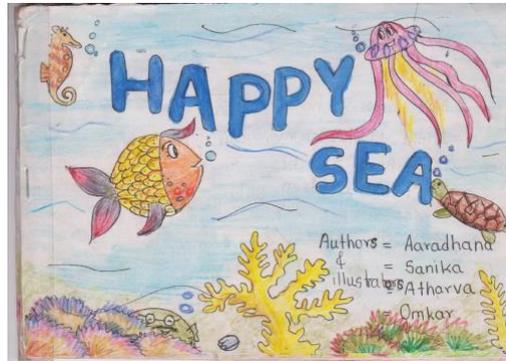

Children's Writing: Creating Books in the Classroom



The emergent literacy approach¹ recommends giving children several opportunities to write from a very young age. These opportunities should give students a *real* reason to write so that they see reading and writing as relevant and meaningful. One such authentic (and exciting!) activity to include in your writing programme is having children create their own books. Children love creating books and it motivates them to write. In sharing one's story through books, children think deeply about what they want to say and how best to say it. In the process, they learn how their oral stories and written language are linked, and they attempt to use different systems of symbols (letters, drawings, etc.) to express their ideas. Thus, creating books in the classroom weaves together several strands of literacy learning, along with engaging children's creativity and imagination.

In this handout, we share some interesting kinds of books your students can create. These are only suggestions; you can easily come up with your own ideas.

Two important thoughts before we proceed. First, when we say 'books', we don't mean they have to be printed or hardbound or, in any way, professionally produced. You could use material available in class. Chart papers or A4 sheets can be folded or cut and pinned up to create a book. Students can use pencils, pens, colour pencils or crayons to write and illustrate. Second, as you introduce your students to creating books, support their writing so that they do not find it overwhelming. One way is to start with easier options that provide them a clear structure and do not require them to write a lot. Later on, you can ask them to write books

¹ Please refer to the ELI handout on Emergent Literacy for details on the topic.

with longer texts and more complex storylines. Encourage young students' emergent writing² and, in general, provide assistance and feedback as your students write.

Now, let us dive into our list of ideas!

Types of Books Children Could Create in the Classroom

Books that Provide High Structure and Support for Writing

These books engage children in interesting writing tasks but they are not overwhelming because the tasks are well-structured and offer many writing prompts. Examples of these kinds of books:

- You could create simple books that have one picture and sentence per page, and make enough copies for your class. Leave the last page empty for the children to draw, write and complete the book, as shown in Figure 1. If there is a storyline, children feel encouraged to consider the sequence of events and suggest a likely conclusion.

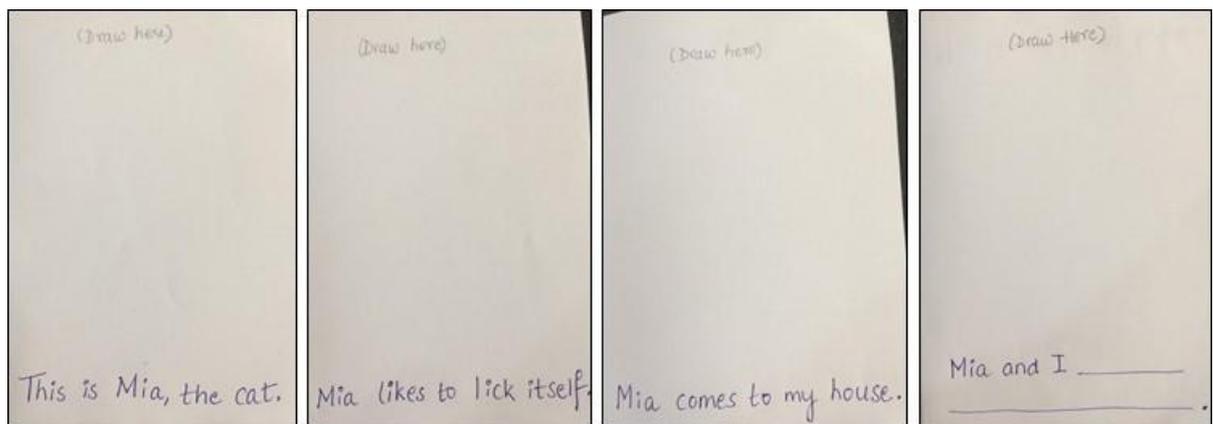


Figure 1. An example of simple books with one sentence per page

- A similar idea is to help children create books based on their own 'dictated' stories. On each page of their book, you can write a line or two from their story and invite students to contribute to the process. For example, very young children can draw illustrations and label them to match the words on each page. Figure 2 shows pages from the book *Where's Ma'am?* Here the story was created orally by the whole class (grades 1 and 2 students) based on a book they had recently read.

