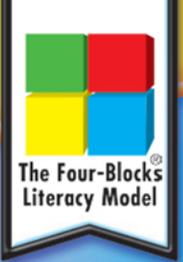


Grades K-6

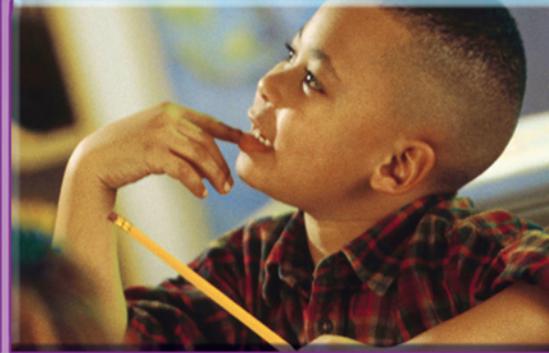


Writing the Four-Blocks[®] Way

The Four-Blocks[®] Literacy Model Book Series



Includes ideas for kindergarten and upper grades!

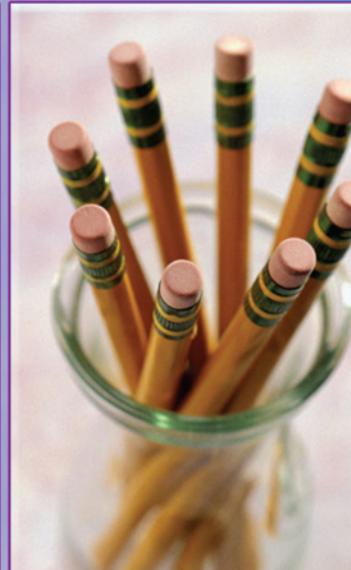


Features ideas for:

- ◆ Setting up a classroom for the Writing Block
- ◆ Getting students to write and keep writing
- ◆ Helping students learn to read through writing
- ◆ Providing extra support for struggling writers
- ◆ Teaching students a variety of writing genres
- ◆ And more!



by Patricia M. Cunningham
James W. Cunningham
Dorothy P. Hall
Sharon Arthur Moore



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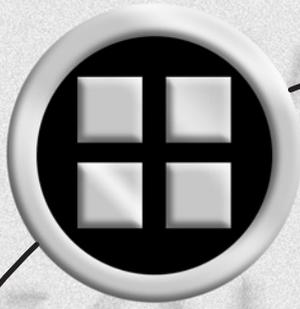
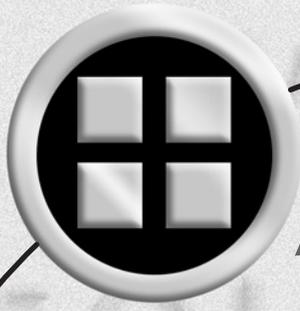


Table of Contents

Chapter 1	A Peek into Classrooms Doing Writing the Four-Blocks® Way	4
Chapter 2	What Is Writing the Four-Blocks® Way?	22
Chapter 3	How Do You Get Students to Write and Keep Writing?	40
Chapter 4	Editing—Fixing It!.....	61
Chapter 5	Revising—Making It EVEN Better!.....	79
Chapter 6	Conferencing—Whatcha Got for Me?	101
Chapter 7	Sharing and Publishing	116
Chapter 8	Genres—What Kinds of Writing Do Children Do?	143
Chapter 9	Focused Writing	158
Chapter 10	How Do You Provide Extra Support for Struggling/Reluctant Writers? .	178
Chapter 11	A Peek into Classrooms Later in the Year	205
Chapter 12	Why Do Writing the Four-Blocks® Way?.....	219
Professional Resources		234
Children’s Works Cited.....		237



Chapter 1

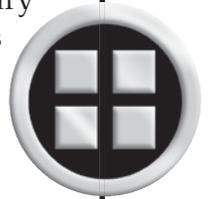
A Peek into Classrooms

Doing Writing the Four-Blocks[®] Way

In Four-Blocks[®] classrooms, the Writing Block always begins with a mini-lesson taught by the teacher as she writes for the children, followed by the children writing and the teacher encouraging them or conferencing with them about their writing. The block ends with a brief period of sharing. This chapter will give you an idea of what the Writing Block might look like “early in the year.” Exactly what happens in each classroom during the Writing Block may be different depending on the class, grade level, teaching style, and time of the year.

