

# THINKING OUTSIDE THE BOOK

by Jill Castek and  
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## Inviting Students to Become Authors Online

The Internet has transformed the way today's students read, write, and communicate. Readers are no longer consumers who simply appreciate books. They are also producers who actively respond by sharing opinions of what they've read and crafting their own stories in a similar style. The Internet has made it possible for writers to reach a wide audience almost instantaneously. In many classrooms we've visited, writing for an online audience increased students' motivation to revise and edit their work so that virtual readers can grasp the ideas they want to communicate. Instructional activities that make use of the Internet turn writing into an experience that is enjoyable, real-world, and social.

Encouraging students to write about what they've read is a powerful way to make important connections between reading and writing. This column introduces several ways to promote writing using safe, student-friendly Web sites. Activities include crafting digital stories, posting book reviews, and reading and contributing to e-zines. Participation in these activities invites responses from students around the world, which in turn increases comprehension and leads to a deeper appreciation of the ideas found within books.

### Digital Stories

Extending opportunities for students to publish their writing provides an authentic and immediate purpose for



**Make powerful connections between writing and reading with these safe, student-friendly Web sites featuring e-zines and more.**

writing. The sites below publish students' original work and support active reading as well as writing.

### Kids' Space

International Kids' Space is a safe, commercial-free environment for students 13 years old and under. The site features engaging ideas for classroom collaborations. Look in the Beanstalk School Pot section to find teachers who have created projects and are looking for collaborators. Don't miss the Story Book section of original works created by kids around the world. Here, students can read or submit original stories, produce on-air concerts, present art projects, and play games.

One of the most popular projects on Kids' Space is Global Story Train. This section promotes progressive storytelling and invites students to collaboratively complete an illustrated story made up of three "story cars." Students can create a car from scratch or add on to a story already in progress.

### Poetry at PBS Kids

Marc Brown's Arthur books are among the most popular texts for students in elementary grades. Arthur's friend Fern has her own online poetry club. This Web site teaches students about poetic forms and provides a forum for poetry reading and writing. The submission directions are easy to follow and include prompts to help students create original poetry. Every day, Fern picks a poem from those submitted and publishes it online. The excitement of learning which new poem will be unveiled each day will encourage multiple visits from budding writers.

### Kidscribe

Kidscribe: A Bilingual Site for Kid Authors invites students from around the world to write stories and share their opinions about important ideas. The most recent prompt asked kids to explain what peace meant to them. It is exciting to scroll through the responses from all over the globe. A wide variety of original student stories are available in both English and Spanish.

### Book Reviews

Online book reviews are a great way for students to share favorite books with their peers. Contributing to these sites invites students to exchange ideas about books in much the same way we do in face-to-face book clubs. Writing a character sketch, plot overview, or alternate ending are all ways kids can participate.

## WEB CONNECTIONS

For links to all of the sites discussed here, visit the *Book Links* Web site at <http://www.ala.org/booklinks> and click on "Web Connections."

### Bookhooks

Bookhooks is a free Web site designed for school, library, or home use. Here, students respond to books in writing or through illustrations. The designers of this site describe Bookhooks as "dynamic" and "organic," a place where collaboration between students can take place in an authentic writing environment geared toward spreading enthusiasm for reading.

### Just for Kids Who Love Books

Created and monitored by a savvy retired librarian, Just for Kids Who Love Books features book reviews for kids by kids, as well as discussions about today's most popular titles. Students do not need to register or have an e-mail address to submit reviews, read, or participate in the discussion threads. This engaging site for kids ages 8 to 14 is as fun to read as it is to post on. It's a must-read for students who are looking for book recommendations.

### E-zines

E-zines are online magazines that appeal to student readers and writers because of their interactivity and reader-friendly format. Unlike traditional magazines, e-zines are available free online. Many popular magazines, such as *Time for Kids*, *National Geographic World*, *American Girl*, and *Ranger Rick*, have e-zine companion sites. For a complete listing of e-zines for kids, visit the SuperKids Directory or the Baltimore County Public Library's e-zines pages. Reading these online magazines introduces students to a new genre and opens up new possibilities for publishing original pieces.


### KidsWWwrite

Sponsored by the Kalamalka Institute for Working Writers, part of the English department at Okanagan College, KidsWWwrite is an e-zine

for kids under 16. A wide variety of stories and poetry are selected for publication each month. Reading selections from KidsWWwrite may encourage students to improve their writing to achieve the goal of being published.

### ZUZU

Another full-feature e-zine to which kids can contribute is ZUZU. This site offers a wide variety of literary and artistic genres. Categories include neighborhood reporting, interviews, Broadway reviews, mysterious stories, poetry, creative writing, and courageous kids.

If you are looking to make reading and writing connections, visit these featured Web sites. By introducing new outlets for sharing original stories, poems, artwork, book reviews, and opinions, you will help students make important connections between reading and writing. In the process, they will learn essential new literacies that stem from becoming authors online. 

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