



AMI-EAA Refresher Course 2016
Songs in the Key of ABC
Elise Huneke-Stone

Journal Prompts

Once a (mostly) faithful journal practice has been established, we can keep the work fresh for the children by offering some repetition with variety. One way to do this is to offer prompts or challenges. These can be written on the board as an (optional) prompt for the whole class, prepared as cards in a basket for children to choose from (and add to!) or suggested by the adult at the end of a presentation, etc.

Prompts/challenges can be loosely grouped in 3 categories, with lots of overlap.

Metacognitive prompts, those encouraging reflection and thinking-about-thinking and work habits:

- My biggest challenge today was _____.
- The most important thing I learned about ____ was _____
- I did my best work when I _____

Third period prompts, when the children actually make a statement of truth about something they learned or discovered. Because we don't dig up the seeds we sow in order to see what's growing, it is especially important that this kind of prompt doesn't become an assignment. Not all children are willing or able to articulate their discoveries immediately after a presentation or after a time of working on something. But being able to summarize one's work in words is a valuable skill, and the journal practice gives children daily opportunity to work on this skill.

- My favorite (and the easiest/ most productive) is when children start each journal entry with "Did you know...."
 - 8:45 Did you know that you can tell if a number is divisible by 2 by looking at the units category?
 - 9:47 Did you know that a banana is a kind of BERRY?
- Other third-period prompts include:
 - I discovered _____
 - We learned _____
 - We wanted to know if _____
 - Our experiment showed _____
 - Our research suggests that _____



Playful Prompts, and/or prompts that arise out of the children’s language work. See also “Journal Challenges” handout for more of these language-based prompts. When children chose these prompts, they often used the prompt for a whole week, extending the repetition and focus. Remember that keeping the Learning Journal is a daily writing work in our classrooms; sometimes this might be the only writing a particular child does in a day, so it carries a lot of significance.

- Write all the verbs in your journal in red this week!
- Try to use an infinitive (an adjective, a prepositional phrase, a metaphor, a gerund, an abstract noun...) in every entry!
- Use a color in every entry! Now use the thesaurus so you don’t repeat any color words!
- Use alliteration in every entry.
- Use gel pens to highlight capital letters (or whatever the focus is). Sometimes children will go back through the whole journal to highlight something they’ve just learned about, if there are gel pens involved.
- Make your decoration reflect something you learned about today.
- Write in calligraphy, a code, hieroglyphics, the semaphore alphabet (this happened once in my classroom; I never would have thought of it, but that child did).
- Change all the nouns to Spanish (or any additional language).
- Write only in complex sentences, or compound-complex sentences.
- Try not to use any articles (or the letter t, or any prepositions, or any form of the verb *to be*, etc.) The children will understand the importance of all of these things in a whole new way!
- Look at last week’s entries. What tense are the verbs in? Can you write this week in the future tense? How does that change what you do? Can you write in the past perfect tense?
- Can you use a comma (correctly!) in each entry? Can you alternate between question marks and exclamation points? Can you use a colon or semi-colon in each entry?
- Write about your day in the third person.
- Write about your day from the perspective of your pencil/your hands/your feet/your chair...
- Write your entry as dialogue with a friend, and you fill in your parts in their journal and they fill in their parts in yours.
- Invite two children to exchange journals and record each other’s work. Strengthen their observation skills and writing skills at the same time, and potentially build a new partnership.
- ABC for the day’s work. Date the page, make your alphabet, and fill in the time each time you add something after a letter. Or do it all at the end of the day as a memory exercise, if the recording habit is well-developed.