

## Social Studies

### Genre

An **Interview** is a nonfiction account of questions asked by one person and answered by another.



### Text Features

**Questions and Answers** are set off by using a different typeface or by shortening the words to **Q** and **A**.

### Content Vocabulary

preferences    aspiring  
spontaneous



## Student Interview with Author Karen Odom

by Perry Faulkner

**Question:** When and how did you get into writing?

**Answer:** I've been writing for as long as I can remember, starting with letters and my diary, where I faithfully wrote down my feelings almost every day. But I really became hooked when I became a reporter for my school newspaper when I was in third grade. I also remember writing a play called *The Silver Locket* in sixth grade.

**Question:** What kind of unique training do you need to be a writer?

**Answer:** Many writers have been known to say the best training for a writer is living. I agree with that to a point. I think good writers also need discipline, creative talent, and a little bit of luck too. Writers are natural readers. Reading what others have written helps you not only appreciate good writing but also helps you understand different writing styles and how they affect you as a reader. If you're serious about being a writer, it's also important when you have the opportunity, whether it's in school or through special workshops, to take formal writing courses.

**Question:** What gives you ideas? What are your **preferences** when writing: people, places, things, or all of them?

**Answer:** You probably guessed it—I get ideas from all of them! I get ideas all the time, even when I'm not consciously thinking about it—when I'm driving to the store, in a meeting, watching TV, cooking, relaxing on the beach—you name it!

**Question:** What is your writing process? Do you write all at once or in fragments?

**Answer:** It all depends on what I'm writing. If I'm writing a nonfiction article that requires a lot of research and interviews, I do the research first, taking notes along the way. I organize my notes, but I also write a word or phrase by different sections of my notes so I can easily know what topic each section covers. Then I start writing. At this stage, I'm not concerned about sentence structure or how it reads or even how long the piece is running. Making sure it reads well, grabs the reader's attention, makes sense, and is the right length will come later when I begin editing and rewriting. And, believe me, there will be plenty of editing and rewriting!

**Question:** How do you organize your thoughts before writing? Do you create an outline? Or are you **spontaneous?**

**Answer:** I believe in outlines, but I'm also flexible. If the ideas are rushing in, I'll write down my thoughts (usually on my computer if I'm in my office) so I don't lose them, and then edit and rearrange them later. Otherwise I write out an outline.



**Question:** How have you changed the way you write over time?

**Answer:** Rewriting many times over has become second nature to me now. Luckily, it's a lesson I learned when I was very young. Some writers learn that in a much more painful way when they first begin writing professionally. There's ALWAYS a great deal of rewriting and editing that occurs before the final version that the reader sees. It's also much easier for me to let the material go now than it used to be. I'm less concerned about making the work "perfect."

**Question:** What is your favorite part of writing?

**Answer:** Actually I have two favorite things that I like about writing. The first is the excitement I feel when I'm brainstorming for a new project. The thoughts come almost faster than I can write them. My second favorite thing is finishing. There's something so satisfying about looking over the finished piece, liking the end result, and knowing that you've created it yourself.

**Question:** What are your plans for future writing? Are you going to write a book?

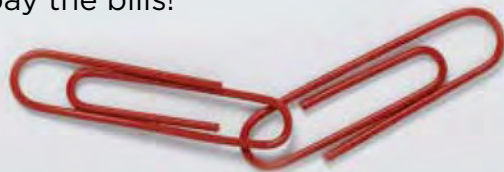
**Answer:** I plan to continue writing for both children and adults. There are many ways to earn a living as a writer. I've chosen writing for magazines, publishing companies, and business writing. It's interesting that you asked the question about writing a book. I have several books in mind, both fiction and nonfiction, but the first one—a children's picture book—is ready for publishing. I have been approaching different publishers to see if they are interested. I even entered it into a contest and was so excited when it won honorable mention in the *2003 Writer's Digest Annual Writing Competition*. I'll let you know what happens!



**Question:** What advice would you give a young, **aspiring** writer?

**Answer:** I have four main pieces of advice:

- Write, write, write, write, write, and write some more! Nothing beats just doing it.
- The life of a writer can be tough sometimes, and you have to be prepared for rejection along the way. You have to learn not to take it personally or dwell on it when something you've written is criticized or not accepted.
- Stick with it and never give up!
- And, remember, while you're writing the "Great American Novel," you may need to write some less exciting material to pay the bills!



## Connect and Compare



1. Reread the questions in the interview. What kind of organizational plan do they show? Explain. **Reading an Interview**
2. How can Karen Odom's advice help you become a better writer? **Evaluate**
3. What writing advice do you think Karen Odom would give Eva in *Nothing Ever Happens on 90th Street*? **Reading/Writing Across Texts**



### Social Studies Activity

Choose somebody to interview about his or her career. Ask at least five questions. Write your completed interview in a question-and-answer format.



Find out more about interviews at [www.macmillanmh.com](http://www.macmillanmh.com)

## Writer's Craft

### Dialogue

Good, well-chosen **dialogue** makes characters sound natural and believable. Forced or bland word choice can make characters sound unnatural or unbelievable.

# Write Dialogue

## Everyone in the Neighborhood

by Sabrena B.

I used specific language in dialogue to convey Mr. Mang's personality.

Details help convey a lot about Jill both in dialogue and in narrative.

It was Saturday morning. The doorbell rang.

"Coming! Hold on! One second!" called Mr. Mang, nervously. He opened the door. It was Jill, the mail carrier.

"Hi," she said. "This package is too big for your mailbox. I am so tired from climbing 10 flights of stairs!" Jill was panting and patting her face with a handkerchief.

Mr. Mang sighed, took the package, and went inside. The doorbell rang again. "I will be right there!" he called.

It was Joe from the dry cleaner's. "Here are your suits," said Joe. "We did a good job if I do say so myself."

Mr. Mang took the suits and went inside. The bell rang. "Okay, okay! Not again! One second!" he yelled.

It was Arnie, the newspaper boy. "Mr. Mang," he said. "It's collection day, old pal, old buddy."

Mr. Mang rolled his eyes, paid Arnie, and took the newspaper inside. The doorbell did not ring.

"Good," said Mr. Mang to himself. "Everyone in the neighborhood has been here. I'm tired of answering the door. I think I'll take a nap with some earplugs in!"

## Your Turn

Write dialogue between two or more characters. Choose words that the characters would really say. Be sure language that is not in dialogue is also interesting and informative. Choosing to write about people you know can help make your dialogue sound more natural. Use the Writer's Checklist to check your writing.



## Writer's Checklist

- Ideas and Content:** Does my dialogue make sense?
- Organization:** Do the events and dialogue proceed naturally?
- Voice:** Do the voices of my characters come through and sound natural?
- Word Choice:** Did I choose words in my **dialogue** that my characters would really use?
- Sentence Fluency:** Does my dialogue flow well?
- Conventions:** Did I punctuate my dialogue correctly?  
Did I check my spelling?