



AN 826 NATIONAL REPORT

PUBLISHING STUDENT WRITING

“This is more than a book.”



“Through this journey we learned we all have different voices, but we came together for one goal: to let people hear our stories and to tell the world about us. Yes, we are in New Orleans, but we are more than the stereotypes that come to mind when you think of the Big Easy. We are rare and powerful. Through this book, we will make you laugh, we will make you cry, and we will challenge the ideas you may have had about us.”

**STUDENT EDITORIAL BOARD, GRADE 11, 826 NEW ORLEANS,
EXCERPT FROM *HISTORY BETWEEN THESE FOLDS***



ABOUT 826

826 is the largest youth writing network in the country. 826 National serves as the hub of the movement to amplify student voices and champions the belief that strong writing skills are essential for academic and lifelong success. The 826 Network now serves close to 350,000 students ages 6 to 18 in under-resourced communities each year online via 826 Digital and through chapters in nine cities: Boston, Chicago, Detroit/Ann Arbor/Ypsilanti, Los Angeles, New Orleans, New York City, San Francisco, Washington, D.C., and Minneapolis/St. Paul. 826 National was established in 2008 to support a growing network of writing centers founded by author Dave Eggers and educator Nínive Calegari in San Francisco in 2002. We work towards a country in which the power and the joy of writing is accessible to every student in every classroom.

Together, we believe writing is the key to cultivating a new generation of creative and diverse thinkers who will define a better, brighter, and more compassionate future.

To learn more about how you can get involved with 826's movement for writing and creativity, please visit our website at 826national.org.

Download this report at

826national.org/research

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TITLE

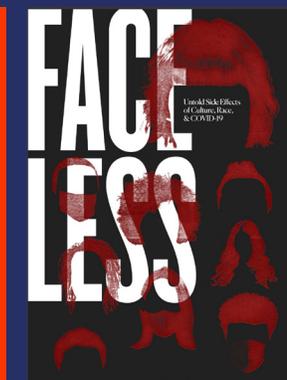
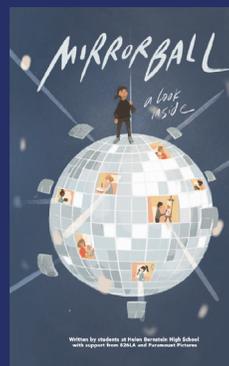
"This is more than a book." by the 826 Dallas Project's Student Editorial Board of *Faceless: Untold Side Effects of Culture, Race, and COVID-19*

“It feels good to have my voice out there and that I have left a mark on this world, even if it’s small.”

BRANDON R., GRADE 11, 826LA

Publishing student work is an essential part of 826’s approach to writing education. It not only provides an opportunity for students to share their thoughts and ideas, but also amplifies their voices to new and diverse audiences. 826 shares student voices in a variety of ways—through social media, community events, public art exhibitions, and more—though none are more central to 826’s core values than print publishing.

When students first see their writing appear in a book, something magical happens. They see their ideas reflected and valued in a tangible way that they can share with others; their confidence and pride in themselves and their writing reaches new levels as they begin to see themselves as authors with words worth reading.



At 826, publishing is a fundamental stage of the writing process, just like drafting and editing. However, we've seen from the educators we collaborate with that while students might share their work with one another or even create a chapbook, publishing student work beyond a classroom peer audience is not a widely held practice in schools across the country (see Box A. for more details). We aim to bring the publication process into more classrooms and increase the perceived value of student publications among students and educators alike. This report will first explore why publishing student writing is so essential to writing education, and then dive deeply into 826's unique approach to student publication.

