

GET EMOTIONAL!

by

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Good writing calls on a writer's innermost thoughts and feelings. And when working on composition, I've found that it pays to get emotional when working with kids. Here's how it works. On the chalkboard (or substitute) I write the word anger and ask, "What makes you angry?" Kids will answer: "When someone steals my lunch." "When we get weekend homework." "When somebody picks on me." I answer "Now about that lunch--that would make me angry, too. This is what I'd do." I stamp my feet, gnash my teeth, scowl, and shake my fists.

"What am I doing?" Kids are quick to respond. "You're angry! You're shaking your fists." I try to help them describe what else a person who is angry might be experiencing.

Then students are asked to pretend that they are playing with a friend at home. Your friend breaks a lamp and races home. Your father comes running in and yells, "You careless clumsy oaf! No TV for a month – and you'll pay for a new lamp with your allowance!"

Kids are then encouraged to write about how they would feel in this situation by considering these questions: What sounds do you make? What do your hands do? Your stomach?

An exercise such as this, calling on a strong negative or positive emotion, is a good way to remind students that fine writing is rooted in a writer's experience and emotions. It also lends itself to consideration of the need for careful use of specific details. Try getting emotional in your classroom for real writing results!