

The Polar Press Publishing Company

At Frost Elementary School, a publishing company run by kids publishes the works of budding young authors.

Last year at Frost Elementary School in Chandler, Arizona, we started a student-run publishing company—the Polar Press—as a natural outgrowth of our writing lab. With a “borrowed” Macintosh computer, our new endeavor now provides students K-6 with a place to take their stories to be published.

First, the Writing Lab

When we started teaching children in the writing lab, we sought ways to turn kids on to writing by demonstrating the natural link between the computer and successful written communication. The lab now consists of 12 Apple IIe computers located in the school’s media center. The beauty of using computers to teach writing skills is, of course, that the children can store their stories on computer disks and then make all the necessary changes with ease. The frustration and agony of rewriting are eliminated.

In the lab, students sit in comfortable surroundings where writing partners can exchange ideas as they revise and edit their works. Authors ready to share their stories sit in a special “author’s chair,” and an audience gathers to enjoy a reading. The writing process is closely linked to reading. Books, magazines, and newspapers are placed on a table to provide writing models and story starters. The class meets twice a week for one-hour segments. They listen to exemplary passages from literature and note the use of comparisons, colorful language, simi-

les and metaphors, and other writing techniques.

Each student starts his or her own writing adventure equipped with a three-ring notebook, paper, a sharp pencil, and a data disk. Children form learning groups that alternate between paper and pencil activities, directed writing techniques, and word processing and keyboarding skills. Their teachers take them through all the steps of the writing process: brainstorming, rough draft, revision, and editing. The students choose their own topics to write about, and we try to hold off on “red pencil” attitudes. Now, at the end of their writing journey, each student has a completed work ready for publication by the Polar Press.

The Polar Press Enterprise

When we decided to take our writing lab one step further into publishing, we won a local grant from an organization called Teacher Venture Arizona, which is designed to support grades K-12 with funds derived from local corporations. We used the money we received to purchase wallpaper for book covers, a saddle stapler, art supplies, and a notary seal to produce gold seals for literary awards.

We decided upon the publishing departments we would need to staff: revision, editing, illustration, layout, manufacturing, and typing positions. To fill them, we visited all the grade 4-6 classrooms to explain our objectives and outline job qualifications and the process of applying. We were looking for



Students who wanted to work for the Polar Press submitted applications along with teacher recommendations and parent signatures. Once “bired,” they began their training by “walking through” the process of publishing their own stories.

students who were dependable, artistic, and, most critically, cooperative.

Interested students submitted applications, which had to be accompanied by teacher recommendations. We also required a parent signature since the company met after school hours. When interviews and typing tests were completed, approximately 25 student positions were filled, and the Polar Press Publishing Company was born. Our most difficult task was writing letters of regret to students not hired, but we assured them that applications would be kept on file for future hiring. This eventually did come to pass as the company grew.

Learning By Doing

Our new staff began their training by publishing their own stories. They walked through the process as an author would, using a checklist so they would know the system when they started to help other students. We felt it was important for them to know the total picture. Each student was trained in all areas in order to help out whenever there was a back-up in any one department. Our manufacturers learned how to produce covers using cereal boxes and wallpaper. Typists familiarized themselves with the software—the program we chose was "Ready, Set, Go."

Layout was the most difficult aspect of the publishing process to teach. Pages that were imperfectly laid out and then passed on to the typists caused many problems. This year one of the new faculty advisors, Karlee Mauer, came up with a solution: to make mock-ups showing what the actual finished book should look like. Now we have example books from 1 to 16 pages long which we can pull out and examine for the proper page sequences.

Spreading the Word

With everything in place, we began making the faculty and the student body aware of our company. We provided teachers with forms for nominating a student's story for publication, which included dates for attending the Polar Press and a parent permission slip. The student council helped pur-

chase T-shirts for the Polar Press staff. Staff members created posters advertising our company and wrote and delivered announcements over the P.A. system.

Three teachers eagerly volunteered to work with the company: Joanna Curtis works with layout and illustrating; Karlee Mauer works with revision and editing; and Joy Woods oversees student funds from the sale of the books, as well as the carding for permanent placement in the school library. With their help, we have been able to separate the departments into three different areas, two of which are in the media center. Student staff members select their own "offices" within each area, including chairs for their "clients." Each department has a file box containing a folder for each staff member. When they report to work, they get their folders and go to their offices.

The Publishing Operation

The editor-in-chief of Polar Press is a 6th grade student. He greets new authors and assigns them to departments. New authors are brought first to the manufacturing department, where they select their book covers. The manufacturers produce the covers while the authors go through the next stages of publication. At the end of the process, the authors return once again to have the finished

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book glued into its cover. Actually, three covers and three books are produced: one copy goes free to the author, one copy goes to the library to be carded and cataloged, and the third copy is put up for sale. Frequently, the young authors purchase the third copy for a relative. One little boy ordered 15 copies!

Budgeting time for the Polar Press was a challenge. Other important activities at our school, like the student council, the computer club, and similar organizations, also had to be taken into consideration. We finally settled on Thursday as our weekly meeting day and decided to meet after school from 2:30 to 3:30. Of course, facilitators spend more than one hour a week with planning and press activities. Even the students feel that one hour isn't enough time, and many show up at recess to type, illustrate, and manufacture books. Some young authors choose to finish their illustrations at home, taking them in a traveling folder which we provide.

The Mentor Mentality

At Polar Press, we feel strongly about students' working together successfully and helping each other to learn. Staffers act as mentors. They work with the authors rather than take over for them. For example, the revisor has the author read the story to him. He or she listens to the story, compliments the author on its strong parts, and offers suggestions for improvement. If there is a disagreement, the authors are awarded the final say—it's their work. Each department operates in a similar manner. Authors have a choice of having an illustrator provide all, part, or none of the graphics for their story. The illustrators encourage the authors to do their own art work, offering to act as consultants. They know that years from now a book illustrated by its author will be more meaningful to the students and their parents than one illustrated by them.

Benefits We Have Reaped

In establishing the Polar Press, we sought to create an atmosphere that would foster self-esteem by giving

Picture This

If you know what it looks like but not what it's called, or you know what it's called but can't quite picture it, you may find the answer in *The Facts on File Visual Dictionary* by Jean-Claude Corbeil. Corbeil, a specialist in linguistic planning, has created a dictionary that allows the reader to look up an image to find out its name or determine the nature or function of a word that you may have heard but cannot visualize. *The Visual Dictionary* contains more than 3,000 illustrations, 25,000 words, and 85 pages of tables and indexes.

A wonderful resource for writers, *The Facts on File Visual Dictionary* is available from Facts on File, Inc., 460 Park Ave., S., New York, NY 10016.

young authors an audience to appreciate their work. And looking back over the last year, we see that the benefits run deeper than that. We gave the students the management, and they assumed the ownership of their company. Leadership qualities become increasingly evident among staffers as they experience the responsibility of being the authorities in their fields who have to use their skills to lead other students through the process. Their communication skills have improved. They have gained confidence by doing their jobs well.

The principal, the media specialists, the student council, and the entire Frost staff supported our efforts to make the Polar Press available to all 850 students at Frost School. Now our program is spreading: four other schools have asked us to help them establish publishing companies at their schools. We have a year of experience to offer them and all the enthusiasm that springs from a hard-won success. □

Jackie Cleveland teaches at Frost Elementary School, 1560 W. Summit, Chandler, AZ 85224. **Rosemarie Orlick** teaches gifted students at Frost Elementary School and at Pomeroy School, 1507 West Shawnee, Chandler, AZ 85224.

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