BOX A. TEACHER SURVEY RESULTS

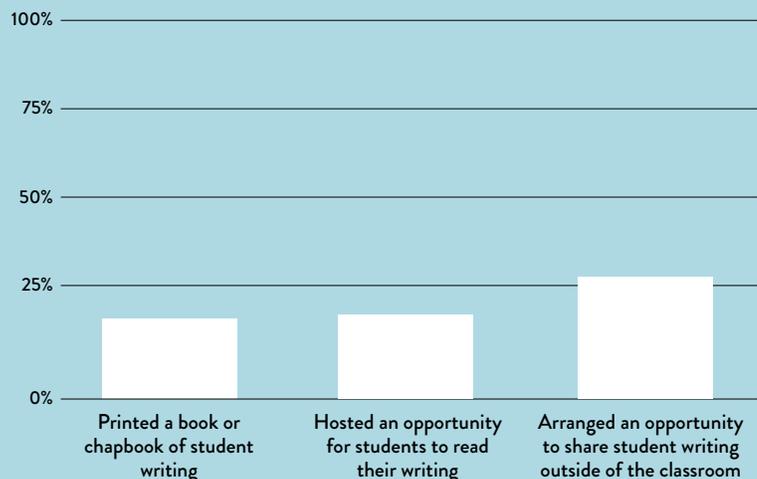
There is not much existing data on publishing practices within the classroom. Here, we share some of our own data that we collected from educators across the country in 2021.

In a survey administered to educators who subscribed to our 826 Digital platform in February 2021, only 18% printed a book or chapbook of student writing, 19% hosted an opportunity for students to read their writing, and 27% arranged an opportunity to share student writing outside of the classroom (n=118).

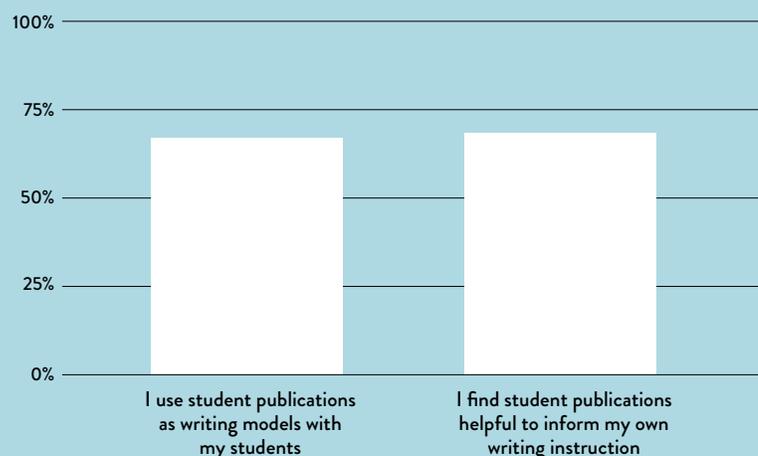
On the other hand, teachers do see value in using student publications, though not as much as we'd hope. In another survey of educators nationwide conducted over the summer of 2021, 67% of respondents said that they used various student publications as writing models with their students, while 69% found that student publications helped to inform their own writing instruction (n=125).

So educators are seeing and understanding the value of student publication, and yet it is largely still not happening in the classroom.

How have you shared your students' writing?



In thinking about student publications, how true are the following statements?



Why publish student writing?

Writing is a powerful tool for students to grapple with their own stories and identities. But when the element of writing for an audience is added, it helps students build a sense of pride in their writing and begin thinking about the impact their words can have on a reader.



1

To create real-world learning opportunities that motivate students to write.



2

To increase students' feelings of ownership and pride in their writing.



3

To use as a learning tool for other student writers.



4

To include and amplify student voices in the larger societal conversation.



1

To create real-world learning opportunities that motivate students to write.

Publication engages students in projects that have value beyond the classroom, motivating them to see writing as a worthwhile activity rather than a chore. Although researchers recognize the importance of having writing programs with a motivational component, studies have shown that they are rare.¹ Researchers of psychology and motivation proposed four key conditions necessary to developing students' motivation to write: "nurturing functional beliefs about writing, fostering engagement using authentic writing tasks, providing a supportive context for writing, and creating a positive emotional environment."² Publishing projects accomplish all those requirements: students learn about the real-world process of writing and editing, engage in the process of writing a book, work in a collaborative environment with their peers, and experience joy from both the act of creating a book and holding the actual book in their hands at the end. Students are not only learning hands-on skills like editing and design, but also career pathways they might want to explore in the future. The publishing project brings the writing process into a real-world context, motivating students to hone new skills and enjoy the world of writing outside of a strictly academic environment.

"I think the biggest impact it has had on me is the realization that other people see the writing I do. Other people can also refer to me as a writer, and it's not just me. It makes me want to improve and do better."

