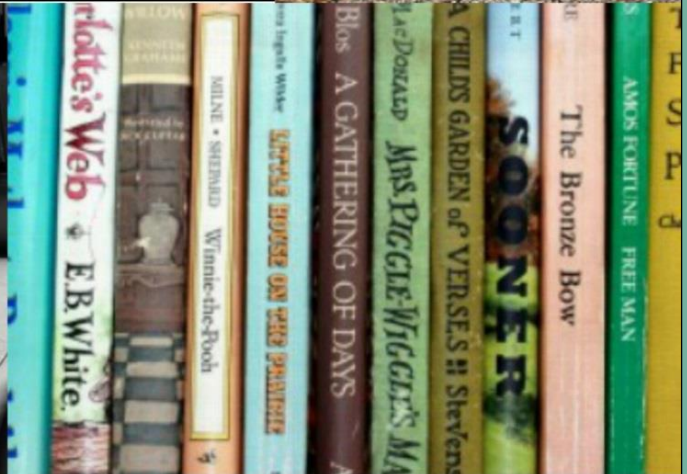




How to Write a **BOOK** **REPORT**

Kim Kautzer



Writing a Book Report

The very thought of writing a book report can send the bravest of writers into a tailspin. Words like “boring” and “hard” threaten to suck the breath out of a child who is asked to write one. And if your child isn’t much of a reader to begin with, the anxiety can mount even further.

“Do I *have* to write a book report?”

I get this. A traditional book report is hard work! It challenges kids to write about a book using not only recollection, but critical thinking skills as well. Children in the primary grades have more options for creative and often crafty book reports (see ideas at the end of the lesson). But as they get older, it’s important for students to know how to examine a book more critically.



This writing lesson presents easy-to-follow steps for teaching this skill to beginning book-report writers. It’s most ideally suited for children ages 9-12, but it can certainly work well for middle schoolers and young high schoolers who have never written more than a “this book is about...” type of report.

Definition

Let’s begin by defining what we mean by “book report.” A book report is a type of informative report in which students:



- Show how well they understand what they read
- Describe parts of the book
- Summarize the story by giving an overview of the book’s theme, plot, and/or main characters
- Give an opinion

PART 1: Pre-writing Exercises

Unlock the Mystery!

In a book report, it's helpful to write a summary or tell what happened in the beginning, the middle, and the end of the book. Before you assign the book report, play a game with your children to help them practice. Enjoy this fun activity together! There is no writing involved.

Advance Prep

Gather five or more favorite books that are very familiar to your children. The purpose of this exercise is practice a new concept, so choose picture books or very short chapter books, even if you have older students.

Make four bookmarks:

- Cut out four 2 1/2- x 8 1/2 -inch bookmarks from sturdy paper or cardstock.
- Label one bookmark: Beginning
- Label the second bookmark: Middle
- Label the third bookmark: End
- Draw or paste a picture of a key on the fourth bookmark.



Directions

1. Choose a book and open it to the beginning pages. Point out an interesting part that shows how the story starts. Place the bookmark labeled *Beginning* in this page.
2. Turn to the middle pages. Point out an interesting part that shows something important that happened in the middle of the story. Place the bookmark labeled *Middle* in this page.
3. Turn to the last pages. Point out an interesting part that shows how the story ends. Place the bookmark labeled *End* in this page.
4. Now pick up the fourth bookmark labeled *Key*.
 - When writing a book report, it's also important to understand what the author is trying to say in the story. What lesson is the author trying to teach? What moral does the author want someone to learn?
 - What you think the author was trying to say in the book? For instance, if you're discussing *There's an Alligator Under My Bed*, you could say, "I think the author is trying to say that when we face our fears, we can help them go away." Then look for a page in the book that supports this key concept. Place the *Key* bookmark in this page.
5. When finished, remove all four bookmarks. Pick up another book and repeat this activity. Invite your children to find the beginning, middle, and end of the book as well as share what they think the author is trying to say in the story.

Let's Talk Books!

As your children develop and gain important writing skills, it's helpful to guide them away from just "telling" the summary of a book and toward "talking" about it instead. Today's activity will give them

practice giving their opinion about what they think the author is trying to say. It will also give them additional practice sharing a personal story that the book prompted them to remember.

This verbal activity encourages kids to talk about books from the viewpoint of a writer. Participating in this exercise will help them gain confidence to write their opinion and personal experience later, during the actual writing lesson.

The goal is to develop conversations about books, a love for reading, and a joy for writing. There is no right or wrong. Opinions are opinions and are always welcome as a sign of your children's growth as writers.

