Writer's Notebook

Strategies that make a difference

Writer's Notebook is a tool that writers use to collect ideas. The strategies outlined here could be used as part of a Writer's Notebook to archive possible writing topics. Students generate and gather ideas for meaningful writing using Idea Alphabet, Life Timeline, and Place Map. It is important to note that this section of a Writer's Notebook could include any other strategy that helps students develop and collect ideas for writing.

Individualized

Targeted
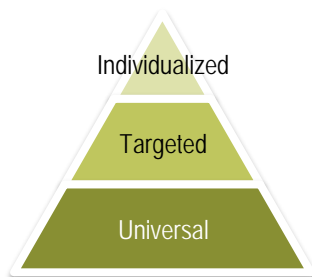
Universal

A teacher's understanding of their students' learning needs helps determine when to provide universal, targeted, or individualized instructional strategies. For some students, universal instructional strategies may be enough to meet their learning needs. For others, more targeted instructional strategies are the starting point for implementing the curriculum. The strategy described is a guideline that teachers can use depending on the learning context.

Why use these strategies in an inclusive learning environment

- Helps stimulate thinking and remind students of what they know, think, or believe.
- Enables students to generate, collect, and review their ideas.
- Encourages students to play with language in a meaningful way.
- Helps students find their voice.
- Shows students that they have many different ideas/stories/experiences/passions they could write about.
- Fosters choice for student writing.
- Helps students focus and understand that writing is a personal process.

How these strategies could be used in an inclusive learning environment

A writer's notebook is a personal learning tool that helps students explore and improve their writing. It is important to use this approach flexibly in an exploratory, nonjudgmental way. The guidelines presented below can be used with each of the examples included (e.g., Idea Alphabet, Life Timeline, and Place Map) to help students generate and collect ideas to write about.

1. Model the use of a writer's notebook to generate ideas using one of the strategies presented in the examples.

Alberta

a. Use a think-aloud to show students how Idea Alphabet, Life Timeline, or Place Map can help interesting story ideas emerge to develop future writing.

b. Skip over letters/years/places to remind students that they don't need to fill out everything the first time. Students can revisit this section of their writer's notebook later and add more ideas.

c. Explain that generating ideas over a short period of time helps to ensure that ideas are not discarded before they can be explored.

d. Remind students spelling correctly or printing neatly are not important in the idea generating phase of writing.

2. Encourage students to generate ideas quickly. Remind students that every idea they have is valid while gathering.

3. After a short time, give students the opportunity to review what they have come up with and consider how each idea might lead to future writing. Students could:

a. put a star next to interesting ideas, circle ideas that make them excited, put an X beside ideas that make them sad, or highlight things that make them want to write more;

b. pick an idea that they want to share with a partner for three minutes. This is an important step to encourage oral storytelling or to help those who process information aurally; and

c. pick an idea and write about it for 5 minutes.

