The Bird Can Blog: Online Writing With a Twist

**Overview:** Students assume the persona of a real or imagined classroom pet and write a blog describing daily activities in the classroom.

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| Grade Level / Subject | 3rd-5th  
|-----------------------|----------  
| --Arts & Humanities  
| --Language Arts       |

**Objectives**
- Students will:
  - summarize classroom activities through descriptive writing.
  - submit written work on a timely basis.
  - write under the persona of a real or imagined pet.

**Materials**
- student access to a word processing program (optional).
- teacher access to the Internet.

**Standards**
- LANGUAGE ARTS: English
  - GRADES K - 12
  - NL-ENG.K-12.6 Applying Knowledge
  - NL-ENG.K-12.11 Participating in Society
  - NL-ENG.K-12.12 Applying Language Skills

**Procedure**

Blogs -- or Web logs -- are much like journals on the Web where users post their thoughts on a regular basis. Entries are dated and listed in chronological order starting with the most recent entry.

Check out [Elementary Blog Spot](#) for an example of a school librarian who uses a blog. Or, see [Blogging? It's Elementary My Dear Watson!](#) for a blog overview and more examples from the K-8 classroom. Because students love seeing what they create published on the Web, the blog can be a great motivating tool to push students in grades 3-5 to write more and better.

Begin this lesson by asking students to explain what a diary or journal is. Point out that either can be used to highlight what happens in their lives.

Next, show students a sample day from the [Studio Four News](#) blog. They'll see one or more paragraphs written by fourth graders describing what went on in their class that day.

Ask students to imagine that they are going to write a blog entry for yesterday’s class. What would they include? Write appropriate ideas on a blackboard, whiteboard, or teacher computer (with a projector or TV monitor attached). Tell students that what you have written could be written as a blog entry, except they are not going to write their own classroom blog. Explain that their blog is going to be written by a classroom pet.

If you have a classroom pet -- a hamster, bird, or snake, for example -- then great! If not, invite students to create an imaginary pet. Or, you might
have the school mascot (The Jefferson School Grizzly Bear, for example!) write the blog.

Once you’ve decided on the persona of the writer (the real or imagined pet or mascot), ask students to look back at the ideas on the board and imagine how that pet or mascot would have written the blog entry. For example, if you had had a tornado drill, the class hamster might write, "All of the sudden, a large siren sounded and everyone left the room. I was scared and didn't know what was happening, but they came back quickly and I knew everything was okay."

By writing the blog from the pet's or mascot's viewpoint, you address a number of issues:

- Concerns over students' online safety and privacy are lessened because no names are identified with the blog entries (all are signed by the animal).
- Upper elementary students can learn about point of view.
- The focus is shifted from the mundane (What's interesting about a vocab test?) to the unique (How would a lizard react to our latest science experiment?), engaging students and hopefully prompting substantive writing.

To make sure students understand the blogging concept, have them silently write today's entry from the viewpoint of the animal you've selected. Collect each student's work and make sure that each understands the assignment: to write about the day's events from the point of view of the classroom pet or mascot. For older students, you might want to set more requirements, such as paragraph length or grammatical expectations.

When you're satisfied that students understand how to write the entries, it's time to show them how to use the blog. WordPress works really well for blogging.

Before class begins, go to WordPress and set up an account. The user name and password are items only you will use. Do not make those known to students. It's also a good idea to use different user names and passwords for school use than for personal use (such as those used for your online banking!). The User Name will be what you use to sign each entry, so it does need to be the pet's or mascot's name -- Marty the Hamster or Main Street Eagle, for example. Click “Gimme a blog!” at the bottom. Click Next.

On Step Two, title your blog with your class name such as Mr. Jacob's 3rd Grade Class. Complete all the information on the page and click Signup.

On Step Three, fill in the First and Last Name with the pet’s names, and give a brief description of the pet from their point of view. When you are done click Save Profile. Activate your account and log in.

Click on the Appearance Tab on the left side and choose a template. Then click on the Posts Tab, and Add New to get started. You'll see a place for a title and more text. This is the first posting on your blog and will be dated the day you're writing it. Type About this Blog in the title blank, click in the text box, and write: This Blog is written by the ________ grade students of
_________ (your name) at ________ school in _____(city, state). We’ve chosen to write our posts as if they were written by our classroom pet or mascot. Its name is ____ and it is a _____. Keep checking back as we add more posts here! Click Publish Post, and then click View Blog (in a new window) to see what you wrote.

That's all you need to do prior to the lesson; it shouldn't take more than ten minutes. Later, you can go back and fill in more information at your blog site if you wish. Note that your blog has an address (URL). You can link the blog to your school's Web site or your classroom Web page if you have one. Now...how do students enter posts? Do not let them type the post directly into WordPress! Instead, have each student type the day's entry into a word processing program. Then you copy and paste their entries into WordPress. That ensures that you'll see each entry before posting and that students don't have access to your logged in account.

Decide how often you want students to post entries -- once a week is a good start, and then assign students to a given week. In some classes, pairs of students writing together might be a good option, helping reluctant writers or English-language learners gain confidence with peer help.

That's it! Be sure to show the blog in class, either on a projector/TV monitor or on a classroom computer. Student will want to see what their classmates have written. You also might want to send home the URL so parents can see the blog. (Also send home a note assuring parents that safety and privacy issues have been addressed).

As the school year progresses, you might modify the assignment, adding a new classroom pet, or perhaps having students write as if they are aliens seeing a classroom for the first time. The goal of the activity is to write, write, write, so do whatever you need to do to keep it interesting and engaging!!

**Assessment**

Students will be assessed on their ability to

- timely submission of a written post.
- description of classroom events from the viewpoint of a pet or mascot.
- use of school appropriate language and subject matter.