

JOURNALS AND IDEA FILES

In her book, *Speaking of JOURNALS* (Boyd's Mills Press, 1999) Paula Graham introduces us to successful authors and asks them all the same question: "When did you start keeping a journal?" The answers don't vary much. Jean Craighead George was 10; Kathleen Krull, 12; James Cross Giblin, 10; Eileen Spinelli, 9; David L. Harrison, 12. Some of these records were kept in diaries and some in folders so the point isn't so much about keeping journals as it is about keeping ideas *somewhere*. Most writers know to hang onto those good ideas one way or another!

Whether you are helping your students start journals or idea files, here are 10 ways to help you get started. You will add plenty of others.

- 1 Take a walk and describe your thoughts.
- 2 Go through a newspaper or magazine and clip or describe articles that look interesting.
- 3 Describe the way a cat or dog walks, eats, sleeps, plays.
- 4 Describe the most interesting thing you did today.
- 5 Describe the most interesting thing you saw today.

(Here's a quick draft for a poem that grew easily from the most interesting thing I saw one rainy day. I was sitting in my house, looking out the window at the back yard, when a sparrow landed on a lawn chair. After a moment the little bird appeared to realize he was getting wet. With an impatient twitch, he flew into a nearby tree that provided some protection from the steady rain.)

Sparrow got his feathers wet,
Didn't like it not a bit,
Shook his head and flew away,
Found a tree and there he stayed.

- 6 Read a favorite poem and write down what you liked best.
- 7 Describe a poem you would like to write.
- 8 Pick a word and make a list of all the other words you can think of that sound the same.
- 9 Describe your mother/father/brother/sister/friend/teacher.
- 10 Make a list of your favorite things to eat.