The Badgerdog Method

While Badgerdog does not dictate a specific curriculum, we do encourage instructors to prepare lessons that embrace our READ, WRITE, SHARE approach to writing instruction. Quite simply, during each visit to your classroom, we want students to:

1. READ. Students should encounter a new text—a children's book, a well-known poem, a page or two from a short story, a piece written by a former Badgerdog writer.
2. WRITE. Students should generate original work during 15- to 20-minute stretches of sustained writing practice.
3. SHARE. Students should practice sharing their work with peers; this includes opportunities for students to practice the art of responding thoughtfully and constructively to the work of their classmates.

We want students to experience all aspects of the writing process—reading, the search for inspiration, culling the imagination, brainstorming, free-writing, pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, blind forays into the unknown, and so on. Of course, all of these won't fit in a one-hour window, but they can appear at various times throughout the course of the workshop and can be paired together in any number of combinations. Each workshop, for example, could include a dash of revision—crossing out one adjective and replacing it with another, inserting a new action sentence in the middle of a narrative, etc. On the other hand, one workshop might be devoted entirely to the quest for objects and ideas that inspire, with a few moments reserved to share what students discovered.

Beyond the fundamental READ, WRITE, SHARE approach, there are a few additional elements and philosophies we want you to take into your workshop:

- **Each student is and can be a writer.** Foster an atmosphere in which students begin to see themselves as writers and understand the various meanings that entails. Talk about the habits of other writers. Talk about your own habits as a writer. Tell anecdotes from the lives of the authors you're reading. Talk about the joys and pains of getting your thoughts and emotions onto a blank page. Remind students they will be published at the end of the semester. You're not only teaching the conventions of writing, but selling students on the idea that they have valuable things to say, things that ought to be recorded and shared.
- **The joy of writing comes, in part, from sharing your work with others.** We strongly encourage you, at various times throughout the semester, to draw attention to the techniques involved in successful public performance and speaking. Each semester, we watch as students make considerable strides in confidence and self-perception as a result of standing before an audience and reading something they've written. Help students practice this art, and the art of being a supportive audience. (See pages 32–33.)
- **Tie it together.** We also encourage you to return to various elements of your teaching as you move students through new lessons. Consider how you might connect lessons so they build on one another and reveal to students the interconnectivity of various writing techniques.

The First Day of Workshop

GOAL: Building Community

Introducing Yourself

The first impression you make on your students sets the tone for the class. It can be difficult to introduce yourself to students while also helping them feel comfortable introducing themselves to you and other students. Here are some suggestions (and some cautions) about introducing yourself and getting to know your students.

Do's and Don'ts for Breaking the Ice

- DO present yourself as enthusiastic and energetic. For most students you'll meet on your first day, writing is not the sexiest after-school activity. It is your job to convince them the Badgerdog workshop is the place to be.
- DO introduce yourself in a kid-friendly way. In teaching (as with most things), knowing your audience is half the battle. If you are teaching a middle- or high-school workshop, you might introduce yourself by sharing your own work (published or unpublished) or your personal writing journal to present yourself as a genuine writer. If you are teaching an elementary-school workshop, you might choose to read your favorite children's book to your students, then ask them about their favorite children's books.
- DO find a way to differentiate your workshop from a regular school day class. Establishing class procedures and rules is important; however, if students don't buy into your class as different from their school day English class, it may be difficult to convince them that your workshop is fun. Allowing students to call you by your first name is a good start, though most students will probably refer to you as Ms./Mr. (insert your first name here).
- DO express genuine interest in your students. You might ask your students: What are your favorite things to read? Why? Or: If you could write anything in the world, what would you like to write? If students seem reluctant to express themselves verbally, a student questionnaire might be a good place for students to begin. Having students' written responses to their reasons for writing, their inspirations, favorite books, etc. could also be a great tool for you—you may even be able to use them to tailor your workshop. **By the end of your first workshop, you should know all of your students' names.**
- DO give students the opportunity to get to know one another. Having students interview one another is a great place to start. After the interviews, students can introduce each other to their peers.
- DON'T walk into your workshop unprepared or fearful. Students can smell fear, and they will have trouble respecting someone they can tell didn't put any thought into their lesson.
- DON'T worry if everything doesn't go according to plan. In order to be a successful workshop leader, you must be flexible and prepared to go with the flow.
- DO spend at least 15–20 minutes establishing expectations with your students on the first day. Have a plan for reminding students of these expectations in each workshop. DON'T introduce them once and let them fade into the Realm of the Forgotten.

