
Winter Writing with Kids

5 Writing Lesson Plans

with

Frosty the Snowman

Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer

Santa Claus

The Gingerbread Man

The 12 Days of Christmas

by

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Skills Used in These Lessons

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Rudolph's Top 5 Writing Tips

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1. Create unique characters

Give characters a tag, a physical or emotional something that makes them stand out from the crowd. That red nose, in the context of a reindeer herd, is absolutely astounding. (And look how it plays out in number 4.)

Also see: Rudolph, the Musical, Act I http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ht_7a_vCFgs

2. There must be conflict

The conflict here is the usual playground teasing and bullying of someone who is different. It’s a classic theme because we can all identify with it on some level. Don’t be afraid of classic themes; just use them in unique ways.

Also, pile on the conflict. The other reindeer do three things to Rudolph, each an escalation: laugh, call him names, exclude him from games.

Also see: Rudolph the Musical, Act II <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yLew0ceFyQ>

3. Turning point

After the set up and the conflict, comes the turning point, the foggy night. The crisis here is that Santa must deliver the toys to the children around the world, but the weather isn’t cooperating.

4. The unusual character trait becomes a blessing

Turning an unusual characteristic into a blessing is a cliched way of handling a conflict and crisis, but it still works. The very thing that sets the character apart, that makes him/her different and weak, is also the very thing that makes

the hero able to save the day. Of course, this means we are matching up conflict and resolution, too. Santa also functions as a sort of mentor here, one who is able to recognize the unique qualities of Rudolph for what they are.

Also see: Rudolph the Musical, Act III <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E3vQUx14Lcs>

5. Characters Need Time to Rejoice

It's not just the climax here, but also the concept of a celebration of successfully completing a quest. Give characters a moment to celebrate. This often comes after a big battle, or a big effort to overcome something.

And, of course, Gene Autry, singing Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer. His original recording hit the top of the charts in 1950. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pISgVQOj_QM

Frosty the Snowman's Top 6 Writing Tips

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Read about [the history](#) of this song or read about it [on Wikipedia](#).
Oh, what a great [3-D snowman cake pan](#)!

1. Extended Character Descriptions

Don't be afraid to take time to describe the main character. One the continuum of character descriptions, this one is longer than you'll find in most children's picture books, including his pipe, nose, and eyes. It works because this is a character story.

2. Point of View and Focus

Starting with the line, "but the children know" it's understood that the song is from the point of view of the kids who find Frosty's old silk hat. Yet, the attention is squarely on Frosty. When you write a story for kids, you don't always have to put the child as the main character.

3. Language Play

"Thumpety, thumpety, thump." The addition of the sound of Frosty walking adds to the fun. It doesn't add much to the plot, it's just pure language play. But this is perfect for the younger audiences, who know that playing around with language is half the fun of reading a story or singing a song. Great onomatopoeia.

4. Story Conflict

Every good story needs conflict, so of course, Frosty begins to melt. The character's attitude in the face of, well, in the

face of certain death, is evident. It's an attitude of taking joy where you find it and facing the future with courage. As a character story, we need to know the attitude of the main character toward the difficulties s/he must face.

5. Conflict Deepens

Frosty runs past a traffic cop, providing an extra bump of conflict that adds to the story's development. For picturebooks, it doesn't have to be much; in fact, it can't be huge, or you're writing a novel. This is perfect: it's a simple introduction of an authority figure who yells, "Stop!" but can't really do anything to stop the breakneck speed of Frosty's life.

6. Hopeful Ending

As Frosty disappears, he encourages the kids to look for him next winter. Stories may end in tragedy, but the best offer a spot of hope. Notice also the nice repetition of the language play that sends the story off with a nice echo.

The Gingerbread Man's Top 5 Writing Tips

The Gingerbread Man has [lost his head!](#) [AND his arm!](#) The gingerbread man is a folktale that can be told during the winter season. This simple story is a good model for writing a folktale.

1. Folktale Structure: Event Repeat

The story of the Gingerbread Man uses an event-repeat plot. An event, meeting someone, is repeated several times, with only a minor change. As the Gingerbread Man escapes and runs away, he meets another person who wants to eat him and he escapes. Each character is added to the parade as the Gingerbread Man runs away, until the Fox outsmarts him at the last. It can also be told as a cumulative story, if you include the growing list of characters each time the event repeats.

2. Chorus or Repeated Text

A chorus, or text that repeats after each event repeat, adds places for the audience to join in the telling.

3. Variety of Settings

Especially for the picturebook format, it's important to keep the setting interesting, so the illustrations are exciting. By sending the Gingerbread Man racing across the landscape, the illustrations have visually exciting possibilities.

4. Folktale Mode

This story is in the folktale mode, which treats characters as a general type. For example, the ugly stepsisters in Cinderella, have a role as mean, ugly stepsisters, and not much more. When Gingy (the cartoon gingerbread man) is added to the [Shrek movies](#), though, his character is made more interesting by giving him individual characteristics. Decide if your story needs a general, folktale type character or a more individual character.

5. Folktale Morals

Folktales and fables often add a moral at the end of a story. Of course, the Gingerbread Man should not have trusted the Fox! It's seldom that picture books and stories today have such an explicit, straight forward moral. Instead, it's usually implied and the reader is left to verbalize it for him or herself.

See Gingerbread Man on UTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uX4NT3iDuRE>

Santa's Top 5 Writing Tips

Just got an e-newsletter from the North Pole and Santa had these writing tips posted for the young-at-heart who are writing stories this year.

First released in 1934, the song, “Santa Claus is Coming to Town” [sold 400,000 copies](#) of the sheet music during that first season.

