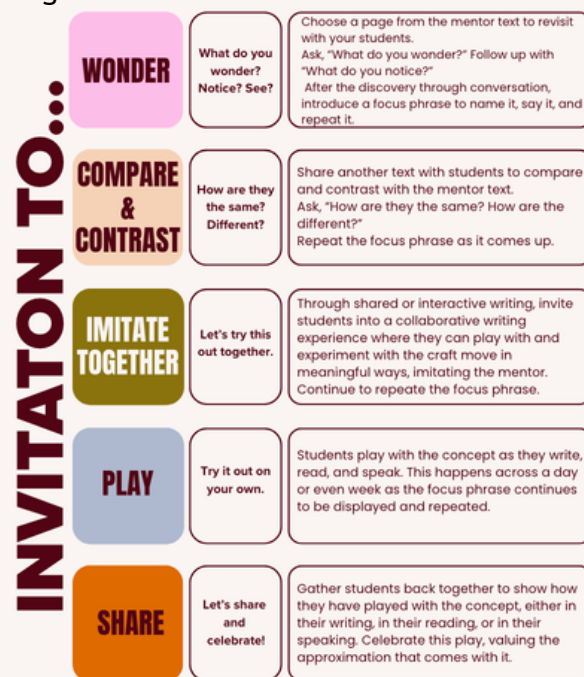


Making Meaning with Pictures and Words: Invitations to Wonder, Discover, and Play with Writing

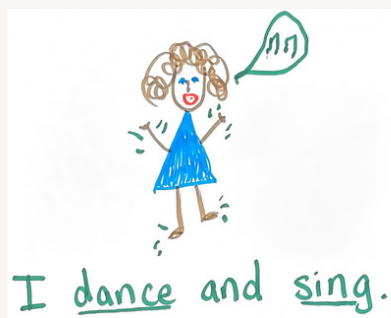
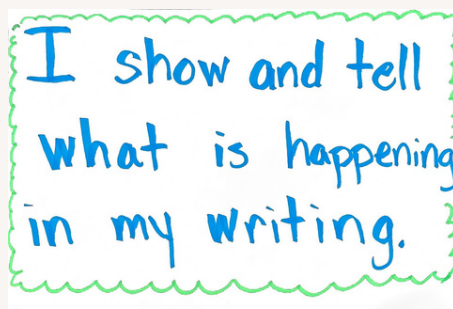
In early childhood classrooms, children are full of curiosity and wonder. As they soak up the world around them, they ask questions and notice some of the smallest details. As teachers of literacy, we can nurture this curiosity through books we read and explore. When we do, wonder becomes a pathway to discovery, rich conversations, and meaningful application in writing.

To initiate engaging conversations about author's purpose and craft through the use of grammatical concepts, we can use a process simply beginning with a favorite book and a few invitations outlined in the printable at the end of this downloadable.

For example, if we want to teach our young writers about verbs, we can invite students to notice and discover how authors show action through words and how illustrators capture action through pictures. By choosing a mentor text that clearly highlights this craft move—such as *Some Pets* by Angela DiTerlizzi—we create opportunities for rich conversation, close observation, and authentic learning.



After reading the book aloud, we take some time to revisit a page or two from it, inviting our students to share their thinking about meaning created by the author and illustrator. We then dive deeper when we compare and contrast that book to another. Together, we notice how authors "show and tell" the actions through both pictures and words, leading to a focus phrase: "I show and tell what is happening in my writing."



Students then try this move out with us through shared or interactive writing. An essential part of this process, though, is the invitation to play, providing students opportunities to experiment with this new move stated in the focus phrase. As our students play, we can support them through three pathways: oral language, illustrations, and written language.

Oral Language

Engaged in play, students develop language in many ways. With the focus phrase in mind, we listen and pay attention. With each opportunity, we notice and name what they are already doing and nudge them to stretch their language a little further. Some questions we can ask ourselves when we pay attention include:

- How do they use language to create meaning when exploring books, often reading the pictures before they learn how to read the words?
- How complex is their language as they explain a creation to a friend?
- How are they attempting to pull in the focus phrase when orally rehearsing their own writing as they share their pieces with us?

With each of these moments, we take our young writers back to the focus phrase and help them to use it orally. “I tell what is happening with action.”

