

knowledge. If we think that whole categories of people—identified by class or occupation—are not that bright, then we reinforce social separations and cripple our ability to talk across cultural divides.

I ask students to determine, paragraph by paragraph, how Rose constructs his argument and provides evidence to support his claim.

Only after all this reading, thinking, and talking do students begin crafting their own compositions on work. I give them the following task: *Summarize the key ideas about work found in the readings and analyze and evaluate those claims, explaining why you agree or disagree with them. Use relevant material from those readings, class discussion, or your own work experiences and/or research to support your analysis.* In their responses, students explore such key ideas as the relationship between a person's job and his or her identity, how the work our parents do influences our own job choices, and the challenge of finding meaningful work that also puts food on the table.

This kind of integrated reading and writing unit, which draws on a collection of texts, offers students both a substantive stimulus for their writing and room to explore their own understanding of the world. It is also tremendously engaging—although hard—work from beginning to end.

### Have Students Write Frequently

Most students do not write enough to learn to write well. You've probably heard the argument that with all the texting and Facebook posting students are doing, they are actually writing more than ever. But these headline-like missives are poor preparation for academic discourse. Tweeting in 140 characters does little to prepare students for the kind of writing they will be expected to produce in college.

## JEFF KINNEY on Taking Your Time

Writing is a skill that needs to be developed over time. I think most people (myself included, at least at first) think that they can just sit down and grind out the next great novel. But like any craft, good writing requires expertise. You can't short-cut the process. It took me eight years to develop the Wimpy Kid universe, and I don't think I could have worked it out in a shorter time frame than that.

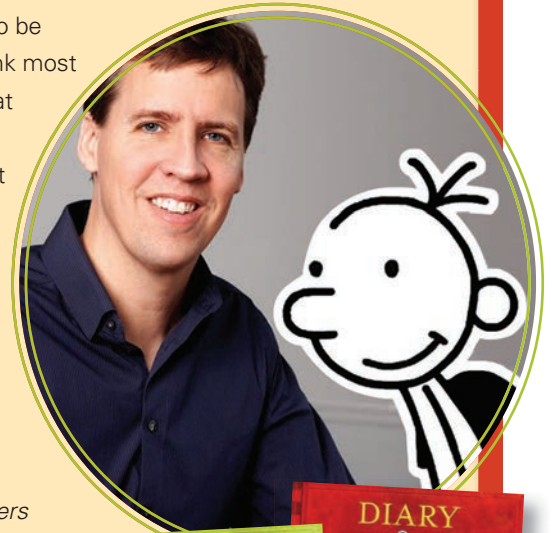
Malcolm Gladwell's book *Outliers* speaks to this idea. He says that in order to become an expert on anything, you need about 10,000 hours (or 10 years). Then, when the opportunity to use your expertise appears, you'll be ready. That's what happened to me. I took my time in developing a concept, and when the opportunity came, I had a fully fleshed-out world to present.

But even after all these years, every aspect of writing remains difficult for me. I admire people for whom ideas seem to come in torrents. My ideas come in tiny little drips—and sometimes not at all. I was recently reading about Carl Barks, the creator/genius behind a huge volume of comic books about Donald Duck and Uncle Scrooge that were written in the 1940s–1960s. He said that there were times when the ideas were flowing so fast, he couldn't keep up with them.

I've never had that wonderful problem, and I doubt I ever will. I have to set aside time to generate my ideas, and there's no guarantee that even if I sit for hours, any good ideas will come. I wish I could get around this difficulty because if I could, I'd be a much more prolific writer.

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