

Helping My Students See Themselves as Readers and Writers

The beginning of the school year always has the same focus for me. I want my students to see themselves as readers. The library is one place where all readers are honored. We talk about the books that we loved from the summer. We suggest books to friends and classmates. We explore new books in the library. We share upcoming releases that we are looking forward to.

The beginning of this school year is different though. I also want my students to see themselves as writers. Maybe it is the number of amazing authors I've been lucky enough to hear from and speak to. Possibly it is the writing that I've done over the last few years. Whatever the reason, I'm looking at my students as readers *and* writers this school year.

Finding a Place for Writing in the Library

Bringing purposeful writing into the library shouldn't be too much of a stretch. Students who talk about books can also be students who write about books. That doesn't mean that I want exhaustive prose or five-paragraph essay. My students certainly do not want to write that! Instead, I look for models where I see people writing about what they read outside the school walls. I look at published book reviews.

Book reviews like those found here in reVIEWS+ and in other professional websites and print publications can be a guide to students in their writing about what they read. The book reviews become a model of structure and format that students can follow in their own writing.

Encouraging students to look closely at how book reviewers react to a book can reveal the basic two-part structure of most reviews. Reviewers typically summarize the book in the first few sentences and react to or connect with the book in the last sentences of the review. More nuanced readings and discussions can reveal tricks of the trade that make a book review appealing and informative. Allowing those differentiated opportunities to learn from reviewers can prepare students for their own writing.

While I have expectations, I also want the writing to be enjoyable. I plan to:

- Encourage students to focus on their favorite books.
- Model the book review writing process with a well-known picture book.
- Share other examples of book reviews for different titles.
- Compare multiple reviews of the same title.
- Pair students to write together or collaborate on each other's writing.

Take a look at my lesson plan, [Student Written Book Reviews](#), for ideas on how to introduce students to this specific type of writing.

Creating an Authentic Audience for Students' Writing

Asking students to share their writing with an authentic audience is as important as asking them to share their spoken ideas with their classmates. An authentic audience gives the written word a specific value and purpose. In this case, an authentic audience should be others who would likely read this same book: students. It could be students in their class, students in other grades, or even students at other schools.

One final question to address is *how* these book reviews should be shared with their audiences. There are several options I am thinking about, considering both ease of access for those reading the book reviews and my time commitment in helping writers' final works make their way in front of others.

My initial thoughts about ways to share students' book reviews included:

- Shelf talkers displayed with the book
- Reviews taped inside the book cover
- QR codes on books that lead to the written review
- QR codes that lead to video or audio clips of students reading their own written review
- Reviews on a rotating slideshow on our library displays

While I haven't made a final decision on how these reviews will be displayed, I know I need to share my decision because this may impact student's writing. The way a book review is shared may impact a target word count. If reviews are read and recorded, the tone of the review may be different.

I always look forward to the new school year and this year I am looking forward to helping my students grow in a new way right from the start!

About the Editor

Tom Bober is a school librarian, 2018 Library Journal Mover and Shaker, former Teacher in Residence at the Library of Congress, and author of the book *Elementary Educator's Guide to Primary Sources: Strategies for Teaching*. He is a Digital Public Library of America Community Rep, a member of the Teachers Advisory Board for the National Portrait Gallery, and a co-chair of the Education Advisory Committee of the American Archive of Public Broadcasting. Tom writes about student learning on AASL's *Knowledge Quest* blog and publications such as *School Library Connection* and *American Libraries* and has given workshops and spoken across the country. His foundation is built on over twenty years in public education, with six years as an elementary classroom teacher, seven years as a building and district instructional technology specialist, and over eight years in school libraries. Find him at <https://tombober.com/> and on Twitter [@CaptainLibrary](#).

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