

Your alphabetical journey through a writer's life and process continues here with these alphabetically-arranged Young Writer's Extras!

Be sure to check back at each season's start to find even more Writing, Reading and Discovery Opportunities.

A is for the Alphabet...

A Writing Opportunity

The word “*abecedarian*” (ā-bē-(,)sē-'der-ē-ən) just about gives away its meaning.

An *abecedarian* is a person who's learning the letters of the alphabet. The word *abecedarian* also describes anything that is related to the alphabet.

S is for Story: A Writer's Alphabet tells the story of a writer's life and process from A to Z. How might you tell *your* story from A to Z? Or the story of your family or your favorite sports team, recording artist or classroom even?

List the letters A through Z. Next choose meaningful words A through Z that tell your subject's story. For example, *The A-to-Z of Me* might include:

A is for my Aunt Mary and Aunt Alice.

B is for my favorite books.

C is for my cousins, first and second.

Choose naming words or nouns at first.

Then grow your story by adding verbs (actions words) or adjectives (describing words) or even both.

B must be for Book, of course...

A Book-making Opportunity

Give your A to Z story a home inside cover-wrapped bound pages.

Visit library.thinkquest.org/J001156/makingbooks/minibook/index.htm and learn how easy it is to create a mini-book.

Be sure to check out the other book-making possibilities: peek-a-boo, flip, pop-up and pull-the-tab, just to name a few.

C is for the Character...

A Writing Opportunity

Most stories start with a character in trouble. It's important to remember: WHO a character is gets him *into* trouble....but....WHO a character is gets him *out* of trouble.

Define and describe each of your story's characters in a name poem. Remember your Hero or Heroine, friends and side-kicks and Villains, too.

Try using adjectives, then verbs, then nouns.

And remember: every character has flaws.

Here's how my character Howard J. Fingerhut defined himself in his Chapter One name poem in my middle grade novel *The Confession and Secret of Howard J. Fingerhut* (Holiday House).

H = hopeful
O = original
W = willing
I = intelligent
E = enthusiastic

D is for the drafts we write...

A Reading and Discovery Opportunity

Most writers are *re*-writers, completing countless drafts before they're ready to show the world their stories. In fact, it wasn't until E.B.White's eighth draft of *Charlotte's Web* that he chose the novel's famous opening line, "Where's Papa going with that axe?"

Check out those eight drafts in *The Annotated Charlotte's Web*, gathered and presented by Peter Neumeier. (HarperCollins)

Notice how in each draft he changed his focus, from Wilbur to Charlotte to the barn, to the family.

What other changes did E.B. White make?

E is for the page we Edit...

A Reading and Discovery Opportunity

So many punctuation marks! So many rules!

Have fun learning the rules for when and where to use commas with Lynn Truss' picture book *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* (Putnam). Cartoon illustrations ensure you'll laugh a lot while doing so.

F is for spun Fairy Tales...

A Reading and Writing Opportunity

David LaRochelle turns Fairy Tales on their heads, literally and figuratively, by *beginning* his original Fairy Tale story *The End* (Arthur A. Levine Books) with every Fairy Tale's closing words:

"And they all lived happily ever after."

Turn the pages of LaRochelle's picture book, proceeding backward through a chain of events that begins, of course, with *"Once upon a time..."*

Then, try your hand at doing the same. Take a favorite Fairy Tale, only begin with the end and end with the beginning!

G begins the French word Genre...

A Reading and Discovery Opportunity

Writers need to pay attention to a specific genre's rules. But is the writing process different for a writer of say, fantasy, and a writer of say, humor?

Read Leonard Marcus' *The Wand in the Word: Conversations with Writers of Fantasy* (Candlewick), in which fantasy writers, including Lloyd Alexander, Susan Cooper, Madeleine L'Engle and Garth Nix, share the source of their ideas, their revisions, their struggles.

Then read the interviews in Marcus' *Funny Business: Conversations with Writers of Comedy* (Candlewick), in which "funny writers," including Judy Blume, Daniel Handler, Norton Juster and Daniel Pinkwater, do the same.

How are writers of fantasy and humor alike and different?

H is for Hero and Heroine...

A Reading and Writing Opportunity

J. Patrick Lewis celebrates both amazing and everyday heroes and heroines, including one dog, in his collection of poems, *Heroes and She-roes* (Dial). Lewis calls them “the path seekers, the truth tellers, the fearless and the scared-but-did-it-anyway.”

*No matter what or where or who,
When something must be done,
They do.*

Who are the everyday, amazing – and usually unsung, little known Heroes and Heroines of *your* world who do what they do because something must be done?