This chapter begins with an imaginary trip to Fourblox Elementary. Tom Baldman is the reading/language arts supervisor for a large school district that includes Fourblox Elementary. Tom has helped all of the schools in his district implement the Four-Blocks[®] framework. His goal for the school system is good, balanced reading/writing instruction for the entire school district at all grade levels. Tom previously taught kindergarten, first, and fifth grades. He is comfortable in classrooms and knows the teachers and the administrators, having grown up and taught in this school system. Tom also has become quite an expert at writing since he learned about the Four-Blocks[®] framework. He realizes that some young children really learn to read in the Writing Block! He also has noticed that children who write daily seem to do better on the state-mandated tests. Tom is accompanied on this visit by Margaret Wright, a reading resource teacher at another elementary school in the district. Prior to this position, Margaret was a Four-Blocks teacher at Fourblox Elementary. Her expertise is in writing instruction. She took a workshop titled “Writer’s Workshop” several years ago and since then has become a quiet but effective local writing leader. This year, she is teaching a semester-long workshop on writing for teachers in the school district. Tom and Margaret will go into many, but not all, of the classrooms today. The focus of their visit is to watch the Writing Block and see what should be included in the upcoming writing workshops Tom is sponsoring for different grade levels and which Margaret will be teaching.

First, Tom and Margaret stop by the office to greet the principal, Claire Leider. Claire has recently been nominated for a “Principal of the Year” award. The three of them talk a little about the backgrounds and training of the teachers who will be observed. Most of the teachers know about writing instruction from their Four-Blocks training and followed up on this training by reading the *Writing Mini-Lesson* books written by Pat Cunningham, Dottie Hall, Denise Boger, Debra Smith, Cheryl Sigmon, Sylvia Ford, and Amanda Arens. “Here is your

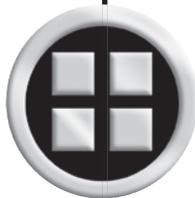


schedule for today,” says Claire, handing Tom a piece of paper with times, teachers, grade levels, and classrooms. Tom and Margaret will be spending the day at this large elementary school with time for only a quick lunch. The busy schedule puts a smile on both Tom’s and Margaret’s faces. They know they will be observing some of the best teachers at this school, who are also some of the best Four-Blocks teachers. They both feel they are sure to learn some new ideas that will help them help other teachers and students. Here is what their schedule for today looks like:

Time	Teacher	Grade Level	Room No.
8:30–9:00	Bea Ginning	Kindergarten	Room 4
9:00–9:35	Deb Webb	Grade 2	Room 25
9:35–10:05	Cece Southern	Grade 1	Room 11
10:05–10:40	DeLinda DeLightful	Grade 2	Room 22
10:40–11:20	Amanda Amazing	Grade 3	Room 33
11:20–12:00	Randy Reid	Grade 4	Room 44
12:00–12:30	Lunch	(get lunch in cafeteria/eat in the office area)	
12:30–1:00	Joe Webman	Grade 1	Room 10
1:00–1:30	Kendra Garden	Kindergarten	Room 3
1:30–2:15	Will Teachum	Grade 5	Room 50
2:15–3:00	Susie Science	Grade 3	Room 30

8:30–9:00 Bea Ginning Kindergarten Room 4

As Tom Baldman and Margaret Wright walk down the hall and around the corner, they come to the kindergarten classrooms. Tom shares with Margaret that Bea Ginning had a wonderful first year teaching kindergarten. Tom tells Margaret that last year Bea loves teaching “Building Blocks,” the Four-Blocks kindergarten model, and reminds Margaret that Bea knows the Building Blocks model well, having learned it in college and having student-taught with a wonderful Building Blocks teacher. As Tom and Margaret enter Bea’s kindergarten class, they slip quietly into the back of the room, almost unnoticed. The children are gathered in a “big group” on a colorful carpet with Bea sitting in a rocking chair and the children sitting in four little rows in front of her. The calendar is to the left of the big group and can be seen by all. Both Tom and Margaret watch Bea finish the calendar and weather. They are about to watch Ms. Ginning as she writes a morning message for children. Early in kindergarten, the emphasis in writing in Building Blocks is putting down on paper what you want to tell. Teachers write daily morning messages and tell the children what will happen in school that day. They also write predictable charts. Later, the teacher will do some interactive charts and interactive writing when the children are ready and most of the class knows what writing is and can use letter/sound correspondence to “write.” Early in the year, Building-Blocks teachers show the children different ways in which they can write. The teachers model “driting” and let children drite (draw and write). They encourage every child’s attempt, acting as both coach and cheerleader. At this stage of learning to write, young children do not need an editor!



