

Right now, many kids are being home schooled. Kudos to all the teachers that pivoted to adjust their curriculum so they could teach the kids while everyone is at home.

A suggested activity is working with the kids to write a book. This would be ideal for middle school kids that have learned the basics of grammar and have done exercises on good writing. A complete book is more of a challenge, but also can be very fulfilling. This activity sheet is designed to assist the parent or teacher that would like to encourage their kids to write a longer piece of fiction. It doesn't delve into spelling or sentence rules. Instead, I try to encourage the kids to be creative and to use the skills they have and apply them in a different way.

There are many different methods used to write a story. This paper is not the only way, but I have tried to make it accessible for pre-teens that haven't written a full book before. The process shouldn't be threatening and should be fun and encourage them to want to write. Feel free to adjust the steps as needed.

You might be tempted to start writing your story without going through the planning steps we have below. I caution against that. If you do, there's a good chance that you'll run into problems or the story won't go as well as you had hoped. I recommend going through each of the following steps as you will end up with a better story when you are done.

Step 1 Concept

The first step is getting a general idea of what the story will be. This usually is done by writing a sentence that is the basic idea of the whole book. Here's a couple examples. You may describe each movie a bit different, and that's absolutely fine. In fact, it's good practice to write out a couple stories and compare to other people's concepts of that same story.

An ill treated step-sister goes to the prince's ball and becomes the princess - Cinderella.

A young boy goes to a magic academy and encounters an ancient enemy - Harry Potter and the Sorcerers Stone

A girl that can control snow and ice almost turns evil but is saved by her sister - Frozen

Give it a try, find some of your favorite books, movies, or even TV episodes, and write a brief synopsis of the whole thing. Try to limit it to one sentence.

Now, do the same for your own story. Keep in mind, you don't want to tell everything that happens in the story or all the events. You want to give a very brief summary, one sentence. You may need to rewrite it several times. Share it with others.

Once you have the one sentence general concept, try to write a brief paragraph that describes the story. This is filling out the story a bit more. Don't tell all the events or everything that someone does. Keep it to a couple sentences that give a more rounded idea of the story.

For example, for Cinderella, you might write:

A young girl is left with her mean step-mom and step-sisters, who pick on her. When everyone is invited to the Prince's ball, the mean sisters rip up Cinderella's dress to prevent her from going, but Cinderella's fairy godmother gives her a new one and helps

her get there. At the ball, the Prince falls in love with her but Cinderella has to leave before the magic wears off and she leaves only a glass slipper. The Prince uses that slipper to find her and they live happily ever after.

Step 2 Beginning and Ending

Now that we have a general idea of the story, let's get a bit more written out for the beginning and ending. Why? Because it's important to setup the story at the beginning and it's good to have an idea of how you want it to end. That will make it easier to come up with all the chapters.

At the beginning, you want to introduce your main characters and present the problem. At the beginning of Cinderella we see her doing the work, the step sisters being mean, and Cinderella being nice to all the animals. NOTE - this is the Disney version of Cinderella I'm using.

At the end of Cinderella, we know we want the Prince and Cinderella to be together. Now, between that beginning and ending, there are many different things that can happen. The important part right now is to know how it starts and how we want it to end. Those will help shape our choices for the rest of the story. For every chapter and event you write, keep in mind how things started and how the character is at the beginning and then how you want it to end.

If, when the mean step-sisters ripped up Cinderella's dress, Cinderella would have attacked them, we wouldn't get the same story and it wouldn't be who Cinderella really is. She's the sweet girl that sings to animals, not the mean one that fights back. Because she's sweet, she's going to end up with the Prince, so instead of attacking the sisters, she gets upset and runs off crying.

Spend some time figuring out the beginning and the ending of your own story. It will help with the next couple steps.

Step 3 Pixar Pitch

You can look this up online, it's not a secret, but this is what the movie studio, Pixar, uses to help craft their wonderful stories. It is similar to our basic description we did above, but it's more guided. You could start with this when working on your story, but I like to save this until I have a better idea of what I want to do with the story.

The PIXAR PITCH is like a mad libs, except you fill it in with information on your story. The basic pitch looks like this:

Once upon a time, there was _____
 Every day _____
 One day _____
 Because of That _____
 Because of That _____
 Until Finally _____

What you want to do is fill in the blanks so that when you read it back it tells your basic story. You already know the first one and the last one because that's what you already put down for the beginning and end.