Advance Prep

Gather five or more favorite books your kids know well. These books can be the same ones you used for "Unlock the Mystery!" or you may choose a different set for variety. If your child is likely to linger at the bookshelf for an hour, you may want to pick the books yourself. To facilitate better discussion, consider choosing books with which you are also familiar.

Directions

1. Explain to your children that giving an opinion about what the author is trying to say helps them look at the book from the viewpoint of a writer. Sharing a personal story that relates to the book also helps them become a stronger writer.
2. Have your child choose one of the books. Suggest that he thumb through it to help him remember what it was about. Ask him to think of the lesson or moral the author is trying to teach in the story (the importance of friendship or loyalty, for example, or how to be brave in a difficult situation). Invite him to share what he thinks is the key point the author is trying to say.
3. Next, ask him to think about the beginning of the book and share his opinion of what he thinks the author is trying to say.
4. When finished, ask him to think about the middle of the book and share his opinion of what he thinks the author is trying to say.
5. Finally, ask him to think about the end of the book. Invite him to share a personal experience that relates to the story in the book.
6. If several children are participating, repeat this activity with another child, choosing a different favorite book. Otherwise, feel free to repeat the activity with the one child.

PART 2: Brainstorming Exercises

Planning a Book Report

For this writing lesson, your child will write a five-paragraph book report. A younger or reluctant writer may not be ready to write five paragraphs. If this describes your child, it's fine to plan for a single paragraph containing a summary of the book's beginning, middle, and end.

Directions

1. Give your child the "Brainstorming for a Book Report" worksheet. Ask him to suggest a book he would like to write about for a book report. *Hint: It helps when you are also familiar with the book.*
2. At the top of the page, have him write down a title for the book report that includes the title of the book and the author's name.
3. Before writing down brainstorming ideas, your child will draw some quick, simple pencil sketches on his worksheet. This is not an art assignment—stick figures are fine!
 - **"Paragraph #1" box:** Invite your child to draw a quick sketch that shows the key point of the book. For instance, if your child is writing a book report about *Farmer Boy*, he could draw a barn to show that Almanzo chooses to become a farmer like he's always wanted, rather than do what others expect him to do.
 - **"Paragraph #2" box:** Next, ask him to sketch something that represents what happened in the beginning of the book.
 - **"Paragraph #3" box:** Instruct your child to draw a quick sketch to represent what happened in the middle of the book.
 - **"Paragraph #4" box:** Have him sketch something that represents how the story ended.
 - **"Paragraph #5" box:** Finally, have him draw a quick sketch that shows how he would like to wrap up his book report. For example, if reading that book inspired him to read other books in the series, he could draw a book.
4. **Introduction:** Write the title of the book on the blank line.
 - In the box along the right of Paragraph #1, invite your child to write the key point the author is trying to make in the story.
5. **Body:** As you plan the body of the story, tell your child to write key words or short phrases on his worksheet. Do not let him write complete sentences.
 - **Discuss the beginning** of the story. Ask your child to think of a word or phrase on the blank line that represents what happened, and write it on the line for Beginning in the Introduction.
 - **Discuss the middle.** Have him think of a word or phrase that represents what happened, and write it the line for Middle in the Introduction.
 - **Discuss the end** of the story. Have him think of a word or phrase that represents what happened, and write it the line for End in the Introduction.
 - Now move back up to **Paragraph #2**.

- Discuss three details about the beginning of the story your child would like to include. Invite him to write each of these on the blank lines.
- Discuss a way he could close that paragraph or transition into the next one. Write that idea on the line for Transition. (See the “Transitions” page for transition words he might use to connect paragraphs.)
- In the box along the right of Paragraph #2, invite your child to write his opinion about what the author is trying to say in the beginning.
- Move to **Paragraph #3**. Discuss with your child three details he would like to include about the middle of the story. Have him write each of these on the blank lines. Discuss a way he could close that paragraph or transition into the next one. Have him write that idea on the line for Transition.
 - In the box along the right of Paragraph #3, invite your child to write his opinion about what the author is trying to say in the middle.
 - To help him come up with an opinion, suggest one of these ideas:
 - I think that the key point of the story is _____.
 - One thing I would like to change about this story is _____.
 - I like/do not like the character named _____ because _____.
 - My favorite part of the story is when _____.
- Move to **Paragraph #4**. Discuss with your child how the story ends. Invite him to write this on the blank line for End.
 - In the box along the right of Paragraph #4, ask him to write down a personal experience this story relates to.
 - Discuss three details about this personal experience and have him write some key words on the blank lines.
 - Discuss a way he could close that paragraph or transition into the next one. Have him write that idea on the line for Transition.
- 6. **Closing:** For **Paragraph #5**, discuss how your child wants to end the book report. Ask him to write down the ideas on the blank lines.