² Please refer to ELI handout on Emergent Literacy for an introduction to emergent writing.

The teacher facilitated this shared oral creation and wrote down the text, and the students illustrated the pages.

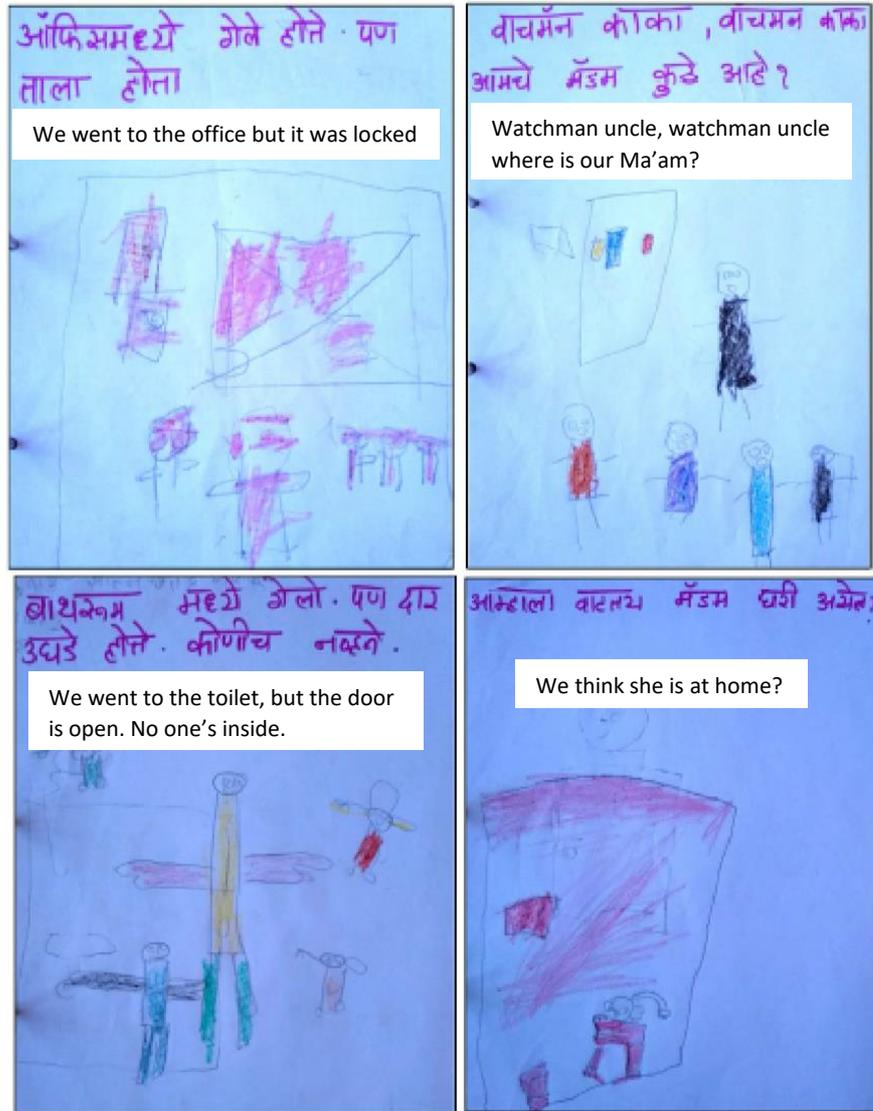


Figure 2. Book 'Where is Ma'am?' based on children's dictated stories (SAJAG, Mumbai)

- Children can make little books using popular poems/text with predictable sentence structure. For example, the poem has a catchy rhythm and a predictable structure. Students can change the animal and its reactions to carry the poem forward in exciting ways!

