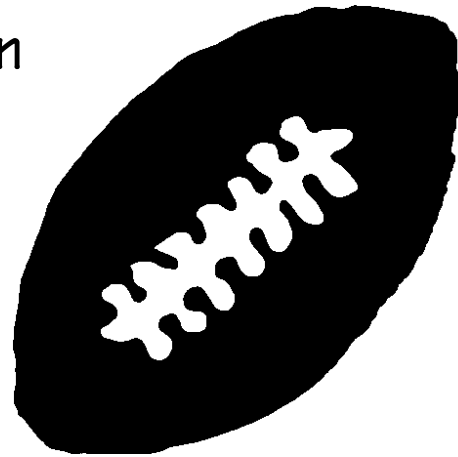


# VOICE

*Lively engagement and commitment  
Audience and purpose for writing are in sync  
The writer enjoyed it and hopes you will, too*

Writing taught once or twice a week is just frequently enough to remind children that they can't write, and teachers that they can't teach. They are both like athletes who never get in condition, yet have to play the game before derisive spectators.



**-DONALD GRAVES**

**WRITING: TEACHERS AND CHILDREN AT WORK**

# VOICE

- ✓ PERSON BEHIND WORDS
- ✓ READER ↔ WRITER
- ✓ INVOLVEMENT
- ✓ AWARENESS OF AUDIENCE
- ✓ INDIVIDUALISTIC
- ✓ EXPRESSIVE

The VOICE is the heart and soul, the magic, the wit, along with the feeling and conviction of the individual writer coming out through the words.

# VOICE

- INDIVIDUAL AND ENGAGING
- "ACHES WITH CARING"
- HONEST, COMMITTED, RESPONSIVE
- SUITS AUDIENCE AND TOPIC
- STRONG INTERACTION WITH READER

## MEMORABLE MOMENTS OF STUDENT VOICE:

- ▶ Most of the chickens were dead anyway. By the time he decided the chickens had to go, most of them were already dead. The whole thing was Dad's idea; some crazy notion about bringing a bit of the old days on the Saskatchewan prairie to suburbia. Dad was like that. Sometimes that line between story and reality got a little fuzzy for him.
- ▶ I will never forget my Aunt Leisa. She loved to bead. She made earrings, necklaces, and bracelets. She was free spirited. She even swam with the dolphins once. On the horrible date of November 13<sup>th</sup> her spirit was released from her body.
- ▶ You want me to tell you what I expect of high school and how my expectations compare to reality? Ha! You're going to love this. If I was gambling in Las Vegas, all of my money would be gone in half an hour-I was that far off!
- ▶ What I want most is strong verbs. Teachers all say I got weak verbs. I got no strong verbs. Teachers all say I got weak verbs. I got no strong verbs. I always have a tuff time in school cause of that. I been pushed around and hounded too much about them verbs. Always them verbs!



# VOICE

**VOICE SEPARATES WRITING THAT IS READ  
FROM WRITING THAT IS NOT READ... VOICE  
IS THE WRITER REVEALED.**

**-DONALD MURRAY**

Voice is YOU coming through your writing. It's what gives your writing personality, flavor, style – a sound all its own. Only you can give your writing this special touch because no one else sees the world quite the way you do. Pretty neat, huh! Your voice is as distinctively yours as your fingerprints.

Honesty is important to create voice in your writing. You must say what you truly think and feel—not what you think someone else might want to hear. This takes courage. You must write from the inside out—from that part of you that's in touch with your feelings. This means you need to know yourself, listen to yourself, and trust those thoughts and feelings. Sometimes, the very act of writing will help you discover what you truly think and feel. It's risky, a bit scary, and exciting, too.

Think about your reader as you write. Write directly to that person just as if he or she were standing there talking to you. Be yourself. Don't try to impress the reader. Readers will respond to your sincerity, honesty, and conviction.

Are you doing a paper on sea urchins? Bungee jumping? Geometric shapes? Lightning? Dancing? Write with confidence, as if you know what you're talking about and it is utterly fascinating; your enthusiasm will be contagious and will draw the reader in to your writer's web of ideas and feelings.

