

Spot

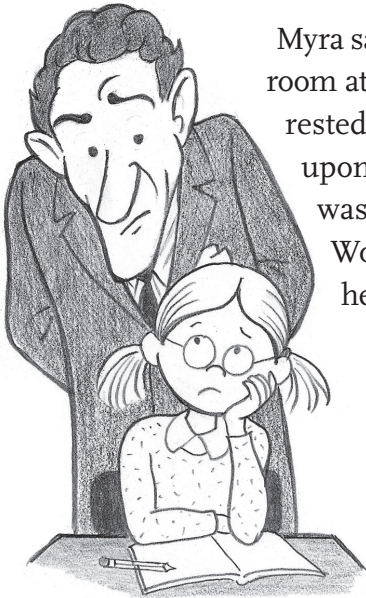
Myra

Oct 15

Writer's Workshop

Every Monday we have Writer's Workshop. It's called Writer's Workshop although we only write and work but never get to shop. We write in journals, except I'm a bad writer. That is because I don't ever have anything to write about. Our teacher said this story must be five sentences long.

The End



Myra sat in the third row in the classroom at the end of the hall. Her chin rested on an elbow that pressed upon the blue-lined paper that was stapled inside her Writer's Workshop journal that lay on her desktop.

The tall teacher stood behind Myra, shaking his head. "Not again, Myra," he said. "Every Writer's Workshop you write about hating Writer's Workshop!"

“But I don’t know what else to write about,” Myra complained. “My mind goes blank when I see blank paper.”

“Good writers write about things they’ve done,” said the teacher. “They write about what they know.”

“But I’m only eight years old,” Myra reminded him. “Eight-year-olds have hardly done anything. Eight-year-olds hardly know anything.”

“Write about what you did last weekend,” the teacher suggested.

“I hardly did a thing,” Myra griped. “I spent my whole Saturday morning in the emergency room because my brother stuck a Lego up his nose. After that I had soccer practice, ballet practice, piano practice, and karate practice. I hardly had time to do anything.”

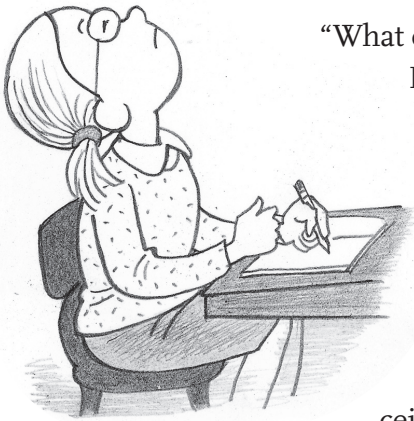
The tall teacher flipped to a blank page in Myra’s journal. “Let’s start writing, Myra,” he said. “I’m sure you can think of a good topic.”

“Hardly,” said Myra.

Myra wrote her name and the date in the top margin of the paper. She put a small X in the middle where she thought five sentences would end.

“But I still don’t know what to write about,” she said.

Sometimes Myra thought best while staring at the ceiling. Tilting her head far back, she looked beyond the long fluorescent lights and focused on the white acoustic tiles that covered the top of her classroom. Each tile had hundreds of small holes in it.



“What could all those holes be for?”

Myra asked herself. “I wonder how many holes are up there. Let’s see—one, two, three, four, five . . .”

As Myra counted, a hole directly overhead started to blink. Could an ant be crawling out? Some ceiling bug? She squinted to

see more clearly. No, oozing from the hole was a large black drop. For a second it hung on the hole. It wobbled and swayed before finally falling straight toward Myra’s desk.

“My classroom’s leaking,” said Myra, watching the drop drip.

Halfway down the black drop flattened. It continued its descent, now floating like a flower petal. Inches above Myra’s desktop, two thin legs sprouted from its bottom and two thin arms popped out its sides. On two thin feet it landed, right on the top margin of Myra’s Writer’s Workshop journal.

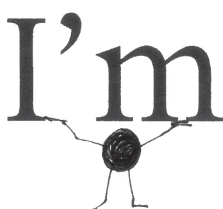


Myra leaned forward to take a good look. The flat black disc was running along the top blue-ruled line in her notebook while shouting in a thin, high voice, “See Spot! See Spot run!”



Myra wrinkled her nose and groaned. “Your name’s Spot?” she asked.

“Run, Spot, run,” said the thing, racing to the edge of her journal. As it did so, a page flipped over to the Writer’s Workshop story Myra had just written. The black dot stood below the word *I’m*.



