

## Literacy Tips



Tips for middle school educators on various topics such as grammar, writing, reading, spelling, vocabulary, cooperative learning and more.

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### Tip #32: Fast Writes and Quickwrites

#### *Fast Writes*

A good writing program should allow students daily practice in writing in order to build fluency. Many of us actually start our classes with a 5 minute fast write as a routine. I supply a prompt to the students in order to keep their writing on an appropriate topic. Sharing in groups after a fast write provides students a real audience with authentic feedback. I use the routine of a table group pass. Students rotate their writing until at least 4 - 5 other students have read it. I randomly sit in on these groups and pass my writing around, too. Next I ask if students read a piece they think should be shared with the entire class. The writer has to then decide whether or not to volunteer to read it aloud. The honor of being nominated really encourages reluctant writers.

Remember that it is important to read everything that students write because of the kinds of personal issues they can divulge. (Department chairs will be addressing this with you in a future meeting.) I don't want my fast writes turning into diary or even journal writing. I want their writing to be focused and academic in the hopes that it can lead to longer pieces of published writing.

Early on, ask students to do a word or a line count with their daily writing. Students should keep a table of this data and graph their results at the end of each week. Have

them self-reflect on their progress. Most of them will be motivated because their word/line count will increase with practice. At some point, students will plateau because they can only physically write so many words in 5 minutes. Your goal is to get them to this point so both you and your students know their capabilities. Then it is reasonable to drop the counting of words/lines from your daily routine, but don't give up your sharing time. You will reap huge rewards with that.

Use your prompts in a strategic way. When you are teaching complex sentences, choose prompts that have that sentence structure. This will ensure that all students get familiar with it by integrating into their writing. (When I turn 18, I will... If I designed a new middle school, I would...) If you are focusing on the mode of descriptive writing, choose prompts that are related to that. (My bedroom is a disaster because... My favorite place is...)

The following web site offers excellent prompts for your consideration:

[www.canteach.ca/elementary/prompts.html](http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/prompts.html)

#### *Quickwrites*

Last week I mentioned using a poem as a springboard for a quickwrite. This is the focus for Linda Rief's newest book called 100 Quickwrites. Her subtitle synthesizes it all:



Fast and Effective Freewriting Exercises That Build Students' Confidence, Develop Their Fluency, and Bring Out the Writer in Every Student. Linda believes it is important to use full pieces of literature as writing prompts. Of course, the challenge is finding those short, poignant pieces. Her book contains 100 of these pieces for day-to-day duplication. I have one copy of the book that I can loan out to anyone who is interested. It is so new that it is hard to find a picture of it on the Internet, but here is a link with a small photo:

[www.booksmatter.com/b0439458773.htm](http://www.booksmatter.com/b0439458773.htm)

I have attached an [example of one of the prompts from her book](#). She includes both professional writers' pieces and works from her own 8th grade students.

Linda isn't strict with the timing of her quickwrites. She gives her students only about 2-3 minutes. She is not looking for completed writing - just potential seeds. She then asks students to look back on their writing after a period of time to choose a piece that can be expanded into a more polished piece. She really gets great success with the writing process because students have ownership in their topics and want to make it their best work.

See if you can find time for this kind of daily writing in your classroom. I know your students will improve quickly with daily writing practice along with your explicit, direct instruction of the skills.



# **I need to find a place**

I need to find a place  
Where friendship never burns out.

I need to find a place  
Where I can scream and shout.

I need to find a place  
Where love is forever  
Where you don't give up – never!

I need to find a place  
That is comforting and calm.  
A place - where nothing goes wrong.

Emily G.

Try this:

- For 2-3 minutes, write as quickly as you can all that comes to mind, when you read this poem.
- Borrow any line and write as quickly and as specifically as you can, letting the line lead your thinking.

Source:

Rief, Linda. 100 Quickwrites. New York: Scholastic Teaching Resources, 2003.