



## PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest

### Writing Guide

For teachers, parents and caregivers  
to assist primary-aged children in creating stories



**The PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest is produced by  
WNED-TV, Buffalo/Toronto and PBS.**



## PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest

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## Writing a Story

This Guide offers suggestions to help children who want to enter the **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest**.

For the **Contest**, children may make up a story, relate a true experience, or write a poem. Children may dictate their stories to someone who can print, legibly write or type the final version of the story.

Think of the ideas in this guide as a menu from which to choose. A young writer may know exactly what he wants to write and will dive right in. Or maybe she would like more guidance to plan out a story. Once the story is written, review the Contest checklist and suggestions for how to revise the story to make it even better.



### The Main Elements of a Story

**Setting:** When and where the story takes place. Usually the setting comes at the beginning of the story.

**Plot:** Series of significant events that goes from the beginning, to the middle, then to the ending.

**Main Character:** The person, animal, or thing your story is about. Each character is revealed through physical characteristics and personality traits.

**Problem & Resolution:** The challenge your character must face and how he or she solves it.

## Activity 1: Get Ready To Write!

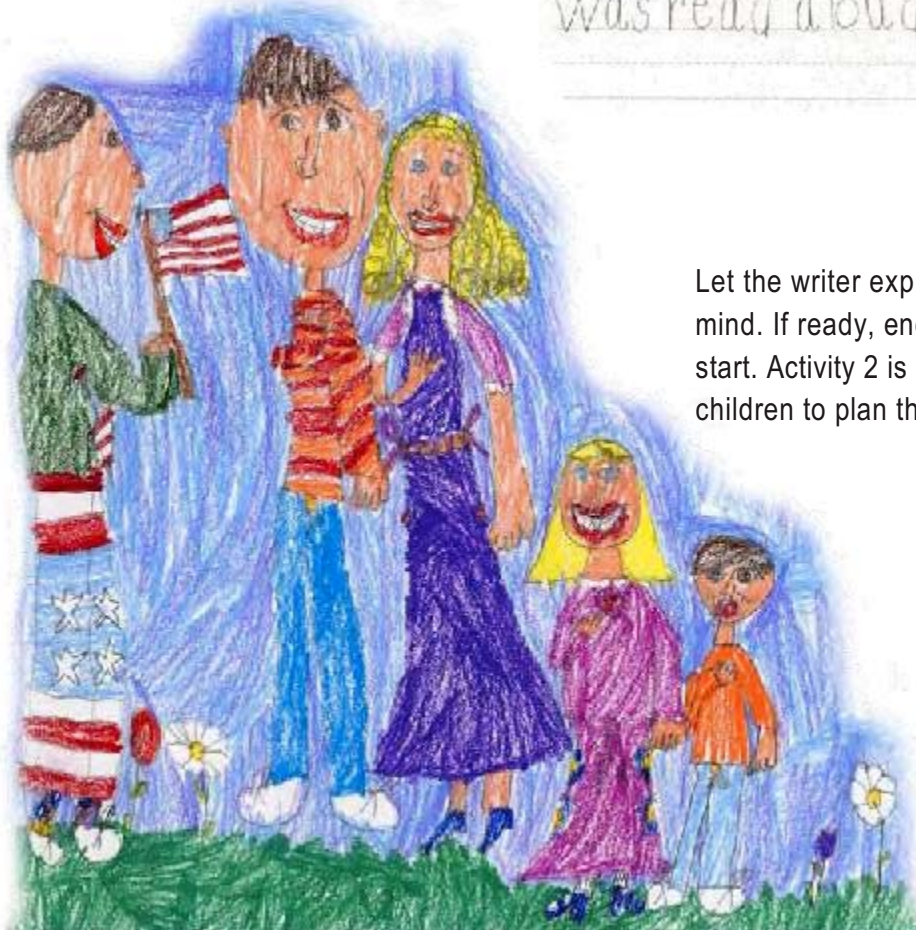
**Introduction:** Writers often plan a story before they begin to write. Knowing a variety of planning strategies is particularly helpful for beginning writers. An example of a planning strategy is brainstorming (see Activity 2). Before beginning to write, children should understand that it is helpful to make a plan.