1. Immediate Conflict

Right from the start, the characters are crying and pouting. Make sure your story has instant conflict.

I'm telling you why:
Oh! You better watch out,
You better not cry,
You better not pout,

2. A Stranger comes to town–Plot

It is said that there are only two plots in the world. A character leaves home, or a stranger comes to town. This time it's promised that the stranger will bring happiness and joy. But will he? In your story, bring on a new character, or send a character on a journey.

Santa Claus is coming to town!

3. Character Motivations

Are you checking your character's motivations? You should know who is naughty or nice and especially why. No character should be totally one or the other. Soften villains and round out main characters by giving them a flaw.

He's making a list,
He's checking it twice,
He's gonna find out
who's naughty or nice.
Santa Claus is coming to town!

4. Know how your characters will act/react

You should know your character's feelings, actions, morals. When s/he is admonished to be good, what would s/he do? Will the character argue or obey?

He sees you when you're sleeping,
He knows when you're awake.
He knows when you've been bad or good,
So be good for goodness sake!

5. Endings Solve the Story's Conflict

Make sure the story's ending resolves the conflict you set up. Here, the song doesn't resolve the conflict, so we have an unsettled feeling. Well, that's probably OK. Christmas morning will tell the real tale. And it's OK to leave the reader wanting a little bit more, as long as you resolve the inner conflict and leave the reader with hope.

So... You better watch out,
You better not cry
You better not pout,
I'm telling you why.
Santa Claus is coming to town.

The Twelve Days of Christmas Writing Tips

This is a traditional English Christmas carol, first published in 1780

1. Alliteration

On the first day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
A partridge in a pear tree.

Play with alliteration, the repetition of initial sounds such as the “p” in partridge and pear.

2. Cumulative Structure

On the second day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

This stanza is very important because it sets up the pattern: we now know that this is a cumulative story, a story that adds a line each time and repeats all the other lines. Some cumulative stories keep going and take off a line each time. Study other cumulative stories, then try writing one.

3. Word choice and Audience

On the third day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

Good writing is about communicating. Think about how different audiences might understand the words of this song. Why do those sea turtles have wings? Five gold rings are onion rings? And why are those ten lords sky-diving? Word choice does matter. And always keep in mind your audience and their point of view.

4. Parody

On the fourth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

Parodies of this song are popular. See [examples of the parodies](#) on Wikipedia. Study parodies and write one of your own.

5. Slow down the rhythm

On the fifth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree

The line “five golden rings” is traditionally sung very slow. When you do a long story, try to find places where the language can slow down the rhythm. In this case, it’s the long O vowel that allows the song to slow down. Try to use the long O to slow down a section of your story.

Also see Miss Piggy singing this song:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4j1paMC5SM>

6. Variety

On the sixth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

Variety within a pattern is established here. We're still adding a line each time, but now the verb at the end becomes important. For longer pieces like this be sure to add variety to keep the interest.

7. Number of Repetitions

On the seventh day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

Numbers are often important to picture books, classic songs and our culture. For example, there are three little pigs and seven dwarves. Part of this fascination with numbers is cultural. In the Navajo culture, four is important: the four cardinal directions and the four sides of a hogan. Three and seven repetitions are generally in northern European stories. Nine is three-threes and twelve is four-threes (or three-fours). Watch for repetitions in stories and notice how many times something repeats. Try retelling stories with a different number of repeats and notice what it does for the story.

8. Language Play

On the eighth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

For this one, you really need to watch a video. Here's the Straight No Chaser men's accapella choir (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kYEK-pxs_A) By the time they get to the 8th day, things get very complicated — and wonderful. Don't be afraid to play and have fun with language.

9. Great Verbs

On the ninth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Nine ladies dancing,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

Strong verbs are vital to a story because they carry the action, or the picture of what is happening. Be sure to revise

your story, using the strongest verbs possible. No adverbs are allowed until the verb has been expressed in the strongest way. For example: limped, NOT walked slowly.

10. Strong nouns

On the tenth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Ten lords a-leaping,
Nine ladies dancing,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

After strong verbs, your attention should turn to the nouns. This song uses lords, not men; swans, not birds. Revise your story for the strongest, most specific appropriate noun.

11. Don't stop too early

On the eleventh day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Eleven pipers piping,
Ten lords a-leaping,
Nine ladies dancing,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,

Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree.

Take a deep breath — and finish what you started. Don't give up before you finish a writing project. See it through to the end.

12. Read aloud and enjoy

On the twelfth day of Christmas,
my true love sent to me
Twelve drummers drumming,
Eleven pipers piping,
Ten lords a-leaping,
Nine ladies dancing,
Eight maids a-milking,
Seven swans a-swimming,
Six geese a-laying,
Five golden rings,
Four calling birds,
Three French hens,
Two turtle doves,
And a partridge in a pear tree!

This folksong has endured because the language is fun. Read this aloud and enjoy the images and the sounds of the words. Read your own work aloud and listen!

And you just have to end with Burl Ives' version with its lush illustrations.

Watch: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EXV-huCSk5c>

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Author, Writing Teacher, Speaker

Darcy Pattison



Speaking to Writers

In 1999, speaker, teacher and author Darcy Pattison created the Novel Revision Retreat to meet the needs of struggling novelists. Since then, her passionate teaching has motivated writers nationwide as she encouraged them, "I believe in your story." Her teaching has taken to events around the nation: Hawaii, California, Washington, Arizona, Michigan, Georgia, Tennessee, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana and many other places. Her blog, Fiction Notes (darcypattison.com), gives writing tips and discusses writing techniques, and receives over 100,000 visitors per year.

Speaking to Students - examples of presentations

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