Writing Identity Activities

Below are several short writing activities created or collected by Liz Prather in her book *The Confidence to Write.* These activities are meant to help students talk about writing and see themselves as writers. As Prather explains:

> "Asking students to share their experiences with writing is beneficial because then both of you [the teacher and the student] have the knowledge of this experience. Students who acknowledge their anxiety about writing to their writing teacher feel seen and heard prior to 'performing' on the page. This declaration is freeing and refreshing to students who may feel isolated and insecure in their fears." -*The Confidence to Write*, pg. 71

Activity: Inventory of Emotions (pg 66-68)

- You will need:
    - Inventory of Emotions worksheet (below)
- Distribute Inventory of Emotions worksheet (could also be on a divided piece of paper and kept anonymous OR made digital)
- Ask students to consider what types of writing elicited those specific emotions.

Inventory of Emotions Related to Writing	
Think over memories you have of writing in school. What emotions or feelings often accompany these memories? Write down five emotions or feelings that surround memories you associate with writing for school.	Think over memories you have of writing outside of school. What emotions or feelings often accompany these memories? Write down five emotions or feelings that surround memories you associate with writing outside of school.

Activity: Gallery of Challenges (pg 69-69)

- You will need:
    - Butcher paper
    - Sticky notes
    - Paper

- Write a writing challenge on a piece of butcher paper. Choose from this list below (adapted from Cameron, Nairn, and Higgins [2009]) or have students generate responses; this could be easily tied from the previous activity. Positive statements like, "I feel proud of my writing" could also be added.
    - I have self-doubt.
    - I don't know how to start.
    - My ideas aren't worth talking about.
    - I struggle to find research.
    - I struggle to find the right tone and voice.
    - I don't know what to leave out and what to leave in.
    - I lack writing skills.
    - I lack writing confidence.
    - I fear being called out.
    - I fear being compared with other writers in the room.
    - I feel pressure to meet other people's expectations.
- Give students 3-5 sticky notes each. (Possible extension: Have them read the statements around the room and think of a specific memory they have with that particular statement and write it on the sticky note.)
- Have students walk around the room and place their sticky notes under the statement that reflects insecurities they've felt with writing before.
- Return to seats and reflect: what do they observe? Do they see any patterns?
- Finish the sentence stems individually:
    - Every writer…
    - Writing is always…
    - The challenges of writing are…
    - All writers are…
    - As a writer, I am…
    - As a writer, I am not…
    - After this activity, I see that…
    - After this activity, I understand that…

Activity: Naming People on Your Bus (pg 71-72)

- You will need:
    - Paper
- This activity is from Patricia Schneider's (2003) book *Writing Alone and with Others*
- Read the following excerpt to students:

  Imagine yourself on a wide stretch of prairie or desert. You can see all the way to the horizon, where a little road meanders along, winding, curving. It stretches from the horizon all the way to your feet. You are standing beside the road. Far, far in the distance, you see a bus coming toward you on the road. Let it come slowly. Perhaps there are heat waves that make it waver a bit at first. Let it come closer and closer until it draws up alongside you and stops. The door opens, and people come out one by one. Each person who gets off the bus is

someone who has an opinion about your writing. (Mother? Father? Sister? Brother? Sixth-grade teacher?) The loudmouths push off first. Let them off, one by one, and let each one say what is on his or her mind. Write it down. If you want, note how the person is dressed; write that down. After all the loudmouths get off, there are some quiet folk at the back of the bus. Let them off too. What they have to say may be entirely different. After you have written the speeches of the people on the bus, you may want to do a dialogue with one or more of them.

- Write about some of the people on your bus.
- After students write, Prather suggests having them reframe their negative experiences:
    - Can you apply the maxim "get curious, not furious" to this experience?
    - Can you interrogate the experience?
    - Can you make meaning from a negative experience?
    - Can you take what you can use from a negative experience and leave the rest to rot?
    - Did you learn to respect your own mind?
    - Did you learn to lean into your own process?
    - Did you challenge yourself to be more independent?

Activity: Claiming Your Mentors (pg 84-85)

- You will need:
    - Paper (possibly, if you want students to write this down)
- This could be a small group/class discussion or a writing activity, or a combination of both.
- Preview this activity with students that it is about thinking of yourself as writers.
- Here are three prompts. You can use all three or have students pick one or more.
    - Think back over your reading life. Are there books that have formed your identity, books that are part of your "textual lineage"? In *The African-American Guide to Writing and Publishing Nonfiction*, Jewell Parker Rhodes writes a whole chapter on the importance of literary ancestors, the writers who are like your literary grandmothers and grandfathers. Who are your literary ancestors? What writers have you learned from and enjoyed? Why do you claim them as your ancestors?
    - Think back over your writing life. What teachers come to mind as mentors of your writing skill? Can you think of a particular lesson that a teacher taught that improved your writing? What other mentors have you had as a writer? Have you mentored someone in writing yourself?
    - David Sedaris said he found his voice by imitating other people, trying on the voices of Joan Didion and Raymond Carver, for example. "It's all part of discovering what you sound like. I think we all do that—we take a little bit of this, and a little bit of that, and we just kind of put it in a big kettle, and we find ourselves" (Strawser 2013, 46). What mentors have you found through reading? Are there writers you have imitated in style or voice? What mentor texts do you find yourself returning to over and over? Why?