

Being a Writer to the Rescue: One District's Response to Virtual Teaching

By Stephanie Milligan | Categories: Writing

In March 2020 school districts across the United States announced closure, and teachers left their classrooms at the end of the day without resources, initially believing that they would return mid-April. However, teachers and district leaders quickly realized that they were going to be teaching remotely for much longer than anticipated. To adjust to this new reality, educational leaders designed instruction to support the needs of teachers and students in this unknown virtual teaching world. One district in the Mid-Atlantic quickly realized that they needed to provide online language arts instruction. This is their story, as told by their English Language Arts Coordinator, Stephanie Milligan.

We took inventory of our most readily available resources. All elementary teachers in Kindergarten through Grade 5 had digital access to *Being a Writer* on Collaborative Classroom's Learning Portal. The *Being a Writer* Poetry unit was a perfect unit to teach.

This was an uncertain time for educators. We needed a resource that would help our students find their voice and express their fears, joys, and concerns. We wanted our students to write from their hearts. We chose to teach the poetry units in *Being a Writer* in our elementary schools.



Literacy coaches provided asynchronous poetry lessons from the poetry units in *Being a Writer*. These lessons were available to students and families at any time convenient to families. Recognizing that conferring is the heart of writing instruction, classroom teachers met one-on-one and in small groups with their students to give guidance and celebrate writing.

Teachers posted the asynchronous poetry lessons each week. Students enjoyed talking about their ideas for their poems and were overwhelmingly willing to share their writing during Google Meet sessions. Some teachers even created video presentations of their students' writing.

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The Language Arts office received many emails from teachers and parents about the success of the poetry lessons. The students enjoyed the experience of writing about their feelings during this time and sharing their work with their classmates.

Some students' poems were featured on the school system's website and local news outlets. Some teachers created video collections at the end of the school year of the poems as virtual celebrations. No doubt, in the future these collections will provide a time capsule of the emotions during this time of uncertainty in 2020.

This is a poem that was written by a 5th grade student in April 2020.

Quarantine

*Stuck inside
Nothing to do
We just want to go back
To what we are used to.
Nothing will change
Nothing is certain
Even the actors wonder
When they draw the curtain
Everyday is filled with worry
Nothing changes
It's like we are all trapped
In luxurious cages
Some people losing money
Some people becoming lazy
Wondering when they can work
Everybody's going crazy*

Learn more about the Being a Writer program and read a related interview with the executive director of the National Writing Project, Elyse Eidman-Aadahl.