

## Young Writers' Week at Suva International Primary School

*Janet Tauvu*

This week our school celebrated Young Writers' Week with all our primary school children.

Positive motivation and a positive attitude are important factors in learning to read and write. We believe it is essential that children view themselves from the beginning as capable readers and writers who are well on the way to success in reading and writing.

Writing helps us to make sense of our world. It is a powerful tool by which to remember, develop, organise, research, gain self-knowledge and communicate ideas, feelings and information.

### **The School English Language Programme**

Our school programme is based on the International Baccalaureate Primary years programme which is inquiry-based and encourages children to write on the topics they are investigating in social studies and science, based on the following essential ideas for teaching and learning:

Children will be encouraged to:

- ❖ show interest and curiosity in different models or forms of writing;
- ❖ observe and listen while the teacher models writing e.g. a morning greeting and highlights of the day;
- ❖ draw and write about their own experiences regularly;
- ❖ attempt to form letters conventionally and legibly following the Queensland handwriting style;
- ❖ write independently, experimenting with print and using known letter sounds and structures to write letters and words and give them meaning; and
- ❖ respond to conventional

pencil grasp instruction.

Teachers will:

- ❖ encourage interest and curiosity in the children towards writing;
- ❖ model a daily message or the appropriate form of writing in front of the children e.g. a morning greeting and highlights of the day, a report or a recount of an interesting event;
- ❖ motivate and encourage a positive attitude to writing with the children;
- ❖ teach and model the various forms of writing daily as set out in the ISS language programme which provides for daily practice and the development of specific writing skills and forms of writing at each year level;
- ❖ provide a writing table or centre in the classroom with interesting paper, letter-writing tools, pens, pencils and ideas for writing: pictures, photographs, books – always available and updated regularly;
- ❖ encourage an interest in stories and legends from Fiji and the Pacific Islands;
- ❖ provide practice and experience in gross (big body) movements such as dancing, and develop fine motor skills through cutting, pasting and model making;
- ❖ provide individual writing books to enable children to draw and write on a daily basis, on topics of interest to them and as a response to the teacher's modelled writing;
- ❖ encourage the children right from the beginning to draw and write independently, experimenting with print and using known letter sounds and structures to write letters and words and give them meaning; and
- ❖ leave the pencil in the hands of the child to enable them to freely experiment with writing.

### **Writers' week**

The planning committee led by our Early Childhood Coordinator, Mrs Yvonne Bakalar, worked out a timetable that allowed all the students and teachers time to prepare for the forthcoming week's events.

The teachers and children were informed at the beginning of the previous term of the Young Writers' Week coming up so that they had at least 10 weeks to prepare and choose from their school writing programme the pieces of written work they wished to submit. For the children in Year One upwards, this would be a selection from written work that has been drafted and written with the teacher's guidance, proofread together and then re-written in the writer's best handwriting to make a finished publication: zig zag books, posters, shape books, hand-written books, work published on computer, and big books individually made or made by the class or a group. Topics vary from retold Fijian stories or legends to recounts of the student's own experiences.

Kindergarten children (our 3-5 year-olds) chose their best writing and drawings to submit from their classroom work.

In the week before the Writers' Week, all the children put the finishing touches to their pieces of published work, ready to submit for display on Friday. It is important to understand that this is not a competition, as every child's best work (two pieces each) was accepted and displayed. The teachers made gold medals from recycled paper given to us by a friendly factory nearby to stick on each child's work.

### **A Book Display**

As the children wrote and rewrote their pieces of writing and made illustrations, title pages and book covers ready to submit, the teachers set up a library book display in their classrooms. The books were those that had won

awards for their excellence as children's literature or for their illustrations. The teachers shared their own personal likes and favourite books with the students' as part of the lead up to the week's events. Our teachers are encouraged to read books (especially books that have won recognition for their excellence in some way) or part of a bigger chapter book to their students every day.

### **Invitations to local writers**

The week's activities began with Seona Smiles, a Fiji Times columnist, who entertained us as she shared her collection of favourite books and authors at our Assembly. Other well-known writing experts in the community were invited to come during the week to talk to the students about their own writing experiences and share their work. We are very grateful to the following people who gave up an afternoon or morning to work with the students:

- ❖ Seona Smiles for a wonderful assembly;
- ❖ Debby Mue, who spoke to Year 2 and Year 4 children and shared her hand-made and published big books;
- ❖ Kelera, who retold and read traditional stories from Fiji to the Year Ones;
- ❖ Cecilia Manuelli, short story writer, who shared her wisdom and experiences with the Year Threes;
- ❖ journalist Susan de Gues, who worked with the Year Fives to make a travel brochure to advertise their recent camp at Naveisama Village Eco tourist camp near Rakiraki; and
- ❖ Larry Thomas, Suva's own playwright, with whom the Year Sixes spent a delightful afternoon sharing ideas.

