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Introduction

Centres are a wonderfully empowering way to allow students to experience independent progress and autonomy. In addition, centres allow teachers to maximise teaching. At last, a teacher can be in more than one place at once, or nearly so. Learning centres are appropriate for just about any subject, but what could be more appropriate than a writing centre?

While writing activities are effective in cooperative learning efforts, and one cannot dispute the value of writers' workshops, writing will always be ultimately an individual pursuit. Writers first learn to write in a manner similar to learning to walk or draw. First there are tentative efforts and individual approaches, and with the encouragement of others, the early writer gains confidence in his or her own special ability to communicate. Early writers learn to write by writing.

Many of a young writer's early writing experiences occur within the safe confines of home as the child begins to scribble and imitate language. With feedback and response from parents and then teachers, the child finds that the world continues to expand as she gains more writing tools. In school, many of the child's writing experiences are a team effort, thereby continuing the social theme of communication learned at home. But she still needs time to contemplate and write alone from a prompt or in a journal. A child needs time to imagine and create and give expression to the images, ideas, and responses that are uniquely her own.

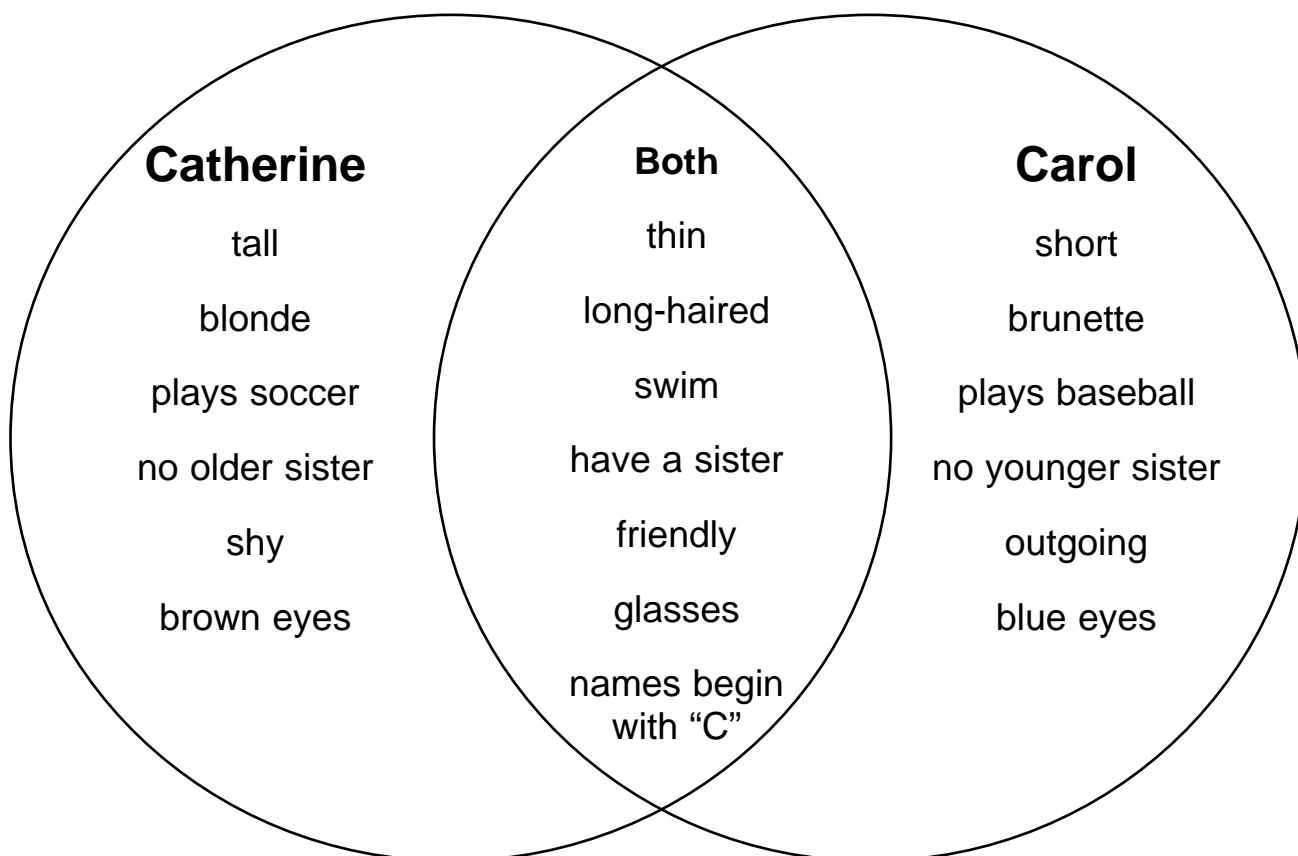
In a writing centre, a child can find a place to imagine and create. The writing centre will provide a space away from the usual classroom structure. It will also provide the materials and the inspiration. The writing centre also benefits you, the teacher. Once the writing centre is set up, you will only need to add additional materials from time to time. You will be able to route the students through the writing centre, and, while some students are engaged in independent work, you will be free to conference with other students.

This book includes all that you will need to set up and run a writing centre. You will find directions for setting up, materials to manage the centre, and lots of activities which can simply be copied and placed in the centre. In addition, you will find inspiration for expanding the centre activities.



Venn Diagrams

When using a Venn diagram, students compare and contrast people, animals, places, characters, or things. Similar qualities are written in the space the two circles share in common. Dissimilar qualities are written in the areas the circles do not share. Here is an example comparing and contrasting two friends.



Challenge your students to make Venn diagrams comparing and contrasting their best friends and themselves. You may use the form on the next page. After they understand how to prewrite using a Venn diagram, encourage them to use this technique when comparing and contrasting other things. Here are some ideas:

- characters in stories
- specific animals
- specific plants
- types of sports
- you and a friend
- books
- seasons
- types of food
- careers
- siblings
- colours
- movies
- hobbies
- subjects in school
- vehicles
- pets in your home
- world leaders
- television shows

Circus Balloon

Finish this story:

A man from the circus filled the boy's large, red balloon with helium and tied it to a long, white string. The boy held the string tight in his hand and walked over to see the enormous, grey elephant. All of a sudden, a brisk wind