**Goal:** If a child already has a solid idea for a story, he can do some planning and begin writing.

**Materials:** Lined paper and a pencil.

**Share with children:** *Writing a story is like going on a trip. You need to plan ahead so you will know where and when you are going to start, what you are going to do and where you are going to end up. Do you have some ideas about what direction you want to take?*

The flag went by first. Timothy and Anna took off their hats and remembered to salute. Then they all sang "God Bless America." The Declaration of Independence was read aloud.



Let the writer express what she has in mind. If ready, encourage the child to start. Activity 2 is a great way for children to plan their stories.

## Activity 2: Brainstorming

**Introduction:** Brainstorming is a way of generating ideas. Come up with as many ideas on a given subject as possible without judging the ideas. Just write down anything that comes to mind. After the list is completed, pick what you consider the best idea.

This process is helpful in making decisions about all the aspects of writing from picking a topic, to deciding which word best describes an idea. For example: You might choose to start your story by writing “The day was cold.” Was it icy, frigid, freezing, chilly, cool, or chilblain-producing? Make a list and the right word for the story will become apparent.

**Goal:** The child will use brainstorming to come up with a plan for writing a story.

**Materials:** Several pieces of blank and lined paper and a pencil.

**Share with children:** *Sometimes it is hard to come up with a plan for your writing. One way writers make up their minds is to brainstorm. Brainstorming is when you come up with lots of ideas that may or may not be useful, but you write them all down anyway. Sometimes a very odd entry on your list turns out to be the best idea after all, and you will recognize it. Here are some exercises that will help you figure out what to write about.*

### Main Character

*On a blank piece of paper, make a list of at least five characters you might like to write about. Then make up your mind which character is going to be the main character and draw a circle around that character’s name.. On the back side of your paper write the character’s name and then list any physical characteristics, like tall or muscular. Next, list any personality traits, such as kind, funny or loyal. You can do this for all of the characters in your story.*

### Plot

*On a separate piece of paper labeled “Plot,” fold your paper in thirds. Draw a “B” for beginning at the top of the paper, “M” for middle in the middle third, and “E” for ending in the final third. How will your story begin? What will be the climax or turning point? How will your story end? Fill in some notes in each space.*



## Problem & Resolution

On a separate piece of paper draw a line down the center of the paper and, on the left, make a list of all the problems (or challenges) you can think of that this character might have. For example, your character may not be a fast runner and must race against someone much faster than he is (Tortoise and the Hare). When you have finished your list, circle the problem you think would be most interesting and challenging for your character to solve.

In the right hand column, make a list of all the ways you can think of that might solve this problem. Circle the solution you like the best.

## Setting

On a separate piece of paper labeled "Setting," make a list of possible times (Tuesday afternoon) and places (at the ball game, on a lake in Maine) - when and where your story takes place. Circle the setting you think works the best for your character and problem.

Now you have a basic plan. You can begin writing your story for the contest. Start with what happens first, then what happens next until you get to the end.



**Have fun writing!**

## Activity 3: Revising

**Introduction:** Once the story is written, the writer needs to read it over to see if anything should be changed and to be sure she has met the standards for the **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest**. The writer will want to look for ways to make her writing be just right for the Contest.

**Goal:** The child has the opportunity to make whatever changes are necessary to feel satisfied with her story and to meet the rules of the Contest.