PART 3: Writing the Book Report

Today your child will write a book report using five paragraphs.

- The **first paragraph** will be the introduction, and the first sentence will say the title of the book and state what the author is trying to say.
- The **next three paragraphs** will be the body and will tell what happens in the beginning, middle, and end of the book.
 - In the first and second paragraph of the body, your child will include an opinion about what the author is trying to say.
 - In the third paragraph, your child will tell a personal example that relates to the story.
- The **last paragraph** will be the closing and will wrap up the book report.

Here is an example of a book report.

Farmer Boy by Laura Ingalls Wilder

In the story Farmer Boy, the author is trying to tell you to choose what you want to do in life and not just what might look good for others to do. The story starts out with Almanzo walking through the frozen woods and snow with his older brother and sisters, but he is warm because he is wearing woolen clothes his mother made from the sheep his father raised on their farm. In the middle of the story, Almanzo works hard to train his calves to wear a yoke. And by the end of the story, Almanzo chooses to become a farmer instead of working as an apprentice to become a wagon maker. It was exciting to see what life was like on a farm so many years ago.

This book told about life on a farm in many different seasons, and the story started in the month of January, the coldest part of the year. I think the author is trying to show that no matter how bad the weather is, farming is still fun even if Almanzo's dad had to get up at midnight and chase the cows around to keep them from freezing. When Almanzo milked the cows, it was warm and cozy inside the barn. But the part of farming Almanzo loved the most, no matter what season, was the horses!

Almanzo was too little to have his own horse, but in the middle of the story, Almanzo had to train his calves, Star and Bright, how to wear a yoke. I think the author is trying to say that before we can do big things we want to do, we have to learn to do small things first, just like Almanzo did when he trained Star and Bright. He got frustrated when they didn't follow his directions at first. But then, after he was very patient with them,

Almanzo taught them to stop and go and turn left and right. Almanzo learned important lessons from this experience.

With all the lessons he learned about farming, Almanzo decided he wanted to be a farmer when he grew up instead of getting a job working in a wagon-shop. This reminded me of the time my own dad was growing up. His parents owned a farm that had belonged to our family for 200 years, but nobody was farming it at that time. So my dad decided to learn how to milk cows and raise pigs. Then when he grew up, he moved onto the family farm and became a farmer, just like Almanzo and his family.

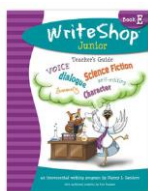
I liked reading Farmer Boy and learning all about chores they did and food they ate. I also thought it was interesting how they grew all their own food on the farm and even made all the clothes they wore. After reading this book, I want to read all the other books by Laura Ingalls Wilder, too.

Writing Directions

1. Allow your child to use the example book report, "Farmer Boy," as a reference while he writes.
2. Encourage him to refer to his brainstorming worksheet as he works so that he can include ideas he thought of and incorporate them into his book report.
3. Remind him to indent the first line of each of the five paragraphs and to skip every other line as he writes.
4. If he is writing by hand, teach him to underline the title of a book. If he is typing, he will not underline it. Instead, show him how to *italicize* the title.
5. A younger or more reluctant writer might feel overwhelmed by this assignment. To help him gain confidence and strengthen writing skills, invite him to write a simple summary of any length where he explains what happened in the beginning, middle, and end of the story. He does not need to follow the five-paragraph format if he's not ready.
6. An accelerated learner might enjoy the additional challenge of posting his report as a book review at an online bookstore site such as [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com). After he finishes his book report, show him how to post a book review online to share his valuable opinion of the book with others.



"Writing a Book Report" is adapted from a lesson in [WriteShop Junior Book E](#).



More Book Report Ideas

Your children may be too young to write a traditional book report. Or perhaps they need an additional challenge or simply enjoy combining reading and writing. If so, consider introducing some of these fun and even crafty alternatives to the regular book report. Any one of these would be a great way to commemorate Children's Book Week—or just use them to supplement your writing schedule at any time!

Picture Book Mail. Place a collection of favorite picture books in a basket. Ask your child to read one or more of the books and then write a letter to one of the characters. What could she say in the letter? When finished, have your child place her letter in a decorated envelope, with a sticker for a stamp. Later, you can respond to the letter as the character your child wrote to!



Book Report in a Bag. Young children might enjoy gathering objects in a paper bag that remind them of the story. Invite them to take out objects one at a time and tell how they relate to the book.

Book Report Mobile. Help your child to make a mobile by cutting shapes from sturdy paper. On the front of each shape, have her color a picture of a significant character or scene from the book. On the back, guide her to write a colorful description or brief character analysis. When finished, she can string each shape with yarn and dangle the papers from a wire hanger. This activity can be adapted to all ages.

