

READER – WRITER WORKSHOPS

Why?

- to provide lots of specific and/or general feedback in a relatively short period of time to student writers
- teacher maintains control over the process
- large numbers of students can participate at once

How?

Give instructions first (before assigning groups)

- FOCUS ON:
 - quiet!
 - passing papers only to the right
 - no marks on papers
 - one person in each group collects & passes papers to other group
- DETAILS:
 - Have students write their names on ALL of their own papers, in case the papers get separated during the process.
 - Be stern – no talking allowed!
 - No paper, no participation. Students without papers should sit on one side of the room and work on their drafts. If they bring a paper that is “not quite” finished, they can still participate. You decide.
 - Some groups will have one fewer student than the others. It will still work, but you’ll have to really keep on them about being quiet so the larger group(s) can finish.
 - ABSENCES: For students absent on the “day of”, allow them to ask a parent, sibling, friend, etc. to give them written feedback and to sign the paper. This is the ONLY way I allow those students to earn the marks they miss on a R-W Workshop day.

Assign groups & move students quickly

- Keep them small: 3 – 4 people max.
- Separate friends (count off or make up the assignments ahead)
- If the room is too small for groups, keep them in rows (either up & down or across)
- Find out ahead who does not have a paper; move them to another part of the room.
- Each group chooses one person who will collect all papers and pass to the next group (sometimes I do the passing from group to group). No papers exchange hands until I say!
- Repeat a shortened version of the instructions. (Mostly: No talking! No writing on the paper! No passing until I say!)

Timing & Mechanics

- Be sure to have a watch with a second hand. Time each “read” for 45 or 60 seconds (30 if it’s only a paragraph or two). Make the time shorter than they really need.
- Say “PASS” and make sure they do (to the right only). Move them along even when they say they’re not done.
- I keep track on the board (or count on my fingers!) of the round & number of papers in each – otherwise it’s too easy to lose track.
- Some groups will finish before others. They **MUST** remain silent until all groups have completed the reading (It’s only a matter of one minute at the most).

Feedback

- NOW they can talk! Tell them how long they have, then time them and stick to it.
- Tell them to focus on one specific trait (suggestions follow).
- Remarks must be **CONSTRUCTIVE**. Anything that is negative will result in a mark of 0 for the reviewer. You are marking their **WORK**, not their **BEHAVIOUR**.
- All remarks must be **SIGNED**.

ONE PERSON IN THE GROUP COLLECTS THE PAPERS AND YOU ARE NOW READY FOR **ROUND TWO!**

Important Final Step

- Be sure all students have their own essays before anyone leaves the room!

BE SERIOUS & WELL ORGANIZED –

KEEP TIME & COUNT ACCURATELY –

IT WILL WORK!!!

SUGGESTED FOCUSES (or FOCI if you like)

- Strongest/weakest sentence.
- Thesis in Reader's own words.
- Editing (point out errors & weaknesses, but DO NOT correct them).
- Transitions.
- Introduction and/or Conclusion
- "Showing" vs. "Telling".
- What do you want to know MORE about?
- What questions do you have?
- Where is there TOO MUCH? Excess? Off topic?
- Title. Comment and/or suggest another.
- Suggestions for revision.

FINALLY....

- Without mentioning names, create a class rubric of STRENGTHS from the best papers. Have everyone copy this list from the board for reference when they're revising outside of class.

OPTIONAL:

- Have each group pick the best paper in each round and keep track.
- At the end of the last round, tally votes and read the paper with the most votes aloud.
- Class discussion: How does this paper fit the rubric? Anything to add to the rubric? Suggestions for revision?
- Some teachers prefer to have students use codes instead of names – but I find that they often spend too much time trying to figure out whose paper it is! I don't ask the students which they prefer. I've never had anyone opt out of this activity and after the first time, I have very few students who are not prepared. They like it!