BLESS A., GRADE 9, 826 BOSTON



2 To increase students' feelings of ownership and pride in their writing.

When students know there is an audience of readers at the end of the writing process, they are not only more eager to write, but also feel more ownership and pride over the writing. They work harder and enjoy the experience more. For most students, the only audience they write to is their teacher, usually to demonstrate understanding of a topic. Publishing changes that context. Students want to make sure they are expressing themselves as clearly and effectively as possible. They know they are writing to someone, not just for a grade. They see themselves as authors with a responsibility and connection to the reader. When students see their writing culminate in a book or other publication, they have a physical, concrete representation of their hard work for all to see, and they gain confidence in their own skills. They begin to see themselves as writers and authors with thoughts and words worth paying for and reading. And tied into all of that is a sense of accomplishment: the thought that if they can write a book, they can write anything.

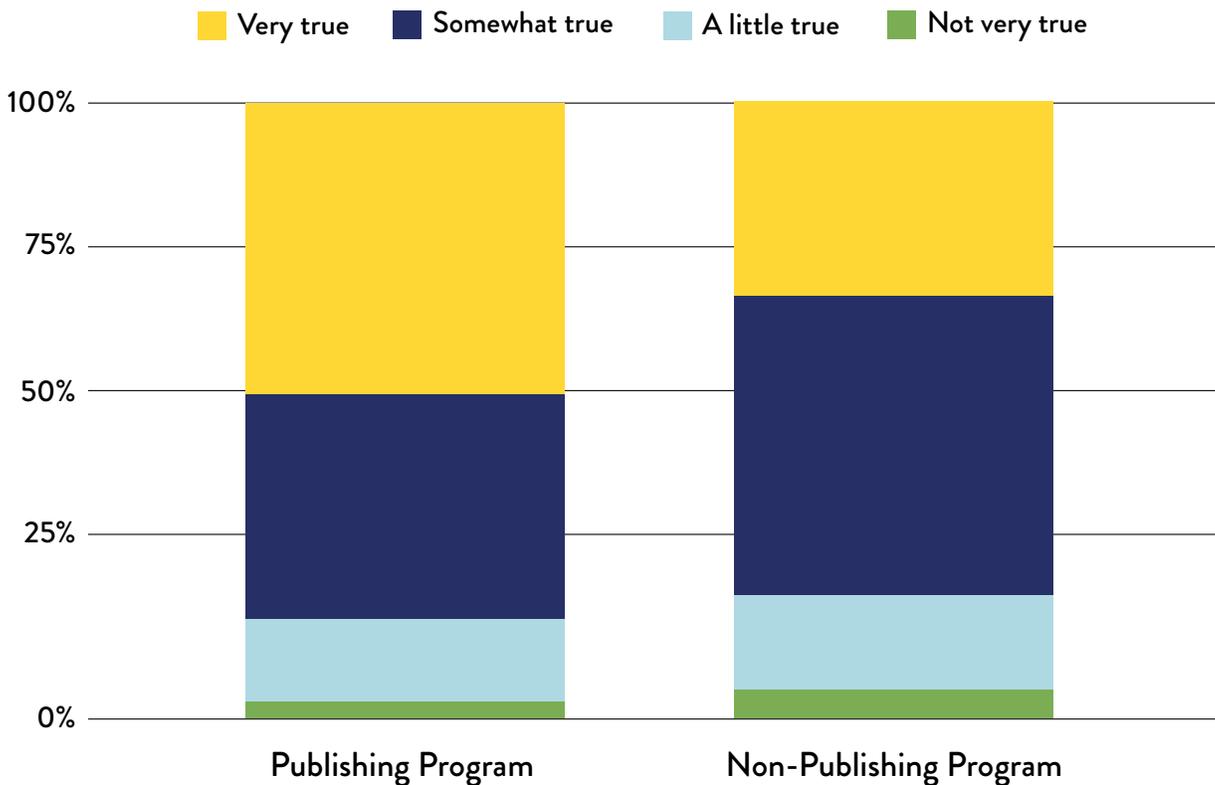
EXCERPT FROM
THE NOISE FELT HUMAN

**“Actually, it’s not
me who writes
the poem—it’s my
heart writing.”**

MARIA C., GRADE 11, 826CHI

In a post-program survey of our 2020-2021 school-year students, the majority of 826 students across our programs felt proud of their writing in general. However, students in publishing programs (n= 148) felt more strongly about having pride in their writing, with 47.3% indicating “very true” as compared to 31.3% of students in non-publishing programs (n=786), a statistically significant difference (p<.05).

