

Writing What You Know

with Michelle Medlock Adams

Even in a fiction book, you can use things you have experienced to help build your story! You have a unique life that no one else has had.



► Characters

I love dachshunds. I always have! So I wanted to write a story about that specific breed. I even named one of the characters Winnie Sue after my own rescue dachshund.

Ideas for your own story:

- Base a character on a unique family member or a special pet in your life.
- Write a story about a person in history that you know a lot about or would like to learn about.
- Write the story of a toy that's special to you.
- Your main character could even be an object!
- Write from a different perspective, like *School's First Day of School*, which is about a new school year written from the school's point of view!

► Setting

Your story needs a specific place to happen. I lived in Texas for a while, so I wrote *The Dachshund Dash* to take place in Texas. Because I had spent so much time there, I knew how to make Winnie Sue talk like people in Texas, I knew that people eat Texas barbecue, and I knew that many girls in Texas like to wear big hairbows like Winnie Sue. Plus, there really is a Dachshund Dash weenie dog race in Texas!

Ideas for your own story:

- Your story could happen in a place you've lived. Things that might seem boring to you are really interesting to people who have never lived there!
- Places you've visited also make great settings. Just think back on what made that place special!
- You can also write about places you've learned a lot about from books, movies, or videos.

► Goals

Your main character needs to have a goal—something he/she really wants to do or get. In *The Dachshund Dash*, Crosby wants to run in the race. I wrote about a race because I've run some 5k races and know how they work. I also once had a dachshund named Miller who was really fast, so we entered him in a weenie dog race in Texas.

Crosby also has another goal in the story: he wants to make friends and fit in at his new school. I was able to write about Crosby's feelings because remember how hard it was for my children when we moved from Texas to Indiana. So in Crosby's story, he goes after that goal by talking to Winnie Sue and being kind to Max.

Ideas for your own story:

- Something that you have really wanted to do or get
- A game or prize that you have competed for (or would like to someday)
- Something that one of your friends or family members has really wanted to do

► Problem / Conflict

In every good story, there is something stopping the main character from reaching his/her goal. This problem is called the conflict. In *The Dachshund Dash*, Crosby feels like he can't sign up for the race because Max will laugh at him. Crosby's other goal of making friends and fitting in is being stopped by Max's rude comments and continued bullying. I know I've also been afraid to do things because people might laugh at me, and people have said rude things to me that made me feel sad. Those struggles I've had helped me write a story that might help other people who have felt the same way.

Ideas for your own story:

- A problem that you have encountered
- A problem a friend or family member has faced—I wrote my book *I Will Not Be Afraid* because of a time when my daughters were scared. I wanted to write a book that would help them deal with their fears.

► Solution

Your story should end with the main character fixing or getting past the problem. That doesn't necessarily mean that your character reaches every goal—Crosby wanted to win the race, but instead he realizes that making a friend is more important than winning, so he helps Max instead and ends up finishing the race in last place.

Ideas for your own story:

- If you were facing the same problem as the character, what clever, strong, or kind solution would you use to fix the problem or reach your goal?
- If you were in the character's place, what would a happy ending be to you?
- What is something you have done that has fixed a big problem?

With this list of ideas, brainstorm some things from your life that you could write about:
