



Featured Teacher: Crystal Hodges

"They were so excited to be published authors. They sat on the rug while I read each student's story, showed their illustrations and they gave each of their classmates a round of applause."

Cast of Characters

Second-grade students in Goldsboro, NC.

Background and Setting

Hodges has been a teacher for 21 years.

Memorable Learning

"I noticed when students write about what they like or what they are familiar with, they do better and are more motivated to write."



"It is one of my favorite activities to do with my students, and I look forward to it every year!"

Watching Ideas Spark

For Hodges, publishing a classbook has become a yearly tradition—one she has previously guided students through seven times. This year, her students weren't sure they had the capability of creating a classbook. Once Hodges showed them her classbook from previous year, it sparked their imaginations.

She said, "They had lots of great ideas for a book. It was really a challenge to choose just one topic!"

After careful consideration, they chose a topic that her second graders naturally gravitated toward, kindness.

"Each student had a page that they wrote [and illustrated] about how they are kind at school, at home or in their communities," Hodges shared.

Building Confident Writers

During small-group time at her teacher table, Hodges met with students individually to help them shape their stories and develop

their writing skills. She kept extra copies of the writing paper on hand and students practiced with pens before finalizing their pages.

As they approached the completion of their book, she could sense their determination. "When we began the actual process of finalizing their stories, most of the students were nervous," said Hodges. "I could tell that they wanted to do well and to do their best work."

Moments of Unexpected Growth

Some of the most meaningful transformations can happen quietly. One English Language Learner in Hodges' class, who had struggled earlier in the year to write letters, surprised everyone, including himself.

"He was so eager to write that he wrote four sentences for his story," said Hodges. "He kept wanting to write more and more...[this] was a huge accomplishment for him."

As her students created their pages, Hodges noticed improvement building, "when



students write about what they like or what they are familiar with, they do better and are more motivated to write.”

Perseverance Through Encouragement

One student, who had joined Hodges' class later in the year, struggled to feel connected with her classmates. She initially wrote about a sad memory when no one showed up to her birthday party.

Hodges saw a moment to connect with her student and asked if there was a positive moment from that day. After thoughtful reflection, her student remembered someone visiting after her birthday party to bring her a toy. The story evolved from sadness to resilience.

“It really taught a lesson about how you can find the positives in any situation, no matter how dark it may seem,” Hodges said.

A Celebration Worth the Work

When their published books finally arrived, Hodges planned her big reveal.

“My students cheered – they were so excited to be published authors!”

She shared how her class celebrated their kindness book. “They sat on the rug while I read each student's story, showed their illustrations and they gave each of their classmates a round of applause.”

At the end of the book, she added a personal touch—an entire page written in cursive, reflecting on all the ways her students showed kindness to her throughout the year.

“I felt like it was important to expose them to the art of cursive writing because not many of my students were familiar with it, so I thought it added a nice touch towards the end of the book,” said Hodges.

Advice to Teachers: Create Memories

Hodges shared many ways to create a memorable experience for her class to look back on and cherish. Author's Teas, read-alouds and crafts at her local library, she made it easy for her students to feel celebrated in big and small ways.

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