

Making Literature Connections

Inspiring young authors with Pixie

by Linda Oaks



Can every student be an author? You bet! Whether they're just starting to write or are already accomplished writers, the motivation to write better and write more grows exponentially with the promise of a published product. Luckily, your students don't have to wait for a publishing house to come calling. They can use Pixie to write, illustrate, and publish original works of literature.

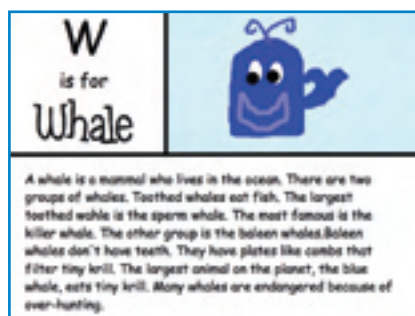
As adults, we seem to shy away from things with blank pages, whether in a journal, a notebook, or on a computer screen. The blankness requires us to provide the input and our first response is "What do I do now?" Kids, on the other hand, view the blankness as an opportunity—no rules, no numbered sequences, just a vast area to explore, create, and show us what they really know and understand.

Your first decision when creating a book is whether the finished product will be a class book, where each member or group contributes a page or a section, or a book with individual authorship. Individual books can use the same rubric and instructions for each student. You can make desired content and length decisions based on your time and instructional requirements. Class books will necessitate a division of labor and topics, and more time for collaboration. Here are a few of my favorite projects.

A-B-C Books

You can use an ABC book for learning and reinforcing the sounds of the alphabet, of course.

Beyond that, alphabet books are a great way to reinforce vocabulary for any science or social studies concept and a great way to further explore a chapter



book. For example, after studying the ocean and marine habitat, each student in my class created a letter page explaining one topic we had covered in the unit.

Adapt Your Favorite Book

If your class has a favorite book, especially those with a repeating pattern, challenge your students to come up with their own variations (see sidebar on page 22 for suggestions). You'll notice that some emphasize particular parts of speech or a particular rhythm. Part of the challenge is in having students recognize the various aspects to determine how they can create their own. This is the fun of playing with language and is also a terrific activity for English Language Learners. As a class, students can generate lists of possibilities, so everyone has the opportunity to contribute to every page. It is also very important to credit the original author, which opens discussions about copyright, even at a young age.

Life Isn't All Fiction

Your classroom books can also be the culmination of nonfiction studies. Your students' writing and illustrations will demonstrate the depth of their learning and show any gaps they may



have in their knowledge. With very large topics, it will be necessary to split the content up between individuals or groups to ensure you cover all content standards for that topic.

Time to Take a Test

Perhaps your classroom or school uses a structured reading program such as Reading Counts (Scholastic) or Accelerated Reader (Renaissance). If so, you have the ability to write your own test questions for books, including books your class has written. It is unbelievably empowering for young authors to have a student earn points for reading his or her book! Just imagine the question "Who is the author of this book" and seeing his or her name on the screen along with Dr. Seuss and J. K. Rowling!

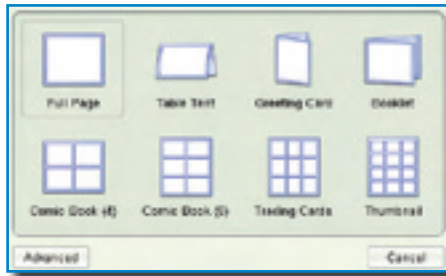
21st-Century Publishing

Today's digital kids love the idea of creating their own podcasts. With Pixie, they can share their original literature as an electronic book, a podcast, or a video to share with parents or other classes. Publishing electronically gives the added dimension of sound. Students can add music to set the mood, sound effects to provide suspense, and even record their own narration. Recording their own voices for their books is yet another way to motivate even the most reluctant learners. It also provides an excellent example of their reading fluency, perfect for a digital portfolio.

Let's Print!

While Pixie can export student work as online storybooks and video podcasts, my students still enjoy creating printed publications. My students have printed their stories in booklet form to simply fold up and share. When students have written more than four pages, we have also cut the images out and placed them in 4 x 6 photo sleeves and bound them together into more formal books. To avoid using too much ink when their stories are really long, students print their stories as thumbnails—12 pictures to 1 printed page.

Then, they cut out the pictures and share them in credit card sleeves and Altoid® tins!



The trading card format produces a size that will fit into the sleeves used for baseball-card collectors. These sleeves act as lamination, making the books durable, so they can be used again the next year with a new group of students. Other ways of binding includes stapling, brass fasteners, plastic sheet protectors and binders, duct tape, electrical tape, yarn, and ribbon. More professional looking binding can be achieved with self-binding kits such as those available from Lintor Publishing (www.lintorpublishing.com) or Bare Books (www.barebooks.com).

A Book of Words

Before and during units of study, we generate class lists of writing words to be used both for spelling and inspiration. The word list is printed, and students can place it in their own vocabulary folders. I share an ocean example as an introduction to guide words. My students need to place this page in the correct place in their folders, a good practice for the use of guide words. We also create single-page illustrations and definitions for new vocabulary words and then print them as trading cards.

By having your students write, illustrate, and publish their own books, you can tap into their innate desire for recognition as they learn to connect to literature, play with language, and beam with pride at their accomplishments.



Linda Oaks

Biography

With 25 years of experience, Linda Oaks brings a creative view to the integration of technology to meet educational standards. A 2008 Tech4Learning Innovative Educator and CUE Gold Disk Award winner, Linda also writes the Tips and Tricks column for OnCUE Magazine.

Curriculum Connections

Literature suggestions for student adaptation

Brown Bear, Brown Bear/Polar Bear, Polar Bear by Eric Carle



Use the repetitive text to describe an environment, habitat, community, or holiday.

Caps, Hats, Socks and Mittens by Louise Borden

"Winter is caps, hats, socks and mittens" could be "Math is..., "Desert is..., America is..."

Diary of a Worm by Doreen Cronin

Make up a diary of an animal, a famous person, a life cycle, or a landmark. Tell from first-person narrative.

It Looked Like Spilt Milk by Charles G. Shaw



Fill the background with color and paint shapes. "It looked like a cat but it wasn't" At the end, "It was just a cloud."

This is the Way We Go To School by Edith Baer

This is the way we (do an activity). Show drawings or photos of the correct way to do something.

The Important Book by Margaret Wise Brown



Practice descriptive writing. "The important thing about grass is that it is green. It's soft and feels squishy. But the important thing..."

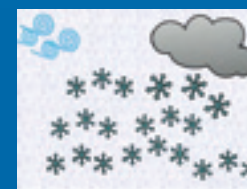
Mary Wore Her Red Dress by Merle Peek

Students draw pictures of themselves and write descriptively about their Halloween costumes and more.

Things That Are Most in the World by Judi Barrett

Use imaginative adjectives to define superlatives. "The smelliest thing in the world is a skunk convention."

Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs by Judi Barrett and Ron Barrett



Forecast the weather with strange items falling from the sky, such as elephants or candy bars.