study of the mind, specifically, the study of development. The deal to major in psychology was clinched when I took a course on Qualitative research and did a paper on the Life Narratives of Northern BC veteran women. Not only did I switch my English major to a minor, and major in psychology, but I started my honours in psychology under Professor Kyle Matsuba. His research was on the life narratives of at-risk-youth and the stages of development according to different psychologists, specifically Erik Erikson's psychosocial developmental stages. I started to study for my GED, planning on getting my masters, then doctorate, in psychology.

Despite all this planning for academic satisfaction, I found myself growing miserable. My answer was found to leave psychology and enter teaching. This answer was ironically found in my research of at-risk youth. While coding their life narratives, I noticed a recurring theme. The teachers in their lives had had dramatic impact on them, positively and negatively. Many of them discussed holding on to a special memory of a teacher who made them feel worthwhile, even during their toughest times. It was at the end of my 3<sup>rd</sup> year that I decided to return to education.

It took doing 8 summer courses, dropping my minor in English and FN studies, dropping my honours, and taking computer science 101 to get my breadth requirement, but that spring I was accepted into the UBC education program. My road to teaching was messy, but I got there because of the honesty of youth in telling their story.

And Now...

At the time of writing, I am 83% of my way through a masters in Imaginative Education, a theory of education created by Kieran Egan. I have been teaching with the Vancouver School Board for nine years, teaching in my own full-time classroom for 3 of those years. My teaching practicum was in a 5/6/7 project-based child-centered team-teaching school. Since then I have taught every grade and even taught 80% in a kindergarten class for a year. My current class is a 3/4 classroom in East Vancouver.

Imaginative Education (IE) has impacted my teaching immensely for the short time it has been a part of life. My education in teaching had centered around children-centeredness, and IE has helped me identify the issues I had with this method. IE challenges me to push my teaching 'reflectiveness', meaning I can no longer hide behind the popularity of teaching practices (such as desks in pods) and instead look at my classroom and analyze what actually does work best for my students and their learning. Egan's theory of education spoke to me because so much of what he talked about I had already observed as successful traits in my own teaching. His theory of students going through 'kinds of understanding' and the cognitive tools that speak to those stages have helped me become a better teacher.

Based on my path to teaching, it comes as no surprise that I am a teacher concerned with equality and creativity. I am the Pride contact for my school and work on anti-racism projects within the school. My classroom library is diverse in regards to culture, history, gender, sexual

orientation, and religion. In my classroom we challenge gender norms, discuss health as movement and knowledge, not as a prescribed body form, discuss the issues surrounding ‘Columbus Day’, and work at understanding the history of Canada as a complicated enigma, one, as Canadians, worth exploring. I am constantly trying to learn more about how to teach Aboriginal learnings in culturally sensitive way as a settler myself. I recognize that I am not perfect in these regards and have much to learn about how to make my classroom a safe space for everyone.

My classroom approach is literature heavy. I am known as ‘the writing teacher’ and incorporate as many forms of literature into my classroom as I can. We do weekly ‘word studies’, where we examine idioms, powerful verbs, ‘worldly’ words, and ‘beautiful’ words. I also have one novel that is a class read-aloud, and every term have smaller novel study groups. We do drama games and plays weekly and have ‘noisy’ reading every morning. This is all on-top of the regular Language Arts program. For me, being immersed in reading and writing is the core of my teaching, and making sure that my students enjoy this world I’ve created for them is vital as well.

### *The Classroom*

My classroom is a hodge-podge of everything I want in a classroom combined with the chaos of my disorganization. The previous teacher adored music teacher and was in the classroom for 15 years before retiring and handing it over to me. Anything heavier than a chair sinks into the floor and gets stuck much to the wonder of my students. Chalkboards cover three of the four walls, but I only use the north facing chalkboards. The east facing chalkboard has permanent music lines and sticker residue on it, while the west facing chalkboard has nails sticking out of it due to having guitars and ukuleles mounted on it for many years. I have covered

these with paper and use them for student artwork. Our windows face the north mountains and the playground, which means on more than one occasion the four-square ball has sailed into the classroom.

The classroom community consists of 21 grade 3/4 students. I have three ESL students who are all highly literate in English and struggle only with abnormal pluralizing of nouns and the occasional many/much slip-up. The school is a public elementary school situation in a gentrifying neighbourhood. The grades range from kindergarten to grade 7. We have four district programs in our school, a challenge centre for double-gifted students, a learning assistance centre classroom, a life skills classroom for intermediate students, and a French Intensif program for grade 6 and 7. This, along with the changing demographic of our neighbourhood, makes for a dynamic and loud school with many challenges, but ultimately a fantastic neighbourhood school.

### *Research Question*

Before we proceed, I would like to define the following terms to help my research be understood more clearly and completely.

#### *Imagination*

In my classroom, imagination is not faeries (but it could be). Imagination is the stretch of the mind with what knowledge the individual possesses. I do not believe that children possess more imagination than adults because they do not have the lived experiences adult have yet, but that they have ways of playing and interacting with their knowledge that dwarfs the resources of adults. Egan (2002) writes ‘if we look at children’s imaginative lives, [...] we see prodigal metaphoric invention, talking middle-class rabbits, titanic conflicts of good and evil, courage and cowardice, fear and security, and so on.’ (p. 94). This is the imagination I am looking at with my research; building on what my students know, vocabulary and concept-wise, but also giving

them the opportunities to play and interact with language in a way only they can. In this sense, Maxine Greene's (1988) argument about children and imagination summarize my goal for the entire project, 'This is what imagination can do: create new domains, new vistas, expansion of ordinary awareness' (p. 47).

### *Cognitive Tools*

Based on this concept of imagination, when I talk about cognitive tools, I mean the tools people use to make sense of knowledge and the world around them. For this group of students, the cognitive tools I am specifically looking at are hero qualities, metaphor, alliteration, rhyme and rhythm, imagery, and humour. Oddly enough, in changing the classroom so dramatically for the stations, and even changing my teaching practice, I am also employing the cognitive tool of 'change of context'.

### *Research Question*

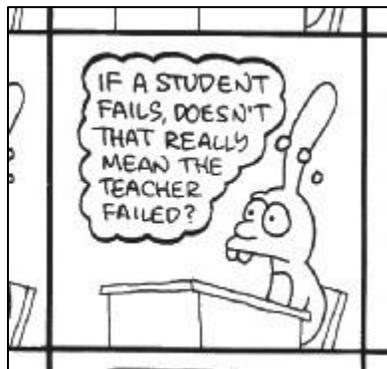
My proposed action research question:

- How does the use of imaginative cognitive tools provide an 'unstructured' time for my students to play with language and further their voice as writers?

My proposed research sub questions:

- What does an effective writing station for independent student use need above all else?
- How will I manage off-task behavior during this unstructured time in a way that is respectful of the different ways students play?
- How does using cognitive tools increase students' risk-taking and experimentation with language?
- How does providing a student-led time support my students' development of confidence in their writing?

My main research question was generated by all the questions raised in my year of grad school. The journey into Imaginative Education has given validity to my concerns around child-centered teaching. I struggled with the lack of direction much of the student-led projects possessed, and the lack of skills students left with at the end of the project. I also felt that student-centered learning did leave children behind just as much as other education philosophies. I am always reminded of Matt Groening's 'School is Hell' where Bongo, while in class, notes that if a student fails, didn't the teacher fail as well?



I found the excuses for these 'teacher failures' of educators who practice student-centered learning just as flimsy as 'traditional' classroom teachers. Students who didn't work in the student-centered project focused classroom weren't 'creative' enough, needed to 'apply' themselves, or just 'didn't fit'.

Another concern I have over independent lessons is that students who are exceeding in that area do not always challenge themselves because they are, in popular opinion, already 'better than the rest'. Due to the competitive nature of schools, students can come out of units and tests thinking that because they got the highest mark they did enough. I have found in my own experience that students who are doing 'the best' tend not to challenge themselves as they do not feel the need, or are worried that challenging themselves would result in a 'bad' mark. This is exemplified in the book *Mindset* by Dr. Carol Dweck. While there are some issues being

raised with the lack of replicated studies around growth mindset, the underlying message around ‘good students’ rings true with my experience as a teacher. A final disclaimer on the growth mindset philosophy is that it is fine in the context of teaching a specific subject, but the idea that a shift in mindset can offset trauma is deeply problematic and inherently racist. Children cannot be lumped together so blindly in their lived lives and the growth mindset when applied to self-regulation and resilience smacks of the misguided and hurtful ‘pull yourself up by your bootstraps’ idea that ignores privilege (The Atlantic, 2015).

IE has also caused me to examine why I am the ‘writing’ teacher. It was just what I thought was important as a teacher, but now I have started to explore the role of writing in my classroom and in the lives of my students. A class on Vygotsky made me ask myself if I focused too much on the writing aspect of language arts, and not enough on the orality and the play of language. In that paper, I concluded that orality and play in middle-age children is just as vital as writing, so that children can develop their ‘inner speech’ and grow as cultural, social learners.

