

## Script for Using Play-Doh to Teach the Writing Process

Today's lesson requires no pencil or paper, only your hands. While you work with your hands, please listen to me. It is important that you connect what you are doing with what I am saying.

From this activity today, you will be able to answer these questions: What process does a writer go through to produce a final piece? How is a writer like a sculptor? [I write these questions on the board to help students focus.]

To get ready, clear your desks and take out your Play-Doh and a pencil.

Close your eyes and get the feel of the clay in your hands. SLOWLY knead the dough. A writer must know the material before using it in a final piece. That's why it is important for you to read a variety of books and explore the dictionary and the thesaurus. These are places you find the material of writers.

What is the material of writers? Words! It is important that you play with words, experiment with words in journals or learning logs or letters or notes. A writer plays with words like a sculptor kneads clay. Take a few minutes now and play. See what this material can do. Stretch it. Pile it. Press it. Fold it. Don't make anything out of it. Just play. [I continue speaking while students do this.]

In a minute I am going to ask you to design something, but before I do, I want to introduce you to two parts of you whom you may not know. A writer, like a sculptor, has two parts that work together to produce a final piece. These two parts we call the creator and the critic. Which do you think has a bigger part in the first stages of writing or sculpting? It's the creator, the uncensored part, the part of you that envisions ideas, that brainstorms possibilities, and conceives of all sorts of ways to do something.

When do you suppose the critic starts to work? Your critic part jumps up when you need to decide, when you need to analyze, revise or edit, when a judgment call is needed. If you hear a voice starting to judge when you are still in the prewriting stages, when you are still just getting ideas for your writing, tell that voice to be quiet and wait for his or her turn.

Today you will create something. You will put it on display for other students and their parents to see. So your audience is more than just you or me. Your audience is all other students and parents. It is important to know who your audience is before you begin, because knowing your audience can affect what you create.

You cannot begin until you know what your purpose is, just as a writer cannot begin to write until she knows what her purpose is, why she is writing. Today your purpose is to create a pencil holder -- something that will hold a pencil on your desk. A purpose focuses our intentions. It sets a path, a destination.

I want you to start to create the first of many ideas you will come up with for a pencil holder. Don't decide the final product yet. Just experiment with lots of ideas. Listen while you work.

A writer always has a purpose. It may be to describe something, or to explain something, or to tell a story. Sometimes the purpose may just be to get rid of anger or sadness -- just to put things down on paper that the writer can't say aloud. Sometimes a writer may write to persuade. Other times a writer's purpose might be to give information, like explaining to

someone how to print a document on the computer or how to get from your house to school. A writer may write to explore how he feels about something. His purpose may be to find out what he thinks.

Okay, mush up your dough, and start again. I know you don't like destroying your first creation, but I want to prove to you that there are thousands more ideas where that one came from. What part of you came up with that first design? That's right, your creator, and your creator is anxious to give you more ideas. Start another design. As you do, please listen.

The creative process has many stages. As a sculptor, the one you are experiencing right now might be called presculpting. In writing, it is called prewriting or rehearsing. It is the time when you are getting ideas and putting them together in new ways, preparing for the final production. During this stage only your creator is at work. Your critic is asleep. For some of you, your critic wants to come out and judge, judge, judge. Tell your critic politely to be quiet. As you rehearse, keep in mind your purpose. Ask yourself, "What am I trying to accomplish? How do I want my audience to feel?" This will keep you focused.

Now mush that idea and start again. Take a couple of minutes to try something new and different from your last design. [I allow students a couple of minutes to start again.]

Okay, now mush it up. Let's start again. But before you do, let's discuss what it is you want to achieve in this piece, because we are getting ready to do a first draft. What criteria shall we use to judge this piece? [At this point we spend a few minutes talking about how we want to judge the pieces. My students' comments always lead eventually to the ideas of beauty (aesthetics; sensory appeal; is it pleasing to look at or touch?), function (usefulness; practicality; does it do what it was intended to?), and creativity (originality; imaginativeness; does it surprise or amuse you?). I write the criteria we come up with on the board.]

Keep these criteria in mind as you design. This time will be your last. Let your critic help you pick out your best idea or combine your ideas to create an entirely new pencil holder. This last design will be your first draft of your final piece. You have five minutes. Please work in silence. [I let students know when there is one minute remaining in the work time.]

You have finished your first draft. A writer, like a sculptor, thinks about how the audience will respond to his or her work. The writer, like the sculptor, may stop at any point and get response from other people. Ask your partner to look at your design and tell you if he or she knows where the pencil will go. This will show that you have given your form meaning. It is not just a lot of Play-Doh thrown together -- it has one idea or purpose. This quality is often called unity. This one idea should be obvious to your response partner. If not, you haven't focused your ideas clearly enough.

You have now gone through two stages of the writing process: 1) rehearsals to come up with lots of ideas and 2) a first draft to get the essential meaning. Now let's move on to the revision stage.

Revision literally means to see again. So, I want you to look at your pencil holder from various points of view. This will help you see it in a new way. Then you can decide what you want to do to it. So stand on your chair or look at it from a distance. What do you see that you would like to change or refine? Now get in front of your desk and stoop down close. What do you want to change or refine? Now look at it from the side. Now from the other side. Now sit down.

You have looked at what needs to be refined. There will never be a time in your writing when you can't revise -- even up until the end. Some people are still revising while they edit or while typing their final draft. That's because every time we reread our writing or "re-view" our pencil holders, we will "re-see" it and come up with a better way of saying or designing it.

One of the ways you can revise is to do what you just did -- look at your work from another point of view or have someone else read it and comment. So right now, let your partner look at it, and then listen to his or her ideas for improving it. You don't have to take your partner's suggestions, but think about them, and make any revisions that you think will improve your pencil holder. [Students confer and revise briefly.]

Now you are ready to begin the final stage -- editing. At this point a writer looks closely at details such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization, which help make the writing clear and readable. Since this is detail work, trade a little colored Play-Doh with your partner or someone nearby so that you can add any necessary finishing touches to your pencil holder. [I allow a few minutes here.]

The details you just added are only finishing touches. You could have a lot of nice little details on your pencil holder, but if it doesn't have meaning, if it doesn't have unity and hold together, these finishing touches aren't worth anything. The same is true for writing. Good spelling, punctuation, and usage are only important if the piece itself has meaning, unity, and coherence.

Now admire your product. A writer is like a sculptor. A writer, like a sculptor, like you today, goes through a process involving many changes which leads to a final product.

Give your final product a name. Write the name on a 3" x 5" card, set your pencil holder on the card, and display it. A writer is like a sculptor, sharing his or her work with the public. Put your final product on display so all can see.

Let's walk around the room quietly looking at each masterpiece. Please keep comments to yourself right now. [We review the final products.]

Now it is time for comments: Look at your partner's piece. Pick one positive comment you would like to use to admire the piece aloud. Stand up and tell the class. And let's applaud each sculptor/writer.

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