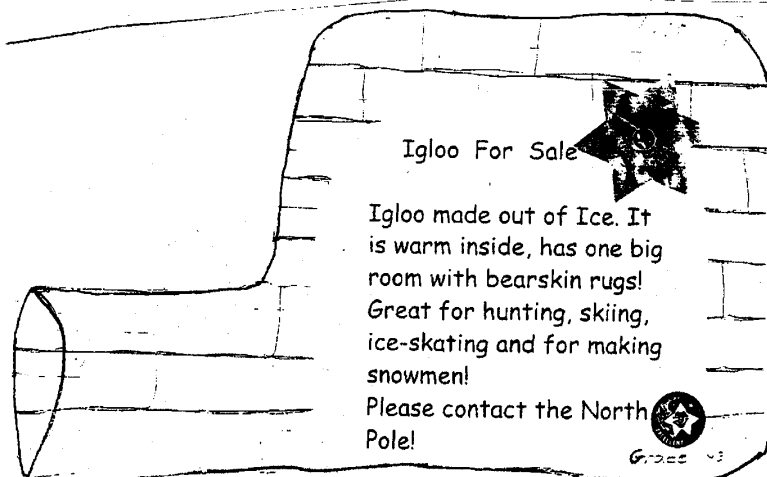
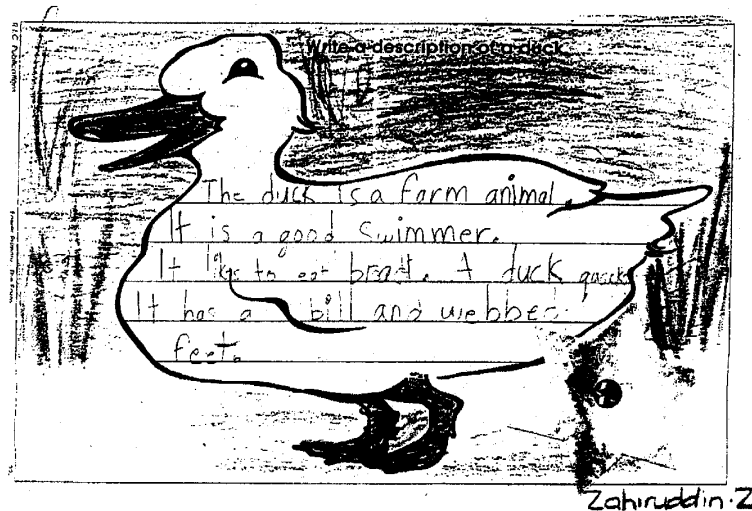
### **Book Character Parade/ Assembly**

To complete the week, on Friday we asked the students and teachers to come dressed as their favourite book characters and to bring the book along if

they could. TV characters were discouraged but not disallowed.

We had a wonderful collection of Cinderellas, Tom Sawyers, princesses, mermaids, giants, fairies, Alices, Snow Whites and of course Harry Potters, witches and wizards to name just a few. The teachers stole the show as Cat in the Hat, witches, pirates, Old Mother Hubbard, Laura from the Little House on the Prairie and even a fairy godmother. After a character parade and our favourite songs at assembly, the children

toured the classrooms and visited the book display made by their school friends. Each child received an ISS Writers Award certificate to commemorate the week and, we hope, went home proud of what they had achieved. The teachers went home for a well-earned rest, pleased with the positive enthusiasm and wonderful written work displayed by all the students!





Author  
and  
Illustrator by Epi

One day there was a huge dalo at the back of Wyatt's house. When the dalo was mature Wyatt went to pull it but he couldn't. Epi came along. He pulled with Wyatt but still it was of no use. Tristam came along and helped but still it was of no use. When Jordan came by he saw Wyatt, Epi and Tristam struggling to pull the dalo. So helped the boys they pulled the dalo. They tried and they tried but still it was of no use. Wyatt said, "What am I going to do?" Tristam replied "Don't worry we will get it out." "But how?" said Wyatt, "The party is on tomorrow and I haven't started yet." Finally Stefan came. He saw us hanging around and asked, "What are you four doing?" Wyatt said, "I have a party tomorrow and I am not ready." "Well I'll help you." So they tried again. They pulled and they pulled but it didn't come out. Wyatt said, "This is of no use. What am I going to do?" They all didn't say anything. Tristam said, "Let's get the other things done then we will come back to this." Once they had put up all the decorations. They came back to the dalo. They pulled and pulled finally the dalo came out. They started to cut up the dalo. It took them one hour. The next morning they all came to Wyatt's house and started to cook the dalo. When they had finish cooking, the party started. Wyatt invited Jordan, Tristam, Stefan and Epi to his party. They shared the dalo soup with other people.