Establishing Expectations

Previous Badgerdog Development Manager, Farid Matuk, taught workshops at both Webb and Dobie Middle Schools. The expectations he outlined for his students have become Badgerdog's "standard" rules. You may decide to create different rules for your class; however, we assure you that these work tremendously well. When using this set of expectations, it may help to complete the "ME" side first, then allow students to guess or help you complete the "YOU" side.

On the board, write:

ME	YOU
Speak	Speak
Listen	Listen
Take Care of Us	Take Care of Us
Write	Write

Speak: Everyone should feel free to speak. Explain to students there is a difference between speaking and talking. We want our workshop participants to learn how to speak with purpose as opposed to talking, whispering, or filling up the air with random comments.

Listen: Everyone deserves to be listened to. Explain to students that examples of poor listening. include: looking around, tapping a pencil, or drumming fingers on the desk while someone is talking. Tell students listening is done with faces (looking at the speaker), ears (hearing the speaker), and hands (all facing forward, giving attention to the speaker). You should be able to reference this when students aren't being attentive by asking: "Are we listening to Christina with our faces and ears and hands?"

Take Care of Us: This is a chance to let students know each person has the responsibility to be present and on-time for the sessions, to not interrupt, and to protect the dignity of each individual. No one is or says or writes anything stupid, and no one will be called dumb or stupid. Sharing one's writing is a vulnerable act. It is the job of the workshop leader to create a safe space for students where everyone is held accountable for their presence and participation.

Write: This, of course, is what we are all here for.

These expectations can be turned into statements that are written on a piece of poster board and brought to every workshop:

- We speak with purpose.
- We listen with respect.
- We take care of each other.
- We write to better understand ourselves and the world around us.

It's a good idea to start each workshop by reviewing expectations with students.

During your first workshop meeting, decide for yourself whether or not students should raise their hands to participate in class, if (and when) they should be able to go to the restroom, when they will have snack (if relevant), how you will structure the reading, writing, and talking time in your class.

NOTE: You will most certainly have at least one student who is starving for attention and may "derail" your instruction with personal stories, off-topic comments, etc. To address this behavior, you might start by asking the student: "Sarah, are you speaking with purpose?" as a way to remind her of class expectations. If this kind of behavior persists, set aside five minutes at the end of the workshop for "talk time."

The Language of Criticism

Workshop Etiquette:

We encourage our writing instructors to introduce the basics for constructive feedback in a workshop setting. Be aware that most students are unaware of how to properly express their opinions in such a way.

What Writers Should Do

Use these ideas to help guide you when introducing positive criticism to kids:

Focus on the writing, NOT the writer.

Remind students that "speaking with purpose" equals "positive and constructive" feedback.

Explain that every student's work has value.

Encourage students to compliment the work of others, ask questions of the group/author, and give specific feedback.

Be encouraging! Urge your students to openly talk about their writing process/ideas.

Things That Will Not Be Tolerated

Biting remarks or sarcasm: "This is stupid! This sucks! That was boring!"

Unconstructive criticism, such as "I liked it" or "I didn't like it." Ask students to explain.

Personal attacks on the writer: "You always write about the same thing." Focus on the writing.

Things to Talk About

When introducing writers to appropriate critiquing, begin by explaining some of the following elements of creative writing and encourage writers to give feedback according to these elements. Feel free to adapt these definitions according to the age and needs of your students.

Subject—What's going on in the poem/story?

Plot—What happens? Does the action move the narrative along? Is the story told at an appropriate pace?

Voice—Does the voice fit the characters or the speaker of a poem?

Word choice—Do the words chosen express the proper emotion?

Clarity—Does the writing make sense?

Language—Is the language unique?

Tone—Does the mood of the writing fit the purpose?

Imagery—What do the images tell you about the poem, story, or narrator?