### Good Stories Include:

**Organization:** A clear beginning, middle, and ending.

**Topic Development:** Enough information to satisfy the reader's questions.

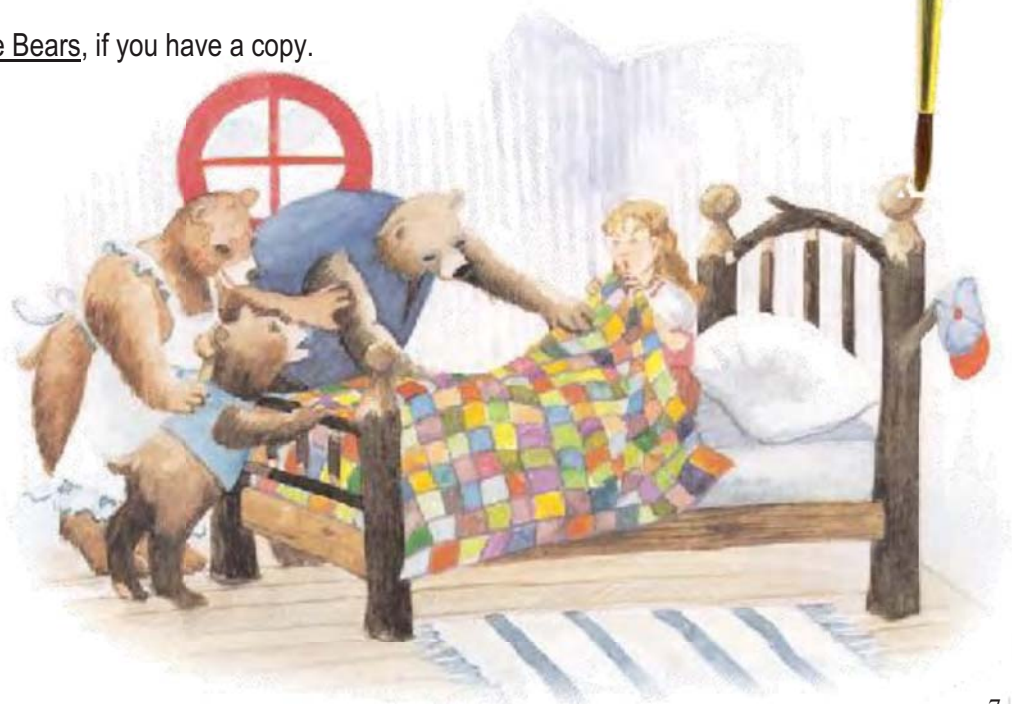
**Detail:** Descriptive language helps develop and enhance the writing.  
(Example: brown squirrels chattering overhead.)

**Word Choice:** Carefully chosen words provide clarity to expression.  
(Example: path, road, highway).

**Sentence Structure:** A variety of sentence types and lengths adds to the flow of the story.

**Materials:** Goldilocks and the Three Bears, if you have a copy.

**Share with children:** *Now that you have written your first draft, how can you make your story just right? Can you retell the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears?" (Listen to the retelling or read/tell the story to the writer.) When you are revising your own story, keep in mind the idea that you don't want it to be too anything, but just right.*



## Organization - Beginning, Middle, and End

How do you get your storyline just right? What if the storyteller wrote the following?

1. Goldilocks fell asleep in baby bear's bed. When the bears came home they were very surprised to find her there. When she woke up she was so scared she ran screaming from the house.

OR

2. Goldilocks entered the empty house and finding the breakfast on the table, she helped herself. Next she tried out the chairs in the living room and after breaking baby bear's chair, she went up to the bedroom and took a nap in baby bear's bed. When Goldilocks was awakened by the bears she was so frightened she ran from the cottage and never ever went into a stranger's house again.

The storyteller got it just right in the second example by showing what happened in the beginning, in the middle, and in the end.



## Topic Development

**Share with children:** *Since your story can only be 50-200 words if you are in kindergarten or 1st grade and 100-350 words if you are in 2nd or 3rd grades, you don't want your story to be too long or too short. How do you get the length "just right" for the **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest**? How much you decide to include in your story and how much detail you have included will affect the length of your story.*

How do you get the amount of information in your story "just right?" What if the storyteller wrote the following?

When Goldilocks goes into the bears' home she tries out their food, their chairs, and their beds. What if she also tried on their clothes, read their books, and played some musical instruments. Would these last events help the story? Would they make the story too long?

What if Goldilocks only tried out their beds? Would that make the story too short?

But the storyteller got it just right. There was enough information, but not too much. Read through your story. Have you answered all of the reader's questions? Did you include too much? Do you have enough information? What can you take out? What can you add?