How true is the statement, “I feel proud of my writing.”?



When we ask students to describe what it feels like to be published, their responses are positive across the board:

“I couldn’t take it seriously at first because I couldn’t believe it. I never thought of myself as a writer before.”
 HAWI E., GRADE 9, 826 MSP

“It feels Awesome, Amazing, Great. I love it that people will know that we’re not just kids, we’re smart and we know how to write a story.”
 ANGEL S., GRADE 3, 826MICHIGAN

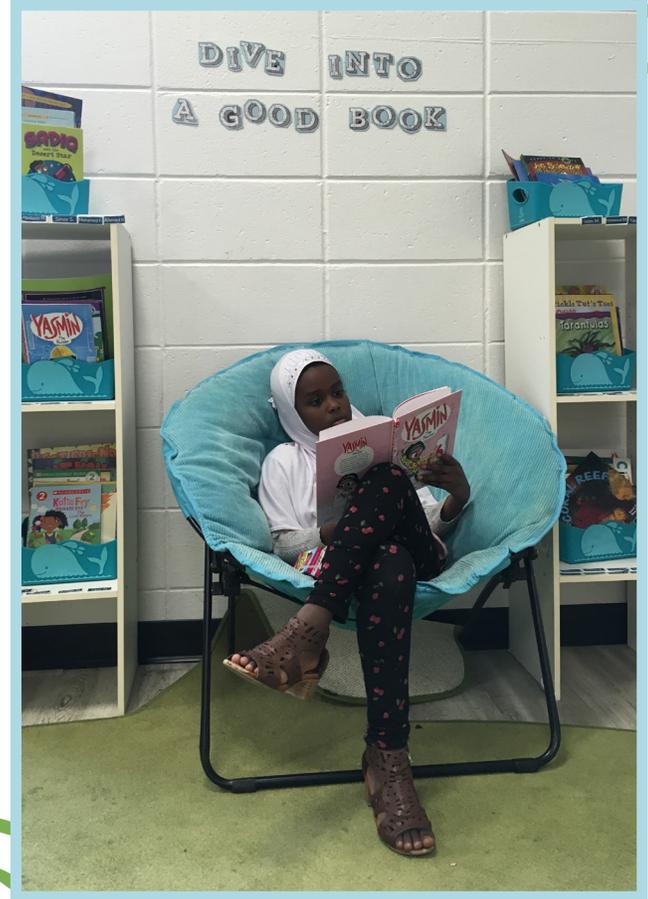
“It feels like sharing your art with the world.”
 MARISSA B., GRADE 7, 826CHI



3 To use as a learning tool for other student writers.

Reading peer writing offers an avenue for students to relate personally to a mentor text and see themselves as capable of doing the same. It is especially important for students to see published authors who resemble themselves in age and background, as conventional school curriculum often highlights “classic” authors and texts that can intimidate student readers and writers.³ Reading published texts that mirror their own way of speaking and engaging with the world can be a liberating practice for students.

In 2011, a distinguished group of scholars and teachers wrote a series of essays about what happens when the texts that students write become the focus of a writing course. Across the board, they asserted that “teaching with student texts is not simply a classroom technique, but a way of working with writing that defines composition as a field.”⁴ Reading student texts in the classroom legitimizes student writing by portraying it as worthy of academic praise and discussion.⁵ Most often, students only work with peer writing during the draft/revision process, and teachers don’t have time to consider how those texts can evolve into “expert” texts. Having student publications as mentor texts subverts the idea that student writing can only be “novice,” meant to be judged, evaluated, and corrected, rather than read as a mentor text.⁶ Not only are student publications a pedagogical tool for students to explore and work with their own writing, they can also help student readers and writers alike to view themselves as capable writers and authors.



