

# *AUTHORS ARISE!*

## *Discovering and becoming the author you are*

A weekly workshop for fourth or fifth graders  
on non-fiction writing

By Author/Publisher  
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### Purpose

*A 9-week program for fourth or fifth graders—challenging, exciting, creative, and fun—to bring out and develop the natural writing abilities of each student, to help them see the value of interesting and accurate content in any piece of good non-fiction writing, to improve and significantly add to the skills each has already developed, to prepare them for the writing tasks ahead in school and adult life, and to inspire them to realize that writing can bring pleasure now and throughout their lives.*

### Approach

In my years of doing school assemblies, workshops, and residencies I've observed that students are empowered and inspired when I regard them as working authors and take their efforts as seriously as I take my own, treating each piece as a work-in-progress to be shaped until it gives satisfaction and pleasure to the writer and makes sense to, communicates to, and pleases the reader. I also have learned that the best way to improve as a writer is to write and then write again.

This 9-week series will give the students techniques, ideas, clues, and tips for writing any kind of non-fiction. The object is to give them a working knowledge of how to approach any writing task and to enhance their basic writing skills by asking them to write constantly in a spirit of adventure, discovery, and growing confidence.

In summary the approach is: write often, make it interesting, think about it, share it, get feedback, and then write some more.

### Classroom Visits

I will meet with each fourth grade class for an hour every week for nine weeks (preferably on the same day) and present a different aspect of non-fiction writing. In each session, using an interactive approach, I will talk about what I've experienced and learned, ask questions about the students' own experience as writers, give tips, give examples, suggest approaches, answer questions, and do brainstorming.

### Weekly Writing

Each student will write an essay each week. This weekly piece will be an exercise using the ideas, skills, or techniques discussed in class that week. The assignment will be

interesting and appealing. This writing will not happen during the classroom hour, but during other school time or at home.

I will read each paper and give written reactions to each writer. Thus each student will write something and receive feedback on it every week. I will not grade the papers but will focus on such questions as: What is really good about the piece? What could you do to make it even better?

### Writing basics

I don't plan to emphasize spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, sentence structure, etc. Instead I will comment on all of these in such a way as to show why they are important, not in some arbitrary way but for giving clarity and style to good writing.

### Presence at the school

After the classroom sessions each week, I will spend the rest of the day at the school, reading the written pieces and giving feedback.

### "Family" theme, final project, and hardbound book by each student

The theme for these weekly assignments will be the student's family, and these short essays will build toward a large final essay about the family. This final essay, these shorter essays, and other material will be edited, rewritten, and gathered into a family history that will be made into a hardbound book at the end of the 9-week program.

This will be a major effort with several sessions devoted to planning, writing, editing, rewriting, designing, laying out, illustrating, and then making the book. This will represent the student's best work and will be a proud reminder of all he or she has accomplished throughout the year. Each fourth-grade class will in effect become a small publishing company, so each classroom will choose a name and will publish the books under this name.

### Collaboration with teachers and staff

I will meet with the fourth-grade teachers, the reading or curriculum specialist, and other staff members before the program begins to plan how it will fit into the schedule and curriculum for the year. The program can be adapted to fit the needs and goals of the school. I'll work closely with the teachers throughout the series monitoring the students' progress, adapting and fine-tuning the content of the sessions, reacting to the student's weekly writing, and preparing for the book-making. I don't see myself as the resident expert, but as one who enables and compliments the skills of the staff.

### Why fourth graders

By the fourth grade, students have developed their writing skills enough to be able to benefit from this kind of intensive experience. They are mature enough to focus on the tasks. In Illinois, there are no standardized tests given in fourth grade.

### Evaluation

At the end of the nine weeks I will ask teachers to compare each student's writing at the beginning with his/her work at the end to show the student's progress. I will also ask teachers for candid feedback on the whole program.

## NINE-WEEK SCHEDULE

Week #1: “Authors Arise”—**Assembly**  
*An introductory program to affirm the students as writers, show them what it’s like to be a writer, give them an overview of the ideas and activities of the nine-week series, encourage them to believe in their own powers of expression, and inspire them to write.*

“The power of looking.” **Classrooms**  
*Good writing starts with good observation. Pay attention to what you see, hear, and feel. Lots of examples of things to notice. Examples of good observation in good writing. How to look. What to look for. The power of the “telling detail.” How to approach any kind of non-fiction writing. Introduction to a simple “Writing Organizer.” How to construct an essay.*

**Writing:** Write an essay about where you live. Here are some questions and suggestions to get you started. What does your place look like from the outside? How big is the house or apartment building? Describe the trees and flowers. What is the street like? Is there a park nearby? How far is it to the store? Tell about the inside of your house. Describe your living room. Describe your room. Are there any neat nooks and crannies in your house? Is there anything weird? Which room does everyone hang out in? Which room do you hang out in? What smells do you notice? What kind of stuff is lying around? Is the TV on most of the time? Is it spooky at night when the lights are off? Does the sun come flooding in in the morning? What do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell? What do you feel? Write it all down. Emphasize the “telling details.”

