



# Before It Wiggles Away

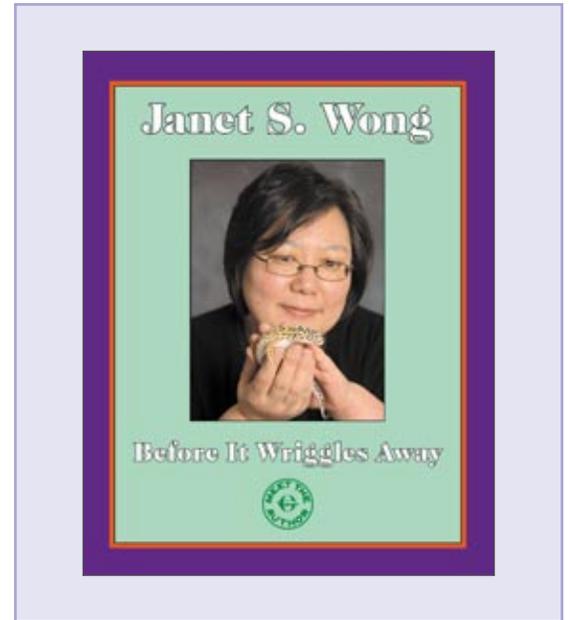
by Janet S. Wong

Thank you for choosing to use my book in your classroom!

When I was asked to write a **Meet the Author** book for Richard C. Owen Publishers, I was thrilled; it's one of those invitations that make you feel like you've truly "arrived" as an author. I was also pleased for a very practical reason: now I have a resource to recommend to the many children who write me, curious about my family and my everyday life.

There are many fun and easy things you can do with my book. Here are some suggestions; I hope you find a few of them useful!

Janet S. Wong

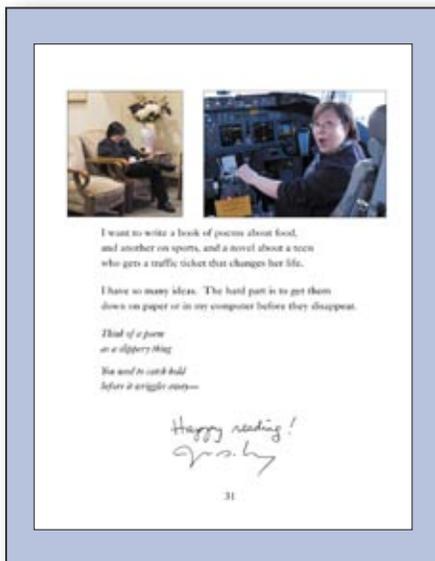


## 1 WRITE IT DOWN!

One of the main themes of my book is that good writing ideas pop into your mind all the time—and vanish just as quickly leaving you wishing you could remember that "great book idea—whatever it was."

On **page 31**, I wrote: "I have so many ideas. The hard part is to get them down on paper or in my computer before they disappear."

Writing ideas down is a simple concept, but one that needs to be repeated!



## Try This!

Have students write 1-5 words on an index card, listing an idea for a poem or story.

You can inspire your students by sharing a few ideas of your own, perhaps: braces, birthday party, time I almost drowned, stitches from skateboard accident, new puppy, bad haircut, bugs, kites, loose tooth.

Once they've written these ideas down, place the index cards in a box. Pull all the ideas out, reading them aloud in rapid succession.

Students have the choice of jotting down notes or not. Then switch to math or some other unrelated subject.

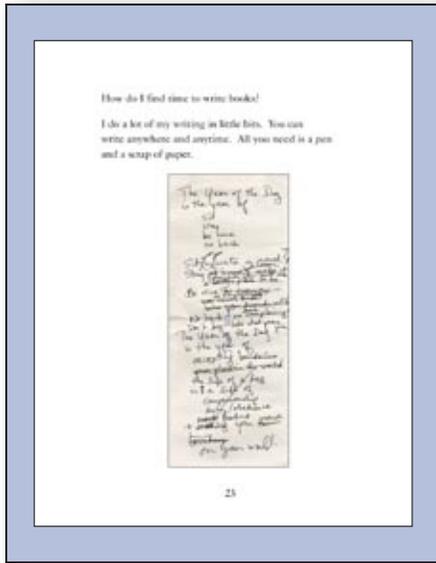
One hour later, have the students recite the ideas they remember. Chances are, the students with notes will remember the most—because they caught hold of the ideas before they wriggled away!