One of my favorite tools to use when paying attention to how students compose language is a framework developed by Matt Glover and Kathy Collins. This framework not only helps with noticing what students are doing already, but it can then be used to determine possibilities for nurturing their language growth and complexity. This Language Composition Framework can be found on their website: languagecomp.com

Language Composition Framework

Individual Student Notes for: _____

QUANTITY	One Label Per Page	Multiple Labels Per Page	Phrases	One Sentence	Multiple Sentences
How much does the child say?	Reading				
	Writing				
Additional Notes					

WORD VARIETY	General Noun	Specific Noun	General Verb	Specific Verb	Prepositional	Adjective/Adverb	Prepositions	Sound Words
What kinds of words does the child use?	Reading							
	Writing							
Additional Notes								

SENTENCE VARIETY	Labeling with a Sentence	Simple Sentences	Extended Sentences	Compound Sentences	Uses a Variety of Sentences
What kinds of sentences does the child use?	Reading				
	Writing				
Additional Notes					

COHERENCE/CONNECTIVENESS	Pages/Events Separate from One Another	Coherence Across Some Pages/Events	Coherence Across Many/All Pages/Events
How coherent is the language across pages?	Reading		
	Writing		
Additional Notes			

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GENRE: STORY LANGUAGE	Transitions Language	Narrative Action	Uses Dialogue	Includes Emotions	Tells Character Thinking	Infers/Explains Why	Mentions Setting
How does the child make a story sound like a story?	Reading						
	Writing						
Additional Notes							

GENRE: INFORMATIONAL LANGUAGE	Generalizes Across the Topic	Uses All Main Points	Authoritative Language/ Facts/ Topic-specific Words	Elaborates with Why/Go/ Because	Elaborates with Lots/ Enough/ Too	Elaborates with Compare/ Contrast (that)	Elaborates with Cause/ Effect (if/ Then)
How does the child make it sound like an informational book?	Reading						
	Writing						
Additional Notes							

EXPRESSION/ "POETRY"	Volume (loud, soft, fast)	Colours (fast, slow, pretty, not)	Emphatic (wow, a word or phrase)	Pitch (rising or dropping, intonation)	Character (visual) (verbs, verbs for character)	Emotion (how voice that emotion is, tone)	Making sounds (what sound, what sound, etc.)
How does the child use their voice to impact/reflect meaning?	Reading						
	Writing						
Additional Notes							

Additional Anecdotal Notes

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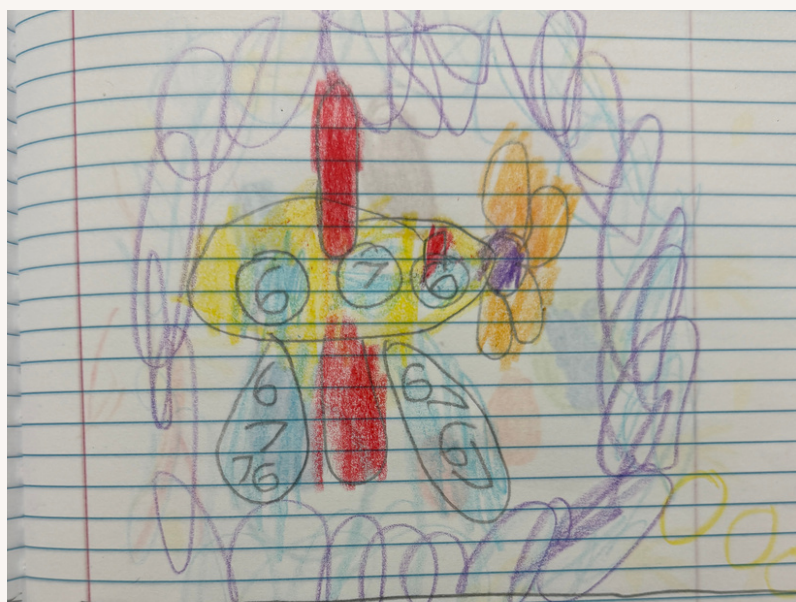
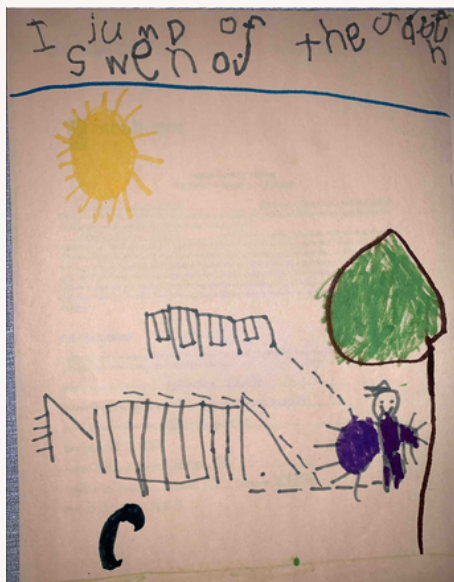
Ollie decided to write about his monster trucks through illustrations. He orally shared what the monster trucks do:

“Monster trucks fly with ramps, but sometimes they crash.”

