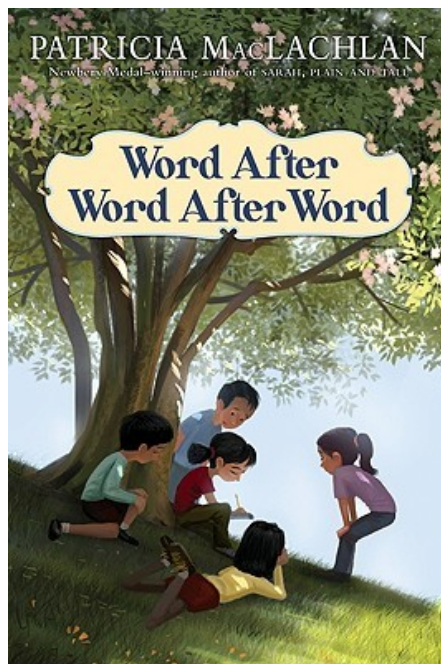




Word After Word After Word

Patricia MacLachlan

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An inspirational short novel for young readers about the power of writing by Newbery Medal–winning author Patricia MacLachlan.

Every school day feels the same for fourth graders Lucy and Henry and Evie and Russell and May. Then Ms. Mirabel comes to their class—bringing magical words and a whole new way of seeing and understanding.

From beloved author Patricia MacLachlan comes an honest, inspiring story about what is real and what is unreal, and about the ways that writing can change our lives and connect us to our own stories—word after word after word.

Word After Word After Word Details

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From Reader Review Word After Word After Word for online ebook

Tammy says

Good story, but unrealistic characters...never have heard 4th graders talk/write/think like the kids in the book do (sharing so many feelings, etc). It would be great to gets kids so excited about writing though!

Sarah Grace Grzy says

As always, absolutely beautiful. Patricia MacLachlan has a way of putting a deeper meaning on a book that young readers probably won't pick up on, but it's there for older readers, which I love. Also, no one handles delicate subjects in a child's perspective like divorce, a parent with cancer, etc, with as much tact, and delicacy as Mrs. MacLachlan! Highly recommended!

Rebekah Morris says

This story was so simple, yet full of wisdom about writing and what it really is. Each one of the children in this story finds their own use for writing word after word after word. And the writer's view of outlines sounds just like me.

Favorite quote:

"Outlines are silly. Once you write the outline, there's no reason to write the story."

Caren says

In an author's note at the end of the book, Ms. MacLachlan explains that she wrote this small novel in answer to requests about what it is like to be a writer. She says she appears in the book both as her child-self and as her adult author self. This sweet little book allows us to spend six weeks in a fourth grade classroom while the well-known author, Ms. Mirabel, leads the class in a writing seminar. We see how a little group of five friends responds to Ms. Mirabel's writing assignments and to the flamboyant Ms. Mirabel herself. Each of these children has some sort of problem, countering the notion that childhood is carefree. With Ms. Mirabel's guidance, each is able to use writing to work through the issue. Their regular teacher, Ms. Cash, is the ordinary sort of teacher who wants outlines for writing projects and who requires order. Ms. Mirabel is the artist. I loved the description of her: "Ms. Mirabel had long, troubled hair and a chest that pushed out in front of her like a grocery cart." When the children ask her why she writes, she answers, "I, myself, write to change my life, to make it come out the way I want it to...But other people write for other reasons: to see more closely what it is they are thinking about, what they may be afraid of. Sometimes writers write to solve a problem, to answer their own question...." This slender little novel is packed with insight. Ms. MacLachlan is a true master of her craft.

Mikayla says

I bought this purely on the reviews of my friends and it did not let me down. After all, its a book on words, how much more awesome does it get?

I found myself completely caught up in the story that I just sat down and read it strait through.

The descriptions of writing were great and I loved how clearly you could see each character.

I loved how much poetry there was in the book, though I found it a little odd that she just talks about is general writing and all anybody writes is poetry.

The only thing I really disliked was the girl who hates her new baby brother.

Overall, a fun quick read with great descriptions.

Kate Willis says

[even Ms. Cash (hide spoiler)]

Manuel Alfonseca says

This is the fourth time I have read this little book, which displays in fictional form the lessons about writing given by a well-known writer to a group of children, and how she teaches and pushes them to write and makes them understand and change their lives.

Miriam says

This book on writing, aimed at elementary-schoolers, opens with a quote from Joan Didion:

I write to find out what I'm thinking, what I'm looking at, what I see and what it means. What I want and what I fear.

While I wouldn't say I *disagree* with this sentiment -- those are valid reasons to write and things I'm sure most writers get out of the process -- it does not speak to me. It is not why I write and does not typify the sort of things I prefer to read. Which is probably why neither Didion nor MacLachlan are favorites of mine. Oh, don't get me wrong, I don't think they are bad writers, they're just not to my taste. They exemplify an approach to writing, as illustrated by the above quote and by this book as a whole, that focuses on personal feelings and the expression of interior experience. This seems to be the sort of writing that most schools encourage in our post-hippie touchy-feely education era, and it produces writing exactly like the poems MacLachlan includes here; really, despite having pretty much all the same voice (one of my complaints about this book) the poems reminded me amazingly of the stuff we were made to write when I was in school. And you know, I thought it was boring and fake then, too.

Here are some problems with writing primarily about personal feelings:

It really requires a high level of writing skill. If you are writing a plot- or action-driven story and have the occasional awkward phrase or moment of flatness the story can carry it. But if your focus is entirely internal you really have to main a consistent and convincing voice that is both believable and (here's the second

aspect of the problem) interesting. Because really, you have to convince me that I care. This is a made up person gushing about made-up feelings. I am willing to listen to Virginia Woolf do this because her writing is superb, but I am not interested in listening to a fourth-grader or, god forbid, a teenager, do the same. I edited enough writing journals in high school and college to know what kind of self-absorbed derivative crap this produces. While it may be valuable as a writing exercise, that doesn't mean you need to publish it.

