



Show; Don't Tell: Secrets of Writing

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Eva Montanari, Illustrator

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There is no better time to learn the power of the written word than during childhood. Encouraging children to tap into their imaginations and express themselves via writing can lead them to discover their inner thoughts and feelings. But what about helping children become writers committed to honing their craft? How does one teach them the writing process, or aspects of grammar, in accessible ways?

Lion, the main character in this book, provides readers with an insightful model. He offers his pupils (Duck, Hippo, Penguin, Cow, and Rat) several secrets of writing sure to sharpen their skills. He teaches specific writing strategies, encourages the animals to prewrite, write, and revise, and clarifies the specific functions of nouns and adjectives and how one might use them effectively.

While Lion's "language arts experiment" and "writing project" teach the importance of both figurative and literal language, he also vividly instructs his pupils that in their effort to show, rather than tell, they must remember that the essence of an object cannot be clearly conveyed by adjectives alone—precise nouns are required. Equally attractive is the book's inclusion of interactive stimuli to teach imagery. The animals are coached to use the coarse texture of a patch that appears to be a remnant of black fishnet and the "Push Here" button at the rear of the book, which offers a sound like the shattering of glass to help students become more descriptive writers.

The author has been a writing consultant committed to teaching, conducting workshops, and lecturing since 1988. Her book *The Nobisso Recommendations: Guiding Students to Write in Their Authentic Voices* marks her turn toward helping young writers learn the fundamentals of their craft. This volume furthers this endeavor. She has also written several other fine books for children, including *Grandpa Loved*, *Grandma's Scrapbook*, *Shh! The Whale is Smiling*, and *In English, of Course*.

Here, the animals have different personalities that reveal them as knowledgeable, self-centered, cute, and funny. A shift in speakers is often denoted by a change in font style and color. The soft-colored illustrations are expressive, clever, and witty, and help make the topics fun and interesting. The illustrator, who lives in Rimini, Italy, also writes children's books of her own, including the recent *Tiff, Taff and Lulu*.

This book, with its lively grammar and creative writing lessons, will both teach and entertain readers of all ages. Aspiring writers will look forward to the sequel, *Cross it Out! More Secrets of Writing*.

KAAVONIA HINTON (August 18, 2009)

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