## Detail

How do you get detail just right? What if the storyteller wrote the following?

1. Goldilocks sat in the Papa Bear's chair. It was too hard.

OR

2. Goldilocks looked around the bears' cozy living room. She thought the wallpaper with the roses was very pretty. Then she saw the big red chair and thought that would be such a comfortable place to rest after her long walk in the woods. She had to scramble to climb up on the chair because it seemed big enough for a giant and she was only a little girl. Still she was pleased to get herself settled into its cushions. Very soon she found that the big cushion was quite stiff and the covering somewhat rough against her skin. This chair was too hard she thought.

OR

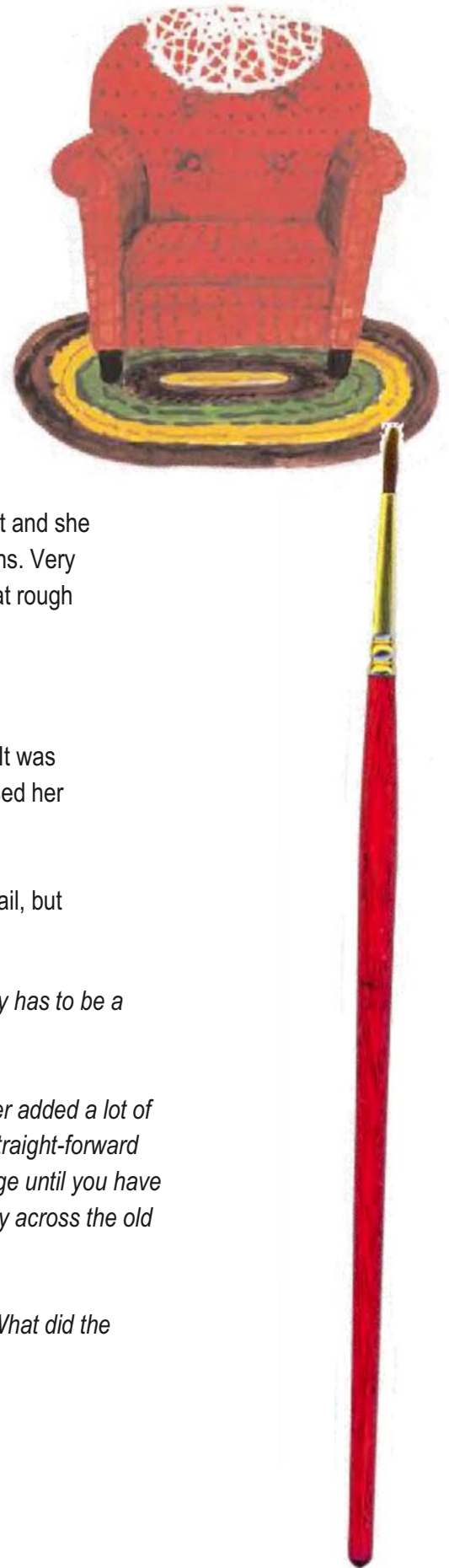
3. Goldilocks looked around the cozy room and ran over to the biggest chair. It was red and inviting. She scrambled up and settled down in its cushions. It surprised her how stiff and uncomfortable it was. "This chair is too hard," she pouted.

In example number three, the storyteller got it just right by having enough detail, but not too much or too little.

**Share with children:** For the **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest**, your story has to be a certain length.

**If your story is too short**, look at example number two above. The storyteller added a lot of detail when describing the chair. If you like, try this exercise. Start off with a straight-forward sentence like, "She went across the bridge." Keep adding descriptive language until you have something like, "Wrapped in her bright red woolen cape, Sarah skipped happily across the old wooden bridge."

**If your story is a little too long**, are there any details you could leave out? What did the storyteller do to make the third example shorter than the second?



## Word Choice

How do you get the word choice just right? What if the storyteller wrote the following?

