

## KIDWRITERSLA METHODOLOGY

Because I view the craft of writing as 2/3 a fine art and 1/3 a science, I use a variety of *backdoor* approaches to get my students engaged in producing with words. Here are a few of my *go-to* strategies.

1. CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT: Sometimes, I'll ask students to put on a disguise. It may be a mask or a pair of sunglasses. Then I ask them to transform themselves into a character, and to answer questions from the perspective of the being before them. The exercise allows students to see that their characters are distinct beings with unique ideas, emotions and motivations, separate from themselves. It's terrific to watch how disarmed they become in costume. It's too good an activity to exist only in the preschool classroom. Most stories are character-driven, so trying to get into the mind of another is a worthwhile exercise.

2. SCAFFOLDING: Scaffolding is teacher-speak for setting students up for success. Scaffolding may come in the form of a graphic organizer or writing prompt. Scaffolding allows students to step into new concepts with confidence. I created a lesson for the UCLA Writing Project, a few years back, in which students were presented with a variety of interesting shoes – a gigantic basketball shoe, a muddy hiking boot, a variety of single high-heels, a golden cowboy boot, a tiny tennis shoe, etc. Students were instructed to select a shoe that attracted them. Then, graphic organizers scaffolded the writers into creating a complete storyline around the *lost* shoe.

3. MENTOR TEXTS: Mentor texts are a key to getting kids interested in expressing themselves with words. Most children love to be read to. When we read or listen to the words of masterful writers with the intention of *cracking the code*, the prospect of putting words together well moves within reach. I love to engage students in identifying what makes a particular piece of writing *work*. The experience is akin to studying the media of great painters and sculptors.

4. READING AND WRITING are two activities one must engage in, regularly, to become a better writer. There is a plethora of research that slams studying grammar out of context. Students *will* internalize language and its conventions with regular exposure to books and frequent writing practice. I encourage parents to refrain from too much criticism as it can hinder the natural development and internalization of our written language. We read and write together, a lot, in my classes. My students love to hear what I come up with in our silent writing time together.