Study Guide

THE AUTHOR’S APPRENTICE

Developing Writing Fluency,
Stamina, and Motivation
Through Authentic Publication

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Foreword by Jeff Anderson

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Summary

With the popular NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month)—an event each November during which participants attempt to write a novel from start to finish—as her inspiration, Vicki Meigs-Kahlenberg reinvents the writer’s workshop using an authentic and engaging “apprenticeship” approach that is based on the writing advice of middle grades and young adult authors students are currently reading.

The book integrates classroom practices from Kelly Gallagher, Ralph Fletcher, Lynne Dorfman, and Nancie Atwell with writing practices from authors such as Rick Riordan, Lois Lowry, Gordon Korman, and Margaret Peterson Haddix. Using the experiences of these successful teachers and authors, Meigs-Kahlenberg creates a classroom where student authors contribute their words to the world and gain the self-confidence to become independent writers who apply their skills to any writing task.

The Author’s Apprentice provides a yearlong planning guide, weekly writing challenges, ideas for publication possibilities, step-by-step lesson plans, and hundreds of author quotes to motivate student learning. The ideas and lessons in this book are not a quick and easy journey, but becoming a better writer—an author—never is.
Chapter 1

The Power of “What If”

Summary
This chapter explains the importance of offering students authentic writing and publishing experiences.

Quote to Ponder
As educators, we have the ability to do more than just develop proficient writers who can perform on an assessment. We can truly create authors who contribute their words to the world AND have the confidence to tackle any test. By taking this approach, we are teaching adolescents to think for themselves and become aware of a larger audience. We are giving them the ability and experience to accept a challenge, to solve problems, and to use the tools and strategies they have learned through literacy lessons to craft memorable writing that will set them apart on the test and out in the real world (16).

Suggested Activities
1. On page 10 Vicki writes, “I think it is time to reclaim our classrooms and to show our students why real writing matters, and how their voices can be heard.” Discuss the ways authentic writing experiences and publication could improve student motivation in your classroom.

2. On page 15 Vicki writes, “The possibility of authentic publication that reaches beyond a grade book provides a real reason to read and write. And it presents all students with the opportunity to give back to the writing world—to be a part of it—to continue the cycle so that future writers can find inspiration for their own writing.” Look at Figure 1.1 and think about the previous quote. With your colleagues, share your students’ current writing “process.” Discuss the idea of writing being a cycle (where student writing is designed to be read to inspire others’ writing) rather than a process that simply ends in a grade. How could this new perspective change or challenge the writing that is done in your classroom?
3. Take a look at your current curriculum and then openly discuss your answers to the following questions:
   a. How much of the curriculum reflects a process or product that exists outside of “school writing”?
   b. When you are planning, do you currently look for ways to make students’ writing tasks reflect authentic writing and publishing practices?
   c. Where in the curriculum could you adapt your lessons or practices to create an authentic writing experience (that may or may not end in publication)?
Chapter 2

The Apprenticeship Approach: Understanding the Structure Behind the Strategy

Summary
This chapter explores the organizational structure and management of the apprenticeship model as well as the role of the writer’s notebook.

Quote to Ponder
In order for students to write (or do anything) well, the assignment must be designed with three qualities in mind: autonomy, mastery, and purpose. The writing apprenticeship approach is not about writing in response to literature or a canned prompt. It is about providing an authentic writing experience—one that preserves writing for writing’s sake, providing a space for students to write on self-selected topics that are important to them (autonomy). The lessons in the apprenticeship approach also transfer to curriculum-prescribed topics, increasing the overall quality of these responses (mastery). And the possibility of publication offers motivation that transcends the grade (purpose) (21).

Suggested Activities
1. Consider the Pareto Principle mentioned on page 24, where students are given 20 percent of class time to work on self-selected writing as a way to stimulate writing frequency and idea generation, and to promote better, more efficient writing during the other 80 percent of class time. Discuss your thoughts about using this 80/20 guide in your classroom.

2. On page 28, Vicki reflects on her prior writer’s notebook teaching experiences. With your colleagues, discuss your current writer’s notebook strategies. How are your writer’s notebooks organized? Does the organization reflect the writing process you are promoting? Is the organization currently working for your students? Is it working for you? Which organizational strategies from this book could prove to be helpful to you and your students? Why?
Summary
Reading helps us understand the terrain of writing. In this chapter, Vicki shows how to build the foundation that connects reading and writing through various author study activities.

Quote to Ponder

Obviously, to cultivate this consciousness for our students that they are truly part of a global writing community, we need to deliberately scaffold assignments that not only represent the work of professional writers but also are grounded in sound educational practices. It is our job to guide our students in ways that develop a writerly mind-set and turn those activities into habits that can impact students’ reading and writing long after they’ve left our classrooms (70-71).

Suggested Activities

1. Consider your students’ favorite authors, or those you study in your classroom. Select five authors who will appeal to a wide array of students. Go online and check out the authors’ websites. Using the questions from the Author Quest activity on page 40, locate and jot down as much relevant advice as you can find for each of the authors. Share the advice you find with your study group and discuss how you could use this advice in conjunction with your existing curriculum.

