A Metaphorical Introduction to the Writing Process
Adapted from an activity by Rosemary Faucette (Ideas Plus, NCTE, 1997)

Using the metaphor of sculpting, this hands-on activity introduces students to the writing process by teaching all its aspects: critic/creator, audience, purpose, rehearsal, editing, and publishing. Students should bring a can of Play-Doh (or you can provide it), a pencil, and be paired with a response peer for this activity. The purpose is to have the students sculpt a creation while the teacher links each phase of the sculpting to the stages of the writing process. Following is the outline of a script that will help with this procedure:

1. Today’s lesson requires no pencil or paper, only your hands. While you work with your hands, please listen to me. It is important that you connect what you are doing with what I am saying.
2. From this activity, you will be able to answer these questions: **What process does a writer go through to produce a final piece? How is a writer like a sculptor?**
3. **(1) prewriting**—this is the pre-sculpting stage; the purpose is to generate ideas, to try different shapes, to experiment and play. Close your eyes and get a feel for the clay….knead it….stretch it…fold it…see what it will do. Words are the material of the writer. A writer needs to know her material before she can write. She reads books, researches, keeps a journal, writes poetry, music, letters, freewrites, she tries new styles; she plays with words.
4. As you play, I want to introduce you to sides of yourself that work together to create: the creator and the critic. Which do you think has the biggest role during the pre-sculpting/prewriting stage? Why? The creator is the uncensored part of you; the one who generates ideas, the innovator, the one who envisions, who brainstorms…When do you suppose the critic starts to work? Your critic jumps up when you need to decide, to choose, to analyze, revise or edit, when a judgment is needed. If you hear the critic’s voice while you are still creating, push it down, ignore it. You need to try on ideas before it is the critic’s turn.
5. Before you decide what you will create, there are two more aspects to consider: purpose and audience. What will you create and why? Why are you writing? Purpose focuses our intentions; it sets a path, a destination. Is it to describe, to inform, to persuade, or tell a story? Now ask yourselves, for whom are you creating this? This will help you determine audience, what and how you create. Your audience will determine how you write your piece: formal or informal; will it be a letter, an essay, or a journal entry?
6. Okay, mush up your dough and start again. Try something else. Even if you already have a design, don’t lock yourself in. Try other designs before you decide what you will make. Think about audience and purpose as you sculpt. Ask yourself, “What am I trying to accomplish? How do I want my audience to feel?” This stage can last as long as you need. Often we rush through the prewriting stage and move too quickly to compose a first draft. We don’t allow our creator the time she needs to develop ideas, make connections, create. At this point, the critic should be sleeping. He will only slow you down; he will make decisions before your creator has gathered all her ideas.
7. **(2) Compose**—we are almost ready to compose our piece, but before we do, let’s discuss what we want to achieve? What criteria will we use to judge this piece? Aesthetics (beauty, sensory appeal, pleasing to the eye)? Function (usefulness, practicality)?
Creativity (originality, imaginativeness, does it surprise or amuse you)? This is your rubric; it outlines your objectives—write on overhead. You should keep this in mind as you compose, edit, revise, and publish.

8. Keeping the criteria in mind, you have five minutes to create your first draft of your final piece.

9. Now that you have finished your first draft, think about how your audience will respond. The writer, like the sculptor, may stop at any point and get responses from others. Ask your partner for feedback. Does he/she know what it is? This will show you have form and meaning. When writing, we call this unity. Your one idea should be evident to your partner.

10. Moving on to the (3) revision stage—revision means to see again—you need to see your work from different angles—from far away, nearby, overhead, to the side—what do you see that you want to change, to revise? There will never be a time when you can’t revise your writing. Revision can go on and on and on (ex. Fitzgerald).

11. Have your partner look at your piece and you reciprocate. Using the three-column peer response sheet, respond to your partner’s work—What do you like? What don’t you like? What is unclear (questions)? Comment on the big stuff like ideas, organization, clarity. Don’t bother with spelling or grammar at this point. You don’t have to act on your partner’s suggestions; just consider them.

12. Now you are ready to (4) edit. At this point, the writer looks closely at details such as spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. Any last minute changes? Trade a little Play-Doh with your partner or someone nearby and add your finishing touches. The details you add here are only finishing touches. You could have many nice little details, but if your piece doesn’t have meaning, if it doesn’t have unity and hold together, these finishing touches aren’t worth a thing. This same is true for writing. Good spelling, punctuation, and usage are only important if the piece itself has meaning, unity, and coherence.

13. (5) Now publish it…display your art…enjoy your creation. A writer, like a sculptor, goes through a process involving many changes, leading to a final product. Write your name and the title of your piece on the index card and display your work. Let’s walk around the room and admire our art.

Writing: In your response journal, answer the following questions:

- What are the steps of the writing process?
- Why is each step important?
- How is writing like sculpting, painting, composing—creating art?