*Good writing is supposed to evoke sensation in the reader—not the fact that it's raining, but the feel of being rained upon.*

*-E.L. Doctorow*

# VOICE

- ▶ You feel a strong connection to the writer's...
  - Emotion
  - Energy
  - Conviction
  - Integrity

*... you feel SOMETHING!*
- ▶ You want to read this piece (or parts of it) aloud to someone else
- ▶ There's a big difference between placid sincerity and powerful engagement
- ▶ Voice takes on different form as the purpose and audience for writing changes
- ▶ No matter what, without voice, it's boring!

## **KEY QUESTION:**

Would you keep reading this piece if it were longer?  
MUCH longer?

# TRAIT: VOICE

**RATING OF 5 (STRONG):** The writer speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individualistic, expressive, and engaging. Clearly, the writer is involved in the text and is writing to be read.

- The paper is honest and written from the heart. It has the ring of conviction.
- The language is natural yet provocative; it brings the topic to life.
- The reader feels a strong sense of interaction with the writer and senses the person behind the words.
- The projected tone and voice give flavor to the writer's message and seem very appropriate for the purpose and audience.

**RATING OF 3 (DEVELOPING):** The writer seems sincere, but not genuinely engaged, committed, or involved. The result is pleasant and sometimes even personable, but short of compelling.

- The writing communicates in an earnest, pleasing manner. Moments here and there amuse, surprise, delight or move the reader.
- Voice may emerge strongly on occasion, then retreat behind general, vague, tentative, or abstract language.
- The writing hides as much of the writer as it reveals.
- The writer seems aware of an audience, but often fails to weigh words carefully, or stands at a distance and avoids risk.

**RATING OF 1 (BEGINNING):** The writer seems indifferent, uninvolved or distanced from the topic and /or the audience. As a result, the writing is flat, lifeless or mechanical; depending on the topic, it may be overly technical or jargonistic. More than one of the following problems is likely to be evident:

- The reader has a hard time sensing the writer behind the words. The writer does not seem to reach out to an audience, or make use of voice to connect with that audience.
- The writer speaks in a kind of monotone that tends to flatten all potential highs and lows of the message.
- The writing communicates on a functional level, with no apparent attempt to move or involve the reader.
- The writer is not yet sufficiently engaged or at home with the topic to take risks or share her/himself.

# VOICE

**5** The writer *speaks directly to the reader in a way that is individual, compelling and engaging. The writer “aches with caring,” yet is aware and respectful of the audience and the purpose for writing.*

- The reader feels a strong interaction with the writer, sensing the person behind the words. The writer takes a risk by revealing who they are and what they think.
- The tone and voice give flavor and texture to the message and are appropriate for the purpose and audience.
- Narrative writing seems honest, personal, and written from the heart.
- Expository or persuasive writing reflects a strong commitment to the topic, and brings the topic to life by showing why the reader needs to know this and why they should care.
- This piece screams to be read aloud, shared and talked about.

**3** The writer *seems sincere, but not fully engaged or involved. The result is pleasant or even personable, but not compelling.*

- The writing communicates in an earnest, pleasing manner. Only one or two moments here or there surprise, delight, or move the reader.
- Voice may emerge strongly on occasion, then retreat behind general, vague language.
- The writing hides as much of the writer as it reveals; it could have been written by a number of people because there is little that is unique or distinctive about it.
- The writer seems aware of an audience, but often weighs words carefully or discards personal insights in favor of safe generalities.

**1** The writer *seems indifferent, uninvolved or distanced from the topic and/or the audience. As a result, the writing is lifeless or mechanical; depending on the topic, it may be overly technical or jargonistic. The paper reflects more than one of the following problems:*

- Who is this writer? The writer does not seem to reach out to an audience, or to anticipate their interests and questions.
- The writer speaks in a kind of monotone that flattens all potential highs or lows of the message.
- The writing may communicate on a functional level, but it does not move or involve the reader no matter who is the intended audience.
- The writer does not seem sufficiently at home with the topic to take risks, share personal insights or make the topic/story personal and real for the reader.



# VOICE

## 5 PAPER-REALLY INDIVIDUAL AND POWERFUL

My paper has lots of personality. It sounds different from the way anyone else writes.



- I have put my personal stamp on this paper. It's really me!
- Readers can tell I am talking right to them.
- I write with confidence and sincerity.
- My paper is full of feelings and my reader will feel what I feel.
- I'm not afraid to say what I really think.
- You can tell that I wrote this. No one else sounds like this!

