

Young Authors at Work: Story Dictations



Preschoolers are creative and imaginative and have many ideas to share with the world. Young children who haven't yet learned to write can still be authors when they dictate their stories to an adult. They might turn their dictations into books or let classmates dramatize their stories.

Start with dictation.

- Set aside some time at least once a week for each child to dictate stories to you or to another adult. Any staff member in the classroom can help with this activity. Young children may also enjoy sharing stories with visiting parent volunteers.
- Keep a dictation notebook or folder for each child. To save paper, you might use half-sheets of paper for the first drafts of stories.
- Let children know when their turn to dictate a story is approaching. Some children may want to take some time to imagine or chat with friends about their ideas.
- Sit where both of you are comfortable. Ask the child to begin their story. Write, print, or type their words as they speak. Some children may need reminders to speak slowly so you can keep up with what they say. Some preschoolers cannot pronounce the “th” sound; you might write “this” if the child actually says “diss.” It’s not necessary to correct a child’s grammar or pronunciation as you go. If you can’t understand something even when a child repeats it, let them know: “I didn’t understand what you said. Can you say it a different way?”
- When a child says that the story is over, read it back to them. Ask, “Does that sound the way you want it to sound?” “Do you want to change something or add anything?” Make any changes they suggest. Read them the revised story.

Let children share their stories with peers.

- When a child is satisfied with their story, invite them to illustrate it before showing it to classmates. If they want to spread the story out over several pages, rewrite or retype it with a few words or sentences on each page.
- Offer several choices for illustration. Children may prefer crayons, paint, colored pencils, thin black markers, or even a computer-based drawing application.
- Set aside time for children to “read” their books aloud. Some classrooms have an Author Chair where children sit when they share their books. You might do the reading if a child is unready to share their book on their own.
- Encourage the listeners to make comments or helpful suggestions.

Invite children to dramatize their stories.

- When a child finishes dictating a story, ask, “Would you like some classmates to act out your story?” If they agree, read the story aloud at group time. Then let the author choose classmates to act out the parts. Remember that some children like to play rocks and other things that have no speaking parts.
- Create a space for the actors to perform as you read the story aloud again.
- After “The End,” encourage actors and author to bow to the “audience” and to thank each other.
- Ask the class for comments or suggestions about the story and the performance.

Any opinions, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this tip sheet are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Illinois State Board of Education.



Children's Research Center
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
51 Gerty Dr. • Champaign, IL 61820-7469
Telephone: 217-333-1386
Toll-free: 877-275-3227
E-mail: iel@illinois.edu
<https://illinoisearlylearning.org>



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