

Make Writing Real

Class Pets Provide Authentic Reasons to Write, Draw, Research,
and Make Books in Kindergarten and First Grade

Updated November 2023



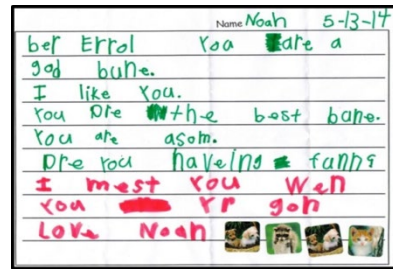
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Charlie the Turtle became a vital part of Katie Nelson's kindergarten.

Mailboxes especially designed for class pets are delightful K-1 writing props! Students love to write books about their animal friends and to pen personal messages to them—**especially if they receive answers!** Notice the use of spiral, twinkling, and 5-point stars (from [30 Essential Kindergarten-Friendly Handwriting Lessons](#)) that were used to “fancy up” drawings. Charlie the Turtle inspired two ambitious boys to research facts about turtles online. Then they independently wrote turtle information books. **Writing is authentic kindergarten child's play!**

Errol the Bunny has his own mailbox in Laura Flocker's kindergarten



Dear Errol. You are a good bunny. I like you. You are the best bunny. You are awesome. Are you having fun? I missed you when you were gone. Love, Noah

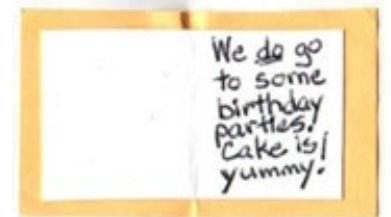
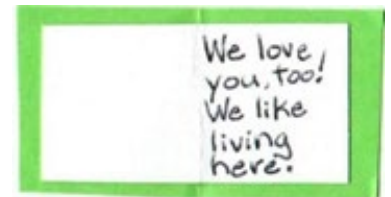
Errol is a bunny who lives in the classroom. His mailbox is often filled with heartfelt letters, and students frequently receive personal responses. (Laura's daughter wields Errol's pen.)

What if you don't have a class pet? Create an imaginary one!

Children wrote these questions and received answers:

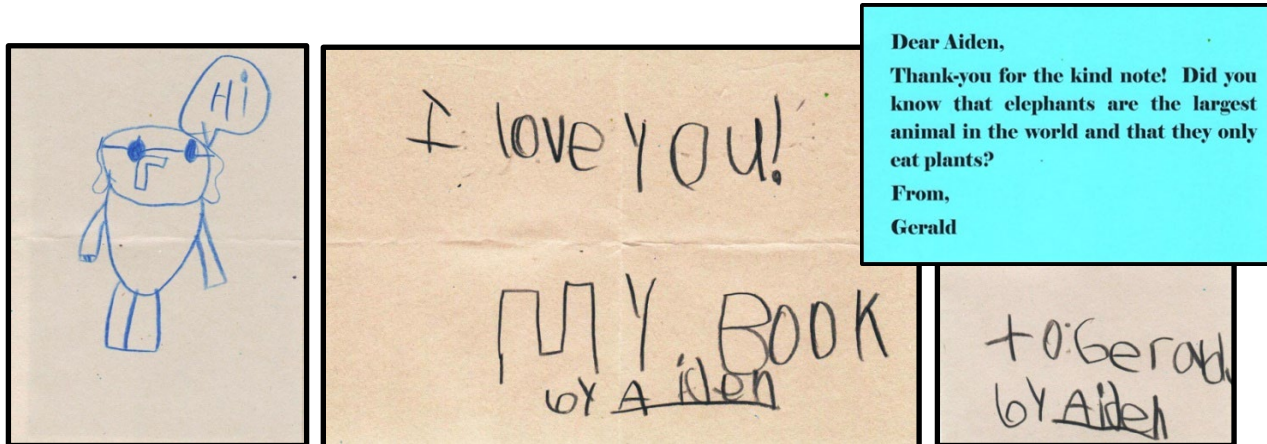
Do you like living in kindergarten?

Do you go to birthday parties and eat cake?



Imaginary pets nurture children's imagination because they are often as "real" to young children as live ones! Kindergartners wrote questions to the fairies who lived in this tiny realm and were enchanted with the responses written on miniature cards.

Set up an Elephant and Piggie letter writing center!



Elephant (Gerald) and Piggie characters from books by Mo Willems are well-loved kindergarten friends. Kindergarten teacher, Shanda Lung made it easy and motivating for kindergartners to write to these delightful animal friends. The return letters carried information—and sometimes jokes!

We heard about a kindergarten teacher in Arizona who has a **kindergarten elf** living behind a small rotting log in her classroom. His mailbox is next to the log. The children never see him—he disappears during daytime; however, the class receives admonitions about good behavior and letters from him.

Dear Kindness Elf,
I missed you! We're here
right now! Friends forever.
Love, your best friend Emma

Dear Kindness Elf,
Thank you for teaching me
how to be nice. I love you so
much! Love, Helen



And I have "kindness elves" who appear in their special little cardboard home in our kitchen. My young friends love these delightful little dolls! Through the exchange of messages—carefully folded into miniature envelopes, of course—the elves continue to inspire kindness dialog and literacy.

Imagination is more important than knowledge. ~ Einstein

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