An added bonus: now that students have heard a couple dozen ideas, they'll have at least ONE thing to write about—and you can launch into a five-minute quick-write of a poem!

# Meet The Author Series Teacher's Guide – Before It Wiggles Away

## 2 ANYWHERE and ANYTIME

**Page 23:** “I do a lot of my writing in little bits. You can write anywhere and anytime. All you need is a pen and a scrap of paper.”



### Try This!

Have students keep a small pen or pencil with them 24 hours a day, for one week, and jot down ideas on any available scraps of paper when and where they pop into their heads.

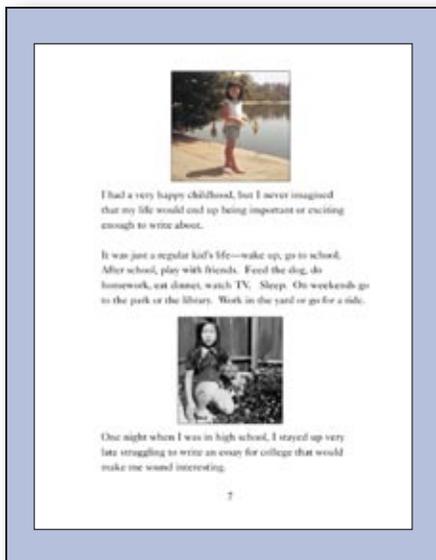
Instruct them to keep a flashlight by their beds, too, in case they get an idea there.

They will enjoy writing on a piece of toilet tissue, on the back of an envelope, or on a restaurant napkin: “bathroom, 7 p.m.,” “in bed, just before falling asleep, 9 p.m.,” and “McDonald’s, after school.”

Or maybe they will be so frustrated to be caught without paper that they’ll start carrying tiny notebooks in their pockets!

## 3 A REGULAR KID’S LIFE

**Page 7:** “I never imagined that my life would end up being important or exciting enough to write about. It was just a regular kid’s life—wake up, go to school. After school, play with friends. Feed the dog, do homework, eat dinner, watch TV. Sleep. On weekends go to the park or the library. Work in the yard or go for a ride.”



### Try This!

Ask kids to write a short paragraph describing their version of a “regular kid’s life.” Have them read their ideas aloud, and encourage more details in their second drafts:

Waking up early and ready to start the day? Or sleepy? Waking in the middle of dreams, or not? What kinds of dreams? Breakfast? Riding the bus or walking? Playing what kinds of games? Where? What types of lessons? Eating fast food? Home-cooked meals? All together at a table? In a car? Going where on weekends? Growing fruit in the garden, or flowers, or just pulling weeds?

Make a big list on the board of their varied activities.

Hopefully what will emerge is a huge messy list showing a lot of diversity in their weekly routines, little consensus on what a “regular kid’s life” is—and a new appreciation for the rich writing material in their own lives.

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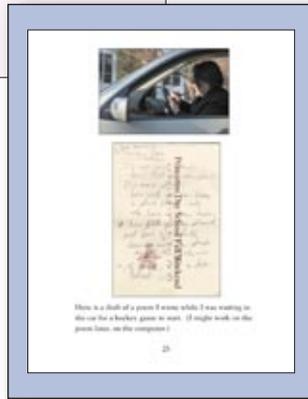
## 4 TAKE A VOTE

On **page 25**, you will find a first draft of my poem, “What Makes A Hockey Star.”

Here is a second draft of that poem. My first draft used repetition and rhyme (and off-rhyme) to hold it together. To make a totally different second draft, I decided to use no rhyme or repetition and to try to use a couple of similes.

### What Makes A Hockey Star (Draft 2)

You are fast as a penguin sliding across the ice,  
solid as a polar bear, blocking the goal.  
Your teeth were never your best feature.  
A puck in the neck? No big deal.  
You were made for hockey.



