

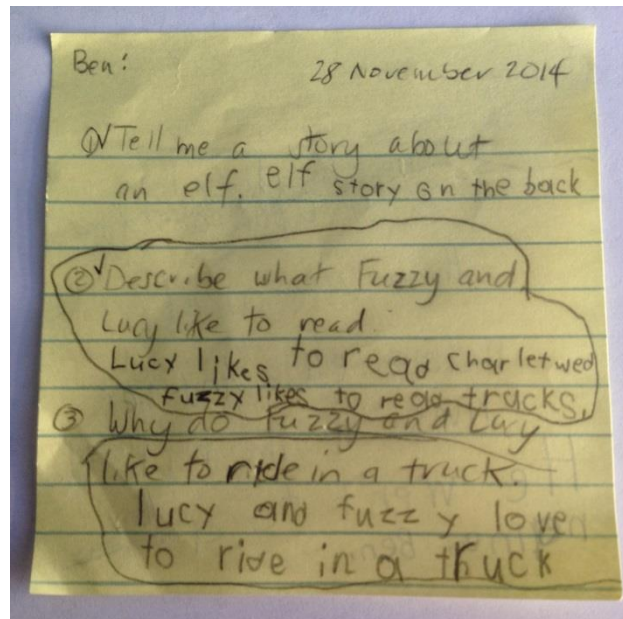
Benjamin Rodrigo Joseph Rodríguez

after seeing Sir John Everett Millais's painting *Bubbles: A Child's World* (1886)

Standing beside the cedar kitchen table, he places a yellow Post-it note and pencil in my hands. As if by genius instinct, his quick hand is followed by a pointed gesture for me to begin the assignment. "Joey, Joey!" he calls. "Write me some questions, okay? Write me some questions!" I listen and follow. His voice invites me to work beside him as his unstoppable curiosity and energy bubble up.

Ben's six.
I ask, "What kinds of questions do you want?" He grimaces, and his brown eyes extra blink. "The kinds with bubbles to pick the right answer." Oh, I wonder, puzzled and confused. "Hmm, like this," Ben adds, and takes a pencil in hand and shapes, curves letters to words. Soon symbols appear in pairs and strings to make sentences bellowing with meaning.

As if with training, Ben creates a question. One bubble here with words and then another. The bubbles he's drawn are clear, precise. Round. Circles. Ready to be filled in. A-D. Bubbles balloon before us as he blots them. His strokes and penmanship say he's a master of this act. The question stem suddenly appears with multiple-choice options. The options written include three distractors and, yes, of course, the correct one, the key.



Next, Ben's on his toes, waiting and watching for me to write. "Now you, okay? Now you, Joey!" he cajoles. His watermelon grin invites me to write with precision and results. He hovers over my pencil marks while I handwrite and struggle. I'm learning about form. Bubbles are what we're after.

As a professor, I create the possibility of a new exercise for us. "What about the other kinds of questions?" I ask. "Which ones?" Ben wants to know. "I want to write some without bubbles, like, 'Tell me a story about an elf.' Or 'How do you know if a dinosaur's really a dinosaur?'" "Okay, write them," Ben says.

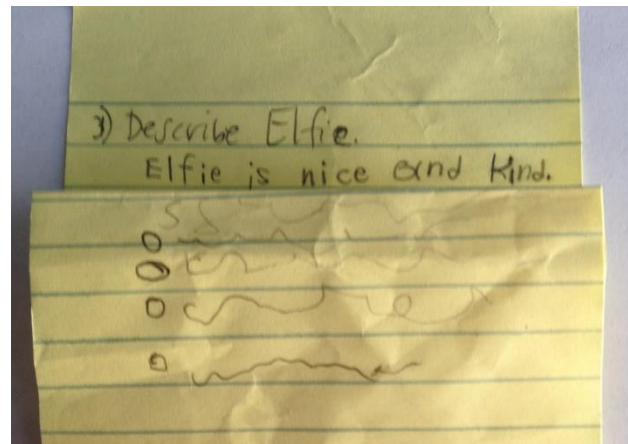
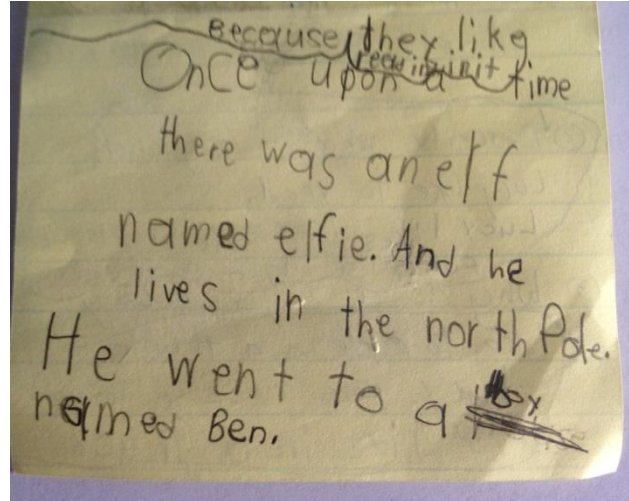
I draft a list:

1. Describe what Fuzzy and Lucy like to read.
2. Why do Fuzzy and Lucy ride in a truck?
3. Tell me about Elfie.
4. How many dinosaur teeth do you have?

Ben gathers the yellow pencils we sharpened. On a few sticky notes, he writes:

1. Lucy likes to read Charlet Wed. Fuzzy likes to read trucks.
2. Lucy and Fuzzy love to ride in a truck because they like to read in it.
3. Once upon a time there was an elf named Elfie. And he lives in the north Pole. He went to a boy named Ben. Elfie is nice and kind.
4. I have one.

"It's time to eat, Ben," his mother calls and waits. Ben's left our writing table and grabs the bubbles solution and runs with a wand in hand.



Rodrigo Joseph Rodríguez is an assistant professor of literacy and English education in the Department of English at The University of Texas at El Paso. His research areas include language acquisition and the teaching of academic writing, socially responsible literacies, and children's and young adult literature. He is an advocate of *El día de los niños / El día de los libros* (Children's Day / Book Day), which is an initiative and daily commitment to link all children, adolescents, and families to books, languages, and cultures. He can be contacted at rjrodriguez6@utep.edu

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