1. Goldilocks walked through the woods. She found a house in a clearing.

OR

2. Goldilocks skipped down the path that led through the tall pines. She discovered a dwelling in a meadow.

**Share with children:** *The storyteller got it just right by picking words that were specific and clear. Let's go back and compare the words the storyteller chose in each example. Help them underline or point out "walked" and "skipped," "woods" and "the tall pines," "found" and "discovered." How do the words in the second example help to describe the setting and action in the story? Let's go back and read through your story. Are there words that you could replace with more specific or descriptive words that would make the story even better?*

## Sentence Structure

How do you get the flow of sentences just right? What if the storyteller wrote the following?

1. Goldilocks walked down the road. Goldilocks saw a house. Goldilocks knocked on the door. No one answered. Goldilocks opened the door. Goldilocks went in.

OR

2. Goldilocks walked down the road and saw a house. She knocked on the door, but since no one answered, she opened the door and went in.

**Share with children:** *In example number two, the storyteller got it just right by combining some of the thoughts into one sentence. The storyteller did not want to use many sentences that were the same length.*

## Mechanics

Don't forget to proofread for spelling, punctuation, and capitalization.



## Activity 4: Illustrations

### Telling a Story with Pictures

**Introduction:** Young children can use many materials and different techniques to create the illustrations in their book. The **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest** rules state that *there must be at least five original, clear and colorful illustrations* in the finished work. The art can be located on the same page as the text or on a page by itself. Only one side of the paper can be used and each page must be numbered on the back.

**Goal:** The book will feature five or more illustrations that complement the text of the story.

#### Before You Begin: Tips for Adults

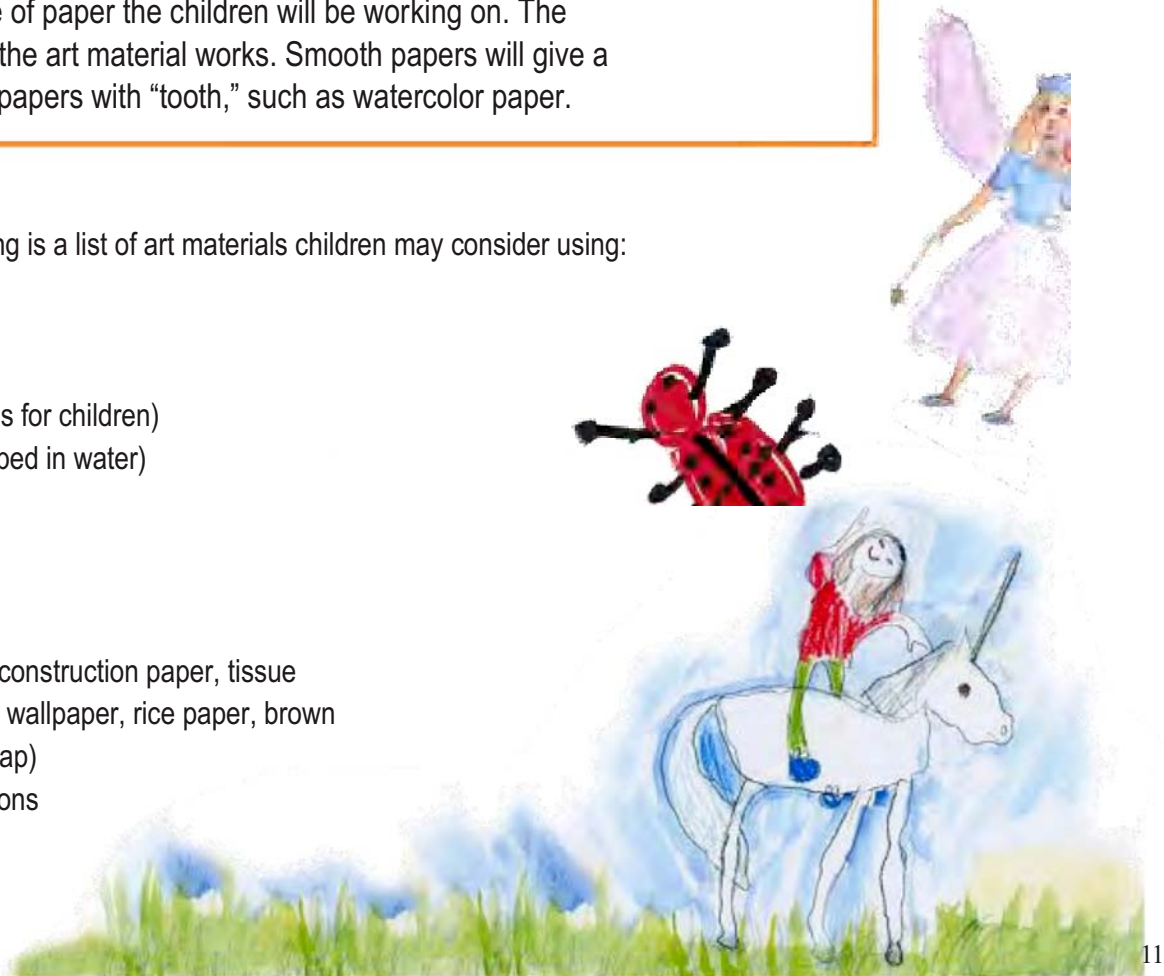
Provide work space that allows for creative “messes.” Make sure the children are comfortable and that the space is well lit.