4. Encourage students to return to these pages of the writer's notebook later on to evaluate whether certain stories are useful for a particular purpose, audience, context, or task.
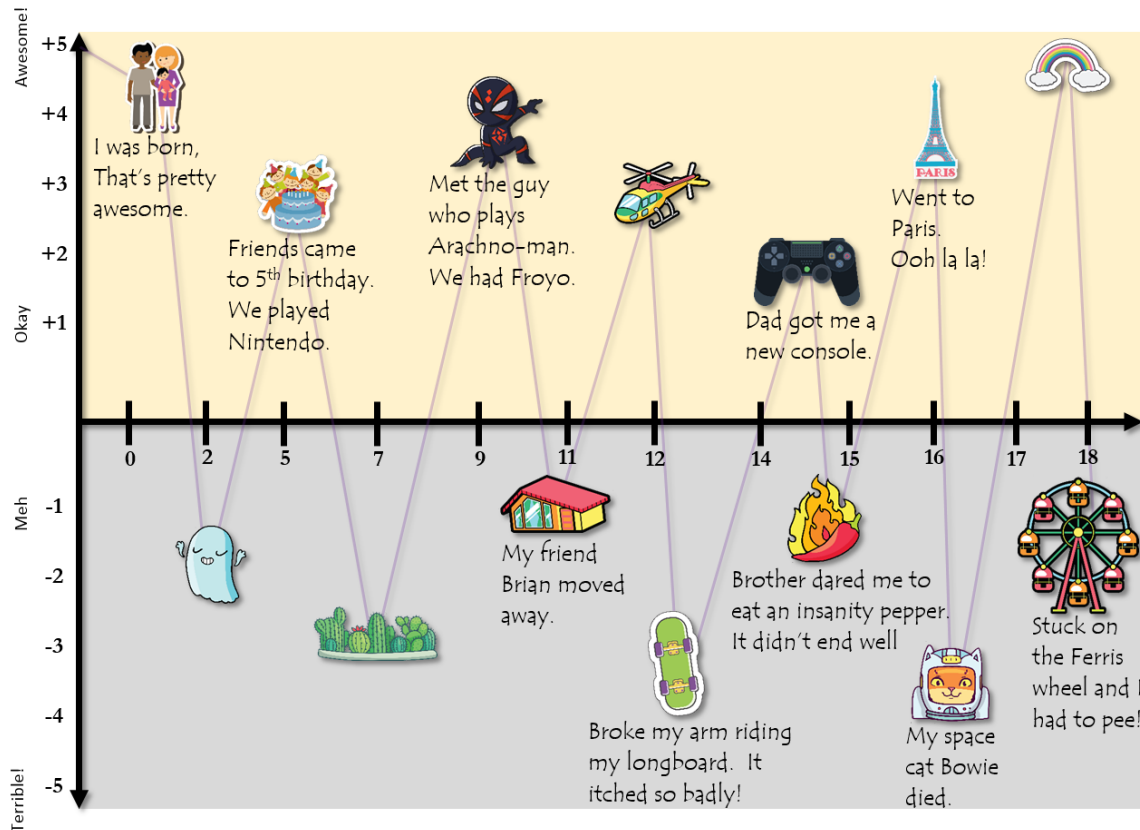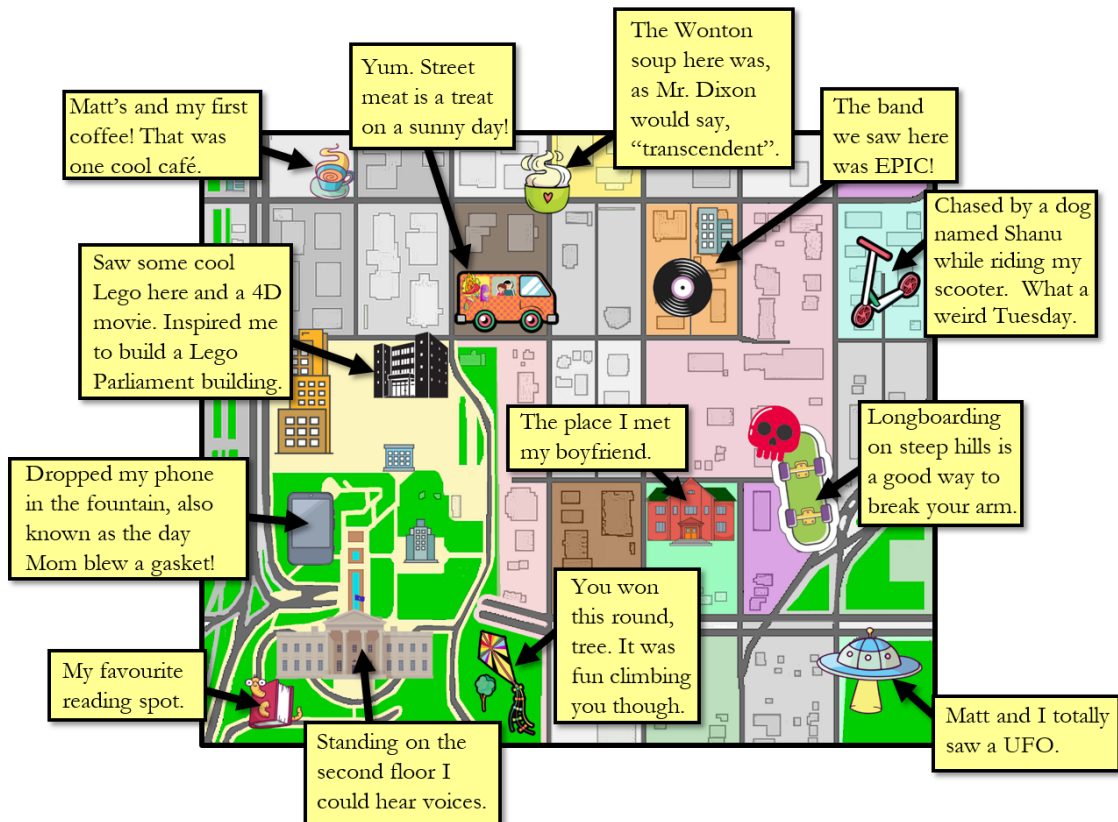
Examples

Idea Alphabet

Life Timeline graph

Awesome! +5
+4
+3
+2
Okay +1

0 2 5 7 9 11 12 14 15 16 17 18

Meh -1
-2
-3
-4
Terrible! -5

I was born, That's pretty awesome.

Friends came to 5th birthday. We played Nintendo.

Met the guy who plays Arachno-man. We had Froyo.

Dad got me a new console.

Went to Paris. Ooh la la!

My friend Brian moved away.

Broke my arm riding my longboard. It itched so badly!

Brother dared me to eat an insanity pepper. It didn't end well

My space cat Bowie died.

Stuck on the Ferris wheel and I had to pee!

Place Map

Matt's and my first coffee! That was one cool café.

Yum. Street meat is a treat on a sunny day!

The Wonton soup here was, as Mr. Dixon would say, "transcendent".

The band we saw here was EPIC!

Chased by a dog named Shanu while riding my scooter. What a weird Tuesday.

Saw some cool Lego here and a 4D movie. Inspired me to build a Lego Parliament building.

The place I met my boyfriend.

Longboarding on steep hills is a good way to break your arm.

Dropped my phone in the fountain, also known as the day Mom blew a gasket!

You won this round, tree. It was fun climbing you though.

My favourite reading spot.

Standing on the second floor I could hear voices.

Matt and I totally saw a UFO.

Alberta

Tips for individualized supports

- Practice using these strategies regularly to reduce student anxiety and build writing stamina.

- Remind students that they can always come back and add or change their ideas.

- Complete the Idea Alphabet, Life Timeline, Place Map orally or by drawing or selecting images.

- Have students share their work in pairs or within a small group setting to help generate more ideas.

- Use different colours to landmark the Idea Alphabet or the Life Timeline.

- Use word prediction or speech recognition to express ideas.

- Start with a completed example that students are familiar with to highlight some of the ideas they may consider.

- Ensure students have time to process the information provided before being asked to respond.

- Allow students to generate ideas in their first language.

- Use a variety of educational technology tools to:
    - adjust text size and font colour; and
    - read student writing aloud.