



Dear Parents,

What a wonderful, adventurous month this has been! I hope your child has kept you informed about the details of life in our classroom. Be sure to pump your child for stories about our fun with stories and books and alphabet letters and most of all, with each other. Research has shown that one of the most important things you, as a parent, can do to support your child's reading and writing is to encourage your child to tell you stories of his or her day. Ask the questions that set children up to tell these stories in great detail: "How, exactly, did it start?" Then what happened?" "Help me picture it. What happened next?" "What did she say?" "What did you do?"

In the beginning of the year, I told you that we spend time every day writing, and that this time always begins with me teaching children some of the skills they need to know. Recently, I have been teaching children how to write stories about the little events of their lives. I am hoping that instead of writing "all about my dog," a child will write the story of losing her shoe and finding it in the dog's bed, and that instead of writing all about a friend who is moving, a child will zoom in and chronicle the step-by-step story of saying good-bye and seeing the moving van pull away.

You may wonder how any of this is possible when children are just learning the ABCs of writing. In our class, every child thinks of a story and draws the story out across the pages of a little booklet. Then the child returns to the pages and writes the story. Some children label the pictures, writing "me" beside themselves and "Mom" or "Gramma" or "Pop" beside you. Others write sentences on the bottom of each page.

Every child learns to add details to his or her story, and the children return to their drafts to add details both to their pictures and to their words. As a class, we wrote a story about a fire drill. It was a bare bones-story that basically said, "We heard the fire alarm. We went outside. We came back in." Then the children recalled the event and realized they could add so many more details (We were frozen like ice cubes. We stood scrunched close to the other class for warmth.), and of course, those details made the world of difference in the writing.

The children are each writing lots and lots of stories, and before long it will be time for them to choose one story to fix up and fancy up for publication. The children will be very excited to share their first published writing piece with their classmates!

Sincerely,

The First Grade Teachers