Try materials out ahead of time to make sure they work.

Think about the type of paper the children will be working on. The surface affects how the art material works. Smooth papers will give a different effect than papers with “tooth,” such as watercolor paper.

**Materials:** The following is a list of art materials children may consider using:

- Crayons
- Colored pencils
- Craypas (oil pastels for children)
- Colored chalk (dipped in water)
- Variety of fabrics
- Watercolor paints
- Tempera paints
- Markers
- Variety of papers (construction paper, tissue paper, magazines, wallpaper, rice paper, brown paper bags, gift wrap)
- Yarn, string or ribbons
- Colored glue
- Glitter





**Share with children:** You can show the feelings of main characters by the way you draw their face, body, and what colors you use. First, decide what parts of the story you'd like to illustrate. Think about some action that happens in your story. What are your characters doing? What does the setting look like? As you decide what to illustrate, use your imagination and try to visualize the picture in your head. Identify some things that are in the scene.

## Additional suggestions for second and third graders:

*POINT OF VIEW* is important to an artist. An illustration can be drawn from a bird's eye view, a mouse eye view, close-up or far away.

*PERSPECTIVE* is showing distance. Far away things look small, close up things are big and near the bottom of the paper.

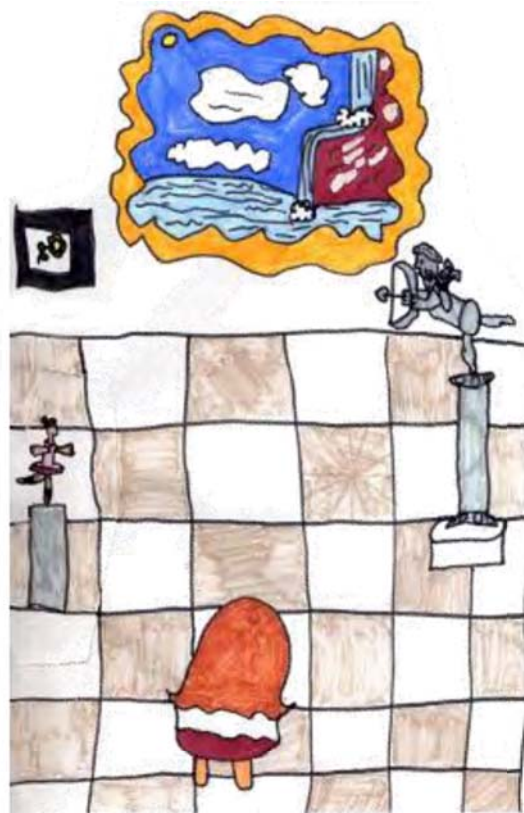
## Creating the Illustrations

If you like, make a rough sketch of your idea with pencil on practice paper the same size as your final drawing. A "rough sketch" is a quick drawing and may only take 5 minutes to do. Once your rough sketch is done, review the materials list and decide what type of materials would be best for your illustration. You might try using a combination of materials.