“There is nothing more powerful, especially when I have reluctant writers, to show a model from someone their own age who shares their identity.”

826 WRITING TUTOR

4

To include and amplify student voices in the larger societal conversation.

Students are the next generation of civic leaders. But more than that, they have the power to change things now, as youth leaders and activists are on the front lines of social, political, and ideological movements worldwide. It's essential for the field of education to cultivate and capitalize on the enthusiasm for civic discourse and engagement that is moving so many young people to action. Students everywhere should learn that their voice and perspective matter and that change begins at the local level, in their communities, their classrooms, and within themselves. While not all students will take their writing to the level of active change, writing down their thoughts is still a way for all students to begin engaging with important societal issues that affect them and their communities.

Writing, especially for publication, is one way to foster student voice and civic engagement. Researchers and educators alike encourage schools to promote democratic principles and civic participation in schools by engaging student voices through avenues such as student government or the school newspaper.⁷ When students write about their communities and the issues that matter to them, they grapple with what it means to be a part of that community, or to be a citizen of this country. They explore the past, represent and analyze the present from their perspective, and create new possible futures. Students can write books about the gentrification of their neighborhoods, the need for free and safe public transportation, their identity and experiences as first and second-generation Americans, the legacy of racism in the classroom and beyond, and so much more. And making a book isn't the only way to "publish" student voices—our students also write letters to local and national politicians, speak at community events, make posters thanking health care workers, and create poems to be displayed on everything from pizza boxes to bus shelters. Also, interacting with the community in this way builds mutual understanding and empathy, meaning that it benefits the reader as well as the writer. It is incredibly important to create channels for students to use their voices to express themselves and affect change.



EXCERPT FROM *WE ARE ALIVE
WHEN WE SPEAK FOR JUSTICE*

“The key to changing this country is within us; we have a voice and two fists to raise. Whether we choose to use this power is up to us. Will we die unspoken or will we live unbroken?”

JACQUELINE R., 826LA

Publishing in Action

“Never Read It. It’s the same as our book. People have never read it but they need to. They’ve never read it because it’s been locked up inside us. They’ve never read it because we didn’t have the courage to write it before.”

MELANIE C., 826LA, EXCERPT FROM NEVER READ IT

We have various publishing opportunities at 826—handmade books during field trips, anthologies of writing from our After-School Tutoring students, poems from workshops on coffee sleeves—but we’re going to take a look at our most intensive publishing program, the Young Authors’ Book Project (see Box C. for examples of non-traditional publishing at 826). Students spend three to four months writing about a particular theme and collaborate with 826 staff and volunteers throughout the editing and publishing process, which culminates in a beautiful publication. Our expectation is not that every educator will have the time or resources to produce a professional-quality book like 826, but rather, that they can use these best practices to take students on a journey through the publication process. Throughout the entire process, we keep three big ideas in mind:



Preserving authentic student voice:

As much as possible, we refrain from editing out students’ authentic voices, encouraging them to write in their own vernaculars.



Student agency and choice:

We believe that every aspect of the book should reflect the students’ vision as much as possible, from the themes and topics to the cover art and design layout.



Scaffolding skills:

We break the writing process down into manageable projects and mini-lessons, teaching students the various skills needed to publish a book as they’re actually publishing a book.

Laying the Groundwork

Before jumping into the writing itself, we work with students to establish an open and supportive culture and build knowledge. During a publishing project, it is essential that students feel safe, invested, and open to both sharing their words and ideas and receiving feedback. Here are a few things to consider as you begin a publishing project:



Create a welcoming and brave space.

Before students pick up a pen, make sure to create a safe, friendly writing community. You can play icebreakers and engage in community-building conversations so that students practice sharing and listening with their classmates.



Teach mini-lessons.

Mini-lessons can make a longer project feel manageable, emphasize the different parts of the writing process, and result in concrete skill-building that both enriches the project and is applicable to students' future writing. Some example topics include: crafting meaningful interview questions and bringing that interview to the page, character development, and adding detail. You can also introduce students to mentor texts that will help inspire or inform their own writing.



Consider the audience.

All throughout the writing process, ask students to consider the audience they're writing to. Who are they? What is or isn't interesting/compelling to them? How do you want to come across to them? What impact do you hope your writing has on them?