Now, here is a third draft where I took my favorite parts of Draft 1 and Draft 2 and knitted them together, adding a few extra words here and there:

### What Makes A Hockey Star (Draft 3)

It's not just about  
how well you can skate  
(but you're tough as a polar bear on ice)—

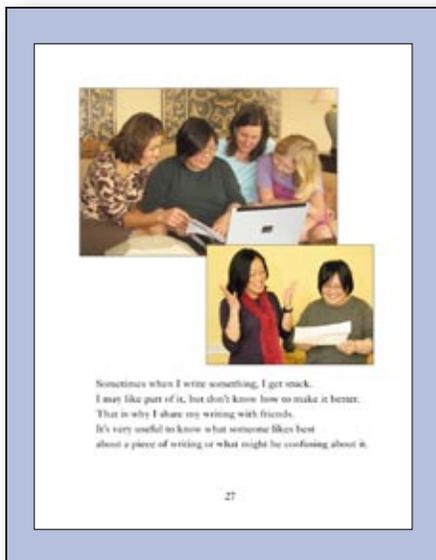
It's more about  
how well you can take  
a full-body blow to your knee (not nice)—

It's about how much you want the puck.  
(And, of course, it's a lot  
about plain old luck!)

Take a vote, and see which version your students prefer. The vote likely will be split, which is fine; that will simply show how difficult it is to judge poetry!

## 5 WRITING WITH FRIENDS

**Page 27:** “Sometimes when I write something, I get stuck. I may like part of it, but don't know how to make it better. That is why I share my writing with friends. It's very useful to know what someone likes best about a piece of writing or what might be confusing about it.”



### Try This!

Ask your students to take a piece of writing that “could use improvement.” Make three photocopies of each piece. Have the student distribute the three copies among friends. Each friend is to underline their favorite parts and put question marks by anything that is confusing. The author of the piece should then compare the three friends' comments and decide whether (and how) to revise. If all three friends love a certain part, that part probably should not be changed, but if all three friends have questions about another part, perhaps it's time for revision there!

Sometimes seeing a friend's negative comment about my writing makes me angry that she “didn't understand it,” or reinforces how much I love a sentence. You don't need to make changes just because someone says you should. On the other hand, if several readers are confused by the same sentence, there's a problem.

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## 6 DIFFERENT KINDS OF POEMS

**Page 12:** “Myra Cohn Livingston...showed me that really didn't know enough about poetry to hate it...Myra urged me to read lots of different kinds of poems: funny poems, serious poems, rhyming poems, free-verse, haiku, and poems that sounded like regular talk.”



Most of the poems you'll find on the children's 811 shelf will be funny rhyming poems. For the best funny rhyming poems, see collections by J. Patrick Lewis, Douglas Florian, and Karla Kuskin.

Children need to hear all sorts of poems, though: for serious free-verse poems, consider sharing poems by Valerie Worth, Deborah Chandra, April Halprin Wayland, Alice Schertle, Kristine O'Connell George, Pat Mora, and Naomi Shihab Nye. Look at haiku collections by Paul Janeczko and Jack Prelutsky. Look for poems on unusual subjects, such as Lee Bennett Hopkins's anthologies on math, science, and U.S. history/geography, and poems in unusual forms, such as Betsy Franco's math poems and Joan Bransfield Graham's concrete poems.

You'll find poems that “sound like regular talk” written by Myra Cohn Livingston, Eve Merriam, Arnold Adoff, Gary Soto, Nikki Grimes, and—me!



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## Other Meet The Author Titles



### About the Meet The Author Collection

35 best-known and award-winning authors like Janet Wong, Jane Yolen, Cynthia Rylant, and Patricia Polacco share their lives and creative process in these autobiographies written for children in grades 2-5. Each title is 32 pages, hardcover, with unique full color photographs of the author at work, home, and play.

**Meet the Author** is ideal for both classroom use and library collections:

- Authors relate to children as peers
- Books contain essential primary source material for author studies
- Authors describe and model the writing process

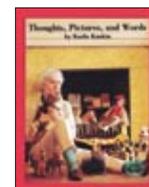
For more information on Janet's books and school visits, visit her website [www.janetwong.com](http://www.janetwong.com).



731  
**Douglas Florian**  
*See for Your Self*

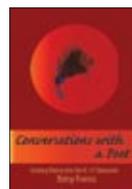


704  
**Lee Bennett Hopkins**  
*The Writing Bug*



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**Karla Kuskin**  
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**Betsy Franco**  
*Conversations With a Poet: Inviting Poetry into K-12 Classrooms*

Written by a practiced poet and author of many books for children and adults, this title explores how to write, read, and teach sixteen poetry forms. Part I offers a thoughtful, easy-to-read view of how to teach poetry. For each poetry form, Part II includes: a brief history, characteristics of the form, everyday parallels, original sample poems, demonstrations for writing, and an extensive bibliography. The author links poetry to state standards in an engaging way for teachers and their students.

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