



# LOW HANGING FRUIT

## The Good Work of Writing

By Jeannie Standal

Awareness of the mental health of children is having a desperately needed moment, although kids' mental distress is nothing new. School can be stressful, but can provide tools to buoy kids' mental health, too. Decades of research have shown that writing can help people process conflict or traumatic events from the past.<sup>1</sup> Even when it comes to class work, writing can encourage self-expression, boost self-confidence, and help kids explore complex emotional concepts.<sup>2</sup>

When considering writing for mental health, we mostly think of journaling. However, if journaling isn't your thing, and the thought of having a classroom full of kids journaling makes your eye twitch, read on! Creative writing can be beneficial for students' mental health, too. Writing fan fiction, original stories, poetry, graphic novels, or any other story format can help kids communicate their feelings, especially those who may not be so good at talking about them.

### Need a hook?

There are lots of local and national contests out there that encourage kids to write through prizes and challenges:

- For the K-3 crowd in the Idaho Public Television service area, IPTV holds the [PBS KIDS Writers Contest](#) each year from January to the 3rd Saturday in March.
- Got 8th graders? The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) runs the [Promising Young Writers Program](#) that accepts applications from Nov. 15, 2022 to Feb 15, 2023.
- Maybe you have Jane Austen fans in your high school. The Jane Austen Society of North America holds an [annual student essay contest](#) in which students can win scholarships.
- Of course, since it is November, we must mention NaNoWriMo, or National Novel Writing Month. The [NaNoWriMo Young Writers Program](#) even has support for educators.



For even more fun ways to engage students in writing, check out Links to More Learning!

<sup>1</sup> Hurley, Katie, LCSW. Writing as Therapy. *Psycom*, Nov 18, 2020 post. Accessed at <https://www.psycom.net/mental-health-wellbeing/the-healing-power-of-writing>. Accessed November 10, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Morin, Amanda. The Benefits of Journaling for Kids. *Verywellfamily*, August 7, 2021. <https://www.verywellfamily.com/the-benefits-of-journaling-for-kids-2086712>

## LINKS TO MORE LEARNING



### Story Pirates

Kids can submit a story to be adapted to become a play, movie, song, graphic novel, really anything. At the very least, every story submitted gets a little "Story Love," meaning it is read and the author gets a response from a professional writer.

<https://www.storypirates.com/>

### Storyboards

Students can use Storyboard creator at Canva to organize their thoughts and learn about sequencing a narrative.

[canva.com](https://canva.com)



## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS



### Sign up: NaNoWriMo for Young Writers

First, an adult (like a teacher or librarian) should set up an account with the [Young Writers Program](#) and set up your profile. You can provide as much or as little information as you like. Next, Take a look at the Educator Resources available to help inspire your group of young writers. Then you are ready to create your virtual classroom where you can monitor, read, and edit your young writers' work. To get the students going, enroll them in your class with a unique classroom code. There is even a permission form for those that should get parental permission for participation. Now, get ready for the next Great American Novel!

## DIGITAL TOOLS



### LearningExpress Library

LearningExpress Library is a comprehensive collection of test preparation tools, skill-building materials, and career resources.

Check out the English Language Arts Writing section under the Grades 4-8 Educator Resources and High School Student Centers for writing practice and tutorials.

<https://lili.org/dbs/learningexpress-library/>