## 3 PAPER-INDIVIDUALITY FADES IN AND OUT

What I truly think and feel only shows up sometimes.

- Although readers will understand what I mean, it won't make them feel like laughing, crying or pounding on the table.
- My writing is right on the edge of being funny, excited, scary or downright honest-but it's not there yet.
- My personality pokes through here and there, but then gets covered up again.
- My writing is pleasant, but a little cautious.
- I've done a lot of telling and not enough showing.



## 1 PAPER-NOT YET ME

I'm not comfortable sharing what I truly think and feel yet.

- If you didn't already know, it might be hard to tell who wrote this paper; you can't really hear my voice in there yet.
- I'm not comfortable taking a risk by telling you what I really think-I've taken the safest route by hiding my true feelings.
- My paper is all telling and no showing at all.
- I've held myself back by using general statements like: "It was fun," "She was nice," "I like him a lot."

# VOICE

## **5** I'VE PUT MY PERSONAL STAMP ON THIS PAPER!

- My paper shines with personality.
- The writing is lively and engaging.
- I speak right to my readers.
- The writing rings with confidence.

## **3** WHAT I TRULY THINK AND FEEL SHOWS UP SOMETIMES.

- You might not laugh, cry or pound on the table.
- Right on the edge of finding its own voice.
- My personality pokes through here & there.
- Pleasant & friendly-cautious, though!

## **1** I'M NOT COMFORTABLE LETTING THE REAL ME SHOW THROUGH.

- It could be hard to tell who wrote this.
- I kept my feelings in check.
- Safe & careful-that's my paper.
- Audience? What audience?

# VOICE

## -THE PERSON BEHIND THE WORDS-

Can't get it out of your head    Strong conviction    Engaging  
Individual    You need to know this...    You've gotta hear this...  
Style!    A thoughtful person wrote this    Laughter and tears  
Lively    Courageous    Fingerprint of the author  
Written to be read    Risky    Topic springs to life  
I want to read the sequel    Passionate  
The voice of authority  
Confident

Watchful, wary  
Right on the edge    Expected  
Earnest, caring, trying

It's there, but then it's gone  
Personable    Hides behind a facade  
Moments that grab you    Safe    Guarded

Let's just get this over with  
No hints of the real writer  
Audience? What audience?  
Stay way over there, reader  
Bland    Boring    Indifferent  
Mechanical/technical    Keep out!    Ho-hum  
Rote response    Author hides    Uninvolved

# VOICE IN CONTEXT

**H**umor, and in particular, *sarcastic humor*, is often where a writer finds his voice early in his writing career. It's easy for kids to let a bit of themselves show through when they're having fun with something. This isn't the only way we'd like them to express themselves, but it's often a good place to start.

Voice is the most personal of the Six Traits, and some kids may not at first be comfortable revealing their personalities in more serious ways. But lighthearted writing may be a good safe place for young writers to dig in and explore how they really feel about certain things.

You know exactly how this writer feels right from the start.

Dolls of Doom

I hate Barbie dolls. The worst things are the commercials. They have annoying little songs that they run in the background while these girls are going "Wow! Her braid changes color." And giggling their heads off. I had the little jingle for that dumb "pet Doctor Barbie" running in my head for two weeks straight. Why did the song stop then? They came out with a new one!

Alliteration in the title hints at the playful nature of the piece.

Sarcasm, irreverence, jocularly, etc. You know this writer is having a good time; he wants the reader to have a good time, too.

My sister has this weird one where the legs change from that weird orangy pink skin color to some sort of sparkly black when you put the doll in cold water. "When the water's cold, Barbie dives right in her wet suit magically appears on her skin." Wet suit, shmet suit. I tried spraying the legs of the doll with some cold water, and it looked like either a whole bunch of moles or some weird case of skin cancer.

An unexpected but appropriate expression. Unusual for a 5<sup>th</sup> grader.

More and more keep coming out, more "Dolls of Doom", as I call them. Sure, they're selling by the thousands. But they only keep them interested for a month, and then they ask for another, and the cycle goes on. Pretty soon, some little girl's room will be filled with Barbies. If that happens to my little sister, her room will cave in on mine, which is right under it, unfortunately.

