

National Endowment for the Arts



imagine!

Introducing Your
Child to the Arts

National Endowment for the Arts

imagine!

Introducing Your
Child to the Arts



Second Edition
2004



CONTENTS

A Message to Parents	1
Introduction by Chairman Dana Gioia	3
Chapter 1: From Words to Stories	5
Chapter 2: Making Art through Movement.....	15
Chapter 3: Making Music Together	23
Chapter 4: Dramatic Play for Children.....	31
Chapter 5: Your Child and the Visual Arts.....	39
Chapter 6: Folk Art: Art in Everyday Life	49
Chapter 7: Media Arts and Children	59
Credits.....	67



A MESSAGE TO PARENTS

“The arts are, above all, the special language of children, who, even before they learn to speak, respond intuitively to dance, music, and color,” Dr. Ernest Boyer, former U.S. Commissioner of Education and president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching once stated. The magic of finding a new way of communicating, a new way of envisioning the world, is one of the most exciting discoveries that children make. Children need encouragement and guidance, though, in making these discoveries. The National Endowment for the Arts created this publication, *Imagine!*, to offer parents practical ways to introduce their children to the arts.

This book revises and updates two earlier publications, its namesake of 1997, and *Three R's for the '90s*. What started as a collection of essays by national associations in the arts and education has been enhanced and expanded—enhanced by perspectives on the arts and children informed by recent research on children’s learning and development; expanded by the addition of an easy-to-use chart that relates the stages of child development to sample arts experiences you and your child can participate in together. The activities and suggestions in *Imagine!* are aimed specifically at children ages 3-8 years old.

Also updated are resources in each of the arts discipline chapters to help you learn more about the arts and to introduce your child to the creativity and joy of making art. Many of these resources have been made possible by grants and national leadership initiatives from the National Endowment for the Arts. Since 1965, the Endowment has supported programs for children and youth. National leadership in arts education continues to be part of our agency’s mission. To find out more about our Learning in the Arts grants and initiatives, visit our Web site at www.arts.gov.



INTRODUCTION BY CHAIRMAN DANA GIOIA

A number of research studies over the past several decades have drawn a clear correlation between early exposure of children to the arts and increased long-term critical reasoning, communication, and social skills. Since its inception in 1965, the National Endowment for the Arts has devoted its resources to the arts and arts education, including studies on their tangible, positive impact upon the nature and quality of our communities and citizenry. What we have learned about arts education can be stated simply: the arts matter profoundly and should be introduced into the lives of children at the earliest possible age.

