

Teaching young children to write a story is challenging, but there is fun in having learned how to do it well. Here are some guidelines for the writing educator to try.

One of the first things a young writer needs to know is that most of their peers tend to write incidents or pieces instead of a real story which is a complete telling of events with a beginning, middle and an ending.

From children's stories to the Bible and classics for all ages, well-told stories have three natural parts. Young writers can understand this better by use of a Triple O system of Objective, Obstacles and Outcome.

Objective stands for the beginning of a story. Obstacles represent the middle of the story and Outcome stands for the ending.

OBJECTIVE: At the beginning, writers need to present a main character who wants something. This becomes his goal or objective. Example: Boy wants a dog, so his objective is to get one. Students can give the boy a name and why he wants a dog.

OBSTACLES: In the middle of the story, students must consider what keeps the boy from reaching his goal? Young writers can think of parents' objections such as their place is too small, they don't have money to feed an extra mouth, they're afraid the boy will neglect his homework to play with the dog, etc. These are obstacles the boy must overcome to get his dog.

Writers need to show the boy trying to find answers to his mother and father's objections. Example: He'll get a small dog that can walk on a leash. He'll get a job cutting lawns or whatever he can to earn money to buy dog food. The boy promises he will do his homework before he takes the dog out to play, walk, etc. His parents agree that if he meets their conditions, and any other that might unexpectedly come up later, he may have a dog.

The boy is faithful and tries hard. He gets a used leash from a friend's father, but the boy finds it difficult to get any kind of job. He has trouble getting his homework done. But he struggles on and earns part of the money, but not all. With only a few days before the parental deadline, they announce that there's new city ordinance requiring all dogs to be vaccinated and wear a collar with tags. The parents can't afford that expense. Unless the boy can earn the extra money before the deadline, he has to give up the idea of a dog.

Crushed by this unexpected news, the boy frantically tries new places that might hire him for all he still needs. He is only partly successful. Just before the deadline set by his parents, the boy thinks of a last possible way to overcome his parents' final objection.

He runs to a small neighborhood grocery store owned by an elderly man. The boy offers to sweep off the front walk each Saturday all summer for enough to buy the dog license. The aging man tells the boy he will think about it, but not to get his hopes up. This is a terrible time for the boy. His dream of having a dog seems impossible.

On the afternoon of deadline day, the boy is feeling really miserable as he arrives home from school. When his parents return, he will have to tell them that he failed to raise enough money. Then he decides to not wait for the store owner's call, but to run back and get his answer. The man tells the boy he was going to call to say he would let him sweep his walk. He also gives the boy an advance to show good faith.

OUTCOME: The boy runs home just as his parents pull into the driveway. He joyfully tells them that he now has all the necessary money. His parents praise him for being so diligent, and since he met their conditions, he may have a dog. A happy ending concludes the outcome.

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CLASS ASSIGNMENT: Each writing student is to bring to class an outline for a story about something they know. Then in class they may critique each other's story idea to see if it has all the necessary elements. That includes a beginning with a character wanting something (Objective), a middle showing Obstacles that keep him from reaching his goal, which tells how it turned out in the end. (Outcome).

Perhaps students may want to make a small book of their own as a collection (anthology) of their stories. Some modest awards might be given to students whose stories are in the class book.

Teaching young students how to write a complete story and have fun doing it has its own reward for all concerned. Perhaps someday one of those students might write a real book and have it published. Encourage them all, and keep them writing.