When using the framework as a tool, we also notice that Ollie used an extended sentence with a compare-contrast structure. Wow!

Illustrations

As students draw pictures, we pay attention to how they make meaning. We always notice and name what we see first. Then, we invite them to use their focus phrase to elevate what they have on the page. They might use lines to show the action, or they may choose to add words to tell what happens.



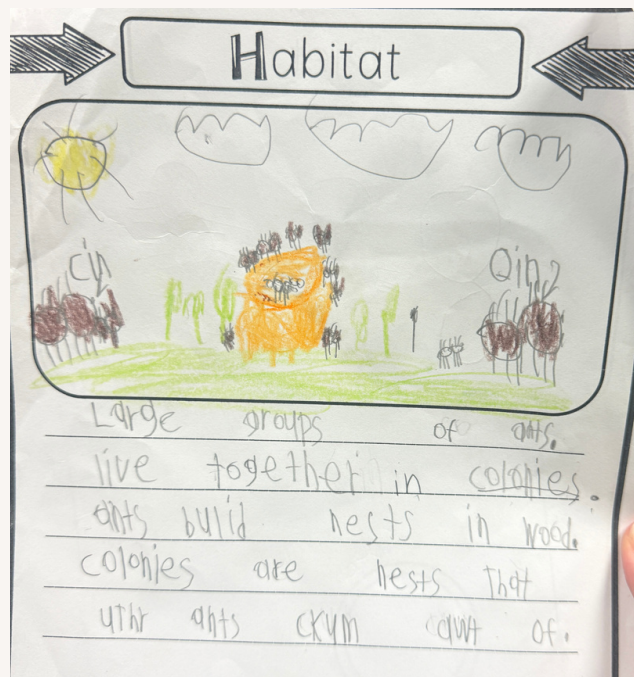
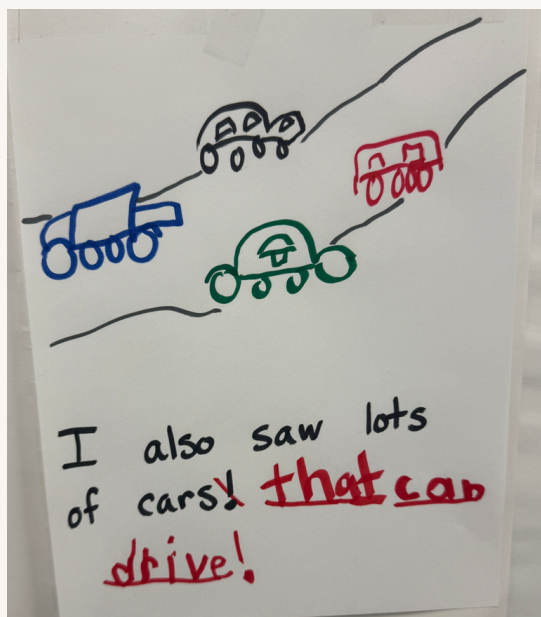
This kindergartner told me that he wrote a 6-7 story in his daily journal. This is a picture of a 6-7 airplane with his wings moving up and down while he says “6-7, 6-7.” Notice how the squiggles all around the plane show the movement on the page.

Written Language

As our young writers begin composing with words, sentences, or even paragraphs, we can look closely at how they continue to make meaning for their readers. When paying attention to their written language, some questions we can ask ourselves include:

- How do they intentionally use capitalization and punctuation?
- How complex are their sentence structures? Are they creating short, simple sentences, or are they attempting to extend their sentences with more details?
- How are they attempting to apply the focus phrase to their written language?
- Are they communicating their ideas through labeled pictures or sentences or both?

Our role is to first notice and name what the students are already doing as writers. Then, we gently support them to take the next step, always keeping the focus phrase in mind.



To conclude the invitational process, we bring students back together to share how they experimented with the author's craft move from the focus phrase in their writing, reading, or speaking. We celebrate this play, valuing the approximation that comes with it. Our young writers are on their way to a deeper understanding of authors' purpose and craft with a focus on meaning and effect rather than right and wrong.

To learn more about the invitational process for emergent writers, explore the following:

La Rocca, W., & Anderson, J. (2021). *Patterns of wonder: Inviting emergent writers to play with the conventions of language*. Stenhouse Publishers.

Sweet, C., La Rocca, W., & Anderson, J. (2026). *Patterns of wonder en español: Inviting emergent bilingual writers to play with the conventions of Spanish, PreK–1*. Routledge.

Patterns of Wonder Process