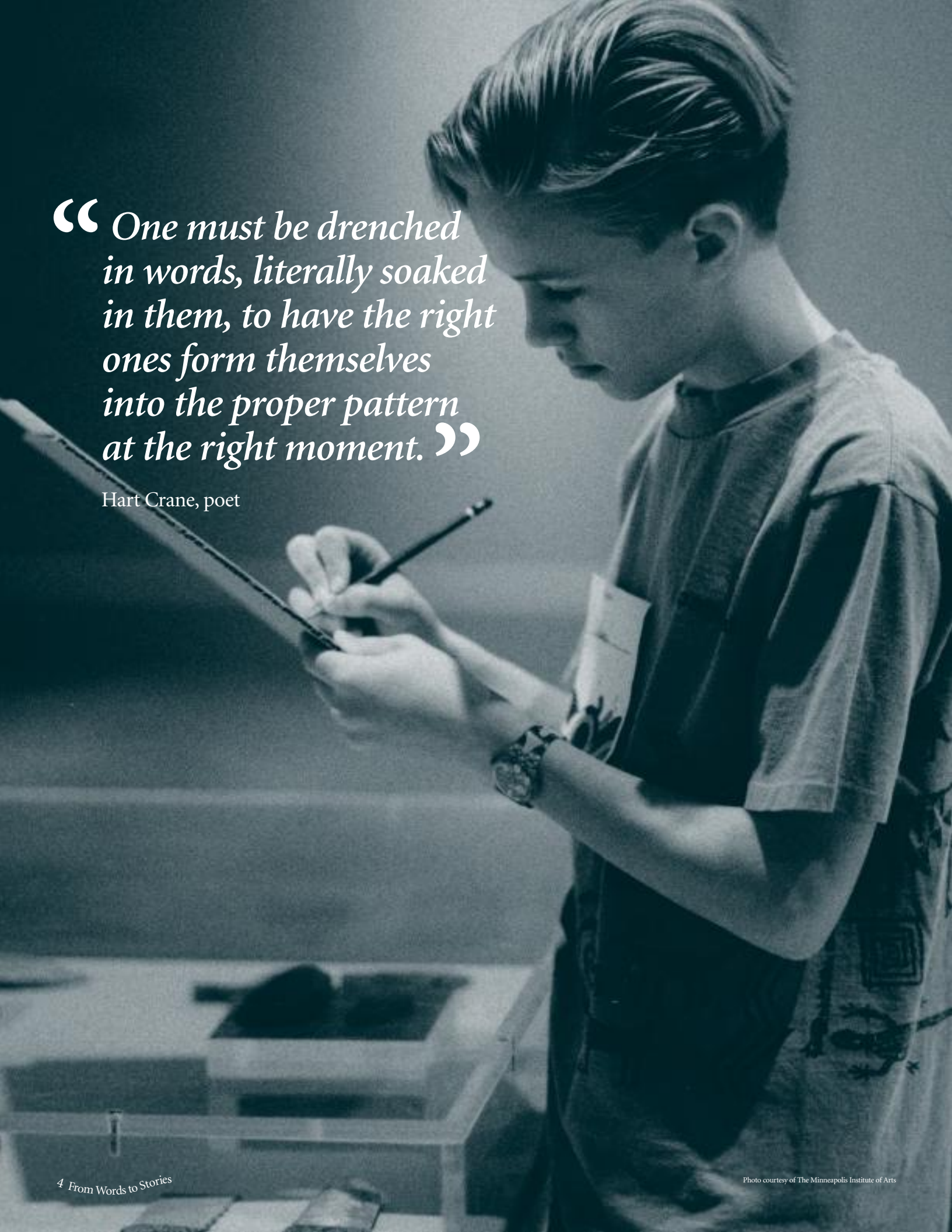
The Arts Endowment has revised and reissued *Imagine!* to help parents and teachers share the arts effectively with children. This essential publication is divided into seven focused areas of learning: reading and writing, dance, music, dramatic play, visual arts, folk arts, and media arts. Easily adapted to the home or classroom setting, *Imagine!* explains how to share the joy of learning and artistic creation with children during their most critical developmental years.

As a parent, I want my children to live complete and fulfilling lives. For many people, true fulfillment is closely linked with finding an early path toward excellence. It does not matter whether one's early interest develops into an adult career. What matters is that every child finds a positive, meaningful activity that instills self-confidence and self-worth. For some children, excellence will come on the athletic fields. For others, it will come in the class spelling bee. But for many children, fulfillment will arrive on the stage, at the piano, or with a paint brush in hand.

As parents and teachers, our responsibility is not to dictate rigidly which path ultimately is the right one, but rather to expose our children to constructive educational opportunities, especially those grounded in the arts and humanities. With our hectic modern lives, it can be a struggle to make time for our children's proper education, but we must not shirk this fundamental responsibility. To do less is to impoverish our children. Impoverished minds do not lead to enlightened lives. And it is enlightenment our children deserve.

Photo by Vance Jacobs





*“ One must be drenched
in words, literally soaked
in them, to have the right
ones form themselves
into the proper pattern
at the right moment. ”*

Hart Crane, poet



CHAPTER ONE

From Words to Stories

All young children love to play with words. They love to make jokes and puns, sing silly songs, make up rhymes, invent names, and tell stories. This same joyful and creative spirit can help children develop as readers and writers. Learning to write can be as natural for a child as learning to sing, run, and play games. It begins even before a child has the ability to represent ideas with standard symbols of writing. In the initial stages of writing awareness, young children understand that written symbols represent ideas and are a means of communication. It is common that first attempts at writing are frequently categorized as scribbles with little or no meaning. It is at this early stage, however, that adults can nurture a young child's interest in the written word, inspiring a deep and fulfilling relationship with this creative endeavor that will last a lifetime.