पैसे पास होते तो चार चने लाते
 चार में से एक चना चूहे को खिलाते
 चूहे को खिलाते तो दांत टूट जाता
 दांत टूट जाता तो बड़ा मज़ा आता ।

पैसे पास होते तो चार चने लाते
 चार में से एक चना तोते को खिलाते
 तोते को खिलाते तो टाव-टाव गाता
 टाव-टाव गाता तो बड़ा मज़ा आता ।

- Even though we typically create books that encourage children to communicate and express themselves, sometimes one could also do so to teach concepts. In Figure 3, children have created a book that reinforces a phonics concept, the "-it" word family. The teacher gave each child four or five sheets with a word and a corresponding image on every page. Children discussed it with her and wrote a sentence using this word that also goes with the image.



Figure 3. A book based on “-it” word family, The Metta Community working in HBP Indian School, Bengaluru.

Shared Books

The whole class or you can decide on a theme or a storyline, and each student can contribute *one* page of text and illustrations. This way, they don’t have to conceptualise or write the entire book individually but can still make an original contribution. You can also divide the class into three or four groups to make it more manageable. Examples of themes/ideas for this kind of a book:

- A story that students collaboratively develop. Have children sit in a circle. You can provide the first few lines. “Oh, no! I have lost my notebook. Where could it be?” The first child takes the story forward. She might say, “I think the cat has torn it!” The

next child might say, “But, the cat is outside the house!” Your role as a teacher is to remind the children that a story should have interesting twists and turns and that it needs to have a conclusion. Once every child has contributed once, you can write their contributions down on a slip of paper and hand it to them, along with a ‘book page’ on which they can write down and illustrate their contribution. Once all the children give their pages to you, you can staple them together and make a shared book for the class. (Manjiri Nimbkar, personal communication, January 23, 2019).

- A collection of short poems. They can have a theme (e.g. my friend) or follow a pattern (e.g. “*Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What do you see? I see a _____ looking at me*”). Each child might name a different animal and illustrate it. And these can go into a shared book.
- An account of students’ experiences, say the class field trip or their interactions with a guest at the school, or even ideas and opinions about a common experience. For example, Figure 4 shows a book made by grade 6 students on what they like and dislike about travelling.

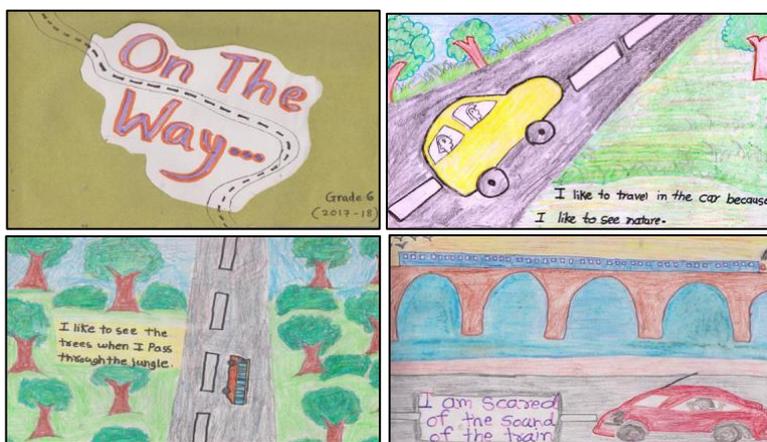


Figure 4. Book based on children’s thoughts on travelling, Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, PSS, Phaltan.

- The shared book can be based on a concept that students are learning in class (e.g. book of colours, a book on endangered animals). In Pragat Shikshan Sanstha (Phaltan, Maharashtra), after talking about verbs or ‘doing words’ in grades 3 and 4, children make groups and select a place or event they would like to work on, like the kitchen, the playground, a birthday or a wedding. Each child in a group draws a picture of an

activity observed at that place/event and writes a line about it, using verbs. The teacher puts the pictures together and makes a book of activities for each group. (Manjiri Nimbkar, Personal Communication, January 23, 2019).