2. Review the Novel Path lesson on pages 48–53. Select one of your favorite YA or middle-level novels and skim through it, reading like a writer, to find an excerpt that you could use in your classroom for the Novel Path lesson leading to WWC #1. Share your excerpt with your study group and explain why it is powerful, based on word choices, crafts, creative punctuation, and so on.

3. Try it: Reread the Jerry Spinelli excerpt in Figure 3.9. Select a setting that you know well, and try your hand at emulating the text.

4. Try it: Select a song that you would consider using in your classroom. Pick a
line that speaks to you, and write for twenty minutes, being sure to include that line somewhere in your writing.

5. Discuss with your colleagues what you noticed about these two writing experiences:
   a. Did the writing come easily?
   b. As you were writing, were you actively thinking about crafting your word choices and selecting “just right” punctuation?
   c. After reading your own entries, what would you say about the overall quality of these short pieces of writing?
   d. What benefits would there be for using these with students?
Chapter 4

Exploring Writing Territories

Summary

In this chapter, readers begin exploring writing territories—not as linear lists of things to write about, but as strategies from real authors that can be applied to any writing topic.

Quotes to Ponder

Although authors knowingly seek inspiration from writers who have come before them, most students have never been explicitly instructed to do so (77).

Authors use proven methods of extracting writing material from their hearts, minds, and lives. This means there is no need for teachers to reinvent the wheel (78).

Suggested Activities

1. On page 81, Vicki writes, “I never ask my students to do anything that I haven’t done myself already or that I am not willing to do myself right by their sides. This approach helps us to build and reinforce our sense of writing community.” With your colleagues, discuss the importance of teachers writing and modeling writing for and with students.

2. Consider Figure 4.2 (Weekly Writing Challenge #3: Writing from the Heart). What is the value for teachers and students in allowing adolescents the space to write about their own lives and things that matter to them (even if it doesn’t “fit” in the traditional curriculum)?

3. Discuss with your colleagues the importance of incorporating a real-world news source into your instruction. What are some ways that you could use the newspaper and/or other online and print media to enhance your current lessons?
Chapter 5

Writing Novels: The NaNoWriMo Experience

Summary
During NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month), students are instructed through the process of writing a novel in one month. The activities in this chapter prepare teachers and students for the most incredible and rewarding writing experience imaginable.

Quote to Ponder
Something unexpected occurs inside every student who takes part in this insane challenge. After writing novels, students will never read another story or novel without knowing the work that went into developing each character and his or her actions. They will no longer casually breeze by vivid details, deliberate word choices, or imbedded symbols. Learning the skills and then fearlessly creating and applying them in their own writing make an impression. This synthesis of knowledge bridges the gap between reading and writing and brings new meaning and a heightened awareness into their everyday reading lives (92).

Suggested Activities
1. Take some time to explore the NaNoWriMo Young Writer’s Program website: www.ywp.nanowrimo.org. Check out the workbooks, FAQs, standards connections, and so on. With your study group, discuss the impact that these resources could have on your classroom instruction.
2. Discuss the benefits of NaNoWriMo...for your students, for your teaching, for your administration, for your community.
3. Vicki believes that it is important to involve the entire community in the adventure with NaNoWriMo. For example, she contacts local businesses for gift cards and donations of prizes for her “I Survived NaNoWriMo” party, and she contacts the local news sources for press coverage and the local bookstore for community write-ins. With your study group, discuss the ways that you can think of to make NaNoWriMo a community event to motivate writers in class and beyond.
4. Look over Figure 5.11. Discuss the curricular connections that you see for integrating NaNoWriMo in your classroom.

5. Describe any concerns you have about including NaNoWriMo in your classroom, and seek solutions together.
Chapter 6

Getting Back to ME (Writer’s Notebook)

Summary

In this chapter, Vicki guides students and teachers as they continue to develop potential writing territories for future publication.

Quote to Ponder

*There has to be not just a story to tell, but a reason to tell it. There has to be something about that story that just is screaming to be told. There has to be something about it that connects with you and something that you know will connect it to readers* (83).

—Neal Shusterman, author of the Skinjacker and Unwind trilogies, and many other titles

Suggested Activities

1. Discuss with your colleagues the ways that you currently incorporate research into your curriculum. How could you expand research to include multi-genre writing beyond the traditional research paper or speech in your classroom or through cross-curricular assignments in conjunction with social studies or science topics?

2. Discuss with your colleagues the benefits of having students reflect on their writing (or any skill in your classroom). What are the benefits for adults in the “real world” of reflecting on their strengths and needs? What are the “real world” reasons that we should teach students the practice of self-reflection?

3. This chapter marks the end of the regular WWCs designed to help young writers build fluency, stamina, and idea formation. With your study group, discuss the challenges that you face when teaching these skills to students. Do the skills taught in one writing unit or lesson tend to transfer to other lessons or genres of writing throughout the year? Brainstorm strategies for realigning your teaching so that the lessons taught are naturally reinforced in proceeding lessons.

4. Make a list of the core writing skills (not necessarily competencies and
standards, but actual writing-in-life skills) that you want your students to leave with at the end of the school year. Compare your list with those of your colleagues.