A child who becomes a confident and creative writer will reap the benefits in countless ways. In school, children who write well find that they excel in almost every subject. Becoming a better writer means becoming a better reader; it gives children the skills to evaluate and appreciate the work of others. In addition, a child who likes to write is a child who usually has something important to say. As they get older, children find that learning to express themselves on the page, and to revise and refine this expression, are talents valued in many endeavors. Becoming confident writers makes it possible for children to grow into active, critical participants in our culture and society.

ENGAGING CHILDREN IN READING AND WRITING

With a little support, children can move from the crude play of early childhood to a full engagement with writing. From your children's earliest days, you should read them stories, demonstrate that reading and writing are meaningful aspects of your own life, and encourage your children to explore the wonders of the written word.

Telling a story can take a variety of forms. Preschoolers and kindergartners can be active in the process. They love to create storylines and develop characters or ideas. Stories take on new meaning when children dictate their tales to older siblings, teachers, and parents. Seeing their words in print has a powerful impact. An active approach to story writing also provides the opportunity to add illustrations, another form of early representation.

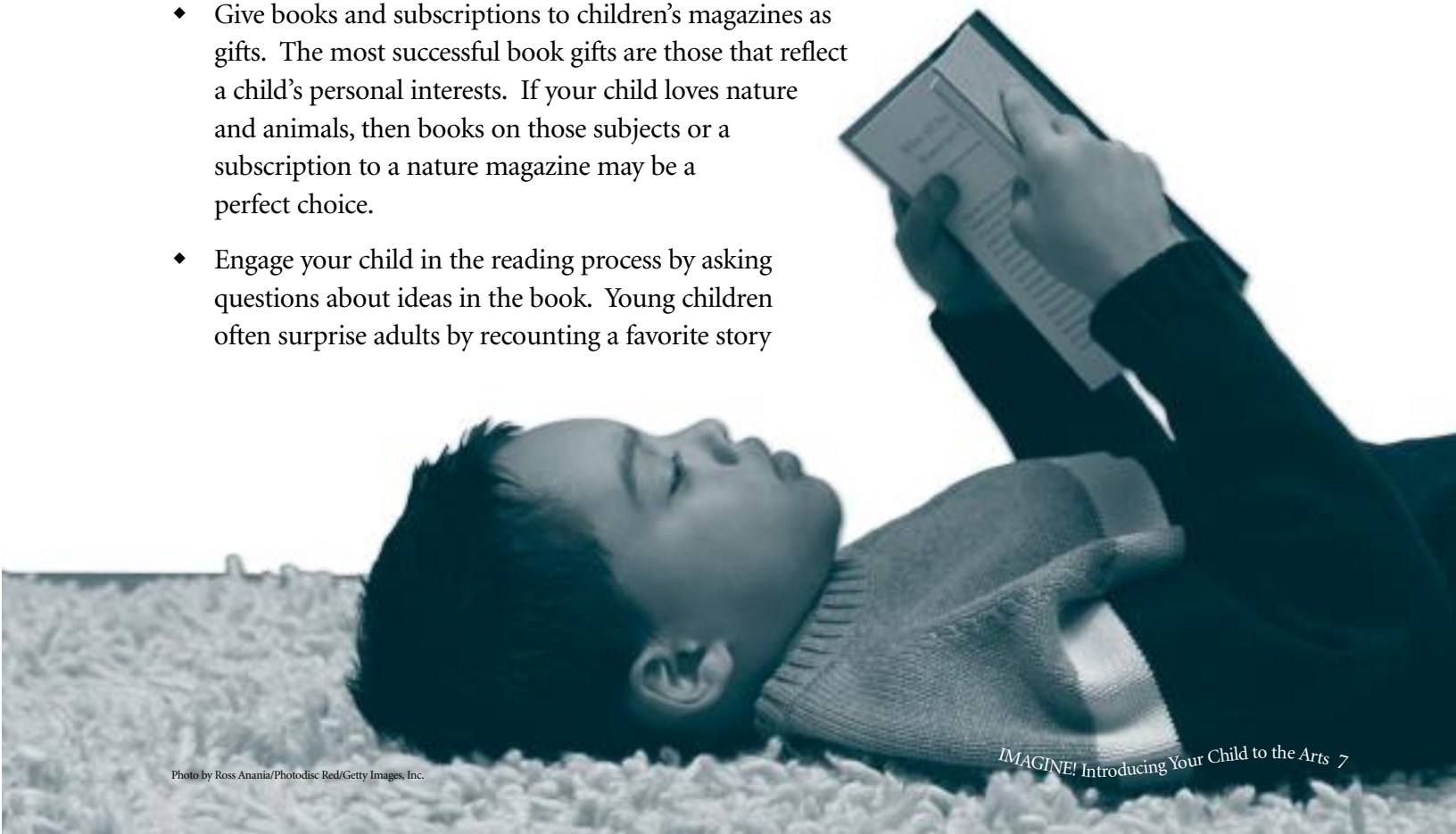
Children learn the nuances of narrative simply by listening to stories. Before children learn actual words, they grasp the tone and intonation proper to different stories and imitate that speech pattern in babbling or nonsense syllables. Preschoolers acquire a sense of story sequence, recognizing the importance of beginning a tale with the familiar words of "once upon a time" and bringing closure to a narrative with the words "the end."