Theme—Is there a main idea behind the story or poem?

BADGERDOG Classroom Management Tips and Workshop Experiences
Excerpted from Instructor Reflections Summer 08/09

Some of the things I learned from the last camp were:

1) To model writing on the blackboard before having the student's write in their journals. I had the class brainstorm as a whole and I wrote down their ideas on the chalkboard. Then I showed them how I might begin writing my own poem/story. This helped students feel more oriented as they started their own writing, and resulted in fewer questions like "How do I start?" "What should I do?" "I don't have any ideas."

2) Keep lessons short. I realized that short lessons were more effective than longer ones. However, I still kept writing times as long as possible. This can be difficult because the more precocious students finish early and get bored—but I tried to address this problem by having students return to unfinished projects during this time. I also kept a few writing prompts on the board for them to work on if they didn't have any work they wanted to return to.

3) Establish certain routines for the students. We always started the day with a game, and had a regular time to read aloud (either just after break or before class let out). This made the students feel more comfortable—they seemed to trust in the authority of the class and the instructor when things were structured.

4) Alternate more difficult writing assignments with easier activities. In my first Badgerdog class, I really struggled to make the whole day about writing, but this year, I played more games and had some sillier writing assignments. This helped the kids enjoy the day more, I think.

The main problem I had in class this summer was discipline. Since I transition from teaching older students during the school year, I often take with me some of the assumptions and habits of college teaching into the elementary classroom. I tend to "ask" students to obey the rules, instead of telling them. I also hesitate to be too strict at the beginning of class, because I'm usually trying to get the students to open up and think creatively.

However, I think those tendencies eventually work against me, and that a stricter approach would be more effective in the long run. In future workshops, I would definitely be quicker to reprimand students for inattentive behavior. I'd also set up a clear "three strikes" rule at the beginning regarding bad behavior (first instance=warning, second instance= time-out, third instance=parent phone call). In this way, I think it would be easier to curb bad behavior sooner and create a more peaceful environment for the students.

Jaime deBlanc
Elementary School Workshop Instructor

The in between times when a student finished and was ready to work on something new called for fun "filler activities" to be on hand at all times. On the table we kept a big baggie of nouns, verbs and adjectives. The children would strengthen their verbal usage by working on pattern poetry such as diamante, haiku and cinquain . . . . We also had a thesaurus and dictionary on the table at all times. I encouraged them to use these helpful books as much as possible to find new words, like treasures in a chest!

Jena Gessaman
Elementary School Workshop Instructor

The only real hurdle was keeping the group quiet, focused and on-task. On the whole, they were a very rambunctious, funny, talkative, theatrical class, which lent great energy to group projects, and made sharing work and supporting one another's efforts a breeze. However, as the class bonded, the inappropriate talking and interrupting became an increasing problem, and I ended up having to send several students into the hall. It was as if some of them simply couldn't help themselves, and had to be fiddling, talking, doodling, humming, etc. at all times, despite warnings. I suspect it may have been ADHD in some cases, but it made it difficult for the class as a whole to focus or get organized when they needed to, and I could sense that some of the students were frustrated by this. I encounter these situations in my college classes from time to time and I'm still trying to figure out how to best deal with them.

Karyna McGlynn
Middle School Workshop Instructor

The last third of the class was when they really needed to be in motion; they couldn't sit still anymore. For this I turned to more theater-based exercises, and those worked beautifully. Many of them are about character, or setting, and demonstrating those things physically or in improvised dialogue, and so can be annexed to writing lessons about the same things. I found a nice stash of such lessons at: http://www.childdrama.com/mainframe.html. I also would just Google "child theater exercises" and phrases like that, and often found dynamic, creative and PHYSICAL exercises/games.

At the near end of the workshop, one student said something that tripped me up. He said he'd had fun but wasn't sure he'd learned brand new things. I realized that I'd been "hiding" the academic terms and formal names for the skills we were acquiring and using. I thought I was allowing the experience to feel more like camp and less like school, in this way. But I realized that these kids LOVE knowing what they learned—it's like a souvenir. So we spent a good hour going through all the lessons, rehashing everything, and I would fill them in on what they'd done—in formal terms. For example, we'd talk about the pieces they'd written at HRC, and I would say that those were examples of "ekphrastic" poetry, which is a tradition that started with...etc. They really liked this roundup.

