

Inspiration



Sharing your writing passion with the next generation is good for both sides of the conversation.

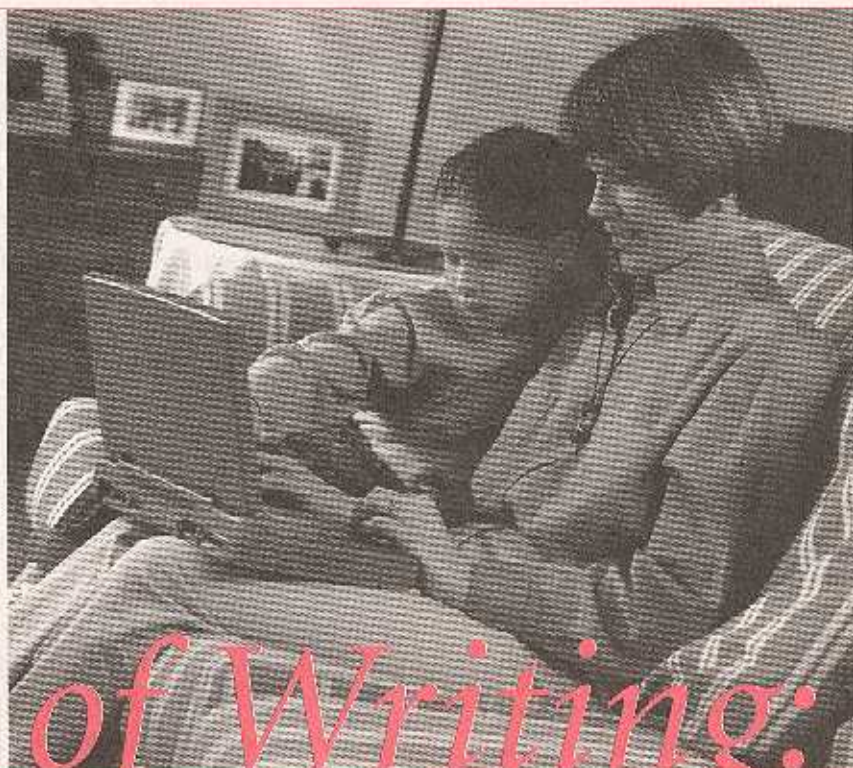


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The Love of Writing: It's Kid Stuff

By Brette McWhorter Sember

One of the best ways to share the joy of writing with the world is to get involved with young writers. Kids who like to write don't always get a lot of support from schools or parents, because writing is usually viewed as a skill, not as a potential career choice. Offering support and encouragement can help young people see the possibilities writing can offer.

1. Talk about your work

Talk to your children, your nieces,

nephews and neighbors' kids about what you do. Present yourself as a professional with respect for your career.

Visit local schools or libraries and talk about what a writer really does. Tell honest stories about rejections and months spent working on projects. Talk not only about why writing is important to you, but also about the incredible importance it has in our society. Share some books with them that have literally changed the world. Emphasize the different uses of writing in our society and the

many different kinds of writers. Kids often envision writers only as people who write long books.

2. Share your writing

Show children your publishing successes. Proudly display your published work. This will make a writing career seem concrete and possible.

3. Involve them

Writing professionally often seems mysterious and magical to kids. They

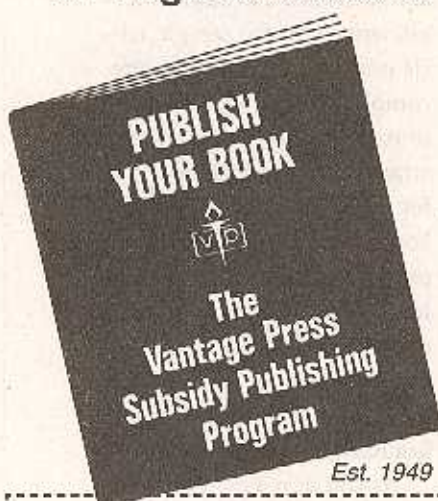
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Kid Stuff

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need to know writers don't sleep until noon and then write five chapters while watching *General Hospital*. Help children understand the process—writing, revising, revising, revising, stuffing envelopes and waiting. Talk about ideas you have for books or articles. Ask for their input and reactions.

4. Read together

Children are never too old to be read to. Take turns reading aloud with your child. Discuss the book and how it affected each of you. Make time to talk about the actual writing itself, and discuss the writer's techniques.

5. Read and react

When a child asks you to read something he or she has written, keep in mind the child's age. Determine what kind of reaction the child wants. Is he or she asking you to correct grammatical and spelling errors? Is the child showing you something to give you pleasure or make you laugh? Does he or she want help improving how a school assignment is organized? Tailor your reaction to what the child is seeking. Critiques will usually turn children off.

Always share how the piece made you feel and point out the aspects that you enjoyed the most. Offer constructive criticism only when appropriate. Let go of your own drive for perfection in writing and your hope that your child will be a high achiever. Just let him or her enjoy being a writer. **WD**

Brette McWhorter Sember is the author of eight nonfiction books and writes three monthly columns for regional parenting magazines.

Interview

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"but I know if a scene is right or wrong. I know it. It's a visual thing—it's how the words look on the page, it's how the sentences sound. It's all that. But, if it's wrong, which happens very frequently throughout every novel, that doesn't mean that I know what will make it right. All it means is I know it's wrong, and I have to do it over."

Sometimes, however, a story just can't be redeemed. Sparks discovered this the hard way in 1998 with his failed novel *The Best Man*. Two hundred pages into the book, he stopped.

"It was wrong, and I gradually came to the conclusion that it was unfixable," he says. "So, if you've got something that's unfixable, you've got two choices: You can either beat your head against the wall and try to do the impossible or you can set it aside, put it away, chalk it up to experience and try to write a different novel."

Such resilience is an essential attribute for any writer's success. As for other qualities new writers should embrace, Sparks recommends the three hallmark habits of all great writers: read, research, write.

"Most of the people who write to me and say they want to be writers want to skip the reading and research," he says. "But, you have to read a lot to learn how writing is done. And research, well, you have to understand not only the principles behind a good story, but the principles behind how the business of publishing works, and how to manage not only a novel, but a career."

—Kelly Nickell