Further context is that there is a new curriculum in British Columbia. There is a renewed passion surrounding Aboriginal present day context, history, and the Aboriginal principles of learning. This action research helped me to further study and incorporate the First Peoples Principles of Learning (FNESC, 2012) into my teaching. Specifically for this unit, I focused on the second principle ‘Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational’ through working with my students to develop the stations over the two weeks, and by making sure they were working together to improve each other’s writing. I also tried to embed the principle of ‘Learning requires exploration of one’s identity’ as we talked through what it is to be a writer throughout the two week unit.

### *The Challenge*

While any full time teacher who is completing a masters is going to struggle with time management, the circumstances around this particular action research are ‘special’. In the beginning weeks of the term, I was given a date for major surgery that coincided with the projected time line of beginning the actual research. In order to deal with this, I jump-started my research and began my action research within the first month of my master’s class. The result of this is that my literature review was finalized after the action research project and there was a six-week gap where no work was done.

As any good researcher, this should also be brought up as a potential bias in my research. Obviously I had a lot on my mind during this time, was rushed to complete the work before my surgery, and have finished the project during my recovery period. However, on the flip side of all that, I dealt with my first ever hospital experience through denial and avoidance, so I threw myself into this project. I didn’t have time to think about all the dreadful thoughts that come with surgery when I was staying in my school’s library cutting and pasting images and words on poster board, or transcribing hours of recorded material upon getting home. On top of all this, I was unable to work on my research for a month after the surgery and was able to return to it with a fresh mind and take a second look at it all.

### *Ending Note*

*“Which book would you like to read with me?” “I hate books.” “How can you hate all books? I understand hating specific books, but not all books.” “Books remind me I’m a failure.”*

*“What would you like to write about?” “Nothing.” “Well, the class is writing about their hopes for the school year. Would you like to write about that?” “No.” “How come?” “I have nothing to say.” “I don’t believe that. You are an interesting child with lots of important things to share.” “No I’m not. I’m dumb.”*

*“You haven’t written anything in your journal. How come?” “I can’t spell.”*

All of these are repeat conversations I’ve had with students throughout my ten years teaching. They all come from capable students who can read and write, but have been taught to look at it as a chore, or taught that they are not ‘smart’ enough to complete the tasks. They tend to fear ridicule from their peers, lose work so as not to hand it in, and groan loudly enough to wake the dead when Language Arts tasks are assigned.

As a teacher, I feel it is my job to make sure that students leave knowing they are readers and writers, no matter their ability compared to their peers, no matter their mark on their report card. I want them to know that books can be an escape for them, and writing is a way to express their individual lived lives. I started off one of my grade 7 classes with a quote ‘a love of reading is caught, not taught’, to which a student replied ‘ew, like rabies’. ‘Yes,’ I replied ‘you start foaming at the mouth for books’. It wasn’t an intentional metaphor but if all my students leave the school year like one of my students did, grabbing an armful of books with an overflowing mouthful of pop rocks, getting spittle all over my desk, and leaving the classroom howling, I’ll be quite pleased.

## Literature Review

The challenge of my literature review was that I was completing it while I was conducting research. Due to this situation, I created a thematic literature review for organization purposes and peace of mind.

### *Early Intermediate Writing*

As I continually am moved from grade to grade, I find myself having to re-educate myself every September for my new age of learners. The most challenging reorientation has been in language arts. The abilities and needs of grade 3 students, while overlapping, do not mesh with those of Grade 7s. Studying IE and Vygotsky has provided me with a wealth of knowledge on how to approach different learners. Both have made me consider the importance of play and orality and the different learning ‘milestones’ of children, whether or not it is their zone of proximal development or their current kind of understanding (Egan, 2005; Vygotsky, 2012). I now look at each learner and where they are at, and the classroom as a whole, to guide my writing lessons.

Further study has helped me explore the role of writing in late primary/early intermediate learners. In *Space to Write*, a paper about a classroom teacher’s attempts to get her reluctant class writing, the researcher’s final conclusion is that students need a supportive environment in order to develop authentic writing voices (2016). Without this space, writing could be created for artificial means, only there to placate the needs of the teacher. Through my research, I want to figure out how best to create a supportive environment for my students to best honour their voices.

*Independent Student Work*

It was comforting to find out I wasn't alone about my unease about independent student work. During my search, finding articles critical of the onslaught of independent student activity models was not hard. What struck me about each one was the crucial teacher-student relationship was missing and the error of assuming 'imagination' will get the children through. The discussion on student work also reminded me of the Vygotskian perspective that emphasizes the importance of talk to figure out new concepts and internalize learning (2012), so it is not that I want to do away with independent work, it's that I want to do it better.

In one case study, a teacher worked with two researchers to identify the problem with literature circles in her classroom and addressed those problems throughout the school year. In the end, the researchers found that the addition of mini-lessons that specifically and explicitly taught the skill expected, followed with the teacher being a 'critical coach' led to better peer-led discussions (Clark & Holwadel, 2007). As it will be mentioned multiple times, the researchers also found that a safe, respectful classroom community was the first requirement of meaningful interaction between students.

While the following article is about reading, I feel the connection between reading and writing is undeniable. In my class, many of my writers look to reading as guides for their writing. I have many students who choose during reading time, to write down verbatim a book they would like to read- usually a book high above their current reading level. Having serious discussions with my class about books, and what we enjoy about books and reading, impacts my students' writing and their view of themselves as writers. The article that best summarized this for me was *Story Discussion in the Primary Grades: Balancing Authenticity and Explicit Teaching* (McIntyre, 2007). The paper is a case study on two primary grade teachers and

explores the struggle of instruction and literacy circles in the classroom. On par with my observations, the teachers felt that the conversations students were having during the independent time were phony and ended up being wasted time. By the end of the year, both teachers had rejected the traditional literary circle, unstructured and unsupervised, in favor of a hybrid model. The teachers turned to a ‘teacher-fronted talk’ in order to implicitly teach strategies of authentic conversation, a much more gradual release of responsibility, and finally the researcher notes that the literary circles depended less on a specific set of skills but more on a classroom environment that fosters respect (2007).

Menmuir, whose paper was touched upon in the previous section, notes that ‘free’ spaces, spaces lacking teacher direction and interference, seemed to be the most inviting to students, noting that previously unengaged students showed more interest in writing while in these spaces (2016). This is mentioned in another articles about children writers when the observation that literature rich classrooms with student only sections allowed more students to feel that they were supported as ‘writers’ by their teacher (Ruiz, 2003).

### *Student Engagement*

Toni Morrison writes that readers and writers can present a shareable imaginative world but not without many difficulties in how to interpret and perform in a common language (1992). Every child in the classroom has this potential to involve themselves in this ‘shareable imaginative world’, but how do I as their teacher help them communicate this world? How do I help them get excited to interact within this world with their peers? For me, this is engagement. Research into this continuously led me back into Egan’s Kinds of Understandings, specifically romantic and mythic learners. He stresses using cognitive tools such as heroic figures, binary opposites (found commonly in fairy tales), and, a little later on for some children, revolt and

idealism (2005). This sentiment was repeated in a study on children and imagination by Yeoman. He observed a 4/5 classroom for 6 months and found that narratives presented by the teacher impacted engagement in the students. Stories that presented binary opposites, specifically, alternative binary opposites excited the students. The presentation of ‘disruptive’ fairy tales, stories that presented feminist male and female heroes that questioned ‘inequitable social structures’ had, in his opinion, the largest impact on the children’s imaginative play and writing (1999).

Speaking to being an African-American woman writer, Toni Morrison (1992) writes ‘my project rises from delight, not disappointment. It rises from what I know about the ways writers transform aspects of their social grounding into aspects of language, and the ways they tell other stories, fight secret wars, limn out all sorts of debates blanketed in their text. And rises from my certainty that writers always know, at some level, that they do this.’ (p. 4). I do find that when my students have opportunities to explore their identity through writing and reading, the level of engagement increases. Presenting the narratives, an IE cognitive tool, of all peoples and having opportunities to read about social injustices in the past and ‘disrupt’ the traditional narratives may further the engagement of my students in their writing.

### Methods

As a teacher first, and a grad student second, I made the following assumption during my research in order to have a complete project to write about.

*Assumption of Community:* The first objective I have of my own teaching in September is to create a sense of community in my classroom. We work together as a class to create a class set of expectations that we all, myself included, should abide by. We talk about the challenges surrounding those expectations, and what should happen if expectations are not met. As their

teacher, I teach how to speak in a constructive and fair way to all people, but especially peers. We spend a lot of time with drama games, learning about tone of voice, getting to work with all classmates of all levels, and working with emotional intelligence. While students do have to share classroom materials and games, they are not expected to share their own possessions in our class; however, they have to understand that we still have to be polite when we don't share, and that we cannot expect others to share their things with us either. Interestingly enough, this is one of the hardest concepts for my new students to grasp. While my action research is concerned with creating a literary 'free' space, I am assuming that for the most part, at least for the means of this paper, that a sense of community is being met.