When I'm old enough, I'll join the Army and get myself an M-1 tank or a fleet of Harriers or something, and raid Mattel. Or maybe I'll make them make a doll like "Militia Barbie" or "In the Navy Now Barbie". Pretty soon, all the little girls in America will be saying, "I wanna Barbie, not a GI Joe!" Down with the dolls! **Nuke** ever Fred Meyers or Toys 'R' Us that carries them! Let the revolution for a Barbie-free America Begin!

Exclamation marks used for emphasis. The writer has strong feelings and a clear point of view.

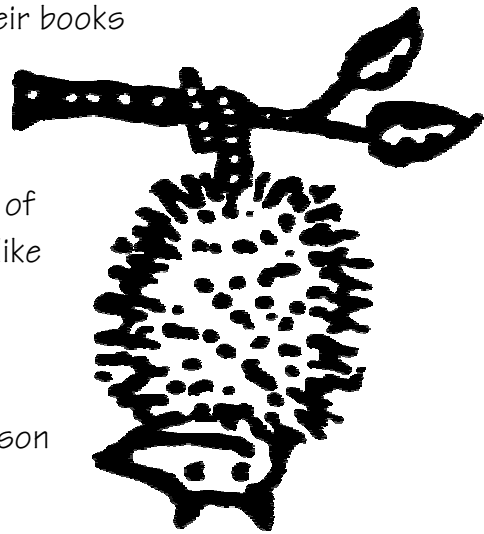
The writer's playfulness continues through the "End" of the piece.

The End  
But only if you call 1-800-569-BARBIE-X now to apply for B.A.D.D.E.  
(Boys Against Dumb Dolls Everywhere)

# USE PICTURE BOOKS TO TEACH THE TRAIT OF:

## VOICE

- ▶ Compare the voices of two different authors exploring the same topic or idea
- ▶ After reading a variety of different picture books, make a list of all the words that can describe voice-angry, passionate, thoughtful, considerate, loving, mean-spirited, charming, eloquent, etc.
- ▶ Play “Hearing Voices” by reading passages from familiar authors’ works and matching their styles to their books
- ▶ Make a list of places you notice voice making a difference-the type of books/print you like to read (what kind of voice is it?)-the things that you don’t like to read (what kind of voice is it?)
- ▶ Pick a famous person and explain an important concept or idea to that person in picture book format
- ▶ Write a letter to a favorite author whose book(s) you love



# SIX TRAIT WRITING

## WARM-UPS

### TRAIT #3: VOICE

#### PREPARATION

#### EXERCISE

#### FOLLOW-UP

	PREPARATION	EXERCISE	FOLLOW-UP
<b>1.</b>	Tape or C.D. Player. 2 or 3 recordings each of classical and rock and roll selection.	Play a minute of classical and then a minute of R&R. Discuss the differences you can hear. Then play a third selection and ask students to identify the "voice". (Classical or R&R)	Talk about how different styles of music employ different voices.
<b>2.</b>	Tape or C.D. Player. 2 or 3 recordings each of two distinctly different female (or male) singers-i.e. Dolly Parton & Whitney Houston, Rod Stewart & George Strait.	Play a bit of each singer. Discuss the differences in their voice and style of singing. Then play a third selection and have students explain how they can tell which singer it is.	Talk about how singers have their own individual voices. They don't all sound alike.
<b>3.</b>	Tape or C.D. Player 2 or 3 recordings each of different instrumental solos-i.e. one flute & one harp, or one piano & one violin.	Play a selection of each instrument. Discuss the differences in the voice of the instrument. Then play a third selection and have students explain how they can tell which instrument it is.	Talk about how each musical instrument has its own individual voice.
<b>4.</b>	Pictures of paintings done by two distinctly different artists-i.e. Picasso & Van Gogh or Rembrandt & Monet.	Show students a painting or two by each artist. Discuss the differences. Then show them another painting and have them explain how they can tell which artist painted it.	Talk about how each artist has a distinct "voice" in his works.
<b>5.</b>	Pairs of very different cards-i.e. two Far Side cards and two sympathy cards	Show children one of each and discuss differences. Show them a third card and have them identify which "kind" it is. Discuss how they can tell.	Point out that each kind of greeting card has a voice.
<b>6.</b>	Display a variety of greeting cards.	Have children compare the cards - what makes them different? Ask why different types of cards are appropriate for different occasions or different people: for a good friend's birthday or great grandmother's, for a holiday or a death.	Talk about the need for different voices for different occasions.
<b>7.</b>	Two brief selections from age directed writing-i.e. a young child's book and an adult novel.	Read a bit of each and ask what the difference is - and how you can tell which is meant for which.	Talk about the need for different voices for different audiences.
<b>8.</b>	Two brief selections from different types of writing-i.e. an encyclopedia & a mystery story	Read a paragraph or two from each. Discuss the difference in voice used by the authors. Why is each important? Which is more fun to listen to?	Talk about purposes of different voices.
<b>9.</b>	Brief selections from two distinctly different children's authors-i.e. Dr. Seuss & R.L. Stein, or Jack Prelutsky and Arnold Lobel	Read a bit of each author and discuss the differences in voice. Then read a third selection and have the students explain how they can tell which author it is.	Talk about how each author has an individual voice.
<b>10.</b>	Two student selections (from your collection) one without much voice and one high in voice.	Ask students which one sounds more like someone actually talking to them. Ask which is more interesting to read. Discuss why.	Point out the way voice enhances writing-makes it more interesting.
<b>11.</b>	Three brief selections (from your collection) one without much voice, one with moderate voice, one high in voice.	Ask children which is which. Ask them to compare and contrast. Ask them to think about their own voice. - how they'd like their writing to sound.	Emphasize that voices are as individual as the writer.