5. Now, consider your current writing curriculum. Does your teaching reflect the core writing skills that you identified in the previous activity? If so, share what you are doing to make this happen. If not, try to identify what needs to change.
Chapter 7
Publication Preparation

Summary
This chapter helps teachers prepare students for their first publication experience.

Quote to Ponder
In classrooms where publication is the inspiration, all students have the opportunity to learn from authors, teachers, and each other. They know what it feels like to be successful writers. Authentic publication gives students ownership of the process and the product of writing. It promotes self- and social awareness by offering students a stage for sharing their voices. Publication endures (151).

Suggested Activities
1. With your study group, discuss your worst experiences as a student in a writing class. How did those experiences make you feel as a writer? How did they affect later writing experiences for you? Now consider your own students:
   a. Think about those students you would consider “talented” writers and those who are decidedly “in progress.” Discuss with your team ways to motivate and push advanced writers to the next level while also encouraging struggling learners to continue to develop their writing.
   b. What do you think may be inhibiting your students from growing as writers?
2. In this chapter, Vicki explains how and why she uses poetry as a natural springboard into professional publication. In your curriculum, which current writing assignments could become publication opportunities for your students? What additional skills or materials would you or your students need to make this happen?
3. In this age of technology and social media, where kids get to share their thoughts with the world on a regular basis, discuss the importance of an authentic publication experience.

4. Try it: Begin collecting your own list of possible publications for YOUR writing. Consider investigating newspaper editorials, magazines, academic journals, and even literary magazines sponsored locally or by your school.
Chapter 8
Researching and Revising for Publication

Summary
Writing with audience in mind, revising for voice, and editing for conventions are challenging concepts for middle school students, but in this chapter, Vicki shows you how to keep kids organized and on track on the road to publication.

Quote to Ponder
A sense of audience—the knowledge that someone will read what they have written—is crucial to young writers. Kids write with purpose and passion when they know that people they care about reaching will read what they have to say. More importantly, through using writing to reach out to the world, students learn what writing is good for. Writing workshop isn’t a method for filling up folders with “pieces.” It is a daily occasion to discover why writing matters in their lives and in others’ and what it can do for them and the world (170).

—Nancie Atwell

Suggested Activities
1. Try it: Ask your students which TV shows and podcasts they watch and listen to. Either have the students complete the analyses in Figure 8.2 or take the time to watch a few for yourself. Compile a list of issues/themes/topics prevalent in teen media today. Compare that list with the topics you address in your classroom.

2. Speaking of audience, think of your students as your daily audience for your lessons. How much are you connecting with them on a daily basis, based on the previous activity? Consider your curriculum as a whole. How could you include the topics and themes that are of particular interest to your students? Discuss some possibilities with your colleagues.

3. With your study group, discuss the current revision and editing strategies that you encourage your students to use. Which ones do you find to be most effective? Most ineffective? Why?
4. Try it: Select a manageable excerpt from your own writer’s notebook that you’d like to revise.

   a. Use Appendix H (RADaR Revision) to revise your text by replacing, adding, deleting, and reordering. Print out a clean copy with revisions included.

   b. Follow all of the steps for the “Three Column Sentence Analyzer” in Appendix D (Post-NaNoWriMo Novel Excerpt Revision), and make necessary revisions. Use Appendix K (Revision Precision) for help with switching up sentence beginnings, structures, and variety. Print out a clean copy with revisions included.

   c. Perform Color Editing (Appendix J) on your piece of writing. Correct any errors and print out a clean copy.

   d. Once you have completed all steps, bring all of your drafts and the final revision back to your team and discuss what you discovered about yourself and about your writing through this process.
Chapter 9
Assessing the Journey

Summary
We've reached the destination: publication. And now, Vicki takes you through some assessment options for evaluating the journey.

Quote to Ponder
What makes a writer different from an author? Anyone can write and everyone should have the opportunity to become an author. An author is a writer who takes that extra step and transforms their writing into something more. Being a published author, even though it was a lot of work, has had a huge impact on me. I now feel more confident about my writing and know that writing requires hard work but in the end, I also know I can produce work I can be proud of (199).

—Melissa, a student who became a published author in seventh grade

Suggested Activities
1. Looking at all the writing advice from middle grades and YA authors represented throughout the chapters in the sidebars and lessons, which ones could stimulate writing lessons for your classroom?
2. Take a risk (pick one or more of the following options):
   a. Write an editorial on a topic that is important to you and send it to your local newspaper.
   b. Look in any of your professional journals (or on their online platforms) for their “Call for Manuscripts,” read their submissions guidelines, write a fitting piece, and submit.
   c. Write a poem, memoir, or short story and send it in to a literary magazine.
   d. If your school has a literary magazine, submit an entry by a student in your class, and encourage colleagues to do so as well.
3. Share something that you’ve written and submitted for publication with your study group. Discuss your process, including how you felt before and during the writing and also after submitting. Share any take-away lessons that you could use with your students.

4. Reflect with your colleagues about the power of publication. What are the benefits for students, teachers, and administrators?