### *Participants*

20 students participated in the two week study (one was away on a family trip) from January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2017 to February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017. I have assigned all the students pseudonyms.

### *Class Discussion and Individual Surveys*

On January 26<sup>th</sup> I held a class discussion with my students about authorship and writing. We had already looked at the writing stations in detail and we discuss 'voice' in the classroom year-long. I wrote the following questions on the board and students had a chance to answer orally and then had time to elaborate on paper afterwards.

1. What is an author?
2. Do you think you're an author?
3. What is your 'best' writing?
4. Describe your 'voice'
5. Any comments on the writing stations?

On February 2<sup>nd</sup>, I wrote the following questions on the board for students to answer in written form. Some students chose to disclose their thoughts orally to me while the others wrote.

1. Do you think the writing stations have impacted your individual writing in any way?
2. Which station(s) do you like the best and why?
3. Which station(s) don't you like and why?

#### Class Discussion

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2017 we held a class discussion and I asked the following questions

What is your favourite station?

What is your favourite moment from the past two weeks?

What would you change about a station and why?

#### *Stations & Classroom Environment*

Stations were held between recess and lunch (75 minutes) for two weeks. For three of the days the time had to be shifted to occur after lunch due to visitors or fieldtrips. Stations lasted for at least 30 minutes, sometimes longer depending on student engagement, with anywhere from 10 to 20 minutes of 'free time' afterwards. Writing would carry until lunch where students had the option to continue writing for another 20 minutes.

Altogether there were six stations and a 'tools of the trade' table, which held lined paper, blank paper, a stapler, a date stamp, white-out (was removed the second day due to misuse), post-it sized notecards, pencils, pens of assorted colours, and tape (lost the first day). Students were allowed to use the table without supervision or permission from me.

The stations themselves were created based on the cognitive imaginative tools. For many of the stations, I borrowed heavily from Egan's book *Teaching Literacy, An Imaginative*

*Approach to Teaching*, and from articles in the literature review, specifically *How Does It Get Into My Imagination* (Yeoman, 1999).

In addition to the stations, I emptied out two of the classroom libraries and made ‘cubbies’ for each student to put their work for easy access at all times. Students kept their writing booklets, file folders, and anything else they wanted in the cubbies.



There was also a ‘literacy corner’ made in a spare corner of the coatroom. It was decorated with origami butterflies, and crepe flowers, lined with yoga mats, and held stuffed animals and pillows.

### *Alliteration, Rhyme, and Rhythm*

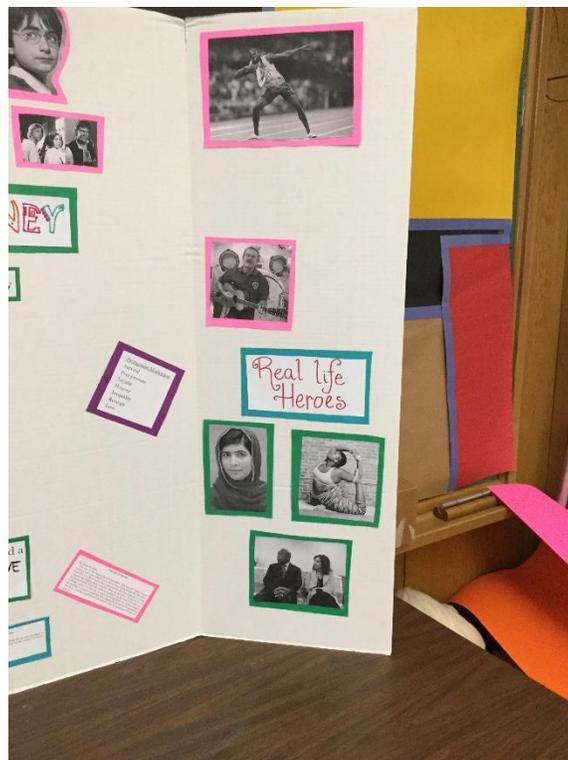
This station was mounted on a large tri-fold presentation board. The options on it were shape poems, an alliteration ice-cream poem, a reverse poem template, an ‘All About Me’ poem template, common rhyming and lyrical poems, such as London Bridge is Falling Down and Pick-Up Sticks, and a template for a poem about colours. For this station I purchased a new visual dictionary, *The Usborne Junior Illustrated English Dictionary and Thesaurus* (to offset the class dictionaries that are from 1995), and an emotion card game set by Todd Parr. Inspired of

Christian Bok's 2001 book of poetry *Eunoia*, I also made lists of word contained only one type of vowel were printed out for the students to create one vowel poems.

### *Hero Journey*

The hero journey station was divided into three sections. The first section was traits and qualities of heroes and villains, characters, and character motivations (appendix B). There was a space for students to add their own traits and qualities underneath the lists.

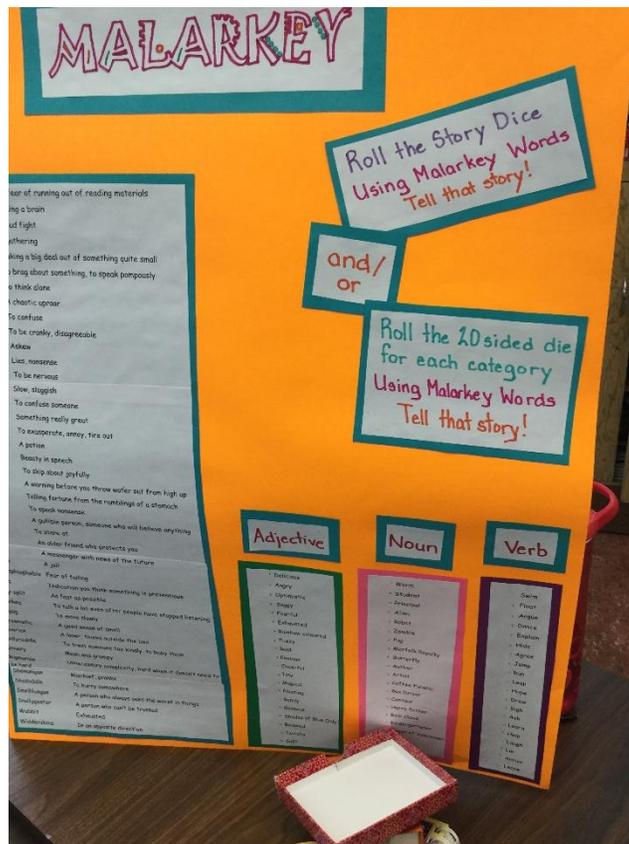
The second section focused around story and had a 'child-friendly' version of Joseph Campbell's Hero Journey and examples of 'mixed-up' fairy tales taken from Teaching Literacy, but retitled 'disrupted' fairy tales based on Yeoman's research that 'mixed-up' fairy tales suggest a story 'gone wrong', while a more effective word like disrupted help promote the idea of alternative perspectives (1999). The third section focused on fictional and real-life heroes assigned with a heroic trait.



The books included at this station were various ‘re-tellings’ of fairy tales, such as *Snow White and the Seven Robots*, *Goldy Luck and the Three Pandas*, *Little Red Hot*, *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, and others.

*Malarkey*

The malarkey station consisted of lists of words and different interactive games (appendix C). The lists were a set of ‘malarkey’ words, and a set of nouns, adjectives, and verb to make a ‘malarkey’ sentence for a sentence. The ‘malarkey sentence’ lists were numbered 1-20 and a 20 sided die was available to roll. The games were ‘story dice’, Tell-A-Tale, and ‘Fairy Tale’ picture cards.

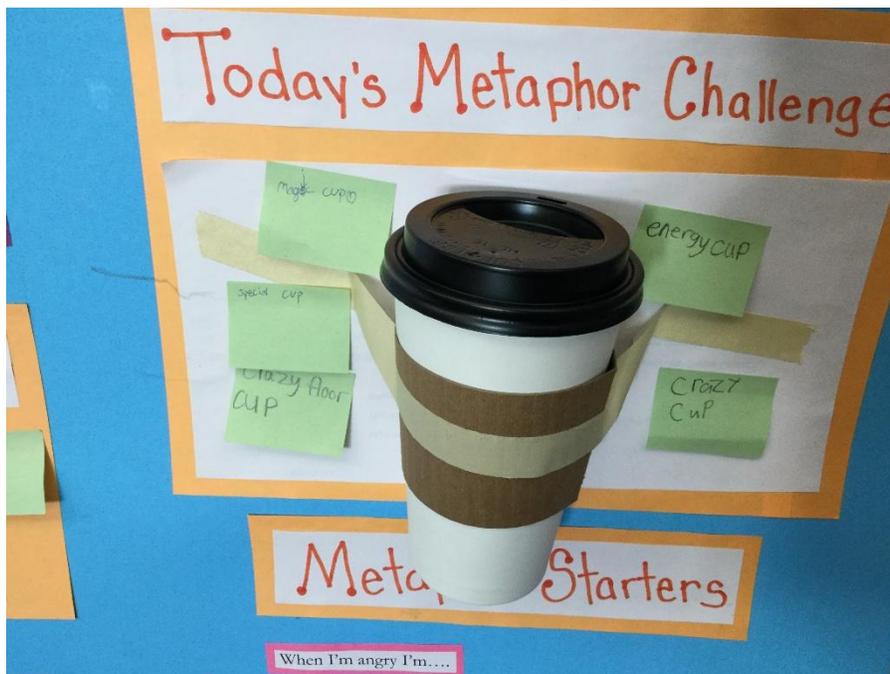


### *Jokes, Puns, and Idioms*

This station only had books at it. The books were *You're Pulling My Leg! 400 Human-Body Sayings From Head to Toe* by Street and Brace, a *Joke-lopedia*, and a pun-book I found in the free table that fell apart before the end of the unit and was recycled. As a class we decided we didn't like the pun book so paper was added to the station to re-do the puns.

