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## Lesson 16 – The Writer’s Muse

One of the hardest things for young writers to learn is how to wait quietly and patiently for inspiration. This is the perfect age to introduce them to their very own Muse.

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**Materials Needed:** a mirror, a thesaurus, a transparency of page 55, and student copies of page 56–57

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1. Explain that a very long time ago in the country of Greece (show this on a map), the people who lived there believed in many gods and goddesses. Zeus was the king of all gods. Athena was the goddess of wisdom. Poseidon was the god of the ocean. Aphrodite was the goddess of love. The Greeks had hundreds of them! There was also a group of nine goddesses who were the goddesses of inspiration. They were called the Muses. From their name, we get several words:

- ⇒ *museum* — the dwelling place of the Muses; the public display of creativity
- ⇒ *amusement* — entertainment of the creative or inspired mind
- ⇒ *musings* — inspired thoughts, wonderings, or reflections

There was a Muse who inspired musicians, one who inspired artists, and another who inspired actors. Several of the Muses inspired writers. It was believed that a writer could only write when his own personal Muse whispered creative thoughts in his ear. In other words, she was inspiration personified.



2. *Personification* means giving a non-living thing the identity or characteristics of a real person. Jack Frost, Mother Nature, Old Man Winter, and Father Time are modern-day examples of how we sometimes personify natural occurrences. We might say, “Mother Nature sure has given us a beautiful day” or “Old Man Winter came early this year.” Since a Muse is inspiration personified, we might say, “I couldn’t come up with an idea for a story until my Muse visited me.” In other words, I couldn’t write until I was inspired.
3. Explain that a Writer’s Notebook is there to hold our musings as they happen. In them we record what we wonder about, question, or reflect on.
4. Hold up a mirror. Let’s think about the word *reflect*. Tell students that a mirror reflects exactly what is in front of it—that and nothing more. (Hold it up in front of a few students to illustrate this point.) However, when we talk about writers reflecting, we mean that they are taking the time to add more to what they have just seen or heard. They are making connections, re-evaluating their opinions, questioning their beliefs, or just trying to make it all make sense to them.
5. Have a student look up *reflect* in a thesaurus and write some of the synonyms on the board (e.g., *muse*, *ponder*, *meditate*, *wonder*, *contemplate*). Explain that these are all words that can be used for the process of interacting with what we see and hear every day. Good writers cannot be effective without going through this process.

**Here is the equation:**

*seeing, hearing, experiencing + reflecting (musing) = thoughtful, meaningful writing*

## Lesson 16 – The Writer’s Muse (cont.)

6. Let’s go back to the idea of writers having a Muse to inspire them. What factors can hinder a writer from taking the time to reflect so that their Muse can “visit” them? List a few of these on the board. They might include lack of privacy or too much noise at home; very little time to just sit and think about things because of schoolwork or chores; or just too many fun things to do that take up leisure time, like friends, TV, or video games.

Explain that if writers want to be inspired, they must make conditions welcoming before their Muse can “drop by.” Every writer is different. Ask students to make a copy of the following chart (without the written-in notations) on a piece of paper. Ask them to think about how they would create the ideal conditions to receive inspiration from their Muse. Suggest how you might complete your chart.



7. Explain that writers sometimes get stuck. We call it “writer’s block.” It’s when we just can’t seem to get an idea. Whenever this happens, we need to call on our Muse for inspiration. How do we do this? By quietly observing the world around us, keeping our minds open to new ideas, and patiently waiting for our writing juices to flow.
8. As a “get their feet wet” activity, practice musing with “Classroom Musings” (page 55). Show the example on page 56 as a transparency, read through it, and then remove it from view. Tell your students that you are going to allow plenty of time for their Muses to “visit them” as they write down what they wonder about as they look at each object in your classroom. Distribute page 55. Have students share their writings if time allows.
9. Now that your students have practiced musing with rather safe subject matter, distribute copies of “Musings About Myself” (page 57). These topics are rather personal in nature, and it will take more time for your students to thoughtfully express their ideas. Please make sure to let them know that you will not be collecting these or asking them to share these in any way. (Respect their privacy, and don’t do any over-the-shoulder reading either.)
10. *Optional Activities:*
- ⇒ Have your students “design” their own personal Muses. Provide sheets of white drawing paper and have students draw what they think their Muse might look like. They might also want to give their Muse a name. After their drawings are completed, have each student introduce their Muse to the class.
  - ⇒ Have your students conduct small-group research projects about Greek mythology and the origins of the Muses. Guide the groups in an Internet search to discover the names of the nine Muses and their creative realms. Assign each group one Muse and have them present an oral report to the class on their findings.

## Lesson 16 – The Writer’s Muse (cont.)

### Sample Page

What I sometimes wonder about . . .

⇒ our country’s flag

If there was a national contest to design a new flag, I wonder what it might look like. I think it should have a big eagle with outstretched wings in the center surrounded by 50 stars – all in gold. Then, "United We Stand" should be written across the top.

⇒ our clock

I’m not a clock-watcher except just before lunch when my stomach starts to growl. If there was no clock in the room, I wonder how our teacher would know when to have us line up. Maybe the lunch lady would have to yell down the hall, "Time to eat!" like at home.

⇒ my desk

I wonder what happens to desks when they get too beat up to be used any more. Hopefully, the metal parts are recycled. Maybe one day my desk will be part of a race car or even a rocket. Hey, my desk could end up on the moon one day! Incredible!

⇒ our whiteboard/chalkboard

If my mom had a whiteboard, she’d hang it in the kitchen and create "Things to Do" lists for all of us – even Dad. My list would probably be the longest, but maybe we’d get a dollar for each thing we checked off. I wonder if I should get her one for Mother’s Day.

⇒ my classmates

I’m looking around the room now and wondering if any of my classmates are musing about me. If so, I hope they’re writing good stuff. Maybe they’re wondering what I’ll be when I grow up or maybe what I’ll look like. Now I’m wondering those same things, too.