- If your students like reading books or listening to read alouds, they can create a book on their favourite books³. As Figure 5 shows, each student can contribute a page about the book she liked best and summarise the story or write about why she liked it. She can also draw an image she associates with the book.

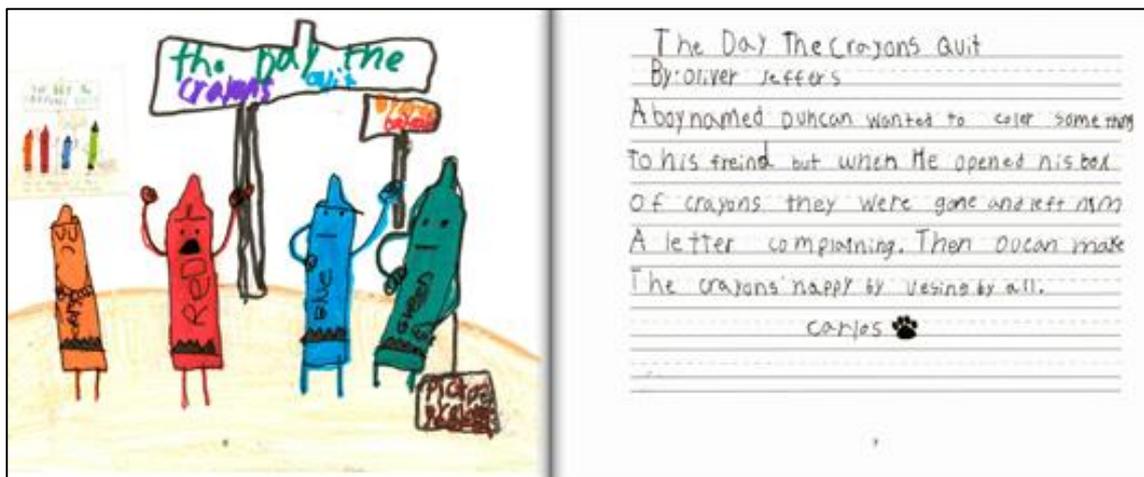


Figure 5. A book on class' favourite books. Retrieved from www.weareteachers.com/10-ideas-for-student-created-books-you-can-publish-before-the-end-of-the-year

- Class books are another simple and fun way for young children to create books. Here, too, each student contributes a page but that page talks about the child herself.

For example, each page can introduce one student with —

“मेरा नाम _____ है। मुझे _____ पसंद हैं।”

Students fill in their names and what they like doing. They can also draw a picture of themselves . You can be creative with themes for class books. In Figure 6, the class book, *Here are our hands*⁴ has one page from each child with the sentence, “Here are _____’s hands”. The child writes her name in the blank and prints her palm impressions in colour.

³ Adapted from <https://www.weareteachers.com/10-ideas-for-student-created-books-you-can-publish-before-the-end-of-the-year/>

⁴ Adapted from <https://www.pre-kpages.com/classbooks/>



Figure 6. Shows an example of a class book. Retrieved from www.pre-kpages.com

Books based on Children's Ideas

Gradually, children can create entire books based on their ideas, individually or as a group. Some ways of doing this are shared below.

- Rewriting or adapting a known book. Using the known as a base is helpful in the beginning phases of writing books. It gives children a broad structure to follow. Figure 7 shows a book created by a group of grade 1 students, based on the book *Where's Spot?* (Eric Hill, 1980) that their teacher had read out to them. You could aid this process by discussing the features of a genre or style of the chosen writer or book.

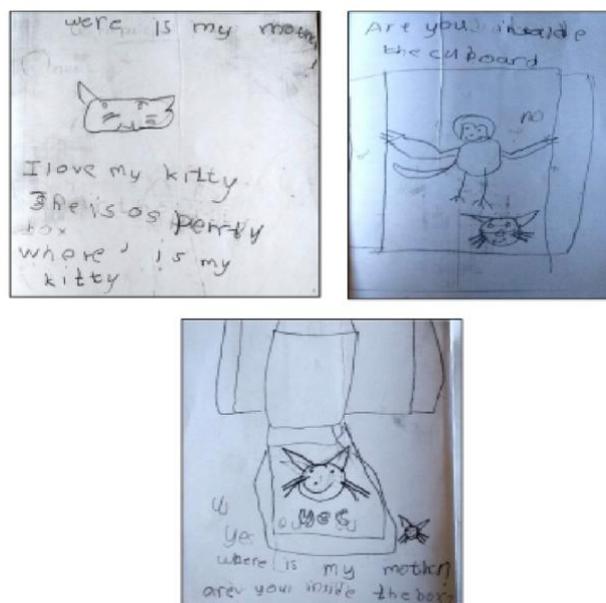


Figure 7. Children's own book based on another book, 'Where's Spot?', SAJAG, Mumbai