If you don't need to practice, go ahead and draw your illustration on the final paper using pencil so you can erase if needed. Draw carefully adding lots of details. Use the whole "illustration" space you have selected and don't forget the background.

At this point, you can go over your pencil lines with a black Sharpie marker to outline your image then finish with color or just color in your pencil drawing.

**TIP:** If you want to show texture of various kinds, use different types of lines – thick, thin, dark, light, straight, curvy, zigzag or crosshatching. For thicker texture, add tissue, fabric, yarn or ribbon.



## Suggestions for Using Art Material



Have a variety of materials available for the children to use.  
You may want to demonstrate some of the following ideas.

Use crayons in various ways - use the side for light colors and/or press hard with the end for bold colors.

Try coloring with crayons or Craypas for the main characters and then add watercolor paints or tempera for the background.

TIP: Cool colors (blues and greens) make you feel cool, calm, relaxed or sometimes sad. Warm colors (reds, oranges, and yellows) make you feel warm, bright, wild, and loud. Blend new colors when using colored pencils, Craypas, chalk, or even crayons!

Dip colored chalk in a very small amount of water and then draw - it is more like painting! When dry, spray with hair spray to keep from smudging.

Try making the complete picture out of cut papers—construction paper, newspaper, brown bags, wrapping paper, wallpaper remnants, tissue paper, etc. Cut your shapes then glue them onto the page.

Try making a complete picture out of fabric. Cut your fabric shapes and glue them to the page. Add details by using yarn, ribbon or glitter.



Try a tissue collage – apply watered down white glue with a paint brush to background paper, place torn or cut pieces of tissue onto glued areas. Overlapped pieces create new colors.



## PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest

### Checklist

**Introduction:** The following checklist will help children assess whether or not their story and art adhere to the Contest rules.

**Share with children:** *Let's make sure your story meets all the guidelines for the contest.*

**Word Count** includes “a,” “an,” and “the” in your story, but not words on non-story pages such as the title page or the words included in an illustration.

If you are in kindergarten or first grade, your story needs to be at least 50 words but no more than 200.

If you are in second or third grade, your story needs to be at least 100 words but no more than 350.

### Illustrations

Does your story include at least five original, clear and colorful illustrations?

If your story is too short or too long, go back to the Revision Section on page 7 and look at “Topic Development” and “Detail.”



**Format** refers to how your story is set up.

Are your story and accompanying illustrations on one side of the paper?

Have you numbered the back of each page? The back of each page must be blank EXCEPT for the page number.

Have you printed your story in ink or typed it? (Younger children may dictate their stories.)

**Entry Form** can be downloaded from the **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest** site at [pbskids.org/read](http://pbskids.org/read)

Is the entry form filled out and does it have the needed signatures?





## **PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest Writing Guide**

*Formerly the Reading Rainbow Young Writers & Illustrators Contest Guide*

### **Credits**

#### **Writing Guide Visionary & Coordinator**

France Shea, Project Manager, Maine Public Broadcasting Network

#### **How to Write a Story**

Lacey Kellett, Former Classroom Teacher; Poetry Book Author

#### **Illustrations – Telling a Story with Pictures**

Sandra Brennan, Art Educator; President - Maine Art Teachers Association

#### **Goldilocks and the Three Bears Watercolor Illustrations**

June Grey, Fine Artist, represented by galleries throughout the U.S.

#### **Children's illustrations**

Maine Reading Rainbow Contest Winners

#### **With Special Support from**

Karen Baldacci, First Lady of Maine

Nan Schweiger, National Reading Rainbow Contest Director

Maine State Library

Maine Library Association

Originally created by Maine Public Broadcasting Network for the Reading Rainbow Young Writers & Illustrators Contest.



The PBS KIDS GO! Writers Contest is part of PBS KIDS Raising Readers. This activity is funded in part by a Ready To Learn grant, in a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Education and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The contents of these contest rules were developed under a grant, #PRU295B050003, from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.