### *Metaphor*

This station had 3 activities. The first was the daily metaphor challenge, in which an ordinary item is placed at the station and students come up with a different use for it.



There were metaphor starter sentences for students to complete with a space for them to create their own metaphor starts. Lastly, there was the daily sentence challenge which was based on an activity described in Egan's *Teaching Literacy*. It posed a challenge for students to re-write sentences by creating new words of items, but keeping the meaning of the sentence the same (appendix D).

*Imagery*

This station had rotating art supplies but always had good card stock, oil pastels, chalk pastels, pencils, pencil crayons, and crayons. I cut up all my past calendars and included collections of postcards and art books. On the poster board itself was lists of imagery words and words associated with emotions. Due to the time constraints I used vocabulary lists found online that cannot be shared here as I do not possess permission to share them.

*Informal Interview Questions during Station Time*

What are you enjoying about this station?

What frustrates you at the station?

What have you done new with your writing at this station? What risks have you taken?

Explain what you are doing at this station.

What would you change about this station?

### Results

*Words found play; play found its ink**Individual Surveys*

In response to the first discussion on authorship and voice, students overwhelmingly reported that an author was a person who wrote for a living. After some discussion from other students, there was more warming up to the idea that a writer is simply someone who writes.

*'An author is a person who thinks of what to write and does it' –Sheldon*

*'A creative person' – Viola*

*'They write books to interest someone, whether to make them laugh, scream, or cry' -*

*Karen*

In response to the question, are you an author, a few were a strong yes, but many wavered on the idea. One student commented that they were an author because they ‘read my stories to the class!’ in the entitled ‘Author’s Corner’ we do as a class every Wednesday afternoon, a connection I had failed to make until then.

*‘I’m almost. I’m 95% but 5% needs bigger and harder words’ – Lee*

*‘Yes beck (because) I love to rite’ - Cara*

*‘No because I want to be something else like a baseball player’ – Charlie*

The ‘best’ writing question stumped a lot of students and required a lot of conversation between peers. We were halfway through a Harry Potter unit and many of my students said ‘imaginative’ and ‘magical’ writing was their best currently. Adventure/action stories were mentioned often, possibly a tribute to the amount of time I spend teaching to plot devices, or simply the age range of the class. A key few mentioned plays, and the older students in the class have enjoyed ‘re-writing’ the plays we do in drama.

I was surprised by how honest my students were about their writing. They were able to pick out things they felt they did well, but also things they needed to work on. Unfortunately I also noticed a trend that students said they were not good writers because they were ‘messy’. This is due to an issue with fine motor skills in my class and my emphasis on printing on the lines. It is an important skill that students need to develop, but should not impact their view of themselves as writers. I will address this further on in the paper.

*‘Amazing, but sloppy in the middle’ – Lee*

*‘Slightly inappropriate’ – Karen*

As for the writing stations, most students were simply excited and wanted to get started. Hero Journey took a small lead overall, but all the stations were mentioned by the students.

*Mid-way Survey*

During this survey, students were quick to note that they liked all the stations, so I had them rank them from 1 to 6 and tell me why they picked that order.

The message I got from students was that the writing stations were energizing their writing. Not everyone felt that way, two students said that there was no change to their writing, and not everyone could explain how their writing was different, but overall they felt a positive change.

*'It made me think more. It helped me think up more action in my story' – Charlie*

*'Made me get good ideas for a song or dancing' – Buffy*

*'My writing is sillier because of the ice cream (alliteration game)' - Karen*

*'Yes, the games were really fun' – Rey*

*'They encouraged me to not stop writing' – Viola*

*'Yes, I'm drawing in my writing' – Letty*

*'It made me more [courageous] in writing and it made me more creative in writing' -*

*Stephen*

Hero Journey was the resounding favourite with 8 out of 19 votes. Imagery and malarkey were second, then jokes and metaphors, and poor alliteration only getting one #1 spot.

## Imagery

*'I'm learning how to draw' – Denis*

*'I like drawing about what I wrote' - Emmet*

## Hero Journey

*'I want to make a story and use my characters' –Charlie*

*'People go there more than once' - Viola*

The least favourite was also a solid vote amongst the class. The jokes station was the least liked by most students, with imagery and malarkey coming in second, metaphor third, and hero fourth. Alliteration, in contrast to only once being first for most liked, was never mentioned as the least liked station.

#### Malarkey

*'I just don't like that kind of stuff' - Emmet*

*'My friends said it was boring and we like a lot of the same things' - Karen*

#### Imagery

*'It doesn't fit me' - Charlie*

#### Jokes, Riddles, and Puns

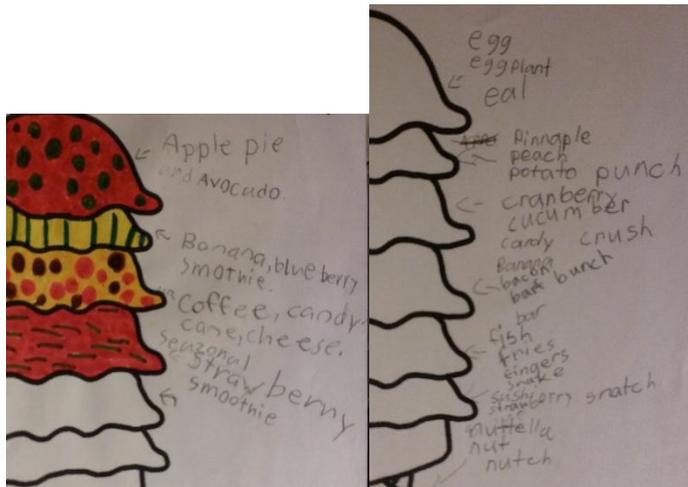
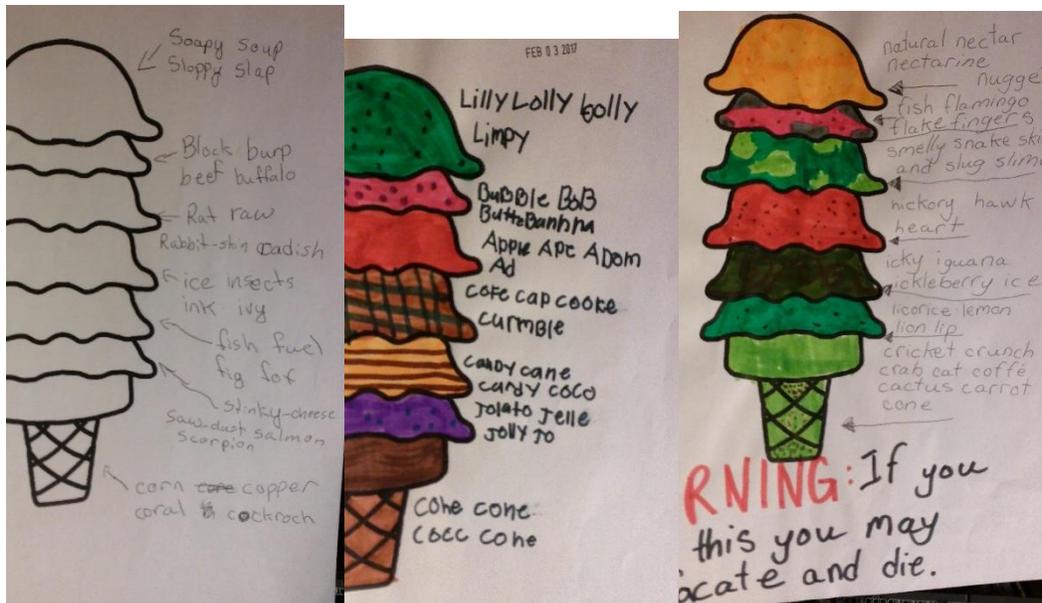
*'Jokes and puns don't make me laugh' - Denis*

*'It doesn't have much to it' - Stephen*

#### Stations

#### *Alliteration, Rhyme, & Rhythm*

The alliteration station, for all my work, was a hit for one reason: the alliteration ice cream cone.