Book Report Sandwich. Cut sandwich components from colored paper and make a book report sandwich! Follow [this link](#) for instructions.

Drama. Children can make or gather some simple props and act out their favorite part of the book. Alternatively, they can use puppets.

Diorama. Creative kids will enjoy making a model or diorama of a favorite scene from the book.

New Endings. Encourage a younger child to make up a new ending for a book. Older students can write a new final chapter.

Map It! Invite children to draw a map that shows all the places where the story took place. This is especially fun when it's an imaginary setting!

Poster. Encourage your artistic children to design a poster advertising a favorite book.

In the News. Acting as a journalist, your child can write a news article about an incident or important event from the book.

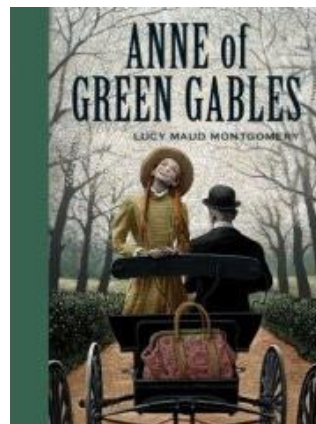
Character Diaries. Have your children create the imaginary diaries of favorite characters from books or novels they're reading. Whether they write as Wilbur the pig, Design your own diaries or buy inexpensive ones from the store.

Character Interviews. Invite your child to make a list of 6-8 questions she would like to ask a main character in a favorite book she has recently read. Once the list is made, have her write the character's

answers to each question. It's not a traditional book report, but the questions and answers should give evidence that your child not only read the book, but grasped its details.

Book Facts. After reading a book, have your student make a list of ten facts he learned from reading the book. Make sure he writes in complete sentences and includes new details and information he learned by reading. Title the sheet "Ten Facts about [Book Title]."

Theme Report. Ask your children to choose a setting, idea, or object from a book they just finished reading. For example, they might choose "spiders" after reading *Charlotte's Web* or "Prince Edward Island" after finishing *Anne of Green Gables*. Help them explore the subject using library resources or the Internet, and then have them write a short report about their chosen subject.



"Setting" the Stage. Where did the story take place? During what time period? Guide your child to search the Internet to find five websites that tell interesting facts about the story's setting. She can recommend these sites to friends and family members who might like to learn more about location and historical time period before they read the book!

Friend or Foe? Have your child choose three characters from the book and describe each one in detail. Would she want to become friends with them? Invite her to list her reasons explaining why or why not.



Books are meant to be shared! Each of these ideas helps your children demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a book and be able to invite others into their experience through book reports. Celebrate [Children's Book Week](#) all month long by incorporating several of these activities into your homeschooling!

Happy writing,

Kim

Are you looking for a writing curriculum that gives your children a wide variety of writing experiences, such as the ones I've been sharing here at SchoolhouseTeachers.com? If so, take a look at [WriteShop](#).

WriteShop Primary – Grades K-3

An introduction to early writing skills, [WriteShop Primary](#) gives young children tools to experience success as they develop the ability to write. Whether you have a more advanced child or one who is just beginning, this program's flexibility lets your young students work at their own level. Gently introduce writing through guided writing practice, favorite picture books, games, and crafty writing projects. Extra challenges appear throughout each lesson to keep the interest of a more advanced child.

"I am amazed at the progress my son made in such a short time. His ability to put his thoughts together in an organized way has improved dramatically." --Bonnie, TX

WriteShop Junior – Grades 3-5

[WriteShop Junior](#) eases your upper-elementary students into writing. Engaging games and activities teach and review important writing and self-editing skills while keeping it fun for everyone. Easy-to-use lesson plans help you lead and guide them through the steps of the writing process. WriteShop Junior exposes children to genre, fiction and nonfiction writing, and journal writing and introduces exciting new brainstorming and editing tools that truly motivate young writers!

"Every time I bring out a writing program, it ends in tears. Thank you for a writing lesson without tears!" --Pam, New Zealand

WriteShop I and II – Middle and High School

The flagship [WriteShop program](#) sets teens on a course for success, guiding them through each step of the writing process. Award-winning WriteShop takes the guesswork out of teaching writing. Assignments give students a chance to practice various kinds of writing, including creative, expository, and narrative. This course also teaches students important techniques of style and self-editing. Lessons focus on clarity, conciseness, colorful vocabulary, and sentence variety, with a strong emphasis placed on the editing process. With each lesson, students learn and practice new skills, apply them to their current writing project, and edit and revise the composition several times.

"I love WriteShop. I used to feel so inadequate teaching writing but now I am confident they are learning all the tools they will need for High School level writing." —Heather, Montana

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