
Collaborative Writing: Ten Experiences

Students who have participated in literature circles can now work together on creative and collaborative writing projects that have a specific purpose and are connected to what students are learning in the classroom. Just like there needs to be differing roles in literature circles, collaborative writing requires students to share the work as well. In *Co-Authoring in the Classroom: Creating an Environment for Effective Collaboration*, Helen Dale writes, “Writing together allows students to work through the writing process in a social context in which they can both see the variations possible in areas like brainstorming and organizing and also experience the recursiveness of the writing process” (p. 70).

Collaboration offers support for writers of varying strengths as students share their own particular ways of writing and composing. Working together on specific writing events allows students to pool their ideas and feed off each other’s strengths and interests.

1. Create an advertising campaign for a school event.

Students, as a group, decide on an event to be advertised and decide upon the medium in which to share the materials (e.g., a CD, a video, an oral presentation, posters).

2. Design a school handbook.

Groups of six to eight decide on an issue that has relevance to the school, perhaps bullying or the environment. Group members research the issue using community and school libraries as well as the Internet to gather resources. The group writes a handbook and works alongside school administrators to publish and distribute it throughout the school community.

3. Publish a school newspaper.

A group can work together to publish a class or school newspaper. Members begin by deciding on the newspaper’s length and the sections that need to be included. They are assigned or volunteer for roles of writers, editors, designers, proofreaders, and so on. Students work alone or with others to prepare their pieces to be compiled in the newspaper. Depending on length, copies can be distributed to others in the school or posted online.

4. Write a script for a short play.

Students can choose a theme and work with others to write, rehearse, and present a short script. Ideas for the script can come from significant issues in the classroom or school. Scenarios from novels or other genres of children’s literature are also suitable sources for writing scripts. Collaboration can happen at each stage of working towards a performance of the script. Students should be encouraged to take on different roles, including acting, directing, and creating a set and props.

5. Prepare for an informative debate.

Two groups select a topic they would like to debate. (For example: Cell phones should be banned in public places; there should be a rigorous dress code in schools.) Each group picks a side (for or against). The groups need time to gather information about the topic, brainstorm their arguments, and gather evidence to support their point of view. The debate can be held for an audience, with a moderator or judge helping to organize the proceedings.

6. Conduct a consumer research report.

Students in a group can investigate how garbage leaves their home and school, and how it leaves the community. They can research local recycling practices and prepare a consumer report, which they present to others.

7. Make public address announcements.

Students can take leadership to present announcements over the public address system. Some items to consider include Joke of the Day, birthday celebrations, fundraising events, extracurricular activities, “This day in history” reports, and current events. A schedule can be organized so that different teams work to prepare the announcements that will be delivered over the public address system. It is important that students prepare a written script and rehearse the oral presentation of the announcements.

8. Write reviews.

Students can write reviews of a book, a movie, a television show, an advertisement to be shared with others. An alternative way to do this is to have students interview others to get their opinions about an item. Findings can be displayed online, in posters, or in a collaborative book.

9. Create attention-grabbing bulletin-board displays.

Groups of students can work together to prepare a bulletin board in the classroom or in the school that helps others pay attention to an issue or topic or perhaps celebrates a theme or curriculum topic that has been studied in the classroom. Students should consider: “How can we balance the visuals as well as items with written texts? What is the best way to focus an audience’s attention on the information and message on the display?”

10. Prepare a class publication.

The class can prepare a publication that includes entries from every student. This publication can be a celebration of a theme or topic that has been investigated in class and have a variety of genres included. Alternatively, students can create an anthology of poetry, fables, opinions, and personal narratives. Copies of the anthology can be shared with parents, other classes, or school library users.

Creating a pattern book is another option. Each member contributes by complying with a pattern, as in a picture book such as *The Important Book* by Margaret Wise Brown or *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* by Bill

Martin Jr. and Eric Carle. Consider the alphabet pattern for this collaborative publishing project (e.g., an alphabet of places, of book titles, of authors' names). (See Brainstorming A B C s, page 81.)

Collaborative Writing Events: Tips

Recommend that student writing groups adopt the following practices:

- In addition to a group writing folder, each member has a personal writing folder that includes resources, draft writing samples, and final published pieces.
- Members keep a log that tracks the group's progress over time as they work collaboratively to prepare and present their work.
- Members spend time brainstorming and recording ideas using a graphic organizer such as a web or a chart.
- Members consider a balance of responsibility: How can each member contribute to the collaborative activity in an equitable way?
- Members keep in mind that collaborative writing events involve negotiation, problem-solving, and listening. At all times group members consider how to contribute ideas, to receive the ideas of others, to seek clarification from others, to challenge others, and to be respectful of ideas with which they might not agree.
- Members keep self-assessment checklists or journals to help consider their involvement in the project and how well they worked with others.