Then you fill out the rest so that it gives the main points of the story. Again, you don't want to fill in every detail, it should be very basic. For Cinderella, you might have this for the Pixar Pitch:

Once upon a time, there was a young girl named Cinderella

Every day she did the chores, took care of her stepmom and stepsisters, and sang to the animals

One day they were all invited to the royal ball where the Prince would pick out a bride

Because of that Cinderella helped the stepsisters get ready for the ball while the animals helped make Cinderella's gown

Because of that the mean stepsisters got jealous and ripped Cinderella's dress

Because of that Cinderella's fairy godmother created a dress and turned the animals into helpers so Cinderella could go to the ball

Because of that the Prince fell in love with Cinderella but she had to leave before all the magic disappeared

Because of that the Prince used her dropped slipper to look through the kingdom and find her

Until finally they went off together and lived happily ever after.

You may notice there are several "Because of that" sections. That's fine, you can put in more than just two of these. Put in as many as you need. Be careful that you don't add in sections that you don't really need. These plot points should be important to the story. If they aren't, you might want to consider taking them out.

Take a bit of time to come up with your Pixar Pitch for your story. Write it out similar to how we have Cinderella above. You can also practice with other books and movies you've seen. In fact, Finding Nemo is used quite often to illustrate how to fill out the Pixar Pitch.

Step 4 Plan out each chapter

Now it's time to fill in more details of the chapters. At this point, you really may want to dive in and start writing the whole book. I know it's difficult, but if you take just a bit more time to plan you will end up with a much better story when done.

What we want to do is plan out each of the main points of the story. This is everything that happens between your beginning and your ending. You want to have a progression of events leading up to your fantastic ending. For now, don't write all the details. You want just enough so that you can read this and tell what the story will be. This is usually called an outline, though you don't have to go into tons of details yet.

Chapter 1 will be your beginning. You can add a bit more information of what should happen in chapter 1, but don't write the whole thing out yet. Keep it to a couple sentences.

Take each other main point of the story and put down a sentence (like you've done before) of the main thing that happens in that chapter.

Chapter 1 - Cinderella's father marries a woman with 2 daughters and then dies. Cinderella becomes the servant to her stepmom and stepsisters, but is still happy and nice to her animal friends

Chapter 2 - Cinderella works on the chores while her stepsisters and stepmom sleep in. The animals try to help Cinderella with her chores. The stepsister and stepmom are mean to Cinderella about getting the chores done.

Chapter 3 - the king plans a ball so his son, the Prince, will meet his future bride, the letters go out to all the houses in the kingdom

Chapter 4 - The stepmom and stepsisters keep Cinderella busy by making her work on their dresses. Since Cinderella doesn't have time to work on her own dress for the ball, the animals work together to create a great dress for her using items the stepsisters threw away

Chapter 5 - When Cinderella shows her dress, the stepsisters rip it apart saying she stole the material from them, Cinderella goes to the garden to cry while her mean stepmom and stepsisters go to the ball.

I hope that gives you an idea of how to write this part out, with each chapter having a main idea or event that happens.

Step 5 Write your book!

This is it! Time to write your book. Take the chapter outline you made and write each chapter in detail. Add in the dialogue. Add the descriptions. Put in all the funny parts. Look at your outline and read over what you want for each chapter. Then write it out. Focus on one chapter at a time. The end of each chapter should lead into the next chapter. It doesn't have to be a cliffhanger, but there should be some flow. If you would have Cinderella making the sister's dresses and then the next chapter starts with her wearing her dress and they rip it up, it gets confusing. You left out the part where the animals put the dress together by using pieces the other sisters threw away. Don't leave out parts.

Take chapter 4 in our outline above. It says, "the animals work together to create a great dress for her using items the stepsisters threw away." That's a small bit of description.

The actual story has two of the mice sneaking around and trying to get items to the room. They sneak items past the cat while the cat tries to capture them. It's cute and funny and there is a lot of story in those scenes, but the outline doesn't tell everything. As they say, 'flesh it out.' Tell the story, keep the story moving along and interesting.

Each chapter can be as long or short as you want and as the story needs it to be. Don't add lots of extras just to make it longer. That tends to bore the reader, but you want to give enough that it stays engaging and interesting. I know, it sounds like double talk. This is one aspect of writing that is difficult to teach. Go read your favorite book and see how the author handles making a good story without boring you.

Finish!

There you go, your book is done! You might want to draw a picture for the cover, or have a friend draw a cover. If you typed it, print it out. Take all your pages and staple them together, with the cover the first page. You can even number the pages and put a table of contents after the cover. Then give it to everyone to read! Congrats, you are an author!

If you would like more writing ideas, I include a section with each story to prompt kids to write their own creative stories.

Check out a free short story - Clarise and the Night Show - <https://www.saschneider.com/books/clarise-and-the-night-show/>

You can also get book 1 of the Town Magician series available for pre-order at Amazon.