After getting over my selfish disappointment that the rest of my work was being ignored, I saw the great work going on with the ice cream cone activity. Students were working together, pouring through dictionaries, and brainstorming words with the same beginning letter but also categorizing them.

Another popular hit at this stations was the Todd Parr emotion cards, though my optional instructions for the game were cast aside for charades. This was interesting because charades in any other context in a disruptive game but during the station time, the student playing it were

respectful of the space they were using and monitored their loudness. Again, this game still worked with language and emotion perfectly and I had no issue with it continuing.

This station was the loudest and most collaborative station and next to hero journey was one of the most sought after. As time went on, more students explored the different activities at the station but usually in oral play. The rhythm sticks went missing on the second day and were never returned.

### *Hero Journey*

By far the most popular station, hero journey called to every student in the class. Students could draw, read, write, or talk about the heroes on the board. There weren't many stories to come out of this station, but there were many characters that possessed hero and villain traits. On top of that, this was the most collaborative station next to the alliteration station.

### *Malarkey*

Malarkey was an interesting station for many reasons. It definitely initially appealed more to my younger students and the students less confident in their writing; however, as the two weeks progressed, more students started playing the games in the station during free time. This made the station more sought after and made it a popular choice by the end of the two weeks. Student enjoyed making up nonsense story plots and using the images from the card games to help tell their made-up story. Many students would continue to use the games into independent writing time and some students would carry the games into their lunch break.



A student playing with the fairy-tale cards at the Malarkey station

### *Jokes, Puns, and Idioms*

Oddly enough, this was a more somber and quiet station than the others. Usually each student would take a book and read to themselves, occasionally sharing an especially good joke or idiom. Students also liked to write their favourite jokes down on cue cards and during the independent writing time share these jokes with the class. Later on in the last week of the stations, this station did get louder and more interactive. Some students were working the jokes into writing they had already done, specifically having the heroes they created in Hero Journey

tell jokes in their writing. This station also had the most student input in the way of books.

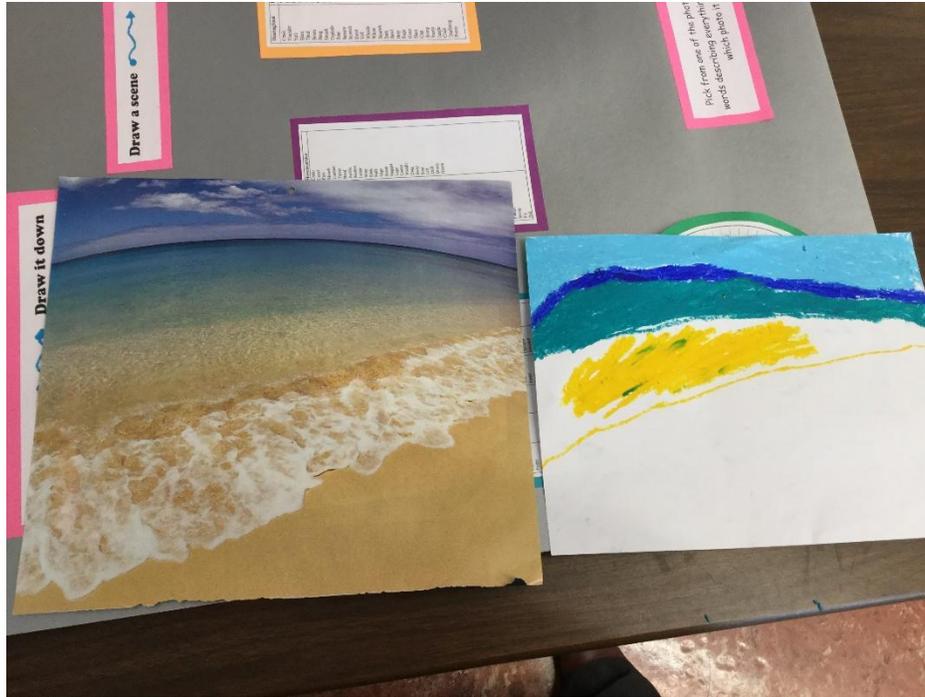
Overall, three books were borrowed from the library and added to the station.

### *Metaphor*

Metaphor turned out to be the most challenging of the stations and therefore was not used in my intended manner. It was often used as a 'free' creative writing station, with lots of personal letters written, sometimes stories from other stations were worked on, and sometimes the activities were tried but usually for short periods of time and then students would move on to something else.

### *Imagery*

Imagery's popularity grew quietly as the two weeks went along. It started off a favourite of two students and by the end had a solid group of students dedicated to working at it during independent time. It was used in two distinct ways: students creating art with the supplies and creating written and oral stories about their drawings, and students taking stories written at other stations and continuing them at the imagery station in order to use the imagery words. The following photo is one of the pieces of art created by Denis, a self-proclaimed 'bad artist'.



### *Independent Student Work in Writing Journals*

As much as I would like to share each of my student's work, time restraints and my own life outside of teaching prevent that degree of detail for right now. For the independent student work, I have chosen three students, two grade threes and one grade four, to share.

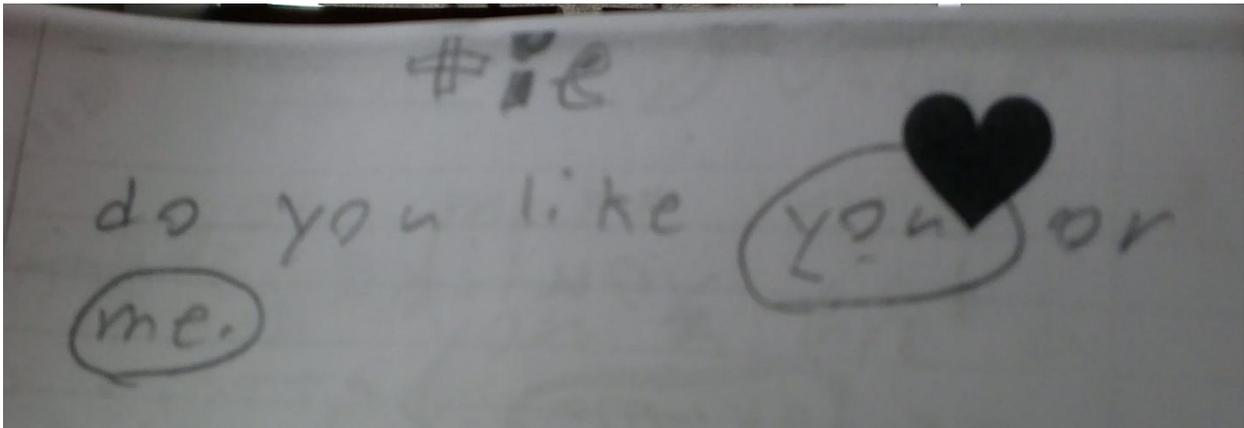
#### *Charlie*

Charlie is an outspoken and dynamic grade 3 student who likes to talk more than write. He took to the idea of 'retelling' stories and whenever he was able he would go to the hero station and read the distorted fairy tales. During independent writing time, Charlie often retold not fairy tales, but movies and TV shows he had seen. He added twists to them, such as placing the stories in Vancouver or in surrounding areas, and adding a bit more of his humour style. For example, in a retelling of a Winnie the Pooh show, he concluded the story with '...tiggly started talking about how he eat these beans that said you will not fart but actually said you will fart tiggly said oh well whatever they arrived home and tiggly farted'. These stories were interesting

due to their length, significantly longer than Charlie's usual writing. They also took on more of Charlie's voice. This 'independent' option not only got Charlie writing more prolifically and without concern over breaking the rules, but it also helped him develop his voice as he was able to delve deeper into his stories.

Charlie, as mentioned before, retold stories, often movies, with his own twist, usually demographically. One of his original pieces is a poem he wrote at the Alliteration station on February 8<sup>th</sup>. It started off as a traditional poem about his friend Sam who was also at the station with him but turned into an interactive 'do you like' poem. The options started off generic but morphed into funny and personal options.

*do you like sing or lego better. do you like sing or avocado better do you like sing or ninjago better. do you like ninjago or me better. do you like me or your sister better do you like me or your dad better. do you like you or me. (tie)*



This struck me for two major reasons. Charlie is a student who has vocalized his dislike of poetry on many occasions, and because this poetry, unlike Charlie's writing in his booklet, is based on his friendship with Sam and their personal lives. When challenged, but left to make his own way

through the challenge with the appropriate cognitive tools, Charlie started to explore writing in new and exciting ways.

### *Viola*

Viola is a talented grade 4 student who loves to write. She often writes essays for her homework when a paragraph would suffice and spends her free time creating plays with her friends. My concern for her, as noted in the introduction, is that she would not be challenged during independent time.