Pay tribute to one such Hero or She-roe, human or animal, in a story or poem.

I is for Ideas galore...

A Writing Opportunity

Brainstorming lets you see an idea’s story possibilities. Free-writing, listing, clustering and webbing are ways to brainstorm.

To explore the possibilities for my Writer’s Alphabet, I worked with young writers to list writing-related words that corresponded with the letters A through Z. Next I chose those twenty-six words that offered readers a balanced picture of becoming a writing, being a writer, living like a writer.

What words would *you* choose for *your* Writer’s Alphabet?

J is for your Journal...

A Writing Opportunity

Create a Reader’s Journal to keep track of when and what you read.

Be sure to note:

- (1) the date you read the book
- (2) the book’s title and author
- (3) a one-or-two sentence description of the story

- (4) what you liked and what you didn't like
- (5) what you learned by reading the book

You can even create your own rating system, using stars, checkmarks or thumbs up.

K is for four Kinds of Writing...

A Discovery Opportunity

Many writers sharpen their skills by returning to read a piece of writing a *second* time, making sure they're wearing their Writer's Caps. That way, they read as writers, carefully examining the author's chosen, ordered and arranged words. The author's purpose becomes clear, the writing style even clearer: to describe or narrate, to inform or persuade.

Each time you finish reading a piece, return to the words wearing your Writer's Cap. Ask yourself: what purpose did the author have in mind? Identify the writing style used to succeed: descriptive or narrative, expository or persuasive.

L is for Letters...

A Writing Opportunity

Suppose you could tweet or text message your favorite author.

How might your letter read, using less than 140 letters?

Remember: most tweets use numbers and symbols as letters and very few vowels.

M? Ah, M's for Magic!

A Reading Opportunity

No one knows both writing and magic better than Newbery medalist Sid Fleischman, author of *The Whipping Boy* and *The Story of the Great Houdini*, who practiced sleight of hand long before he wrote his humorous tall tales, cleverly-plotted adventures and biographies.

Page through his autobiography, *The Abracadabra Kid* (HarperCollins).

Peek inside this magical writer's life to learn not only magic tricks but a writer's tricks of the trade.

N is for Notebook...

A Reading and Writing Opportunity

Author Ralph Fletcher describes a Writer's Notebook as a place for anyone to *live* like a writer, anytime, anywhere. Read his book *A Writer's Notebook* (Scholastic) to learn how to use *your* Writer's Notebook.

Before too long, you'll be writing down lists, memories, story sparks and jokes and even notes for the book you're writing.

O is for the verb Observe...

A Writing Opportunity

Writers use their five senses to see, hear, taste, touch and smell.

Raise your writer's antennae to observe and record in your Writer's Notebook

- (1) the first sounds you hear in the morning when you awake
- (2) the last sounds you hear in the evening before falling asleep
- (3) the in-between sounds you hear throughout the day.

List the sounds from morning to night, grouping them to create a poem.

P can only be for Plot...

A Thinking and Writing Opportunity

When you're ready to tell your story to your reader, it helps to summarize your story's action in one sentence in order to remain focused.

Can you match the one-sentence plot descriptions below with their titles?

“Rescued from the outrageous neglect of his aunt and uncle, a young boy with a great destiny proves his worth while attending Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.”

“In his quest for Rhyme and Reason, a boy “who didn't know what to do

with himself” pays his toll and enters a very strange land with even stranger characters.”

“The life of a ten-year old-boy in rural Virginia expands when he becomes friends with a newcomer who subsequently meets an untimely death trying to reach their hideaway during a storm.”

“A boy named Henry has been wishing for some excitement in his life, but never thought it would come in the form of a lost, hungry dog with big brown eyes that just begged for a taste of his ice cream cone.”

“When their father invites a mail-order bride to come to live with them in their prairie home, Caleb and Anna are captivated by her and hope that she will stay.”

Choices: *Sarah, Plain and Tall*, *The Phantom Toll Booth*,
Henry Huggins, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone*,
Bridge to Terabithia

Summarize favorite books to create your own Mix-and-Match Quiz.

Q is for the Question Words...

A Writing Opportunity

The Question Words – *Who*, *What*, *When*, *Where*, *How* and *Why*, help you grow a story.

Change one answer, and voila!: you have a brand-new story, sometimes even a Fractured Fairy Tale, such as those Jon Scieszka writes, when the Villain becomes the Hero or the setting becomes modern day.

Take your favorite Fairy Tale.

Identify the *Who*, *What*, *When*, *Where*, *How* and *Why* of the story.

Then change two answers, say, the *Who* and the *Where*, and rewrite the story.

R is for Revision...

