

## Procedures for Implementing Dialogue Journals

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**1. Collect information about each child.** I give a form to students entitled “Who are You?” On it, they tell me 5 things about themselves that I cannot find out on my own (through records or obvious things like what they look like). I send out a parent questionnaire and may use information from there too. They can also ask me questions on the “Who are You?” sheet. We discuss “appropriate” questions, but I answer almost anything. There are many other ways to collect information on students. Do what feels right for you.

**2. Decide on a journal.** Each student decorates a notebook (composition or spiral) with pictures, images, words and materials of their choice. Most students use pictures, which make the books look so sweet and individual. I learn a lot about them simply by the way they decorate their journal. They can use a store-bought journal also.

**3. Write the first letter.** I write the first letter, structured in correct letter format with the date in the upper right corner, and “Dear\_\_\_,” to begin. I choose to end each letter with “Love, Ms. Galarza.” In the letter, I try to make connections with them, writing about the things we have in common and weaving in my answers to their questions.

**4. Return the journals.** I return all books at the same time and I enjoy watching the class read my letters. Then they are told to write back. You could give them time in class or ask them to do it at home. Stagger the classes so you do not have all the books back at the same time. Respond to student letters and watch the magic happen.

### Some Suggestions

**5. Privacy.** I discuss the issue of privacy, telling them that the information in the journal is private unless I feel that they are unsafe in some way.

**6. Collection.** Since I teach in a middle school, I collect books in trays that are labeled by period. There is a checklist posted near the tray and they check off their name when they hand it in.

**7. Response.** When I write back, I try to match the approximate length of the student’s letter. This is less intimidating but maintains conversation. I write in a style that is a good model for *that* student.

**8. Questions.** Keep the conversation going! Try not to ask too many questions, but if the conversation has stalled, you may **have** to. Always attempt to extend the *student’s* ideas, providing brief anecdotes that might parallel a situation that the student is experiencing and include some self-reflection. This goes a long way!

**9. Corrections.** Do not correct or point out errors in spelling or grammar, but try to model spelling, grammar, sentence structure and organization in your own letter. I use their misspelled words in my own letter and spell them correctly. Do the same for grammar and sentence structure errors.

**10. Storage.** The journals are stored in my room, but kids are permitted to take them home to write in if they want to.

**11. Submissions.** Students are allowed to hand in the journals as often as possible, and I get them back to them as quickly as I can. Some kids will write daily. The more frequent the exchange, the more benefits that are seen.

**12. Grading.** Content and correctness of the journals are ungraded, but there can be an expectation of how much writing is done. You can assess whether the students have used the journal in the way it was intended: to explore thoughts and communicate through regular writing.