Choose a theme.

It is important to know where the book is going before students start drafting their pieces—is it an informational book about the community they live in? A collection of short stories about time travel? Poetry inspired by mentor texts? Suggestions for civic leaders? It's crucial to get student buy-in before moving forward with the publishing project and for students to have agency over their writing with prompts that invite dynamic responses

The Publishing Process

At 826, we emphasize that “writing” is not just putting pen to paper—it’s everything a writer does from the moment they start thinking about a project until the moment they share their final piece with an audience. We have opportunities for students to engage with other elements of the publishing process, such as editing and design, in order to turn the manuscript into a real book that will be shared with an audience. All of these pieces that people don’t often think about help students dive deeper into the publication process, and feel more like real authors!

We guide students through the five stages of writing for publication: Pre-Writing, Drafting, Revising, Editing, and Publishing. Through this process, we aim not to teach students to write formulaically, but instead to develop their own unique writing voice and communicate it to the best of their ability.

The first four probably sound familiar as they are staples of the writing process in general, but we want to dig deeper into the publishing stage.



Pre-Writing

Everything you do before you actually sit down and start to write in complete sentences, like brainstorming and outlining.

Drafting

The time to get ideas down on the page, even if they’re messy or imperfect.

Revising

The process of strengthening your ideas, adding or changing the structure of your first draft in order to make your writing as clear and effective as possible.

Editing

The nitty-gritty aspect of the writing process, this is the time for making final changes, particularly relating to grammar and readability. We try not to edit out the students’ voice as much as possible, as we want them to be comfortable writing in their own vernacular.

Publishing

The time to pull all the content together and decide what the final product is going to look like!

BOX B. 826 NATIONAL STUDENT EDITORIAL BOARD

At 826, a group of students called the Student Editorial Board often take the reins in the publishing stage. Recently, we expanded Student Editorial Boards formed at the chapter level to a national level. In the spring of 2021, 826 and non-826 students from across the country submitted writing pieces for an 826 National publication based on a prompt from award-winning author and three-time National Ambassador for Young People’s Literature Jason Reynolds. After receiving more than 100 submissions from across the country, we established the first-ever 826 National Student Editorial Board, which brought together students from all nine of our 826 chapters. These nineteen committed middle and high school students read through submissions, which were first reviewed by student leadership at our chapters and then elevated to the National Student Editorial Board, who chose which ones to include in the book and grouped the writing into different themed sections. Along with submitting their own pieces, they also wrote the introduction as a group and worked with a professional designer to choose the visual style for the cover art and book layout. During the last virtual session, students signed up for an “open mic” to read their pieces, and as they read, the rest of the students jotted down lines they heard that could be the title of the book.

WE ASKED THE STUDENTS ABOUT THEIR EXPERIENCE ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD:

What made you want to join the editorial board?

“I joined because I wanted to experience what it felt like editing a book on a larger scale. They really delivered when they said they would work alongside us and treat us as professionals.”—*Rayne C., Grade 11, 826 New Orleans*

What specific things did you learn about editing and designing a book?

“How to give good and bad feedback on my work and turn it into something better”—*Robyn W., Grade 8, 826LA*

“I learned more about the visual design of a cover. It was interesting hearing about certain colors that attract different ages. I also learned more about the editorial process and how to do it more effectively.”—*Josiah A., Grade 8, 826michigan*

“I learned how the design process went, how collaboration affects a book, and how to fit into a theme with my writing.”—*Arianna R., Grade 11, 826 Boston*

What was the most memorable or meaningful moment of the editorial board experience?

“Getting to look at everyone’s writing. It always feels like an honor when someone shares their writing because writing is a physical form of somebody’s vulnerability and it’s special to see that when I get the chance.”—*Justis P., Grade 9, 826 Boston*

“The last meeting when we performed our poems. There was a lot of warmth in that space.”—*Bless A., Grade 9, 826 Boston*

Why do you think publishing student work is important?