- Writing stories and poems. They can start with simple pieces, and as they write more, they can attempt longer and more complex texts. Figure 8 shows a book developed by a grade 6 student at PSS, Phaltan. Students work over a few weeks, refining and revising their books with the help of their teacher.

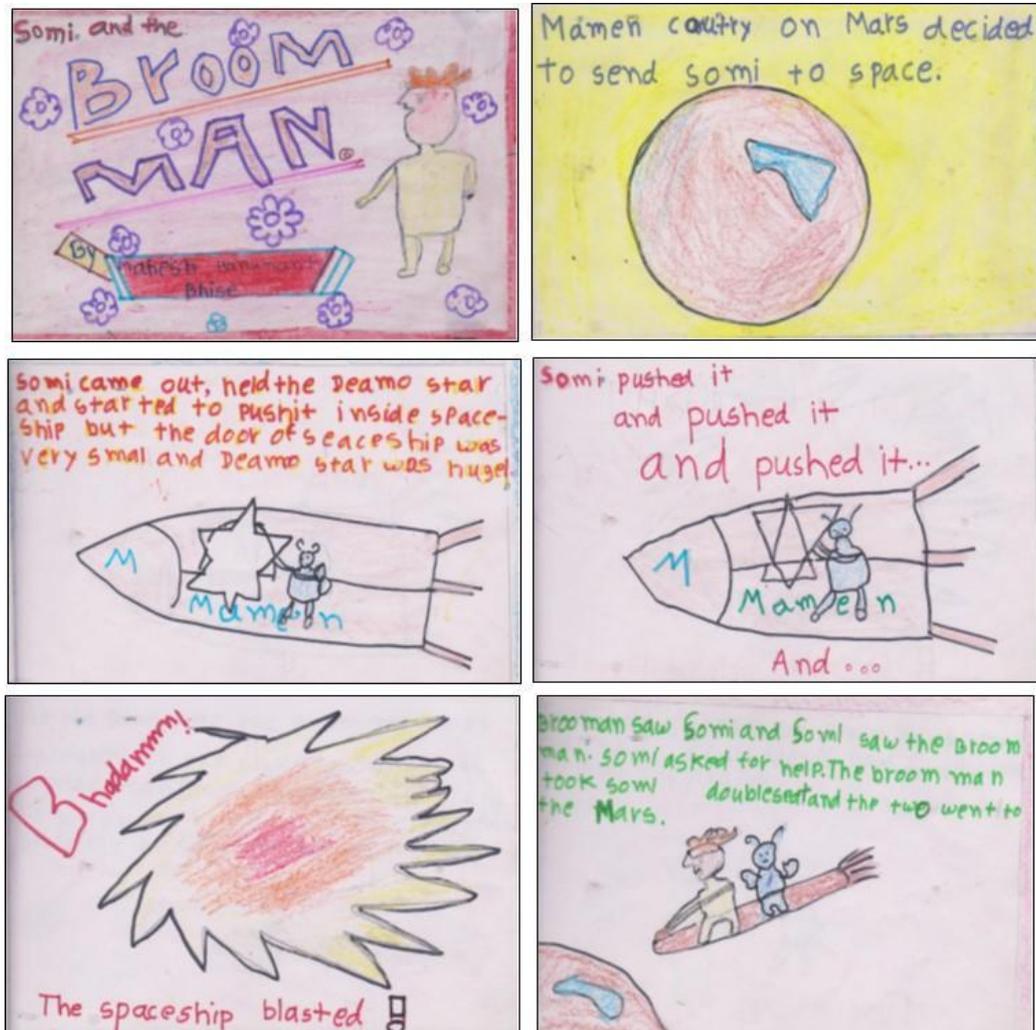


Figure 8. A book based on a student's own story. Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, PSS, Phaltan.