Happily, I feel that the absence of ‘marks’ and the focus on individual students’ progress over the two weeks led Viola to embrace the writing stations. She was eager to spend time at all the stations and explore the different tasks. An additional bonus, due to the variety of stations and the scattered way students picked out which station they would go to, Viola was not always with her friend group. She appeared to enjoy working with different students and took on a ‘teaching’ role without being patronizing.

Another thing I noticed about Viola was a more ‘relaxed’ take on the writing she did produce. For example, here is a poem she wrote on the last day of the stations.

*If a human could fly/ your hair would blow/ you would see fields below/ the dewdrops on your feet/ from the ground/ racing around the clouds/ you would see the sun/ reaching/ to touch it you would fall/ you would realize it meant/ nothing at all/ you would fly into the sky/ but come back down/ so you realize you should stay on the ground*

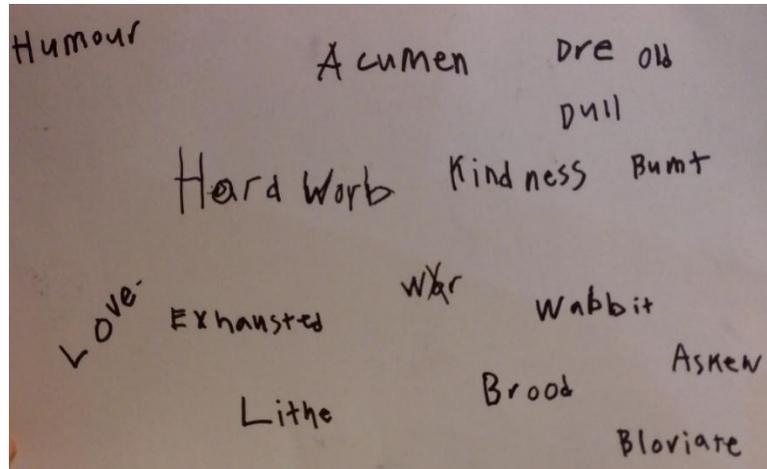
Viola’s poem is beautiful and with revisions would make an outstanding final piece. What struck me as her teacher is that she did not show it to me. I came across it weeks after it was completed while going through her work. For a student who seemed to need a lot of teacher

confirmation on what she was doing, I was proud that she wrote this and seemingly was content to keep it in her book. For me, this showed a maturity in her independence as a writer.

### *Rey*

Rey came into the school year approaching grade 3 expectations in reading or writing. Not only has he come so far in his learning throughout the year, this research action allowed him to exceed in a variety of ways. One way I noticed right away was his risk-taking in word choice (please note, I did not pick the following sentence just for its wonderful content, it sincerely is the best representation of his risk-taking). During independent writing, he wrote ‘Ms. Pesen is the best teachr in the wold I wosh I cub har hur as a etrel day tecr efen in hiscol and collig.’ (*Ms. Payson is the best teacher in the world, I wish I could have her as an entire day teacher even in high school and college.*). And during independent time he re-wrote a joke he knew I would like without having the text in front of him ‘what ~~did-d~~ kind of fish gos gud with peneputr a jellyfish’ (*what kind of fish goes good with peanut butter? A jellyfish*).

Rey’s adventurous side with his words shows up in his folder. He spent his time during the folder activity very carefully writing down words. He knew what some of them meant, like love, dull, and hard work, but work down challenging and unique words. The care he took to make his letters upper and lower case and the neatness of his writing shows a tremendous growth to me of his love of language.



Other evidence that Rey was taking a more invested role in his writing is the time he spent putting together a booklet. He lined up his paper, cut of the side with the holes, carefully stapled the paper together with three staples equally lined apart, and stamped each page. While he did not end up writing in this booklet by the end of the two weeks, he was proud of his work and I, once again, was struck by the care and deliberate nature he was taking in his work.

### *Personal Observations*

On the first day, I knew I would not be able to take notes. I walked around with one of the classroom i-pads recording my conversation with students, verbally taking notes, and taking photos. I would spend lunch writing down my immediate thoughts on the day, and after going through the videos and comments in the evening, reflect further on the experience.

Overall I found that despite the school year being halfway through, my students were not as independent as I would have liked. The experience of listening through my interactions with the students showed me that they did need reassurance on things they should have been comfortable with, or were asking questions that were answerable elsewhere.

There was a notable difference between the two weeks. The first week I was interrupted 13 times during a 1-to-1 lesson with Lee, while the second week we were only disturbed 3 times,

and two of those three times were over reasonable requests that did require my input. Another difference between the two weeks was my discomfort at the independent activity. The first week I mentioned my discomfort at not correcting behaviour, especially at the metaphor station, every day. By the second week, I had either resigned myself to my fate, or let go of those worries, and they were not mentioned once. I also noticed by the second week students were taking more ownership of the stations, setting them up, moving chairs and tables around, and moving around more freely during independent writing time. The first week I mentioned having to encourage students to move chairs so all students could interact with the station, or to try new stations during the 'free time'.

A comment that I noticed I made repeatedly during the weeks was how proud I was of my students. I noted the on-task behaviour, the exploration of language, the respectful interactions between students who were not used to working with each other, the playing between stations, and the positive time the students were having.

#### *End-of-Unit Class Discussion*

The class discussion on the last day of the stations started off productively. When asked which was their favourite station and which was their favourite moment, many students combined the two for one answer. For some students, getting to interact with their friends at a station was the best, for instance, my students who wrote notes to each other at the metaphor station all listed that as their favourite. Many students found that the games options at Malarkey was their favourite, but still hero journey took it for popularity.

The last day of the unit was also my last day before leaving for my surgery so when the conversation turned to what would they change the focus shifted to my departure. I stopped recording the audio because some of my students were expressing strong emotions and I wanted

to be respectful of the change of context. Overall, the gist was that they wanted more time at stations, more freedom to move from station to station during the day, and that there needed to be more things to do at the joke station. I interpreted this all positively. The underlying message was they wanted to keep doing the stations and just make them more of their own.

### Conclusion

#### *Still wet, my heart beats*

#### *Student Writing*

The two week span of this research has limited any impact I might see on my student's writing; however, I feel that student's perceptions on what a writer is has changed in the two weeks. This project gave my students space to explore literacy in a new way. They got to play with language and express themselves in a wholly unique fashion to the 'traditional' classroom setting. Instead of performing a writing task to how they think I would like them to complete it, they got to perform, think, and act with language. This point was driven home to me with Charlie's unprompted poem during independent time.

As well, I had many students, Tan, Denis, and Liesl to name a few, who had avoidance tactics during language arts, such as losing their work, breaking pencils, and frequent bathroom breaks. These tactics were not an issue during the action research. Instead, Tan was excited to get back to malarkey because he was going to make a malarkey sentence involving my coffee cup, Denis stayed in during a lunch period to make up stories with Rey, and Liesl was the first to set up the stations before recess. This change towards language arts gives me hope that their writing

skills will benefit as they feel more like the authors of their own lives and know that they can share their lived experiences.

### *Independent Student Work*

Overall I was pleased with the work my students did on their own, but I do believe there are many different factors that led to this success. Firstly, the class has worked hard since September to build a solid community. Even as I plan writing stations for next year, I am quick not to get ahead of myself and think success will repeat with a new class right away. We spent five months before starting the stations working on classroom expectations, talking respectfully to one another, and peaceful problem solving. This was evident as I walked around the classroom and listened to students conversations. When there were disagreements, students went on to something else, each did their own thing, or worked it out without drama. If I may paraphrase a discussion I overheard between Emmet and Jeff at the hero journey

Emmet: I'm bored. (In my opinion, he wasn't bored, he was frustrated because his drawing wasn't turning out the way he wanted it to.)

Jeff: Want to help with Captain America?

Emmet: No

Jeff: Want to start a new story?

Emmet: Which one do you want to do?

Jeff: One of the disruptive fairy tales

Emmet: Want to do this one?

Jeff: Yeah. Can I use your pen? (Invisible ink pen- bane of my existence)

Emmet: Okay, write down what I say.

In my personal reflecting, I found that the first week was challenging. I wrote down many frustrations I felt, and the feelings of ‘not doing my job’. The first week I did not stay at my desk and would stroll around the classroom checking in on the students. Over the weekend I looked back on my notes and listened to my recordings and wondered if my ‘strolls’ were my way of putting leadership back in my position. For the second week, I stayed at my desk for longer and only did two strolls around the classroom, asking specific questions for the action research. I found that staying at my desk was giving me a unique chance to observe my students. I noticed interactions between students I had not noticed before. On top of that, I feel that my staying at my desk gave my students more permission to problem solve on their own. When they had issues they could not solve they were quick to come to my desk and we solved it together, but I saw students getting their own dictionaries without asking me permission, running to the supplies station, in one case going into the paper cabinet to restock the supplies station, modifying stations to suit their needs (erasing the word ‘friends’ and writing ‘besties’ instead), and one student, Lee, who was done with the loudness of hero station early, took a few unused pillows from the literacy corner, and set himself up a lovely reading spot underneath the hero journey table with some disrupted fairy tales to read. He told me afterwards that he just ‘needed some time with just words’.