When teachers write a morning message, they provide a model for writing. Children need to know how people think as they write and what they do when they write. As the children watch Bea and listen, they begin to understand what they are to do when they are asked to write later in the year. Young children learn many skills, such as riding a bike or swimming, by first watching someone else. This happens with writing when they watch a teacher write the daily morning message. Morning message is one of the most powerful ways for young children to understand what writing is and how people think as they write. For children further along in their literacy learning, watching the teacher write a morning message can move them quickly toward independence in writing.

Bea Ginning has a large piece of lined, manila paper clinging to the white board with two colorful magnets, one in each of the top corners. (Plain or lined paper could also be used.) She places the paper at a comfortable level for her to write on. With a large, black marker, Bea begins to talk and write.

Dear Class, (“Dear, Capital D-e-a-r, space, Class, Capital C-l-a-s-s, comma”)

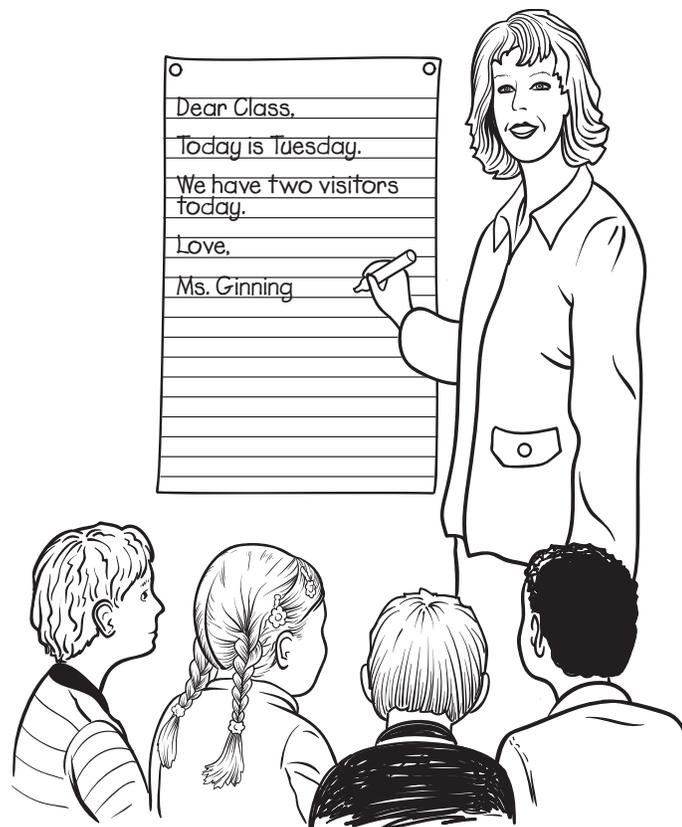
Today is Tuesday. (“Today, Capital T-o-d-a-y, space, is, i-s, space, Tuesday, Capital T-u-e-s-d-a-y, period.”)

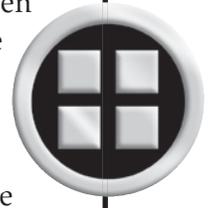
We have two visitors today. (“We, Capital W-e, space, have, h-a-v-e, space, two, t-w-o, space, visitors, v-i-s-i-t-o-r-s, space, today, t-o-d-a-y, period.”)

Love, (“Capital L-o-v-e, comma”)

Ms. Ginning (“Capital M-s, period, Capital G-i-n-n-i-n-g”)

Bea writes and talks about what she is writing in her morning message; she lets her students know what she is writing and why she is writing it. Bea is doing all of the work, and the children are just listening and learning what to do and why. When Bea finishes the message, she asks her kindergarten students to count the sentences (2), to count the words in the first sentence (3), and to count the words in the second sentence (5). Then, Bea asks the children which sentence has more words (the second). Next, she asks students to count the letters in the first sentence (14) and to





count the letters in the second sentence (22). Finally, she asks which sentence has more letters (the second). Bea does all of the counting with the children to find the correct answers, then calls on a child to answer her questions. “You’re right!” she says. “The second sentence has more words and more letters than the first sentence.” In another week or so, she will ask individual children to do the counting and call on those who can do the task easily. Then, she will call on the children who need more help with counting. This gives her a chance to assess individual students, and it gives students who need a little extra practice that opportunity.