Jardine Libaire
Elementary Workshop Instructor

Between writing sessions that required students to sit and work quietly I liked to have a transitional activity that got the kids out of their seats and let them move around. Before going into one these more game-like periods I would let the kids know the amount of time that we would be playing: *Let's play story-ball for ten minutes before we come back and* _____. I would also give the kids a reminder of the time remaining for any activity that we were doing. I think that letting the kids knows that they have five minutes left, or two left minutes left helped with shutting one activity down and moving on to another without stragglers or complaining.

Some transitional activities that were popular with the group of kids I worked with were:

Story Ball (Ten Minutes)
Preparation: All you need is a ball and kids.
1.Have the kids sit in a circle on the floor
2.Give the ball to one of the kids and have them start telling a story. Whenever he or she is ready, the storyteller tosses the ball to someone else in the circle and that person has to continue it from the point where the last person left off.

Dinner Party (Fifteen Minutes)
Preparation: Pretend that you are creating a quest list for a dinner party and type up the professions (doctor, librarian, chef, talk show host ect.) of all the guests then cut the paper into strips so that there is a profession on each strip. Then make a smaller amount of strips with things/people who would definitely not be at a dinner party (unicorn, mermaid, escaped convict, flamingo ect.).

1. Each student gets a slip of paper. Make sure that at least a few people get slips for "uninvited guests". Students do not tell one another what is on their slip. Students cannot directly ask one another who or what they are. Through interaction they have to try and figure out who, or, what, everyone else at the party is.
2. Let the students get up and move around the room in character. Everyone should be interacting with one another. (Five to ten minutes, depending on the size of the group)
3. After a few minutes have them come back, sit, and write down (ten minutes) their experiences at this odd dinner party.
4. Invite them to share what they wrote. After sharing, let everyone explain who or what they were and how they were trying to convey their role.

Story Dice

Preparation: You'll have to make two or three large dice out of card stock. Use a different color for each dice. Label all the sides of one dice with places (setting) and label another dice with potential conflicts. If you make a third dice it can be a "wild card", or, it could be character traits. Each student will roll the dice and have to write based on what they roll. (This worked well for my group as a starting point for writing flash fiction pieces. We read some examples of flash fiction before we rolled the story dice.)
1. Get the kids in a circle and have them roll the dice. They'll write a story that contains whatever they roll.

Jenny Hanning
Middle School Workshop Instructor

I had three other students that were deserving of that third spot, each for different reasons. Alexa was the most helpful of the students. Gloria had a great short story. Vivian seemed to need the self-confidence boost. The night before the reading, I mulled it over but I still couldn't decide. The reading went smoothly. It was during the reading that I decided it was more important to pick someone that would be the most affected by the validation. Vivian had shared many personal aspects of her life during the session. This included the death of her mother and how miserable she is at her current school. She was incredibly friendly and got along with her cohorts but she still had an insecure shell. I approached Vivian and her grandmother after the reading and asked Vivian if she would be our third representative. She immediately started shaking and crying. Another student hugged her and jumped around, telling her how much she deserved it. Vivian, wide-eyed, caught her breath and instantly stood up straighter. She reminded me of myself at that age. She walked out with a solid smile on her face. It was an important reminder for me as to how powerful our roles are when it comes to the confidence of our students.

Alisha Brophy
Middle School Workshop Instructor

Both last summer (when I taught middle schoolers) and this summer, I have found that the first week was inevitably the hardest. You need to get to know your students before you can select activities that truly engage them. You need to test out different activities before you really get a feel for the collective (and individual) tastes of the workshop. I would advise future workshop leaders to be especially flexible during that first week – try a variety of activities and figure out what students are interested in. What books are they reading? What movies are they watching? What are they talking about? I had my students fill out the Badgerdog Student Questionnaire (the one in the instructor handbook), and I found that helped a great deal.