I didn’t just let the students go for the two weeks without any instruction. Based on my observations and feedback from the students, we did several mini-lessons based on the stations. On the second week we went over the metaphor station and did the activities as a class which helped students who were stumped by the activities. We also talked about all the different activities we could do at each station, prompted by some of my students saying they were bored of ‘just writing’. We had did a category word sort based on the words at the imagery station as

many of them were challenging and new to my students. These mini-lessons helped reiterate the initial goal of the writing stations for my students, but also helped them explore different stations independently.

### *Student Engagement*

Engagement in the activities was by far the most successful aspect of this short research project. Every day I scanned for off-task distracting behaviour and never found any. Students did struggle with knowing what to do at times, but would problem solve on their own or with their peers. The behaviour was not always specifically tied to writing or to the goals of the station, but it was always *literary play*.

Two stations that caught my eye continuously for a new type of student engagement were alliteration and metaphor. At the alliteration station, even when students were done their ice cream cones, they spent time looking in the visual dictionary and thesaurus, read the poems on the board, smiled at they recalled the poems they learned in younger years, or played charades. This station by far produced the most writing and some of the most risk-taking writing behaviour in students.

The metaphor station was, in some aspects, a failure. There was a sorry lack of metaphor creation, but there was no shortage of writing. Instead of metaphor starters, my examples become 'note' starters for my students to write letters to one another. The daily sentence challenge became the basis of a story. The coffee cup metaphor become an essay on their teacher's addiction to caffeine. While in the future I will work to make the metaphor station more accessible and easier to understand, there was never a lack of engagement at the station.

An interesting effect of the stations was the small groups made for different peer pairings. This gave my students a new way to interact with language, not only through the station, but

through their interactions with a new friend. I noticed this most dramatically at the malarkey station. Because it was so game based there was almost a necessity for student interaction, whereas at most other stations you could chose to work on your own. Here I saw students getting a chance to play with their peers in a structured, yet still independent way. This was exciting for three reasons for me: I saw the older students helping read and make sense of the challenging malarkey words with the younger students, helping them explore and take risks with language; students who may not have been as strong in reading getting to play a ‘language arts’ game with their peers that requires no reading and being on the same level as everyone else; and the creation of ‘shareable imaginative worlds’. Students were making connections between their lives without a teacher standing over them getting them to play a ‘get to know you’ game. I don’t know how else that I as a teacher can ask for more than that.

#### *Research Question*

- How does the use of imaginative cognitive tools provide an ‘unstructured’ time for my students to play with language and further their voice as writers?

I feel that the unstructured stations provided an excellent space for my students to explore their voices as writers in ways they had never before. Overall, I think the writing stations are a diving board into further ways of exploring imaginative cognitive tools in the classroom. In terms of literary play the stations far exceeded my hopes and captured the interest of my students. There is a lot of work still to be done to make the stations stronger, but in my mind the research question prompted a lot of good work in my students and in me. The only consideration I have over the question is the change in voice in my students. Unfortunately I was not able to collect enough data before and after to see whether or not there was a change in students’ voices,

and due to the short time of the unit, I would not have cared to even if I had the resources. I think a longer research project would be needed in order to expect a change in writing.

*My proposed research sub questions*

- What does an effective writing station for independent student use need above all else?

The core two things this research revealed was that classroom community is crucial for independent stations. The second thing is teaching to the stations ahead of time so that each station has a purpose, whether or not students choose to follow that objective is up to them.

- How will I manage off-task behavior during this unstructured time in a way that is respectful of the different ways students play?

This sub question is still ongoing for me. In many ways, I did not have to manage off-task behavior but that will not always be the case. While a strong classroom community helps deal with behaviours that are not conducive to learning, there will be situations where I may need to intervene. In some circumstances when I felt that behaviour was getting out of hand usually a simple clearing of my throat along with a raised eyebrow was able to check the behaviour. That may not always be an issue but as always, classroom management changes depending on the make-up and age of the students.

- How does using cognitive tools increase students' risk-taking and experimentation with language?

I feel that the use of cognitive tools improved risk-taking and experimentation by allowing the students to play with language in a safe environment and by accessing their imagination. The cognitive tools were exciting for the students because they were age appropriate and because they were fun and dynamic for them. Overall I felt that many of my students grew in their voices as writers and grew in their knowledge of the English language.

This of course is just my speculation and a longer study would be required in order to put this theory to test.

- How does providing a student-led time support my students' development of confidence in their writing?

My students were excited to work on their own. Many were thrilled at the idea of being in charge of what they did and as time went on they grew more confident. I feel that the writing stations gave them permission to create their own rules around how they were going to play with language and this play crept into their writing. The level of engagement in the writing stations and the commitment to writing during independent time would suggest to me that there was a deeper level of concentration and play occurring due to these stations.

#### *Where Do We Go From Here?*

*More time teaching to stations:* Due to the time restraints there was not enough time to teach the strategies of each station. While my students made the most of each station, and literary play was achieved, some of the cognitive tools I wanted to teach to were lost. As addressed before, the metaphor station suffered the most from this time crunch. In the future, I will spend time introducing each station and going over the activities as a class first. I imagine that the alliteration ice cream cone will still be the cult classic, but at least the others will be viable options.

*More Class Projects:* Students worked well on their own and in small groups, but there was a disconnect at times as students were moved to different stations. For instance, the joke station was not appreciated by a lot of students because it felt like it 'wasn't writing'. I want to keep the joke station as many good ideas came out of it and because I do want students to challenge themselves and try new things even if it 'isn't their thing'; however, I think an evolving class

project at each station will help students who are peer motivated and at a station without their key peers. For instance, at the joke station I would like to create a class joke book where students would journal pages to write down their favourite jokes, puns, riddles, and idioms. Other students could comment on their peers' pages or just write on their own.

Another class project would simply be taking a photo of what happened at the station that day and printing it off for others to enjoy. It was a shame to remove the daily metaphor item each day and for students to tuck away their beautiful drawings from the imagery station. Even a simple black and white photo of work that is being done at each station that is quickly inserted into a photograph book would capture those ideas and drawings for other students to reflect and draw upon.

### *Editing as Craft*

There is a lack of editing in this unit I find upsetting. Students did amazing work and I am proud of them, but there was a sense that once they were done at a station for a day they were 'done' with that work as well.

*Editing as a Game:* In his book, *The Craft of Revision*, Murray suggests an activity that is easily adaptable to any writing level (1991). I would group the students to help those students who struggle to get words down quickly, but as the game becomes more familiar hopefully students would feel strong enough to work on their own if they wanted. The 'game' starts with a quick, free association writing activity on a cue card. Fragments, whole sentences, single words- whatever students can get down in a short, timed period. Afterwards, this produced writing is revised in many different ways. Murray suggests revising for meaning, audience, order, evidence, voice, and then a final re-write combining all the revisions.

For my grade 3/4 class I would shift a few things around. We would write on the cue cards, maybe two minutes, a scene from our summer vacation, or anything else that struck their fancy that day. Any student who wanted to share their writing out loud would be able at any point during the game. Then we would edit for meaning. I would ask them to underline any words that they could explain further, then do so on a second cue card. From there we would edit it for audience. I would have them change who they were writing it for, be it a parent, a peer in the class, for me, for the principal, or for their alien pen-pal living on the moon. Then we would rewrite it for order, I'd ask them to start with the ending, then work back up to it, or start in the middle of their story. Afterwards, revise for voice- hopefully this would be a more learned activity since I focus on voice throughout the year, but we would look at ways of making the writing more our own. The final part would be re-writing the original piece, choosing what to take from the multitude of revisions, and doing a compare and contrast of our final results.

*Editing as a Station:* While editing and revising are not cognitive tools, I think an editing station based on different strategies and reading out-loud would be a good addition going forward. This station would still involve cognitive tools but as suggestions to make writing stronger. For instance, one of the strategies would be using more imagery language in descriptive scenes, using more emotion in dialogue, or using metaphors to create a stronger meaning. I believe this station would be heavily influenced by the students and would be an evolving station. I like the idea of having students read their work out loud to their peers as they peer groups are always changing and this would provide feedback from many different students.

*Editing as process:* It would be my hope that as the school year advanced, editing would become a part of the writing process for the students. Revision during writing would be as natural as

putting the words on the paper, and critical analysis of each other's work would be a learned activity.

*Classroom Environment:* After reading the journal entries, I realized how names and words in the classroom impacted how the students saw themselves. I work very hard at the beginning of the year to make sure my students call themselves scientists, am I working hard enough to help them realize they are writers as well? After seeing the impact that 'author's corner' had on one of my students, I will make sure to have a labeled title to attach to the 'author's chair' we use, and a more pronounced emphasis on the idea of being an 'author' throughout the classroom.

