Inside the
Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook
A WORKSHOP ESSENTIAL
Linda Rief
HEINEMANN ♦ PORTSMOUTH, NH
Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS vii

INTRODUCTION ix

PART I How to Use the Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook 1

1 The Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook 3
2 How This Writing-Reading Notebook Evolved 5
3 Keeping a Writing-Reading Notebook 9
4 The Shape, Materials, and Organization of the Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook 11
5 Variations with the Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook 26
6 Evaluation and Written Response 29
7 The Importance of the Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook 34
8 In Conclusion 37

PART II Student Notebook Samples 41

AFTERWORD 165

REFERENCES AND RECOMMENDED RESOURCES 169

APPENDIX: CLASSROOM EXAMPLES 177
Introduction

When I was twelve, I read Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl. Every year I re-read it, along with more current books and documentaries. The true beauty of Anne Frank’s diary is that she always sounds so incredibly real. Her diary makes the Holocaust personal, not political; individual, not anonymous.

I wrote Julie Weiss’s diary with Anne Frank’s near me at all times so I wouldn’t forget, truly, what I was doing. It was a constant source of inspiration. (Denenberg 2000)

This may be the best idea anyone could give us as teachers, especially teachers of writing—to keep Anne Frank’s diary near us at all times so that we make sure all we ask our students to do is personal, individual, and real. This means keeping kids central to all we do, and keeping real writing and real reading at the heart of the language arts. It means knowing our kids well enough that we can build on their strengths and promises. It means teaching with our head and our heart because kids learn better when we know them, respect them, and care about them.

For me, this means designing my classroom as a writers-readers workshop, where we are doing personal, individualized, and real writing and reading. I believe our kids can do their best work as writers and readers in a workshop approach when given

- time
- choice
- response
  - This is what you did well.
  - These are the questions you need to consider.
  - Try this suggestion or two.
- models of fine writing and reading, both fiction and nonfiction, that engage, interest, and challenge

In designing my classroom as a writers-readers workshop, I give students choices and time: choices about what they write and read, time to develop their ideas as writers, and time to read books of their choice. I also provide constructive written and oral
PART I

How to Use
the Writer’s-Reader’s
Notebook
The Shape, Materials, and Organization of the Writer’s-Reader’s Notebook

The Size, Cover, and Materials

Over the years I’ve found that an organizational structure gives students a sense of security and comfort so they can write more freely and honestly. And, I admit, the consistency in size and structure of the sections of the notebook helps me when reading and responding to more than a hundred notebooks every two weeks.

The students prefer a smaller size, not the 8½-by-11-inch size of most notebooks they are asked to use in school. The smaller size fits nicely in their hands or laps as they are reading paperbacks, and it feels more like a journal, a personal space for thinking. The size of each page is less ominous—it’s a size students believe they can fill because it is not overwhelmingly large. Instructions and lists are printed on cardstock to give more permanence, so they won’t fall out and disappear. The cardstock also enables kids to easily locate and return to a page again and again as they add titles and ideas to these lists.

Most students also prefer lightly lined paper. Although I would rather leave the pages blank to invite drawing, the lines make it easier for kids to write. I keep a pile of heavier white art paper, cut just a bit smaller than the notebook pages, so kids have thicker paper on which to draw. They can easily glue it into the notebook. This way they choose where and when to insert a drawing.

The cover, made of a strong, heavy paper so that it survives a year, has been left blank. Suggest to kids that they personalize the notebooks by designing their own cover. They could do this in many ways; here are just a few ideas:

- Students can make a collage—use the front cover for pictures or words of things they like to do, places they love to go.
- Read “My Name” from The House on Mango Street (Cisneros 1989) to the students. Have them do a quickwrite in response to this vignette (in the “Response” section of the W-RN). Ask, “What does this bring to mind about your name?” Have kids research their names: What do you know about your name? Where did it come from? What does it mean? How well does it fit? Have you ever wanted to change it? To what? Why? Have them put their name and the history and meaning of their name in words and drawings on the front cover.
PART II

Student Notebook Samples
Megan

November 28
But I'll Be Back Again
Cynthia Rylant
30 minutes

"Writing stories has given me the power to change things I could not change as a child. I can make boys into doctors. I can make fathers stop drinking. I can make mothers stay."

Cynthia Rylant really thinks a lot like I do in terms of why she writes and how she writes. I like to write things that have a lot of parts of me in them and change what really happened. I have all of the control and I can do whatever I want. I think this may be why Cynthia Rylant writes a lot of her stories about love because she didn't have a lot as a child. She didn't have a father or a mother really. So she writes her stories about people who do have love, like she wishes it had been for her.

She may not have had control of her life as a child, but she has such power as a writer. Terrific that you recognize that.
Zhiwen

I am afraid to go to school, but not me.

In the Social Studies and Science, I even don't know what should I do. I just watch and learn. They thought I am something wrong.

In China, I was a wonderful student and I was popular. I had so many friends in the school, I felt like I would not be lonely.

My mom said, "Just patience." I can't, I feel I can't stay with Americans anymore.

I believe if a person doesn't went to any other countries and have never felt like can't do anything. That person won't knows what I'm saying now and never ever knows how a foreign student feel like.

Your English continues to get stronger.

I am so sorry you are feeling so much fear. You are right, no one else understands this unless they've experienced it.

It will get better. "Patience!"
This is a drawing of a Dirt Biker October 4
hitting a corner full throttle.

Mike

When you are riding a dirt bike you get a wicked adrenaline rush when you go huming down the public trail. The sights are amazing when you are pretty much flying down the trails everything goes by so fast that it's freaky. The sounds are loud so loud that it makes my ears ring. The smells are great especially the smells of burning gasoline from rubbing the engine so much. The feeling is freaky when you are speeding down a trail and the bike starts to shake.
Thank you for sampling this resource.

For more information or to purchase, please visit Heinemann by clicking the link below:


Use of this material is solely for individual, noncommercial use and is for informational purposes only.