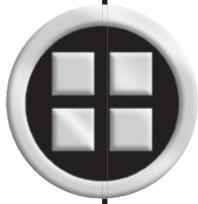
Ms. Ginning also talks about the morning message by asking, “What day did I say it is?” (Tuesday) “What letter did I write at the beginning of Tuesday?” (T) “What else did I tell you in my message today?” (We have two visitors.) “Do we have two visitors?” When many of the children turn around to look at the visitors, Bea stops to introduce Mr. Baldman and Mrs. Wright to her class. Bea then lowers the message to the children’s level and asks them, “What do you notice about the morning message?” The children talk about Today and Tuesday in the first sentence starting with capital “Ts” and two and today in the second sentence starting with small “ts.” One student tells Bea that he notices she always starts on “that side” (pointing to the left) and goes “that way” (pointing to the right)! When Bea asks what words they can find, the students raise their hands for the opportunity to come up and circle **Dear, Class, we, love, Today, today, Tuesday, and is.** They have had all of these words in previous morning messages, and these words have become familiar words to some students already.

As Tom leaves the classroom, he shares with Margaret how last year Ms. Ginning had the best kindergarten writers in the school because she waited until after a few weeks of morning messages before asking the children to write by themselves. By then, ALL of the children knew what writing was, regardless of their experiences before entering school. Tom and Margaret left the classroom talking about the importance of writing for children.

9:00–9:35 Deb Webb Grade 2 Room 25

Tom and Margaret are on schedule as they enter Deb Webb’s second-grade classroom. The children are all sitting on the carpet with their knees and noses pointed at Mrs. Webb, who is standing in front of a white board. Mrs. Webb is ready to write. Since it is early in the year, her second graders need to work on building the habit of using the Word Wall every time they write. Mrs. Webb has decided to model using the Word Wall as the focus of her writing mini-lesson today. She thinks aloud, “What should I write about today? I could write about walking along the shore of the lake this weekend with my family. I could write about taking Andrew and Ashleigh to the grocery store. Or, I could write about my dog, Quincy. I know; I will write about our latest trip to the grocery store.” Deb thinks aloud, talks, and writes:

Last night, I went (“Went is on the Word Wall. Who can tell me what color went is? When I want to write went, I look at the Word Wall and copy it, because Word Wall words have to be spelled right!”) to the grocery store with (“With is on the Word Wall.”) Andrew and Ashleigh. (“Our family rule is that each child gets to pick one treat.”) First, Ashleigh picked cookies. (“Cook rhymes with look, so I can use the Word Wall word look to help me with the beginning of cookies and add ies.”) In the snacks aisle, Ashleigh picked up potato chips, so she put away the

