

Warning: Dangerous Writing Project!

By Shelly Lyon

Do **NOT** attempt this project if you:

1. Need to maintain control of your classroom.
2. Want one writing project completed per day.
3. Have a limited paper supply.

This is how it happened in my Fourth grade.

It all seemed so innocent at first. Sure, I accepted the hamster as a classroom pet from Lynn, my colleague who had two. And yes, I allowed the children to build a relationship with him. They named him Ralph, and we let him cruise the room in his exercise ball while I read the class the **Iris La Bonga** spy series of stories published by the Wright Group. But, I had no idea that when experimenting with personification of our class pet that I would be left in the figurative dust of a writing frenzy!

The students went wild! Ralph, our normally mild-mannered little hamster became a spy solving kidnapping, chasing robbers, and even falling out of upstairs windows into passing garbage trucks to escape capture.

Adventure was not the only direction in Ralph's personified existence. He became romantic! He flirted, exchanged meaningful glances with enamored female rodents, got married after surprisingly short courtships, and helped produce countless litters of offspring.

Fame and fortune became Ralph's destiny in many cases. His accolades were numerous and the rewards generous. Alas, in comparison I began to feel my meagerly rewarded career choice was far too modest in the shadow of Ralph's greatness.

This rampant personification did not just occur in the classroom. The children were begging to take their Draft Books to recess, lunch, and even home. A sign up list to take Ralph home for specified weekends was created. After one such weekend, a student returned with a series of five typed chapters of Ralph's exciting life.

I've got to be honest with you I've never lost control like this over a writing project before. I can't make them complete just one story a day; the children flood me with several. They won't stop! And yes, our paper supply is dwindling despite my warnings of endangered forests in a fragile world.

One might hope that this insanity would fade away after a while. But this does not seem to be the case. Soon we have a break from school. Ralph is going to Yosemite National Park with a student. I shudder to think the volume of journaling that will return after that week's bracing outdoor expeditions. Do you think they make backpacks and rock climbing gear small enough for hamsters?

So think carefully about my plight. Attempt this project only if you are a brave hearted soul with lots of paper, and no other essential writing projects planned for the near future. You can't say I didn't warn you!