Week #2: “The power of hearing” – listening and interviewing  
*Interesting writing captures the sounds, the revealing comments, the peculiarities, and the unique expressions of people. What to listen for. What people like to talk about. Pay attention to how people talk—their slang, their exclamations, their funny sayings, their jokes, the things that make them angry. How to ask good questions. How to keep people talking.*

**Writing:** Write an essay about how people talk in your family. Listen to family members talking. Write down what they say. Do they use funny expressions? Write those down. Sometimes family members get angry. What do they say when they do? What do they say when they are happy? What do they say to tell you they love you? What do they talk about to each other? Do you have nicknames for each other?  
Also work on the final draft of the essay from last week.

Week #3: “The power of true stories”  
*People love stories, not just made-up ones, but true ones—stories from the past about family, stories about danger, stories about funny things that happened,*

*stories about trips and adventures, stories about things that were hard to do, stories about family feuds, stories about how mom and dad or grandpa and grandma met.*

**Writing:** Interview family members and write an essay in which you tell family stories. Interview your parents. Ask them when they were born and where. Ask them if your grandparents ever told them stories about when they were born. Ask your parents what happened on the day *you* were born. Ask when your family first came to the United States. Ask your parents to tell how they came. Ask if there are any funny stories about things that have happened in your family. Ask if there are any sad stories. Make notes on what you learned in these interviews. Then write about it.

Also work on the final draft of the essay from last week.

Week #4: “The power of finding things out – Part 1” – the library and the internet  
*Good writing has in it interesting and accurate facts. Facts answer the questions who, what, where, and when.*

**Writing:** Write an essay about your family name. Find out where your family name came from. Find out how many people have the same last name you have—in Schaumburg, in Illinois, in the United States. Is there anyone anywhere in the world who has exactly the same name you have? What does your family name mean?

Also work on the final draft of the essay from last week.

Week #5: “The power of finding things out – Part 2” – documents and images  
*Good writing is based on things that really happened, and “documents” prove they really did happen. What are documents? Birth certificates, marriage licenses, letters, old diaries, deeds, old bills, old telephone records. Good non-fiction writing is also often accompanied by pictures—old photos facsimiles of documents, old sketches, etc.*

**Writing:** Write an essay about what you learned about your family. Look at old documents. Ask your parents if you may see your birth certificate. Ask if you may see their birth certificate. Ask if you may see their marriage license. Ask if they have any old diaries by grandparents or great grandparents. Ask if they have old letters. Ask if they have any really old newspapers or magazines. Ask if they have a deed to your house. Also ask to see old family pictures or old drawings. Even clothes from an earlier time can tell you a lot. Ask if you may make photocopies of the old pictures and documents.

Write about what you learned from these old documents, old images, and old things. What facts did you find? What surprised you? What can you say about how people in your family lived in a different time. What did you learn from the old photos? How was the clothing different? How did the people look different? Or how were they the same?

Also work on the final draft of the essay from last week.

Week #6: “Organize your questions and thoughts”  
*Using the “Writing Organizer” (in a more advanced form than the earlier version), prepare to write a long essay on your family. First choose a big idea or theme—what is the main thing you want to say about your family. Then list at least three other points you want to make. Then list the facts you want to use, list the great quotes you want to use, list the stories you want to tell. And list any pictures, drawings, or photocopies of documents you want to include.*

**Writing:** Begin writing the story of your family. Don’t hurry. Take your time. Let the ideas rise up in you. Trust that they will. But don’t stop either. Just go ahead and write even if you don’t feel inspired. Don’t worry about getting everything right. That will come later. Write as though you are telling your best friend about your family.

Week #7: “How important is rewriting”  
*Examples of using just the right word. Examples of adding extra detail to make something clearer. Examples of changing a sentence so it reads better. Fixing tenses. Examples of how cutting stuff out usually improves the piece.*

**Writing:** Continue to write, begin to rewrite

Week #8: “Designing your book”  
*Doing a layout. Putting pictures with words. Choosing fonts. Designing a cover. Doing the title page, publishing information page, and dedication page.*  
**Writing:** Finish your rewriting, gather all your essays, and your final essay, and any photos, drawings, etc., you want to put in your book. Get ready for book-making. Finish rewriting.

Week #9: “Making your book”  
*All materials will be prepared. The students in each class will watch a demonstration. Students will choose the colors of the endpaper and the covers. The pages and endpapers will be sewed, the binding reinforced, the hardbound cover made, the spine formed, the pages glued in, the spine crimped, each book pressed. The students will do everything but the sewing. When finished, each student will have a 7x10 hardbound book with a library-quality, side-sewn, reinforced binding, just like a commercially produced volume.*

Conclusion: “Book-signing party and big celebration! FOURTH-GRADE AUTHORS!”  
*Parents, family, other students invited. A photo could be taken of each student autographing the book he/she wrote. Refreshments. Books displayed. Some of the stories read. The students honored for their hard work.*

**BUDGET:** Call to discuss costs