

Voila! Curating Quality Writing



At a Glance

GRADE LEVEL:	Grade 2 (Primary)
INSTRUCTOR:	Linda Karamatic
VIDEO LENGTH:	5:04
RELATED TEXT:	<i>Preserving Student Writing as a Curator</i> by Heather Rader <i>Voila! Best Writing and Entry Slips in Second Grade</i> by Heather Rader
RELATED TOPICS:	small group instruction; publishing; portfolios; self assess
COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS:	W.2.6. With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers

Video Summary

Linda Karamatic leads a small group of second graders who are choosing pieces with the help of their peers to place in their portfolios. After reading and discussing their pieces, Linda shares an entry slip to encourage more careful selection of writing.

Discussion Questions

What would you add or subtract from Linda's list of "things to ask yourself"?

What is the purpose of this entry slip? How might you adapt it for your students' needs?

How do you preserve student writing and encourage student reflection?

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Planning for Professional Development

- 10 min. Welcome participants. Give each educator a copy of *Preserving Student Writing as a Curator*. Have them read independently and annotate with these three icons
! ? ☺
- ▶ ideas that encourage further thought (!)
 - ▶ ideas that invite questions (?),
 - ▶ and ideas that they like and are currently using ☺
- 5 min. Have participants share annotations and thoughts with a partner.
- 10 min View the video, and then discuss using the focus questions:
- ▶ *What would you add or subtract from Linda’s list of “things to ask yourself”?*
 - ▶ *What is the purpose of this entry slip? How might you adapt it for your students’ needs?*
 - ▶ *How do you preserve student writing and encourage student reflection?*
- 10 min. Distribute copies of *Voila! Best Writing and Entry Slips in Second Grade* and discuss issues related to portfolio items and choice.

Total Time: 35 minutes

Troubleshooting this video: The student voices are quiet as they are reading to each other, but as they come back together in discussion the volume improves.

Preserving Student Writing as a Curator

by Heather Rader

It's a Friday afternoon when I sit down with second-grade teacher Linda Karamatic. After teaching many years, she's tried different systems of preserving student writing. She's clear on what she wants:

Clearing out the "finished" pocket of the writing folder once a month
Sharing and celebrating student writing with families
Reflecting on finished pieces

When I asked her what hasn't worked, she's sure about that too.

"I need to tighten it up," she says. She wants a system that doesn't make her feel like she is chasing paper at the end of the month. Consistency and follow-through are on the wish list too.

A Container

I've been thinking about her question since she asked me earlier in the week. It's one I hear often from teachers, and struggled with as well. *How do we preserve writing in real life?* I consider. My mind goes to the binders I keep for my children. Each binder has page protectors waiting and about once a month I slip in a letter from me and current art, writing, cards and certificates. As a starting place, I share the description of the "container" for preserving student work with Linda.

"What that would allow me to do," her eyes light up as she brainstorms, "is have kids pick a piece each month, drop it in the protected sleeve and then I could send it home for families to enjoy and return. Then I'd have them for conferences and throughout the year."

"So let's talk more about what they'd be dropping in that sleeve," I say.

The Process of Picking

"In the past, students would pick pieces because it was their longest piece or because it had a picture they liked. They wouldn't necessarily be picking pieces representative of their best writing or growth. I've since realized that picking writing to share and reflect on is a skill in itself," Linda explains.

"How much time do you want to spend developing that skill?" I ask.

"See, that's the thing. Conferring individually would be best for this, but I don't want to take that kind of time once a month," Linda replies.

"And whole group isn't going to get at it either," I agree.

"What would it look like to bring together small heterogeneous groups looking through their finished pocket to choose a piece or two and reflect on it?" I pose. We begin to sketch out what those small groups sessions could entail and how to keep it manageable.

The Thread

One of the many things I admire about Linda's teaching is how she artfully weaves elements of her writing workshop together. I observe the flow of her workshop through crafting, composing, and reflecting. This was one of her fall workshops:

- 1) Minilesson topic: How to use an idea notebook to generate ideas
- 2) Conferring focus: Address the idea notebook and other issues
- 3) Sharing session: Showcase students' work and thinking about the idea notebooks

We talk about how students' progress-folios could be more connected with the instructional focus. In our district writing plans, the first few weeks of school are focused on helping students develop their ideas. I drafted a simple entry form that students could use to reflect based what they've been working on.

These entry slips could provide an early scaffold for how we look back and reflect on our writing as well as communicate our instructional focus to families on a regular basis.

When we think about preserving student writing, a curator comes to mind. A curator of a museum works on acquisitions, collections management, exhibitions, research and writing (interestingly, they have to be experts at label writing) and community connections. They are often known as the "jack" or "jill of all trades" and the word curator comes from the Latin *cura* or "care." Finding the container, process of picking, and reflection focus that works for you and your students can help preserve students' writing that is worthy of exhibition.

Entry Slip for:

Title:

I created this during writing workshop. We've been working on developing our ideas and details.

One of the details I like is: _____

Voila! Best Writing and Entry Slips in Second Grade

by Heather Rader

The word "voila" in French literally means "see there." Linda Karamatic put time and reflection into creating a binder, or voila book, that will ease the bulging writing workshop folders and preserve the best of students' writing to celebrate their progression as second-grade writers throughout the year. When you hear people pronounce the word "voila" they say it with expression. And if they talk with their hands like I do, they may throw a kiss or make jazz hands - voila! Which is exactly the reason why Mrs. Karamatic and her students chose the name.

Linda said, "I asked them, 'What do you say when you want to show something off?' When they said 'voila' I liked it too because I think their writing is magical."

This group of four students was the first one we called after Linda's preceding lesson on how to select a "Voila Book" piece. She gave them three things to ask themselves as writers and charted the questions:

Is it finished?

Does it stick to your idea or topic?

Does it include interesting details?

We knew that this whole group lesson would only introduce the parameters, and that students would need partner and teacher support to make their selections.

When We Offer Choice

Prior to this small group, Linda and I talked a lot about choice. After teaching more than thirty years, she knew that it was typical for writers to pick the topics they liked best, but not necessarily their best-written pieces. We considered the option that she would pick a piece that showed evidence of the class writing goals, and they could pick a piece "just because."

"Still, I want them to practice selecting pieces with criteria in mind," she said.

We decided to experiment and planned to meet with the students in small groups.

Thinking about choices, my choice of outfits the other day comes to mind. The Administrative Center where my office is housed has been without heat due to a burst pipe. Space heaters are everywhere, but it's still quite cold. When getting dressed in the morning, I considered two sweaters: one, long-sleeved and extremely warm, the other, !-sleeved, warm-ish, but very stylish. I went for style, not because it fit the criteria best, but because I wanted to - just because.

Two of the four kids in our first group made similar choices to my stylish sweater. They opted for the topics they loved even though they lacked interesting details.

At one point during the small group, Linda leans over and asks me to listen in on Courtney and explains why. This is a sign of a student-centered coaching relationship. She understands we are focused on the students' work and performance in order to make informed instructional decisions, and views me as her partner in meeting her goals for the students. She knows how to make good use of me as a coach.

As we debrief, we consider moving into one-on-one conferring with Courtney. Selecting pieces with interesting details allows us the opportunity to informally assess if students can notice and name their details. We also want to give Courtney feedback on some of her other pieces and show her the interesting details she often includes in her pieces. Even if she doesn't select the piece we think best exemplifies her learning, we've had the opportunity to discuss writing and selection criteria.