A Reading and Discovery Opportunity

Dr. Seuss figured he could knock off his *The Cat in the Hat* in a week. After all, he wasn't using more than 250 words. Imagine his surprise when after one year, he was still working on the story. Page through Philip Nel's *The Annotated Cat, Under the Hats of Seuss and His Cats* (Random House) to see and study Dr. Seuss' revisions.

What are some of the changes Dr. Seuss made in word choice and the story's action?

S is for Story...

A Discovery Opportunity

One story can have several different tellings.

For instance, first read Kate DiCamillo's original telling of *The Tale of Despereaux: Being the Story of a Mouse, a Princess, Some Soup, and a Spool of Thread* (Candlewick), which won the Newbery Medal in 2003.

Next, *listen* to the book on tape.

Then, *watch* the Universal Pictures movie, released in 2008.

Finally, read the graphic novel version of the story as it was adapted from the movie.

Does the story ever change? Do some characters disappear? Do the scenes of action remain the same?

How does choosing a particular format change the way a story is told?

T stands for Tall Tales...

A Reading Opportunity

It's easy to spot a Tall Tale. Just look for (1) exaggeration (2) humorous and sometimes tragic exploits and (3) imaginative language, including similes, metaphors and hyperboles.

Read Deborah Hopkinson's original Tall Tale *Apples to Oregon*, described on the cover as the "(Slightly) True Narrative of How a Brave Pioneer Father Brought Apples, Peaches, Pears, Plums, Grapes, and Cherries (and Children) Across the Plains (Atheneum/Anne Schwartz Books). The book's Heroine is the little girl

Delicious who describes her family's journey from Iowa to Oregon in the 1800's. In an Author's Note, Hopkinson shares that the tale is loosely based on one Henderson Luelling, the founder of Oregon's first nursery in 1847.

List the real facts embedded in the story.
Find three scenes ripe with exaggeration.
Find at least five examples of figurative speech, noting whether the images are similes, metaphors or hyperboles.

U is for Unstoppable...

A Reading and Discovery Opportunity

Reading biographies of unstoppable children's book writers helps you learn how other writers kept on working to learn and hone their craft, no matter their disappointments, doubts and early failures.

Check out these writer biographies written by Kathleen Krull:

The Boy on Fairfield Street (How Ted Geisel Grew Up to Become Dr. Seuss)
(Random House)

The Road to Oz: Twists, Turns, Bumps, and Triumphs in the Life of L. Frank Baum (Knopf)

The Lives of Writers: Comedies, Tragedies (and What the Neighbors Thought)
(Harcourt)

V? Why, V must be for Voice...

A Listening Opportunity

Each of the characters in your stories speaks with a distinctive, unique voice, even though their voices appear as words on paper.

Listen to an audio version of one of your favorite books. Listen carefully to the voices of the characters. How are they different? How do they compare? How do you know which character is speaking?

Next, record how *you* think *your* story's characters might sound, were the story recorded on tape.

How can you use words to create those sounds?

W's for Word Choice...

A Writing Opportunity

It's hard to write a story that includes characters speaking without over-using the verbs *say* and *said*.

Sometimes, *say* and *said* say it all.

Other times, it pays to use your Thesaurus to find synonyms that better express a character's speaking voice – the speed of the delivery, the loudness, the pitch, the eloquence, the smoothness, the force. Sometimes the correct verb can even suggest the occasion.

Return to a conversation in a story you've written. Circle the verbs *say* and *said*. Then experiment using the more accurate synonyms you found.

X is for eXpression...

A Writing Opportunity

Some writers borrow expressions to use as pen names, names under which they write. For instance, Charles Lutwidge Dodgson translated his first two names into the Latin "Carolus Lodovious" and then into the English pen name Lewis Carroll.

Create a pen name for *you* to use.

Think about foreign languages, code words, synonyms, antonyms, the street on which you live, favorite characters, names of pets.

Y is for Your Story...

A Writing Opportunity

A short biographical sketch of a book's author usually appears on the book's back flap jacket.

What might be *your* biographical sketch?

What would you want your readers to know about you?

How would you describe yourself?

Read, study and model the back flap bios that appear on other books.

Z is for masked Zorro...

A Writing Opportunity

Many writers today place a famous quotation beneath their name when they sign letters, emails and reports. Such quotations are called *signature quotes*.

Bartlett's Book of Familiar Quotations sits on the reference shelf of most libraries.

What quote would *you* choose to write beneath *your* name to show the world you're here and just who you are?

Think about your favorite books (*Winnie the Pooh*, the *Harry Potter* series), movies, favorite characters, poems, ads, tag lines, song titles and lyrics, sports figures, musicians, games.