Reading and listening to stories make writing easier. Children develop a natural understanding of how sentences, ideas, and narratives work, and have an easier time later when these elements are taught to them in school. Reading also can make your child more eager to write. Just as young sports fans long to play the games they watch, children who love reading want to create their own stories and poems.

YOUNG CHILDREN AS READERS

A strong foundation for writing begins with an interest in books and a love of reading. Here are a few ways to include reading in your child's life:

- ◆ Read aloud to your child, even to infants and toddlers. As you read aloud, children get not only a good story, but also a chance to be close to you. Continue to read to your children even after they have developed independent skills. You can read more advanced books than your child is capable of reading, or enjoy old favorites together. Build a reading time into your daily routine so that it is a natural part of everyday life.
- ◆ Play with words through rhyming or alliteration. Read examples from children's books and then let your child make up rhyming words or think of sentences in which each word begins with the same sound. Children enjoy Dr. Seuss's unique style of storytelling with silly, made-up words with lots of rhyme and rhythm.
- ◆ Visit the library with your child. Take advantage of programs offered by the library and local bookstores where your child can enjoy stories read by seasoned storytellers or meet an author or illustrator of a favorite book.
- ◆ Give books and subscriptions to children's magazines as gifts. The most successful book gifts are those that reflect a child's personal interests. If your child loves nature and animals, then books on those subjects or a subscription to a nature magazine may be a perfect choice.
- ◆ Engage your child in the reading process by asking questions about ideas in the book. Young children often surprise adults by recounting a favorite story



word for word or correcting the reader when a word in the text is skipped. Allowing your child to “read along” with a familiar text gives him or her a sense of confidence and excitement about being a reader.

- ◆ Acknowledge print in the environment. Engage your child in conversation about signs and symbols that you encounter in everyday life. Respond to your child’s curiosity about what signs say and what words mean. This simple task helps young children realize the importance of the written word and also builds a framework for reading and writing.

YOUNG CHILDREN AS WRITERS



Photo by Ryan McVay/Photodisc Green/Getty Images, Inc.

Children are eager to imitate those around them. They learn about the world and make sense of it by mirroring the actions of others. Writing is something that is a natural part of the child’s environment and typically approached by children with curiosity. For some, exploring writing will be a natural outgrowth of that curiosity. Others may need encouragement.

Nurture your child’s interest in writing by providing appropriate writing materials. Make sure that your child has access to the tools of the trade: paper, pencils, and pens. As their skills develop, computers or typewriters become increasingly useful. It is also helpful to designate a special place for writing that has adequate space and is comfortable and quiet. You can make writing special by allowing your child to use your desk, your typewriter or computer, or just your favorite pen.

It’s essential that children learn that it takes time to develop ideas and compose sentences. Let them enjoy the process and play with different versions. Remember that your child’s daydreaming, make-believe adventures, and imaginary journeys could be the basis for future writing and storytelling.

Encourage and support your child’s efforts in writing:

- ◆ Writing can begin with storytelling and the understanding of the concepts of beginning, middle, and end. Use sequencing cards to

encourage order and plot. Have your child make up a story with a beginning, middle, and end. Record your child's thoughts in his or her own words. Then re-read the story and make changes suggested by your child—an introduction to the process of editing. Have your child add illustrations to the text to help tell the story, creating a simple picture book.