Set an intention. This is what yoga teachers sometimes tell you to do at the beginning of a yoga class, but it works with creative writing workshops, too. On the first day of class, I brought in a short quote from the novelist Zadie Smith, in which Smith warns writers against "sleepwalking through a sentence." For Smith, to use a clichéd phrase in a sentence is to sleepwalk through it – to fail to uncover the truth within what you're trying to say. "To speak personally," Smith says, "the very reason I write is so that I might not sleepwalk through my entire life." I had my students read the full quotation aloud and discuss its significance. I then encouraged them to keep Smith's dictum in mind when writing. No sleepwalking. Sure enough, the students returned again and again to this concept ("I was about to write *this*, but then that

would've been sleepwalking, so I thought....."). I would encourage instructors who are working with older students to discuss bigger issues like this one on the first day; it lets the students know that the workshop experience will be challenging but also fun and spontaneous.

Avoid prompts that sound too much like TAKS test prompts. Students really want to know that they're not in school. When I used warm-up prompts that asked students to express themselves in an abstract way (i.e., "If you were a house, what kind of house would you be?"), students would get frustrated; apparently the folks at TAKS have cornered that (prompt) market. As a result, I focused on activities that students were not likely to do at school, and I tried to bring in literature that students weren't likely to come across in the classroom. We read, for instance, Donald Barthelme, Aimee Bender, Anna Deavere Smith, and John Cheever. Students reacted especially well to those activities that took them outside their comfort zones but that were still fun and original. We made a "Choose-Your-Own-Adventure" book. We wrote collaborative plays. We wrote "organic poems" after the style of Anna Deavere Smith. We wrote ekphrastic poems from postcards. The students loved making pagecasts at the UT Writing Center. Each of these activities took the students far away from "TAKS-land"; each offered the students decidedly different approaches to writing.

Sebastian Langdell
High School Workshop Instructor

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TEACHING TIPS

Tips to help make everyone a stronger teacher:

1. **Praise in public, reprimand in private.** Create a cooperative, healthy learning environment by taking aside problem students after class. Avoid direct confrontations, which result in power struggles. Make students work hard on the material by referencing their contributions aloud.

2. **Circle up, every time**, even if it means asking students to move their desks into a circle at the beginning of every class period. Circling up boosts participation, makes everyone feel more involved, and encourages students to talk to one another, rather than just to you.

3. **Scan the room**, make eye contact, and call on students by name. Avoid asking questions and then looking down at your notes.

4. **Re-phrase** students' comments and expand on them. When a student makes a remark, avoid simply nodding and saying, "Good." Instead, re-phrase the comment ("So what I think you're saying is..."), expand ("I noticed the same thing, not only on page 5, but also on page 8..."), and ask follow-up questions ("What do you mean by X?"). This shows that you're enthusiastic about what they're saying and you want to hear from them.

5. **Elicit answers from the class.** If students don't answer right away, re-phrase your question rather than simply answering it yourself.

6. **Use the whiteboard.** Don't worry if you have bad handwriting. Write anything on the board that you want students to remember or pay attention to: fiction or poetry terms, the narrative arc of a short story, instances of sight rhyme in a poem. Use the board when eliciting answers from the class, too. For example, if you ask students, "What does the term 'voice' mean to you?" or "What are some examples of clichéd metaphors?" write their answers on the board.

7. **Pay attention** to how specific or broad your questions are: Mix it up between the two. Start with their interest—what caught their eye? What did they think was interesting about the piece? What did they like or dislike?

8. **Don't belabor student work**; use it to talk about writing. For example, rather than spending twenty minutes saying "this is a poem with bad rhymes," use it to move into a discussion about "how can rhyme make a poem stronger?"

9. **Use their writing to get them to participate.** Reference their homework to get shy kids talking, and to show that you're reading it.

IDEAS FOR THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

First, ask students to organize their desks into a circle (if they aren't already). After introducing yourself and taking roll, go over the syllabus. Consider asking different people to read different parts aloud; the interaction adds a little variety to an otherwise tedious activity, and gets everyone involved.

After you're done, consider doing an icebreaker activity to get students comfortable. Here are some ideas:

1. After students have their desks in a circle, ask everyone to say their name and an interesting tidbit about themselves. Each student must also repeat the names/facts of the preceding student(s). This is fun and helpful; distinguishing between three different girls named Amanda is easier once you know that one breeds rabbits, one enjoys spelunking, and one was born at home. It's also best if you begin the exercise with your own interesting fact.