- Researching and writing on a concept that students are learning in class. Figure 9 presents some pages from a book based on preposition 'in', created by a grade 4 student at PSS, Phaltan. Older students could look for more information on a topic that fascinates them and create a book explaining the concept.



Figure 9. Book based on a preposition ‘in’ created by a Grade 4 Student. Kamala Nimbkar Balbhavan, PSS, Phaltan.

Supporting the Writing Process

Reading and writing develop in inter-connected ways. Hence, one way to support your students’ writing is to read aloud many books to them, encouraging them to notice the writing and to explore books on their own. But, more specifically, as they engage in the process of creating books, you can support them in the following ways:

- Give them several opportunities to discuss their ideas with you and with each other.
- Encourage them to think about how best to convey their ideas so that readers can understand them clearly. This includes responding to their illustrations. Encourage them to see if their illustrations match the words on the page, whether they need to be labelled and whether they show enough details for readers to understand them.
- Whenever your students are trying something new, like a new kind of a book or a new genre of writing, model what you’d like them to attempt. As we said earlier, you can also show them books in the genre highlighting features you want them to focus on.

- Allow students to rewrite their drafts (can be over a couple of days) and share feedback on their writing. Focus on proofreading and spelling only towards the end, as they get ready to share the ‘final’ version with an audience. Young children may make ‘mistakes’ as they are trying to invent spellings based on their understanding of the script. You needn’t correct every incorrectly spelled word at this point. Instead, you can keep up their motivation to write by responding to the *meaning* they are trying to convey. Later on, you can teach a small-group lesson on one or two recurring patterns of errors.
- Over time, as students engage in more writing, make the writing process more transparent to them (Fletcher and Portalupi, 2001).

Planning before writing (or pre-writing). Ask students to first jot down ideas for the book. Model for them how you think about associations and ideas. They may find an ‘idea web’ useful for this (Figure 10).

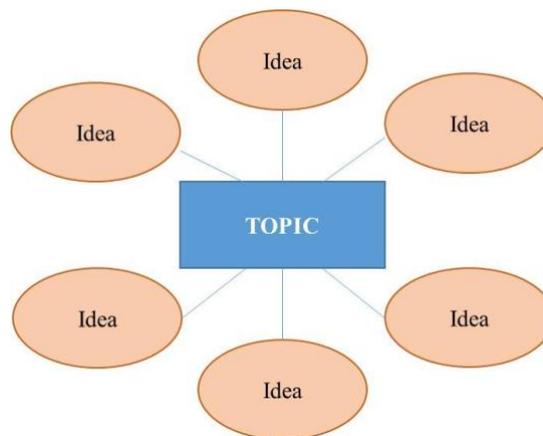


Figure 10. Shows an ‘Idea web’.

Writing a draft. From the list or web of ideas, show them how you decide which are most relevant to the book/topic and how one can begin to order and write them to convey the complete thought/story.

Revise. Encourage your students to reread drafts and check if their writing is complete (have they said all that they wanted to say and in a clear way?); if any repetitive or unnecessary parts could be removed; if the beginning or ending can be made better; if the words they have chosen are best ones for what they want to say; if the illustrations can be done differently; and the like.

Edit. Encourage students to check their work for errors in the ‘final’ stages of writing.

Publish. Students get ready to share their ‘final’ versions with an audience. This could be their classmates, students from another class, or parents.

Creating Opportunities to Share Books

After students publish their books, display them prominently in the classroom library. Allow children to read these books themselves or to each other. You can design exciting events around these books, like a book launch or ‘author readings’ where the ‘author’ reads aloud her book to her classmates (she can also wear an ‘author’ hat!) and they can ask her questions or share their responses to the book. At the end of the year, you can organise an exhibition of children’s work, including these books, for the parents and community members.

We hope you will take these ideas to class and see the brilliant energy bookmaking can bring to your writing programme. All the best!

References

Fletcher, R. & Portalupi, J. (2001). The Writing Cycle. *Writing workshop*. (pp. 61-71) Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

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