- ◆ Build on your child's interests. Select a favorite book and then borrow or purchase other books by the same author. Help your child explore the idea of being an author or illustrator. If Eric Carle is a favorite, ask your child, "What can we learn about Eric Carle by reading his books?" "Why do you think he chose to write about animals, bugs, and butterflies?" Encourage your child to think as an author and ponder what it would be like to be a writer.
- ◆ Journal writing is a wonderful early step. Buy a journal with plain pages and encourage your child to fill it with words and pictures. Have your child "read" his or her stories after writing. Even though a very young child may not be able to write a single recognizable word, it is important that he or she begins to associate written marks with the spoken word as a means of communicating ideas to other people.

Encouraging your child to write is a delicate matter. Many children react to pressure by withdrawing, in this instance, avoiding writing because they are afraid of making mistakes such as spelling errors. Adults can reassure children by relaxing rules of grammar and spelling and stressing plot, characters, and settings. Children will write a lot only if they enjoy it!

Some children in elementary school eagerly pick up pencil and paper to create stories and poems. For these children, it is probably best not to meddle. Children will spend more time writing if they feel that it is really their own. If they do ask for help, or you see that they are running out of inspiration, here are a few ideas you could try:

- ◆ *Riddles.* Ask your child to describe something without revealing what the thing is. For example: "I have four legs but I don't walk. What am I?" (A chair.) Writing riddles improves children's ability to describe accurately.

INVENTIVE SPELLING

As young children begin to experiment with writing, there is little resemblance between their work and the basic standards that frame formal writing—spelling, grammar, and punctuation. While there are different perspectives about the use of these standards, there is general consensus that early writing should be about the process of expressing ideas rather than an emphasis on the rules associated with these standards. Inventive spelling is the term used for early writing where children apply basic knowledge of letter sounds and words from memory to represent their ideas through symbols. This approach gives children the freedom to concentrate on the ideas, an important aspect of writing. As children mature and writing is acknowledged as a means of communication, it is important to help your child explore and understand the associated standards. It is helpful to emphasize that rules or standards increase everyone's ability to be able to read the same written words.

