

Play Doh and the Writing Process

You'll need:

1. Half of a 3-ounce can of Play Doh per student (If using the "fun size," a one-ounce can per student will work) Mix up the colors so students sitting together have different ones.
2. White paper plates (the cheapest you can find)
3. 3"-x-3" stick-on notes, 4-6 per student

Getting Ready

1. Pair up students or put them in small groups.
2. Introduce the concept of the writing process to students. Explain that writers follow certain steps as they write.
 - Prewrite
 - Draft
 - Give and Receive Feedback
 - Revise
 - Edit
 - Finish/Publish
3. Tell students that they will use Play Doh to create unique sculptures, following the steps in the writing process.

Getting Started—Prewriting, Drafting, Giving and Receiving Feedback

1. Hand out the Play Doh. Give each student a little less than half a can of one color, or a whole can of the "fun size." Reserve a small amount of each color for use later in the activity. Ask students to work the Play Doh as they discuss what they might create. Encourage lively conversation about the possibilities. Play upbeat background music to set a lively tone. (3-4 minutes)
2. Stop the music. Refer back to the steps in the writing process and tell students they are prewriting at this point—deciding what they want to create.
3. Ask students to make something out of the Play Doh, using only one color. Tell them they can make what they talked about with classmates during prewriting, or something else. Restart the background music. (5-7 minutes)
4. Stop the music when most students have finished. Ask them to discuss what they created with their partners and fellow group members. Connect their creations to the "draft" stage of the writing process: when writers have an idea and get it down without worrying too much about the finished product. Point out that the feedback they get from peers helps them decide what they might do next. If you wish, take photos of the "drafts" with your smartphone so you can compare/contrast them to revised versions later.

Moving Along—Revising

1. Explain to students that they have started working on their Play Doh sculptures the way a writer drafts and then revisits his or her piece again and again it to make it even better.
2. Allow students to select from all the other colors of Play Doh you're holding in reserve and tell them to "revise" their work by:
 - Adding something using a new color. Play music and stop it before the second prompt. (2-3 minutes)

- Removing something. Play music and stop it when ready for the third prompt. (1-2 minutes)
 - Changing something (adding more color, texture, or detail, for instance). Play music and stop it when most students are finished. (3-4 minutes)
3. Discuss how the sculptures changed from the draft stage to the revision stage. If you wish, take smartphone photos of the revised sculptures to compare/contrast them to photos of their drafts. Ask students which version is more interesting for the viewer and which one they prefer. Help them understand that when they revise their writing, they are making it richer, clearer, and more interesting, not to mention capturing their personal point of view.

Moving Along—Editing

1. Explain that editing is another important step in the writing process. The reason writers edit is to clean up the writing so readers can understand the message. They check their spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar and usage.
2. Ask students to “clean up” their sculptures by putting back into the cans any loose, unused pieces of Play Doh and then tidy up their work space.
3. Tell them to come up with a title for their sculpture and write it on the paper plate. Be sure they use the conventions of title writing: capital letters and correct spelling.

Giving Feedback

1. Give each student 4-6 stick-on notes and ask him or her to circulate the room and leave supportive and constructive feedback for fellow Play Doh artists alongside their sculptures. Tell them that their notes must be:
 - written in complete sentences.
 - positive.
 - specific. They should not write: “Good job,” “Well done,” “Love it,” “Way to go,” and so on. Ask student to help you brainstorm a list of elements they might respond to, such as color, texture, imagination, creativity, clarity of vision. You might also suggest they write questions and note any surprises the piece evoked.
2. Allow time for students to circulate the room and leave their notes. Be sure to work right alongside them so your comments help guide their own comments. Play upbeat music. (5-7 minutes)

Wrapping It Up

Discuss with students:

1. How the sculptures matured and improved through revision.
2. How specific feedback is more helpful than generic comments.
3. What they have learned about writing process from this activity.