“Because our voices need to be forefronted if we want to reimagine this world.”—*Anton J., Grade 12, 826 MSP*

“Publishing students is important because our perspective is important. Our experiences and hardships are important, too. There are so many students that are talented and deserve a chance at being heard. Even being published once can really encourage someone to keep writing.”—*Bless A., Grade 9, 826 Boston*

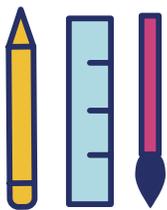
“Being published has shaped my perspective on writing. Rather than writing something random, I put more thought into my writing.”—*Aravah C., Grade 8, 826NYC*

Elements of the Publishing Stage:



Peer editing:

It is important to cultivate spaces that foster sharing, reflection, and dialogue from day one. Establish a student editorial group, assigning roles to interested students (see Box B. to dive deeper into 826's Student Editorial Boards). This allows students to act as the collective editor and designer of the book, and to become ambassadors for their fellow students' ideas. Center peer review around not only observation and suggestions, but also around curiosity: What are students curious about/interested in when they read each other's work? What do they want to know more about?



Design:

Design gives students the opportunity to dive into the details of publishing a book. Students can identify uniting themes within the book and explore how the presentation of the pieces can reflect those themes. Some questions you might ask your students include: How can the design best reflect the themes of the book? How will we order the writing pieces? What font should we use? What will the final product look like (e.g., a physical book, an online publication, an instruction manual, etc.)? Should we include a table of contents?



Title:

The best titles often come directly from the students' writing itself. Have students read through each other's pieces and pull out 2 or 3 of their favorite lines and phrases that they feel best represent the theme of the publication. Have the class vote for their favorite titles, or hold a student-led full group discussion about the options.



Cover Art:

Designing a cover challenges students to a deeper inspection of their theme by thinking about how it can be indicated through images. You might first ask the class to weigh in on key design decisions, such as: What images come to mind when you think about the book? Should the cover be colorful or monotone? Full of details or minimalist? How much space should the title take up? If you have the luxury of working with a professional designer or illustrator, ask them to present several different directions for the cover. If not, see if any of your students are interested in creating the cover art for the book!



Student Introduction:

Along with handling the design elements, our Student Editorial Boards also write an introduction for the book. They often talk about what the process of writing the book was like, what they learned from it, and what they want the reader to get out of the book. This is a chance to explore another kind of writing with your students, as they have to both broadly summarize the contents of the book while also acclimating the reader to the tone and themes of the publication. Before your students begin work on an introduction, have them do some brainstorming based on the following questions: What important aspects of the book and the writing process do we want to tell our readers about? Is there anything a reader needs to know before diving into the book? How can we ensure that the introduction reflects the thoughts/intents/perspectives of all the student authors?

Guest Foreword:



826 books also include a foreword written by an influential adult in the school or community who was chosen by the students. We've had educators, politicians, writers, and popstars alike pen forewords that praise and analyze our students' words. In a way, the foreword writer is the first audience for the book, and their words help to validate and honor the student authors' work. It also elevates the students' work to stand alongside acclaimed writers or public figures in a publication as fellow writers. Our Student Editorial Boards often head up the selection process, working together with our staff and volunteers. Together, talk to students about who they would be interested in hearing from—maybe they have a favorite teacher or school administrator, or they admire a local community artist— and have students write a letter or email to solicit their help with the foreword.

Author Biographies:



All of our books also include an author biography for each piece, which ranges from the name and age of a student to a brief “about the author” paragraph that you would see at the end of a professional publication. Students have said this is a favorite part of the project, both because they enjoy the style of writing and it helps them see themselves as real authors. We recommend starting out by sharing some examples with students so that they understand the format. You can then have students fill out a form with helpful prompts like: Tell your readers a little bit about where you are from. What do you love to do? Tell us an interesting fact of your choice about yourself. What is something that is important to you? What did or do you enjoy or find challenging about writing? What are your goals for the future? Once students have filled those out, they can start crafting their own author biographies!



