



5 reasons to “make books” in pre-K

a guide for teachers to share with parents

Parents often ask, “Why are the children making books in preschool? How can they make books if they can't read and write yet?”

Research tells us that young children *can* read and write—they are already understanding and using important skills that mature readers and writers do. When we teach them to make books, we use what they already know *and* add to that knowledge, helping them establish strong foundations for long term academic success. There are multiple reasons for teaching writing in this way at this age:

1. Picture books are familiar—and fun

Children are surrounded by picture books in preschool. They might also see picture books at home and other places where they spend a lot of time.

In school, teachers and volunteers read picture books aloud to the whole class, and sometimes in small groups, and sometimes one-on-one with an individual child. We look at picture books together and talk about what each of us sees, what it reminds us of in our own lives, or questions we have about it. We encourage children to look at picture books on their own, and we work to keep a wide variety of picture books available. In short, picture books are a significant part of every single day.

Because students see and hear picture books so often, they can easily imagine what it means to make one. They understand the goal. This is an important concept for them to know as they grow and attempt other kinds of writing: successful writers study texts that are like what they wish to make.

Children also *enjoy* making picture books, and even though that alone is not a reason to do it in class, nurturing that love for reading and writing certainly helps support learning for years to come.

2. Picture books are varied and complex

Don't be fooled by the length of picture books. They actually contain complex concepts about writing. Picture books come in all genres: they can tell true stories, be pure fantasy, demonstrate how to do something, explain something, explore history, or showcase poems. They achieve this with a combination of words and images, helping us see many different ways we can communicate ideas to others.

By studying and making picture books, children come to deeper understandings about genres and their purposes as well as *how* authors make decisions about genre and purpose.



3. Making picture books supports composition

The word *compose* means to order or arrange parts to form a whole, especially in an artistic way. The definition implies that ordering and arranging are done in an *intentional* way, not accidentally, perhaps to achieve a desired effect. When children compose picture books, they think and make choices about purpose, genre, audience, ideas, organization, word selection, sentence length, tone, appearance, white space, and other “craft strategies.”

It is possible, of course, to compose lots of complex ideas on a single piece of paper, too—as certainly many works of visual art do—but often when students are asked to do so, a teacher or other adult then reduces their complex ideas to a single sentence and writes it on the bottom of the page. This teaching strategy actually destroys all the elements of the composition. It does not nurture students’ abilities to “elaborate” or expand meaning; it unintentionally hurts it.

Instead, by inviting students to compose across multiple pages, we help them imagine how to expand an idea or ideas.

4. Making picture books helps students read like writers

Being writers changes how children read. In the same way that people who cook notice things about the food they eat that non-cooks don't think about—or a musician notices things about a musical performance that non-musicians don't—writers notice and think about more than just a book's meaning. Writers notice *how* a text is written—how an author approached a challenge or produced a desired effect on readers, for example. This is how writers learn new strategies and become effective at choosing among them when creating books, or any texts, of their own.

5. Making picture books builds stamina

Good writing takes time. Not only do writers need to sit down and work for long stretches of time, they also must learn to come back to the same piece of writing many times to revise and make it better. Developing an idea over multiple

pages allows preschoolers the practice they need to build stamina for these writing habits.

We see children who struggle at first to create more than a single page become writers who are eager to grow their ideas across many pages of a book. Occasionally, preschoolers will even return to the same book on a different day, wanting to add more or change something. These students are building the stamina they need for future scholarly tasks.

In short, we believe that making books—each child doing the best a 3-, 4-, or 5-year-old can to approximate words and images on each page—makes the best use of children's existing knowledge of text and language while also supporting further development that will serve them well into their futures as readers and writers.

You may see your child's stamina for writing grow throughout the school year, hear your child talk about why he chose a particular topic or style or composition strategy, or hear your child identify herself as a reader and writer even before she is reading and writing in ways that society recognizes. Those are all excellent milestones. We will help you spot these and other emerging skills throughout the year.

Content adapted from *Already Ready* (Katie Wood Ray & Matt Glover, 2008, Heinemann) and *About the Authors* (Katie Wood Ray & Lisa Cleveland, 2004, Heinemann)

Partnership for Inquiry Learning

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