2. Have everyone say their name and two facts about themselves which are true, and one which is false ('two truths and a lie'). As a class, decide which is the untrue statement. This exercise can get really silly, but it also sneaks in a lesson about using believable and relevant details in storytelling.

3. Break students into four groups of four or five people each. Have each student rip a piece of paper out of their notebooks, and ask them to draw a small picture at the top (taking up about five inches of the page). Once everyone is finished, tell them to pass their paper to the right. The next person must write a caption below the picture. When they're finished, they fold the paper so that the next person only sees the caption (fold it backwards). The next student, thus, draws a picture to correspond with the caption, and folds the caption back so that the next person only sees the picture. You can see where this is going: picture, caption, picture, caption. Each student should fit about four pictures on a page. Afterwards, they read them out loud to one another and pick their favorite to present to the class as a whole.

4. Create a questionnaire to distribute to your students (see the following page for a sample). Explain that they won't be sharing their responses with the class; the questionnaire is just a means of you getting to know them and what they hope to get out of the course.

5. Create a handout which asks your students to find others in the room who fulfill certain requirements. For instance, they must find someone who has written a sonnet, and someone else whose favorite book is The Great Gatsby. This exercise focuses on reading and writing habits, and has a fun scavenger hunt feel to it.

BadgerPups Creative Writing Workshop Student Questionnaire

Name _____

School _____

Grade _____

Please answer the questions below.

What is your favorite book or story?

What is your favorite movie?

What is your favorite TV show?

What is one thing that you like about school?

What are two things you like to do when you aren't in school?

What do you want to be when you grow up?

Getting to Know Each Other: BadgerPups Interview Questions

Choose three questions below to ask your partner. Write down their answers and be ready to introduce them to us.

Your name _____

Name of person you are interviewing _____

If you could have one wish granted, what would it be?

What is the best birthday or Christmas present you've ever received?

Which is a better holiday—Valentine's Day or the Fourth of July? Give one reason why your choice is better.

Would you rather be a lion or a horse? Give one reason for your choice.

If you won the lottery, what is one thing you would buy for your family?

What is your favorite flavor of ice cream?

Would you rather be a famous rock star or a famous athlete?

Which season do you like better—fall or spring?

What is the first thing you would do if you were elected to be the President of the United States?

Would you sit in a cage with snakes for $1,000?

Getting Your Students "In the Mood"

GOAL: Inspiring your students to write

As part of your classroom routine, you might want to begin occasional workshops with 5–10 minute free writing sessions. Offer the students a prompt to get them started and encourage them to keep pen to paper for the duration of the activity. Some instructors have called this activity "caffeine." Workshop leader Farid Matuk calls this activity "swimming." Breakthrough teacher Tracy Austria calls this "the chase" (students have to keep writing to "chase" an idea). After students finish the free write, you might ask them to underline/highlight words, phrases, or lines that stand out to them. If time allows before moving into a lesson, you might encourage students to share their freewrites and allow classmates to propose ideas for developing the freewrite into a longer work.

NOTE TO WORKSHOP LEADERS: Prompts 1–7 may be better suited for middle- and high-school workshops; prompts 8–29 would work for any age group.

Suggested Prompts:

1. At the top of your page, write the name of a: river, color, shape, flower, city, street, fruit, month, job, and a musical instrument. Do a 10-minute writing exercise where you write about your best birthday, your biggest disappointment, your best vacation or holiday. The catch? You have to include at least five things from your list in your free write. (Modified from Natalie Goldberg's *Wild Mind.*)
2. Describe a place where you go often, but not your current location. Be specific; use your senses and end with the feeling this place evokes. Why is this a place you go often? Are you forced to go or do you go by choice? What makes you go back? What does this place say about you? (From Georgia Heard's *Writing Toward Home.*)
3. Complete as many statements that begin with the words "I remember" as you can. When you tire or lose that flow, try completing statements like "I don't remember," "You can't make me remember," or "I don't want to remember." (From Natalie Goldberg's *Wild Mind.*)
4. Begin writing with the phrase "In that time . . ." Flash forward to the future—imagine or pretend that you are already grown up or a teenager—and think back to something that was hard for you to do, or reflect on a difficult time in your life. How do you imagine you'll see it differently?
5. Answer the following "what if?" questions:

   If you had the power to rid the Earth of one thing, what would it be?