Celebrations

No Young Authors' Book Project would be complete without a book launch party to celebrate the hard work of the student authors! Our launch parties serve three important purposes:

- 1 CELEBRATE:** To celebrate the student writers and all they accomplished! Students help to plan the party in order to create a space in which they feel safe and celebrated, often including traditions from their cultures and communities. Attendees play games and answer writing prompts, eat and drink, give author signatures, and hold the book in their hands for the first time.
- 2 COMMUNITY:** The launch party is also the time when we invite families and the broader community into our spaces to listen to and celebrate our students' words. The writing tutors and teaching artists attend as well to celebrate with the students they have been working with over the past few months. The party, like the book, reflects the students and the communities they come from.
- 3 SHARE:** The launch party is an opportunity for students to share their work directly with an audience and take even more pride in their writing. Students volunteer to read their pieces and also to talk about their experience writing the book.

While we love the atmosphere of an in-person celebration event, our chapters found ways to bring joy to virtual celebrations. Students who were uncomfortable reading live were able to record their pieces beforehand, while some chapters had unboxing events where students unwrapped their copies of the book on camera. Attendees shared their responses to writing prompts in the chat, creating a writing community like the students have been working in. Students took the reins even more, co-leading discussion and Q&A panels with 826 staff. While a big event or festival is not always possible, we suggest doing some quick research on local literary events that may spark ideas beyond a classroom party!

BOX C. BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL PUBLICATION

While creating high-quality physical books is a core aspect of 826's publishing work, it is not the only avenue in which we share our students' writing. In particular, being stuck in our homes during the pandemic got us thinking about alternative ways to "publish" student work beyond the traditional classroom book. Here are some creative ways that our chapters have been getting student words out into the world, publishing everywhere from digital platforms to neighborhood lawns and community spaces:



826 Boston's A Tour of Latin America:

In the latest project from the Blanca Burgos Bilingual Writers' Room at the Rafael Hernández School, middle school students did extensive research into different places in Latin America in order to create a massive travel guide for the region! This [interactive Google Map](#) features stories of places to visit, culture, food, music, and history across the diverse region. By clicking on different locations on the map, readers can learn about everything from capital cities to famous soccer players, enjoy poetry about food and music, and read personal narratives by students who have traveled to or lived in Latin America. This project shows that there are lots of unique ways to publish content, especially with new digital tools that are free and add to the purpose of the project—instead of just publishing the writing in a physical book, the visual medium of Google Maps helps readers visualize the journey that the student writers are taking them on.



826 MSP's Words on a Line:

Thanks to a unique partnership with Metro Transit, twenty-three poems by twenty-three young 826 MSP poets were displayed on bus shelters throughout Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Brooklyn Park in the summer of 2019. Due to the success of this project, 826 MSP encouraged students to create even more writing for public display in a workshop called Words on a Line, where students wrote poems about transit, travel, their neighborhoods, communities, and the places they call home. Their writing will be available at bus stops throughout the Twin Cities, combining both traditional publishing with more imaginative means to get their student writing displayed in as many places as possible.



826 New Orleans' Pizza Poetry Project:

Working together with some of the best pizza joints in town, 826 New Orleans publishes poems of all kinds on pizza boxes for delivery and pick up on Pizza Poetry Day. New Orleans' Young Writers' Council selects poems across age groups to be the Pizza Poet Laureates. The laureates are honored with a certificate and reading at a Pizza Poetry Party, and all of the poems are collected and published in a [Pizza Poetry Anthology](#).



826 Valencia's Odes to a Hero:

Odes to a Hero is a collaborative project between 826 Valencia, the Saint Francis Foundation, and Saint Francis Memorial Hospital with the intention to increase appreciation of San Francisco's health care workers during the COVID-19 pandemic and boost spirits at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital. After reading bios for six health care workers from Saint Francis Memorial Hospital, the students prepared interview questions and met with the heroes. They took what they learned from each person and wrote odes to the health care workers that celebrate and honor their dedication. Illustrated by artists Tony Manalo and Elizabeth McConaughy-Oliver, [framed artworks](#) featuring the original student writing was hung in a busy thoroughfare at Saint Francis Memorial Hospital from October-December 2021. Each whimsical artwork features the health care workers' favorite flowers and plants and other calming imagery designed to boost morale.

Citations:

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⁷Beaudoin, N. (2016). In *Elevating Student Voice: how to enhance student participation, citizenship and leadership*. Routledge.



To learn more about how you can get involved with 826's movement for writing and creativity, please visit our website at [826national.org](https://www.826national.org).