# VOICE

*Any activity that allows students to practice...*

*Helping writers feel safe & accepted*

*Noting moments of voice in writing & pictures*

*Valuing and requesting diversity*

*Rewarding risk-even over success*

*Providing opportunities to hear the voices of others*

*Writing to someone (letters, posters)*

*Asking students to write voice in... or out*

*Looking for voice in advertising, print and non-print resources*

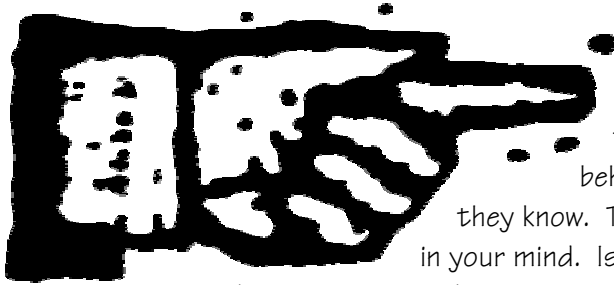
## 1. REWRITING VOICE-FREE PIECES

This is a simple activity, but it works wonderfully well. Find a sample of writing that is devoid of voice; they are every where. (Hint: Sad to say, textbooks are often a good source-memos, too!) Ask students to rewrite the piece, working individually or in pairs. They should try to put in as much voice as possible. Read revisions aloud to appreciate the contrast. Try this activity in reverse, too. Strange as it seems, taking voice out of a piece is also a good activity for building students' awareness of voice because in order to take it out, they have to understand what it is!

## 2. READING ALOUD

The books and materials we love most are often those that ring with voice. Make lists of favorites, and share them aloud. Keep a book of your favorites and ask students to add names and titles to it. Tell your students when you read and what you read. Share favorite passages and let them see how good writing affects you. Give them time to do the same, either in small groups, in large groups or with younger students. What a refreshing alternative to the standard book report-and look! No papers to correct.

