

A Column to Celebrate Students' Voices

Publication celebrations are a special event at our school. It is a time when all of our classrooms are opened and everyone in our school—students, teachers, parents, and grandparents—circulates to read students' writing. I am particularly drawn to the middle school students who frequently can be seen standing off to the side watching quietly as visitors to the classroom read their work. Unlike the very young students who are still in the "Read mine! Read mine!" stage, these students tend to hold back and watch carefully for reactions to their writing. However, if the middle school student gets any sign whatsoever that the reader likes the writing, he or she is quick to step in and claim ownership of the work. This is especially true when middle school students receive positive feedback from their peers. Tapping into the social network of adolescents is key to motivating adolescent readers and writers.

Middle school students are especially drawn to book recommendations from friends and are frequently more excited about writing for peers than any other audience. If your students have not had an opportunity to be published for an audience larger than your classroom or school community, then you are in for a real treat! It has been my ex-

perience that once one student in your classroom gets published, your other students begin looking for new sources that accept student publications. Writing for audiences beyond your classroom serves not only as a great motivator for students, but also demonstrates that you believe others will find value in their writing.

As the new editor for the "Student to Student" column, it is my hope that it will continue to serve two important roles—as a useful tool for teachers who want to encourage students to share their love of books with a wider audience, and as a place for students to celebrate their work as writers. This is a great starting place for teachers and students who are new to publishing because the submission process is simple, and the book review format is either already familiar to your students or can be taught within a reasonable amount of instructional time. Just imagine the classroom publishing celebration you will have when your students are published authors!

Getting your students started with book reviews and publishing is straightforward, even if you have never done it before. When I work with my student writers, I prefer to serve as the facilitator, providing samples of work that they can use to search for patterns and features that should be included in their own writing. You can begin by gathering samples of successful submissions to the "Student to Student" column. Previous columns are readily available on the NCTE website at www.ncte.org.

Next, provide copies of the columns to your students. Have them work alone or in small groups to read the reviews and identify the common qualities of accepted submissions. As a whole-class activity, chart the features of suc-

cessful entries that students are able to identify, adding in any elements that they may have overlooked.

Provide students with your own scoring rubric for the assignment, making special note of the specific elements that should be included in the review (as described in step 3 of the guidelines below). Have all of your students write a book review, and then select the 3–5 reviews you believe are best and submit them. You may even want to have students vote on which reviews to submit during a classroom publication celebration. Before you know it, many of your students' favorite books will be reviewed, and your students will be celebrating their success as writers!

Guidelines for Student Book Review Submissions

Teachers, we are asking for your help in maintaining prompt responses and high-quality reviews by establishing guidelines for submissions:

1. **Screen your students' book reviews**, submitting those you feel are most powerful, interesting, and unique. Send only 3–5 of the best reviews per semester. Teachers, not students, must submit the reviews. Please submit reviews as a Word attachment to vmstudenttostudent@gmail.com.
2. **Keep an eye on upcoming themes.** We like to use books that touch on the topic of the issue. Upcoming themes include intervention, writing, and new literacies.
3. **Make sure the review contains complete bibliographic information** (title, author, publisher, year of publication, number of pages, price, and 13-digit ISBN). Use reviews from a current issue as reference.
4. **Include your own name, preferred email address, and school address.** We respond to students through the teacher who submits the reviews.
5. **Aim for 200 words**, including bibliographic information and child's name, grade, and school. Longer reviews, if accepted, will be edited to fit.
6. **Have students keyboard or type their reviews**, if possible; this will allow for ease of reading and may encourage students to take greater care with their prose.
7. **Check back editions!** We only review a book once every three years, so scan recent copies and use the index of reviewed titles that appears in each May issue.
8. Most of all, **tell the students to express themselves.** We want to hear about books kids love—great books, powerful books, books they want everyone to read (or not read). Speak up! We're listening! It is rewarding, indeed, to know that students around the country are reading, writing, and sharing their love of books. Thank you for including us in your literacy circle!