As far this specific book goes, it was at an awkward length for this interior type of writing. There wasn't time for enough character development. The kids mostly sounded the same to me, and often did not sound convincingly like 9-year-olds. The parents did not seem entirely convincing, either, especially in the last section where they read their kids' poems and oh! the revelations! the tears! Seriously? It did not occur to you till you read her poem that your daughter would be sad and scared that you were dying of cancer? You didn't think your kids would be upset that you moved out of the house* and never called or visited? I don't think parents with that level of indifference usually show up for classroom activities.

But I don't want to totally harsh on this book. I did like the basic idea, encouraging kids not only to write but to think of themselves as **writers**, as having something to say to others rather than just doing a school exercise. I liked that they weren't forced into really specific assignments, even if they did produce the same generic poems that our rule-bound writing did when I was a kid. I wish MacLachlan hadn't repeated the phrase "word after word after word" quite so many times, but that is a minor quibble.

Maybe younger kids will like this more than I did. And if it gives even one kid the encouragement to write, then I guess it is worthwhile.

*Other than the one mother who briefly moves out, all the families seem to be white-middle-class-two-parents, but I'm not getting into that here.

Magpie67 says

Brilliant look at creative writing for kids. I think everyone should keep a journal just to jot down the thoughts as they hit you.. A great way for younger children, tweens and teens to express their feelings and maybe a place where they can release their frustrations in a healthy way. Writing poems can heal the soul and help one find peace in the moment. Poems that they wrote or poems and quotes they found that makes their day. Something to look back at and have fond memories. I also think adults should try this too. Someday it could actually be a keepsake for the family members. Things Dad loved, recipes Mom tried, events that took place, tidbits of vacation memories, newspaper clippings, fun drawings, a made up cartoon, things children said or did... writing or drawing is another great hobby like reading. Also nowadays, writing is about nil with the computers so what a great way for kids to keep the skill...

Donalyn says

In the hands of a lesser author, this story about a published author who visits a classroom to teach the children about writing could have turned into a self-congratulatory work about how wonderful said author and her writing is. Thank goodness, Patricia MacLachlan did not take this delightful book in that direction.

I enjoyed watching the children discover writing as a method of sharing their lives and expressing their feelings. Although the book is brief, I felt that I grew to know each child and their personal experiences. I

bawled through the last chapter-- enough said. A wonderful book for launching a writing workshop or encouraging children to write.

Cheryl says

Too short and sweet for me. I bet it's actually written for classroom teachers like the character Miss Cash.

Courtney says

100% magic. As an elementary school teacher, I can't wait to share this with my kids and let them use this to inspire their writing. Words after words after words definitely show how words can be magic.

Lisa Vegan says

This short children's novel took less time to read than it would have to read 3 or 4 children's picture books.

I should have loved this book. It has: a group of fourth grade students, girls & boys who are close friends, who have some genuinely difficult challenges in their lives, who are introspective and thoughtful. A pair of teachers, one in particular who is there to teach creative writing, and the kids' writing about their lives, their writing appearing as part of the book. Musings about what's real and what's unreal and the place of writing in our lives. There is humor, lots of humor. All very appealing!

But somehow this story didn't entirely mesh for me. I cared about the people, and the idea behind the story was terrific, but the whole didn't quite wow me as I would have expected.

I do think this is a wonderful book for reluctant readers, especially those who are not fond of poetry (the kids in the book write poetry), and also for kids who are behind grade level in reading but don't want to read "baby books" because this is an easy book to read but has a story with some depth to it, especially depth of feelings.

I liked it, but I wanted it to be longer and have more details to the story and the subplots. However, for kids the right age & stage, this could become a beloved book.

Krista the Krazy Kataloguer says

I think this would have made a better story had it been longer, more fleshed out. The story focuses on a group of 4th-graders who are being taught how to write by a real writer, Ms. Mirabel. Each of the characters in the book discovers something about themselves through writing. I did appreciate MacLachlan's crafting of this tale--no words wasted, every word counted. She says a lot in a few words. I also liked some of the poems in the book. My favorite is the one by Russell at the end, which sums up the whole book, I think:

Out of our writer mouths
Will come clouds
Rising to the sky
Dropping rain words below
And when the clouds leave
The sun will shine down word
After word
After word
Planting our stories in the earth.

Recommended, especially as an anticipatory set for a unit on creative writing.

babyhippoface says

First thought: *These are **not** the words of 4th graders.*

But I liked it anyway.

Henry, Russell, May, Evie, and Lucy are enjoying classroom visits with an author, Ms. Mirabel, who encourages and inspires student storytelling through writing: *You have a story in you.... Words will whisper in your ear.... You will know....*

What I appreciated about the story:

- > Lucy's feeling of sadness over her mother's cancer, and her inability to write anything without that sadness creeping in
- > Russell's optimism and his tender-hearted words about his dog
- > Henry's love of words
- > May's irritation over her parents' decision to adopt a baby, even though her family is already large, and her acceptance of John Everett even though he's ugly :)
- > Evie's attempts to find a new wife for her father, and Sister Sassy Mary Grace :)

I thiiiink this might work as a classroom read-aloud and inspiration for student writing. Sometimes our students have to know that they are capable of great things before they attempt great things. Reading this before starting a creative writing unit might encourage students to attempt more than your basic AABB rhyming poems.