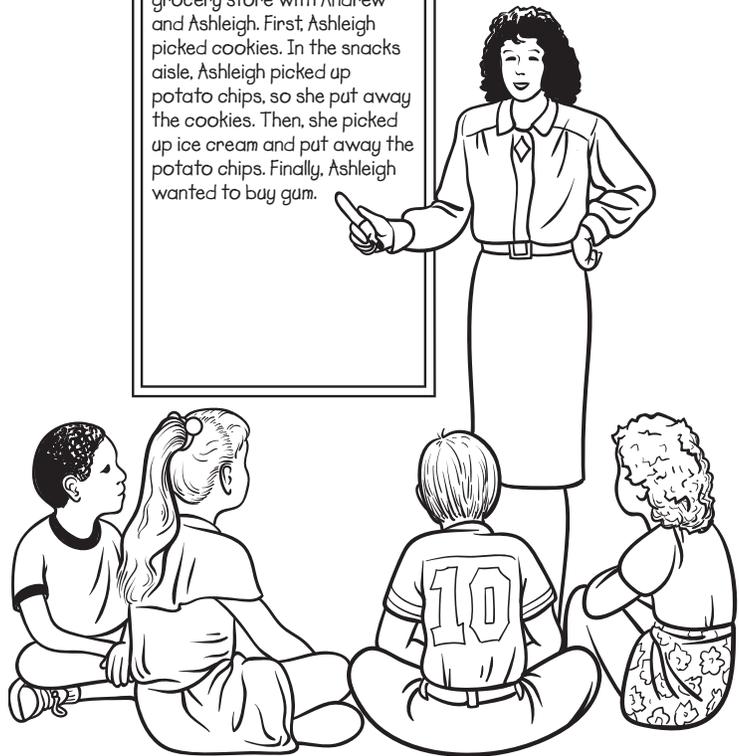


cookies. Then, (“Then is on the Word Wall.”) she picked up ice cream and put away the potato chips. Finally, Ashleigh wanted (“Wanted is on the Word Wall.”) to buy gum. She returned the ice cream so that she could get the gum. Andrew waited in the checkout aisle and bought peanut butter cups. Ashleigh left with (“With is on the Word Wall.”) gum. As usual, she just had to touch some (“Some is on the Word Wall.”) other things first! (“First is on the Word Wall.”)

Deb reminds her students, “Since many of you are waving your hands to tell me your own grocery store stories, why not tell me on paper, and write your stories for me to read?” She sends them off to write, saying, “As you are writing today, remember to use the Word Wall to spell Word Wall words and rhyming words.” The children return to their seats and begin to write. They know they can finish previously started pieces, and some children do just that; other children begin new pieces about the grocery store or other topics of their choice.

Deb roams around the classroom making sure her second graders are on task writing and using the Word Wall to write words correctly. She helps a student who has spelled a word wrong see how the Word Wall word could help to spell the word correctly. Mrs. Webb then moves on to another desk nearby and conferences with another child, David, pointing to two Word Wall words that are misspelled and reminding him that Word Wall words have to be spelled correctly even in a first draft. Another student is sitting there thinking but not writing, so Deb goes over to him and asks what he is thinking about. He tells his teacher that he remembers going to the grocery store before a snowstorm. It was crowded, the milk was almost gone, and there was an empty shelf where his favorite kind of bread was usually found. His mother bought wheat bread, not white bread, and he found out he liked wheat bread even better than white! “You have a lot to tell us, don’t you?” Deb asks. “How are you going to start the story?” When he tells her his beginning sentence, she tells him to write it down and smiles. Deb then “oohs” and “aahs” over how well a few other students are writing. Margaret notes that Deb has spent the writing time encouraging 10 or more children and having three different conversations with children who were nudged forward in their literacy learning!

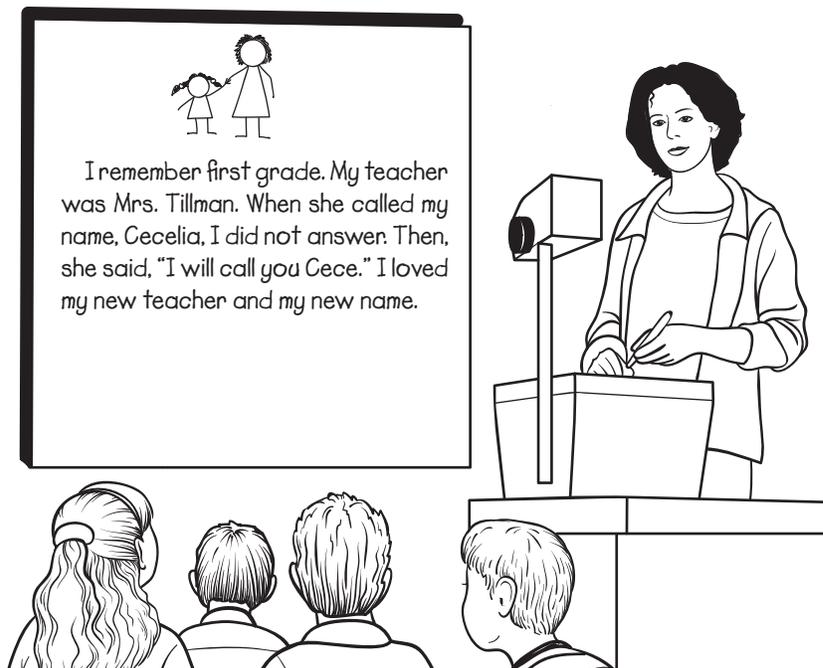
Last night, I went to the grocery store with Andrew and Ashleigh. First, Ashleigh picked cookies. In the snacks aisle, Ashleigh picked up potato chips, so she put away the cookies. Then, she picked up ice cream and put away the potato chips. Finally, Ashleigh wanted to buy gum.

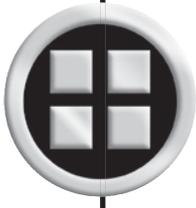


9:35–10:05 Cece Southern Grade 1 Room 11

Cece is gathering up the children in front of the room around her overhead projector as Tom and Margaret enter and find two “big chairs” waiting for them in the back of the room. They sit and watch as Cece begins to talk to her students about what she will write about today in her mini-lesson. “Today, I could write about my two daughters; I’ve told you about them before. I could write about the new car my husband wants to buy and tell you about all of the magazines he is bringing home with pictures and information about new cars in them. Or, I could write and tell you about me when I was in first grade like you. That’s what I think I will write about today—me in first grade! I am going to tell you about the first day in first grade when my teacher, Mrs. Tillman, called the roll, and I did not know my first name was Cecelia. You see, my family had always called me Sissy at home, so I thought that was my name. Then, Mrs. Tillman said, ‘Cecilia! That’s much too big a name for such a pretty little girl! How about we just call you Cece?’ And I have been Cece to my friends ever since. I still think of Mrs. Tillman and how she helped me that day.” First, Cece Southern draws a simple picture of a woman and a little girl. Then, she talks and writes:

I (“I begin my sentence with a capital letter, and I is always a capital letter when we talk about ourselves.”) remember (“That’s a big word, I have to stretch it out to spell it: re-mem-ber.”) first grade. My (“I begin my sentence with a capital letter.”) teacher was Mrs. Tillman. (“Names begin with capital letters, so we need one at the beginning of Mrs. and one at the beginning of Tillman.”) When (“I begin my sentence with a capital letter.”) she called my name, Cecelia, (“Names begin with capital letters.”) I did not answer. Then, she said, “I (“I is always a capital letter.”) will call you Cece.” (“Names begin with capital letters.”) I (“I is always a capital letter.”) loved my new teacher and my new name.





Cece tells the children they can go back to their seats and continue the writing they started yesterday. Or, if they want to start writing about new things today, they can return to their seats and write about themselves, or school, or anything else they want to tell about. Mrs. Southern begins by wandering around the room and chatting with a few students about their writing. She then sits at a table on one side of the room and calls children over, one by one, to conference with her. The children know to bring their writing folders over to Mrs. Southern. She looks at any papers in the folder that have been started since the last time she visited with these children. All of the children are prepared to read or tell about what they wrote or the pictures they drew. The children seem to love this special time alone each week with their teacher to talk about their writing.

On his way out of the classroom, Tom remarks to Cece that he remembers when first graders at this school, for the most part, could not write early in first grade; some children did not even write later in first grade! Cece says she, too, remembers and adds, "Since we began doing Four Blocks, the children are both reading and writing better, and teaching is certainly more fun, too!"

10:05–10:40 DeLinda DeLightful Grade 2 Room 22

As Tom and Margaret enter the classroom, DeLinda DeLightful greets them. "This is the block my second graders look forward to each day; we all love to write!" she informs her visitors. The children are also entering the room now, having just returned from physical education on the playground. They sit in their places on a colorful carpet. Mrs. DeLightful goes over to her overhead projector and sits in front of it. DeLinda seems delighted at what she will tell the children today and then write for her mini-lesson. "I am so excited about what I will write about today. I've wanted to tell you my news all morning, but I waited until our writing time, because that is when I usually share something about my family, my friends, or what we are doing at school. Today, I have the best news so far this year. This weekend my son, Zach, got engaged! He is going to get married. I am so-o-o excited! Watch as I write about this for you." DeLinda then talks and writes on an overhead transparency at her projector:

My son, Zach, is getting married. ("Let me stretch that out and spell it: **mar-rie-d.**")

I am so excited! ("Let me stretch that out and spell it: **ex-ci-ted.**")

Then, she puts down her felt-tipped pen and says, "Well, that's it. I'm finished." The children have a look of surprise on their faces; they want their teacher to tell them more. Many little hands go up, and the children begin to ask some questions. "Who is he marrying?" one student wants to know. Another child asks, "When is he getting married?" Each child DeLinda calls upon has another question; "Where is he getting married?" "Will we get to go to the wedding?" "Will you be a bridesmaid?"

DeLinda is pleased that they want to know more. "You have lots of questions, just like I do when some of you don't write enough and I want to know more. We have talked before about how a good story tells us who, what, where, when, and sometimes why. Did I do that in my story?" she asks. She then returns to her writing and tells the children the answers to their questions as she writes more.