



Quick Links

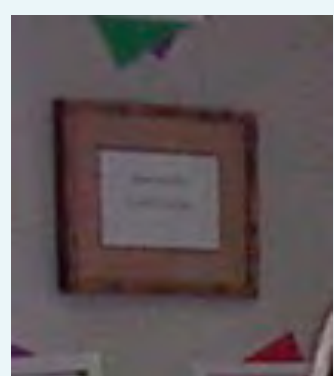
Like us on Facebook

View our videos on YouTube



Julie Patterson

is associate director and writer-in-residence at the Indiana Partnership for Young Writers. Her poems, essays and articles have appeared in literary journals, magazines and newspapers throughout the U.S. She has a Master of Fine Arts degree in creative writing from Lesley University.



After the 2010 Winter Workshop, Julie wrote about the image gallery she created to celebrate student work in her classroom in Boston. This, too, could become an interactive bulletin board. Click [here](#) to revisit that article.

Display and honor writers' thinking, not just final products

Collaborative bulletin boards can reinforce notebook strategies and craft lessons

by Julie Patterson

I am a sucker for art and teacher supply stores. Since I've typically been a visiting writer or the teacher-on-wheels who rotates between classrooms, I've rarely had the opportunity to create a bulletin board. But boy can I imagine what my students and I would build together if I had the space!

For starters, I'd always have one board that mimics a strategy I use in my writer's notebook. I'd teach the strategy and invite students to try it -- not only to try it in their notebooks but to post their ideas on the bulletin board as well. I'd choose a strategy that will serve students across genres so we can continue to fill the board for months at a time, just as I want them to re-use "old" strategies in their notebooks throughout the year, storing up ideas and inspiration for writing projects they haven't even thought of (or I haven't assigned) yet. After all, that's exactly what I do in my writer's notebook. Here are two ideas:

Lines We Wish We'd Written

This is a notebook strategy I'd teach early in the year, perhaps during a Writerly Life unit, though I can imagine it working in some Reading Like a Writer or Mentor Author units as well.

As I read, I'm always paying attention to what moves me -- makes me laugh, cry, cringe or otherwise hooks me, transports me to another reality. When I run across lines or phrases like this, I always jot them down in my writer's notebook. In fact, here are a few I found in old notebooks:

"I am sure he must have been right, for he had blue spectacles and a bald head." - from *The Devoted Friend* by Oscar Wilde

"...drawing her breath in the darkness." - from *Babylon Revisited* by F. Scott Fitzgerald

I don't record every good line I read, just the ones that really, really send shivers down my spine at the moment I first encounter them. So on this collaborative bulletin board, I'd encourage students to add their own favorites that they encounter in the world -- in our read-alouds, independent reading, life outside of school, anywhere. Just be sure to teach students to include the author's name and title of the text; he or she deserves the credit for that great line!

"Lightning Verbs"

I'd teach "lightning verbs" as a revision minilesson in any number of genre studies and perhaps point out during a mid-workshop teaching point that we can keep a running list of lightning verbs in our writers' notebooks -- and on a new collaborative bulletin board in the classroom.

I'm using the term "lightning verb" because of a quote I love from Mark Twain:

The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug.

In advice to aspiring writers, Twain also suggested that there is no need for adverbs if the right verb is used. (Consider it: Why say, "He walked slowly" when you can say, "He slithered"?) So I'd share Twain's thoughts and ask students to audit the verbs in a draft-in-progress.

As a try-it, we might isolate one dull verb (a lightning bug) and write it at the top of a page in our notebook, then brainstorm -- using our own knowledge, a group of peers and even a Thesaurus -- all of the alternatives before settling on the one that feels most like lightning. At the mid-workshop teaching point, I'd acknowledge that sometimes it is hard to think of great lightning verbs on demand or under pressure, so it can be wise to stockpile a list of great verbs in our notebooks. ("In fact, let's start a new collaborative bulletin board to hold them, too," I might say.)

Here's an example of a verb stockpile from my writer's notebook:

smear
seep
ooze
flicker
boils
smothers
dampens
sweats
heave
creep
bleeds
linger
shatter
soar
tumble
drip

