



## Featured Teacher: Karen Wright

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### Cast of Characters

Fourth grade students in Kennesaw, GA.

### Background and Setting

Wright has taught fourth and fifth graders for almost her entire career and currently teaches fourth grade English Language Arts. Wright has been creating published authors for 24 years with Studenttreasures.

### Memorable Learning

"One of the most rewarding parts of creating this Legacy Project through Studenttreasures is when former students come back to visit or find me on social media to tell me they still remember creating our classroom."



**"The definition of 'legacy' is the long-lasting impact of a particular event or action that took place in a person's life. I believe that creating published authors does just that!"**

## Two Decades of Published Authors

"I have been using Studenttreasures' books with my students for 24 years. Over the last 12 years, my school has been departmentalized, so I teach English Language Arts to two classes. During that time, both classes have completed the project, giving more students the opportunity to become published authors.

It all began as a way to encourage students to find a love for writing poetry but evolved into our class 'Legacy Project.' Each year during our poetry unit, I would teach the many different forms of poetry: Haiku, rhyming, acrostic, free verse and more. The form that seemed to intrigue my students the most was free verse. I think they were drawn to it because it really has no rules."

## Bursting with Color

Wright's classbook writing process is unlike any other. This is to be expected of a teacher who has been working with Studenttreasures for over 20 years! There are some amazing ideas that any teacher can implement into their own classbook project.

"Every year when I introduce the idea of the Legacy Project, the students jump out of their skin with excitement. We begin the brainstorming process with one color word. For example, we might begin with the color yellow. I talk with the kids about thinking of nouns, adjectives or verbs that remind them of yellow. In their notebooks, the class makes an extensive list of words related to that color. Their ideas and vocabulary always blow me away!

After brainstorming four different colors, I model for them a process they can use to jump start their poems. Then, I simply let them fly! Each student is required to write at least one poem for each color we brainstormed, but most students take off and write multiple for each color. Students become so excited to share their work with me and their peers. I am constantly impressed with their word choices, voice and how they take their job as authors seriously. After multiple check-ins with students, I conference one-on-one with each child. When they come to the conference, I ask them to choose their favorite poem. Together, we read all their poems and decide on which one will be published in the book.



This is always an exciting and proud day for the class. Each student then types out their own poem and sends it to me to be reviewed and printed. Then the students proofread and edit one last time before the final print! Finally, we discuss the illustrations. The students really enjoy making their poems come to life on the page with a personal illustration.

As a class, the students brainstorm and vote on the title and dedication page. I also hold a cover contest for students to interpret what they feel the title would look like through an illustration."

## Reading and Writing Go Hand-in-Hand

"I always tell my students that when you become a better writer, you become a better reader. I have watched as students who were once reluctant writers become unstoppable. Several students have continued writing all forms of poetry simply because they have built up their confidence through this project. Students beg to take their journals home to continue writing or share with their families the work they have completed at school. They are more aware of their vocabulary usage, elaborating with details, figurative language in reading and thinking deeply about the world around them."

## A Healing Experience

Wright shares her experience of seeing her now grown-up students expressing their love for writing. "For many young children, writing can be intimidating. With so many rules in spelling, grammar and structure, students are often fearful to even begin because they are afraid it won't be good enough.

Several years ago, I had a student who struggled greatly to get his ideas on paper and lacked confidence in his writing skills. It took a lot of encouragement and individual work to help this child believe in himself, but once he did there was no stopping him. Another student, who had gone through a very difficult time, said that writing poetry and this project helped her heal."

## The Big Reveal

Wright has endlessly creative ideas for the day that she is ready to reveal the finished book to her students.

"The anticipation of 'Book Arrival Day' is like no other! I have delivered classbooks to students in several different ways. I have done an 'unboxing' with the whole class. I have put the classbooks up on each students' desk as they came into class that morning. I even hand delivered them to students' homes during the pandemic. No matter the fanfare, the students beam with pride. I always give them time to explore the classbook with each other and share in their successes. This is by far the best part of the process.

## Planning is Key

"The advice I would give to a teacher who is considering creating a classbook with Studenttreasures is to have a plan and map it out. Remember, mistakes are a part of learning and growing. There will be errors in student work, kids will draw pictures upside down...just go with the flow. The Studenttreasures staff is amazing and will help you in any way they can. I know this from firsthand experience. Just go for it!"



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