a b c d e f

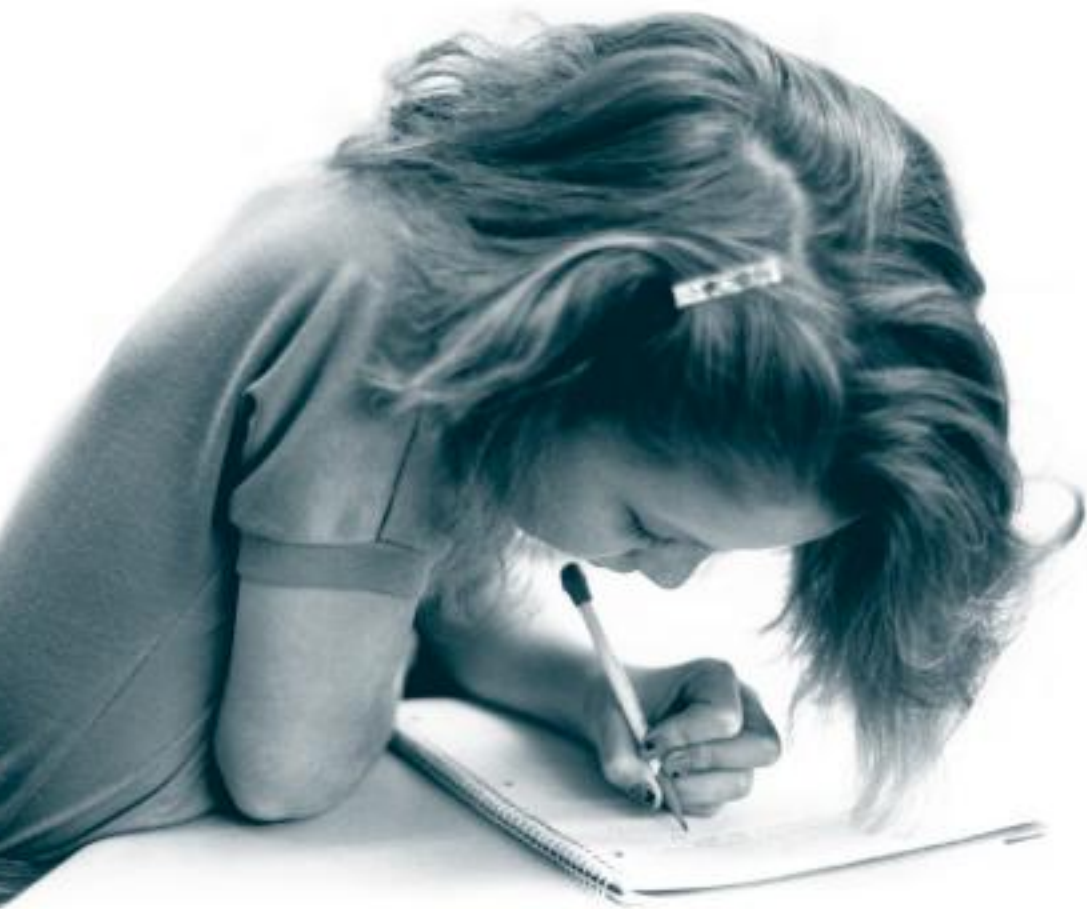


Photo courtesy of Teachers & Writers Collaborative

- ◆ *First sentences.* Help your child start a story by providing a first sentence that sets up a strange or intriguing situation. For example: “When we reached the mountaintop, we found a rope hanging from the sky.”
- ◆ *Photostories.* Suggest that children flip through a magazine until they find an interesting photograph. Then, have them write a story that describes what happened before, during, and after the photograph was taken. This idea also works well with paintings and family photographs, particularly if they are about unfamiliar people or places.
- ◆ *Poetry.* Poetry has many of the verbal elements children love—rhyme, rhythm, alliteration. Pick a subject—a person, an animal—and compose a poem together, letting your child make the rhymes, similes, and verse length.

SUPPORTING YOUNG WRITERS

Your response to your child's writing is crucial. When you take pride in your child's efforts and accomplishments as a writer, your child will also do the same. A positive experience sets the tone for future efforts and often leads to a desire to continue writing.

For the beginning writer, early attempts should be acknowledged simply for the effort. Showing genuine interest in a child's writing is one of the most productive ways of encouraging young writers. As children develop more sophisticated skills, ask them to talk about their writing and consider alternatives within their storyline. Encourage the child to rethink ideas and descriptions. "What other words can you use to describe the game that the boys are playing in your story?" "Do you think that adding interesting words will help me to imagine what's happening?"

For six- to eight-year-olds, editing and revising should be taught not as criticism but as additions to the writing process. Children's initial efforts as writers focus primarily on expressing ideas on paper. As children begin to think about their work in terms of communicating with others, new skills such as editing and revising should be introduced. A good writer ultimately has to be able to express ideas in thoughtful and creative ways, and meet the standards of writing so that others can enjoy the work.



Photo by Digital Vision/Getty Images, Inc.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR NURTURING YOUNG WRITERS

Preschoolers and kindergartners can gain valuable experience from programs that emphasize the world of writing. When preschools and libraries invite professional writers and poets to share their love of writing, young children learn about the process of writing that ultimately contributes to the necessary skills of the trade. This personal interaction often encourages inquiry about the author's approach to telling a story or about the selection of topics. Look for such encounters for your child that will build a strong foundation for more formal writing of the future.

For elementary students, writing instruction should be lively, engaging, and supportive. It is important to recognize the different talents and styles of children and to provide a mix of approaches and forms of writing. Every child should be given an opportunity to write poetry as well as stories or book reports. Exercises in grammar should be complemented by imaginative assignments. Topics should range from nature to history to personal experience.

Writing programs outside of school should be reserved for older children. Some schools offer writing as part of after-school programs. These can be a wonderful opportunity for your child to hone his or her writing skills, but make sure the program sparks your child's natural interests and abilities and makes the process engaging!

Thank You for previewing this eBook

You can read the full version of this eBook in different formats:

- HTML (Free /Available to everyone)
- PDF / TXT (Available to V.I.P. members. Free Standard members can access up to 5 PDF/TXT eBooks per month each month)
- Epub & Mobipocket (Exclusive to V.I.P. members)

To download this full book, simply select the format you desire below