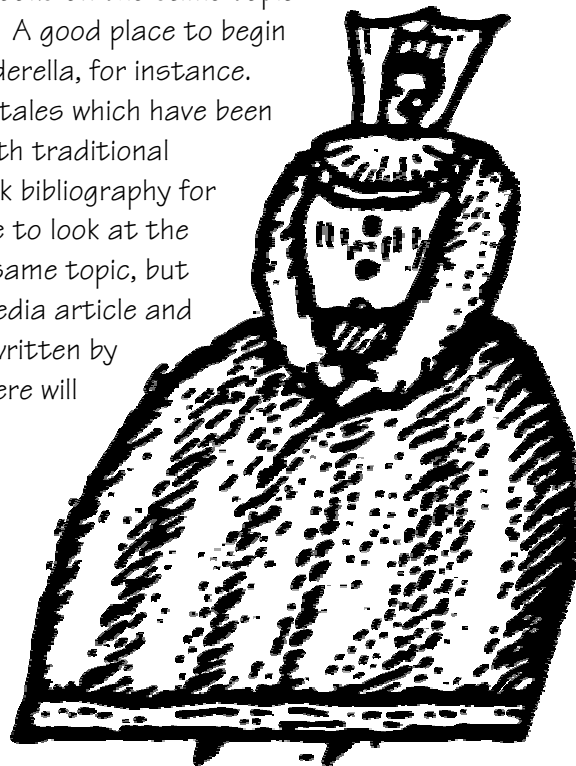
### 3. HEARING VOICES



Collect short passages that exemplify strong or distinctive voice. Put them on overheads, and read them aloud. Ask the students to describe the person behind the voice-or even to name them if they know. The idea is to get a picture of the writer in your mind. Is it a man or a woman? Is he/she young or old (be careful now...) Where is this person from? What words describe the tone? Funny, sarcastic, thoughtful, reflective, bitter, charming? Talk about the clues that readers use to draw these inferences about the writer. Now ask what the reader of one of their own pieces might learn about them through their writing?

### 4. COMPARE AND CONTRAST

Compare and contrast two or three books on the same topic but by authors using different styles. A good place to begin is with fairy tales-two versions of Cinderella, for instance. There are wonderful examples of fairy tales which have been written in playful ways to contrast with traditional versions. Check NWREL's Picture Book bibliography for more ideas. Older students might like to look at the differences in expository text on the same topic, but by different authors. Try an encyclopedia article and compare it with an informative piece written by a museum or magazine. Trust me, there will be a significant difference. Another favorite source is textbooks-they are always a good target! (We are now offering a workshop of informational/technical writing which deals in depth with the issue of audience and style. (Give us a call for more information.)



# VOICE

Amber on the Mountain  
An Angel for Solomon Singer  
Aunt Chip and the Great Triple Creek Dam Affair  
The Beanstalk Incident  
Benjamin Brody's Backyard Bag  
Between Earth and Sky  
The Block  
Brother Eagle, Sister Sky: A Message from Chief Seattle  
The Carousel  
Caves  
Daddy, Daddy, Be There  
Dear Children of the Earth  
December  
Earthdance  
The Ever-Living Tree: Life and times of a Coast Redwood  
Fly Away Home  
The Frog Prince, Continued  
The Gift of the Sacred Dog  
Going Home  
Hey world, Here I Am!  
I Dream of Peace: Images of War By Children of Former  
Yugoslavia  
Kate Shelly: Bound for Legend  
Koko's Kitten  
The Ledgerbook of Thomas Blue Eagle  
Life Doesn't Frighten Me  
Math Curse  
More Than Anything Else

Mrs. Kate and Tush  
My House Has Stars  
Out of the Ark: Stories From the World's Great Religions  
The Paper Bag Princess  
Pink and Say  
Purr... Children's Book Illustrators Brag About Their Cats  
Reach for the Moon  
Sadako  
Sleeping Ugly  
The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales  
Sweet Words So Brave  
Tar Beach  
The Teacher from the Black Lagoon  
This Land is My Land  
The Twits  
The Wall  
Way Home  
We are all in the Dumps With Jack and Guy  
What You Know First  
White Socks Only  
Whoever You Are  
Yeh-Shen: A Cinderella Story From China

## Resource:

Picture Books  
An Annotated Bibliog.  
With Activities For Teachers

## “Granna”

I remember spending an afternoon with “Granna” (my grandmother) before she got married. We went shopping and out for lunch. The day was hot, so we walked to an ice cream parlor and bought double scoops! When you're nine, this is very impressing. We took our double scoops to a park across the street and talked.

As I was explaining the importance of smurfs to my grandmother, ice cream began to dribble down my arm, I jerked the ice cream to my mouth and gave a big lick, getting it all over my nose and chin. I flicked my tongue at my wrist before Granna handed me a napkin. I cleaned myself up and gave her a warm hug. “I love you.” I murmured.

Now Granna is married to Roger Jamison. Roger's a nice enough guy, I guess. Very different from the gruff man I remember my grandfather to be. I love Roger, and I'm glad he's with my grandmother, making her happy. We're all very close. But sometimes, just once in a while, I wish it was just Granna and me, in the park, with ice cream on my face.