   If you could have seen or been there for one event from your family history, what would you want to see?

   If you were to prescribe a cure for grief (or sadness or pain), what would it be?

   If you could change one thing about your typical day, what would it be?

   If you could change one thing about your mother's life, what would it be?

   If you could do any job for one day, what would it be?

If you could give your parents one special gift, what would it be?

If you had to choose the one thing you enjoy most, what would it be?

If you had to name a person who was the most important role model in your life, who would it be?

If you could choose any view from your bedroom window, what would you want it to be?

When you finish answering the questions, highlight or underline those words or phrases that would make a great beginning to a poem or story. (Questions from *The Big Book of If.*)

6. Begin writing with the phrase "The last time . . ." Complete as many statements as you can with this beginning. (Note: Encourage students to write at least 5 such statements). When you finish, choose one or two you might elaborate on for a poem or story. (Contributed by Farid Matuk.)

7. This lesson from Houston's Writers in Schools could also be used as a powerful first-day activity. Students could use this lesson to introduce themselves to you and the class. *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros opens with a short chapter titled "My Name" which introduces the main character, Esperanza. Read and/or distribute this two-page chapter. Discuss the chapter and consider with your students how our names matter to us, that they often have stories attached to them, and that our feeling about our names can vary according to the different contexts in which we live. Have your students write about their names (first, middle, and/or last) as a prompt. *For younger children, the book* Chrysanthemum, *by Kevin Henkes, a story of a little girl whose name is Chrysanthemum, might be a better option.* (Contributed by Paige Moore.)

8. Have students write "I could not tell . . ." on the top of their page, and have them freewrite a list. Encourage them to write down fictional secrets at first, but then they should dig in and reveal what they didn't before. The power of unleashing secrets is amazing and makes a good start for an amazing poem. (From Georgia Heard's *Writing Toward Home.*)

9. Lie Poem: Students write something that isn't true in each line.

10. My Hand: Write five things your hand looks like.

11. Stretch Poem: Each line is one word longer than the previous line.

12. The Floor of My House: Five physical descriptions, one for each sense.

13. My Favorite Chicken: Five things their favorite chicken does.

14. When I close my eyes at night, I hear . . .

15. If I close my eyes and look at the sun, I see . . .

16. I wish my house was . . . , but I'm glad it's . . .

17. I used to . . . , but now I . . .

18. Pick a subject for a poem. The poem must be at least eight lines long, and it must use these five words: yellow, sweet, sunshine, avocado, smell, fish, taste, rock, snowflake, etc.

19. If you were having a garage sale, and you could only keep one thing, what would you keep?

20. Finish the statement: When I grow up, I'm going to look like . . .

Senses

21. Write six lines about your favorite holiday. Include two things you do, one thing you eat, one smell, two sounds, and one detail about touch.

22. The power goes out, and you're hungry. Describe the dark kitchen.

23. It snows outside. Describe your street.

24. Pick one person you admire—an idol, sports figure, etc. Now, imagine that person is the new kid in fourth grade. Describe him or her. What would you say to him? How would she act? Would you be friends? Would he be popular?

25. Imagine you're invisible. What do you do? What does it feel like?

Recipe Poem

26. Describe your favorite food. Be sure to include its colors, tastes, and smells. Why do you like it? When do you eat it? Who makes it the best? What are the ingredients? How do you make it?

27. Write a poem: Once upon a time there was _____, but now there is _____.
Repeat those two lines (same beginning, different endings) five times.

28. Ideas for starting a story (*in each case, describe what happened, what it looked like, how you felt about it*):
The place you've always wanted to visit.
The most exciting thing that could happen to you.
The scariest thing that could happen next.
How the scariest thing ended.
The happiest thing that could happen next.
The person you'd most like to see appear.
How you got home.