The mid way survey also showed to me the significance of peer influence on the students. Many students listed stations they hadn't gone to yet as their favourite or least favourite merely on the word of their peers. For me, this means I will watch out for what students are excited about, but also make sure I teach to each station so that students can make up their own minds.

*Distinction between Fine Motor Skills and Writing:* I know going forward I am going to make sure to distinguish the difference between writing and fine motor skills. Every teacher faces the predicament of having work handed in that is too messy to read and having to explain that unless the work is done neatly it cannot be read. No doubt some students think that messy writing means they aren't a good writer. One difference to the classroom I am considering is to make a fine-motor skills time in the classroom. Students work on printing skills, sewing, knitting, delicate colouring sheets with pencil crayons, or other fine motor skill building activities. Hopefully this will help students recognize that messy writing is indicative of needing to build up fine motor skills, not of their skills as a writer.

*Student Friendly Text:* There's always that line between challenging a student to learn and internalize exciting and new words and simply stumping them into frustration. I found that some

stations crossed this line. The imagery station had beautiful words but there were many of them and the font was small. From now on, I will create a new list of words that is shorter and in a larger font. I will also make sure to teach to these words and go over how to use dictionaries (having dictionaries that are not from the 90s would also be helpful). I also found that the Joseph Campbell hero journey, despite being 'kid-friendly' was just too big of a leap for the majority of my students. I will work on creating a new visual hero journey that is challenging but accessible for my students.

### *Closing notes*

This research action has been a learning experience as much for the students as it was for me. I feel more confident going forward next year not only as an IE teacher, but as a writing teacher. I also feel like the work I put into creating a classroom community is worth all the time because the work that has resulted from this class is astounding. I am proud of all of my students and their accomplishments in this unit.

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## Appendix A: Permission Forms

Dear Parents and Students,

I am conducting a study in the classroom this term focused on writing development and student engagement. As many of you know, I am in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of a Masters of Education in Imaginative Education at SFU. My focus throughout the two years has been encouraging writing and imaginative play in my students. This study will help me further my understanding of how best to use imaginative cognitive tools within language arts lessons and how to empower students to take a more active role in their writing.

This process stays within the new BC curriculum and is designed to engage the imagination of the students. I hope to increase the students' confidence in their voice as an 'author', foster intellectual development, creativity, and self-confidence, and improve their knowledge of the English language. Research activities will include teacher observations, videos and audio recordings during the lessons, semi-formal interviews between teacher and students and between students, whole class discussions, and analysis of students' work during the lessons.

The project is focused on the potential of all students to learn and do well in school. Although students may choose not to participate in the interviews, I think they will enjoy being part of the research as a researcher themselves. They may benefit from it, in terms of increased awareness of their educational needs and preferences, and a greater sense of participation in classroom decisions.

Any personal data collected during the study will be kept confidential and will not be used for any purpose, within the limits of professional ethics. Images and descriptions of the classroom activities will not identify students by name.

Questions or concerns regarding this research may be communication to me directly or to Ms. Hughes.

Thank you for your time.

Leone Payson

lpayson@vsb.bc.ca

CONSENT BY PARENT/GUARDIAN  
TO ALLOW PARTICIPATION IN A RESEARCH PROJECT

I understand the research action Ms. Payson is conducting and have discussed it with my child, and consent to my child's participation in the activities described.

Name of Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_ \_\_/ \_\_ \_\_/ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

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I also consent to my child appearing in photos or videos of class activities which are shared with teachers and researchers outside the school district. I understand that my child will not be identified by name and that these images will focus on the positive achievements and abilities of the students and their engagement in learning.

Name of Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Student: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_ \_\_/ \_\_ \_\_/ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_ \_\_

Appendix B: Hero Journey

Hero

Accountability

Acumen

Adaptability

Altruism

Attention to Detail

Beauty

Believing in Yourself

Bravery

Caring

Charity

Collaboration

Compassion

Courage

Creativity

Curiosity

Dedication

Determination

Encouragement

Enthusiasm

Fairness

Foresight

Friendship

Generosity

Hard Work

Honesty

Humour

Imagination

Independence

Innovation

Integrity

Kindness

Life Giving

Life Long Learning

Love

Loyalty

Patience

Peaceful

Perseverance

Power

Reliability

Resilience

Resourcefulness

Respect

Selflessness  
Sense of Community  
Sensitivity  
Strength  
Teamwork  
Tenacity  
Understanding  
Unselfishness  
Valour  
Wisdom

Villain

Greedy  
Untrustworthy  
Steals  
Lies  
Traitorous  
Tells mean jokes  
Spoiled  
Cruel  
Picks fights  
Bullies  
Litters/Doesn't care about the environment  
Doesn't play fair  
Irresponsible  
Selfish  
Spreads rumours  
Controlling of friends  
Evil/Wants to destroy the world  
Hurts living things

Characters

Protagonist  
Antagonist  
Sidekick  
Mentor  
Mysterious Other

Protagonist Motivation

Survival  
Peer pressure  
Loyalty  
Honour  
Inequality  
Revenge  
Loss

## Appendix C: Malarkey

Malarkey Words

Abibliophobia	The fear of running out of reading materials
Anencephalous	Lacking a brain
Argle-bargle	A loud fight
Assemblage	A gathering
Batrachomyomachy	Making a big deal out of something quite small
Bloviate	To brag about something, to speak pompously
Brood	To think alone
Brouhaha	A chaotic uproar
Bumfuzzle	To confuse
Cantankerous	To be cranky, disagreeable
Cattywampus	Askew
Codswallop	Lies, nonsense
Collywobbles	To be nervous
Desultory	Slow, sluggish
Discombobulate	To confuse someone
Doozy	Something really great
Flummox	To exasperate, annoy, tire out
Elixir	A potion
Eloquence	Beauty in speech
Gambol	To skip about joyfully
Gardyloo!	A warning before you throw water out from high up
Gastromancy	Telling fortune from the rumblings of a stomach
Gobbledygook	To speak nonsense
Gobemouche	A gullible person, someone who will believe anything
Gongoozle	To stare at
Goombah	An older friend who protects you
Harbinger	A messenger with news of the future
Hoosegow	A jail
Kakorrhaphiophobia	Fear of failing
La-di-da	Indication you think something is pretentious
Lickety-split	As fast as possible
Logorrhea	To talk a lot even after people have stopped listening
Lollygag	To move slowly
Microsmatic	A good sense of smell
Maverick	A loner, thinks outside the box
Mollycoddle	To treat someone too kindly, to baby them
Ornery	Mean and grumpy
Rigmarole	Unnecessary complexity, hard when it doesn't need to be hard
Shenanigan	Mischief, pranks
Skedaddle	To hurry somewhere
Smellfungus	A person who always sees the worst in things
Snollygoster	A person who can't be trusted
Wabbit	Exhausted

Widdershins

In an opposite direction

Adjectives

Delicious  
Angry  
Optimistic  
Soggy  
Fearful  
Exhausted  
Rainbow coloured  
Fuzzy  
Bald  
Envious  
Cheerful  
Tiny  
Magical  
Floating  
Bendy  
Gaseous  
Shades of Blue Only  
Relaxed  
Twitchy  
Soft

Nouns

Worm  
Student  
Principal  
Alien  
Robot  
Zombie  
Pug  
Merfolk Royalty  
Butterfly  
Author  
Artist  
Coffee Fanatic  
Bus Driver  
Centaur  
Harry Potter  
Rain Cloud  
Kindergartener  
Mayor of Vancouver  
Miner  
Astronaut

Verbs

Swim

Float  
Argue  
Dance  
Explain  
Hide  
Agree  
Jump  
Run  
Leap  
Hop  
Draw  
Sigh  
Ask  
Learn  
Help  
Laugh  
Lie  
Arrive  
Leave

## Appendix D: Metaphor Station

(taken from Egan's *Teaching Literacy: Engaging the Imagination of New Readers and Writers*)

**ORIGINAL:** THE DOG RAN ALONG THE STREET, PASSED THE CAR, AND JUMPED INTO THE GARDEN

1. THE BARKER ROARED ALONG THE CAR SPACE, ZIPPED BY THE FOUR-WHEELER, AND SKYED THE FENCE INTO FLOWERS
2. FIDO LEGGED IT ALONG THE BLACKTOP, PASSED THE PEOPLE-MOVER, AND FLEW INTO THE FLOWERBEDS
3. THE PAWS PADDED ALONG THE TARMAC, OVERTOOK THE METAL BOX, AND SOARED INTO THE VEGGIE PATCH
4. THE CANINE GALLOPED ALONG THE DEAD EARTH, PASSED THE METAL CHARIOT, AND FLEW INTO THE TAMED PLANTS

Metaphor Starters

My home is a....

My dreams are...

When I'm angry I'm....

Works Cited

My friend can sing like a...

This dinner is...

When I am calm I am....

Fridays are....

When I am happy I am...

This day is....