“What’s going on?” Myra said.
“What are you doing on my story?”

“*I’m* on the Spot,” the thing called out.

Myra rubbed her eyeballs with her knuckles. “Whatever,” she said.

After running some more, Spot lay under the word *That*.



“*That* hits the Spot!” it announced.

“That’s weird,” said Myra, looking around the room. No one else seemed to notice the big period racing around her journal.

At this point Spot sat on the word *about*. “There’s a Spot on you,” it said.



Myra groaned again.

Next, Spot hid behind the *x* in the word *except*. “Any guesses?” it asked.

Myra shrugged.

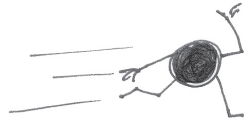


“X marks the Spot,” came the answer.

The thing began moving again. “See Spot! See Spot run!”

Myra bent a finger and cocked it with her thumb.

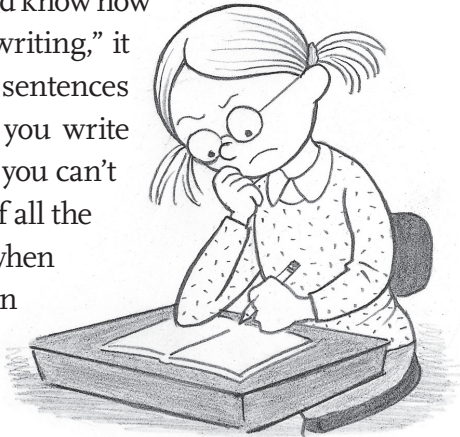
“Well, Spot,” she said, holding her hand an inch from the black dot, “this paper will soon be Spot-less, because you’re looking at my Spot remover. I have journal writing to do.”



Spot waved its tiny arms. “Wait, Myra! Wait! You’ve hit a rough spot, and I can help.”

Myra scowled. “*Hardly*. What good could you do?”

Spot walked over to the word *Myra* and sat down. “Being a third-grader, you should know how important spots are in writing,” it said. “Without spots, sentences would never end. Can you write a question? And I’ll bet you can’t get excited! And think of all the letters a spot saves you when you use it at the end of an abbreviation. I could go on and on . . .”



“I see your point,”

said Myra, picking up her pencil. “Well, Spot, writing is a sore spot with me. And I’ll be in a tight spot if I don’t think of something to write about for Writer’s Workshop.”

“Then this is the right spot for me,” said Spot.

At that moment Myra felt a hand on her shoulder. “Myra, who are you talking to?” The tall teacher stood behind her.

“Spot,” the girl said. But a quick glance toward her paper told her that the dot had disappeared. She noticed, however, a fresh period after *Oct*.

The tall teacher frowned. “Well, Myra, I see only your old Writer’s Workshop story. And you’ll stay glued to that spot until you write something new.”

After the teacher left, Myra tapped her journal with her pencil. “All right, Spot. Come on out. You said you could help me.”



The period after *Oct* began to grow. A moment later Spot stood again on the paper.

“First, a quick spot check, Myra,” it said. “Tell me your problem.”

“I can’t think of anything to write about,” Myra said.

Spot paced back and forth along the top blue line. “Does your brain seemed blocked like a clogged drain?” it said.

“Uh-huh,” said Myra.

“And does your writing hand freeze when you try to write?”

“Exactly.”

Spot stopped on the word *Writer’s*. “Myra, I believe . . . no, it’s more than that—I’m *certain* that you suffer from a disorder that even the greatest writers on earth sometimes suffer from. Writer’s block.”

“Writer’s block?” Myra said. “I have writer’s block?”

“You see, Myra, your brain is filled with ideas,” Spot explained. “There is a drain in the brain, a brain drain, that lets these ideas flow down your arm to your writing hand. For reasons teachers have never figured out, this brain drain at times gets clogged. Now hold up a pencil.”

Myra held up her pencil with her left hand.

“Ah, a *southpaw!*” Spot exclaimed. “You’re one of the rare left-handed writers—one in ten. That means that the drain to your left hand is blocked. With no way of getting out, your thoughts are just swirling around in your head, like water in a washing machine.”

Myra stared at her journal. “Well, Spot, you might be able to help me end sentences and abbreviations, but I don’t see how you can help me with writer’s block.”

Spot raced to the edge of Myra’s desktop. “I’ll be right back,” it said. “Spotlight, please!”

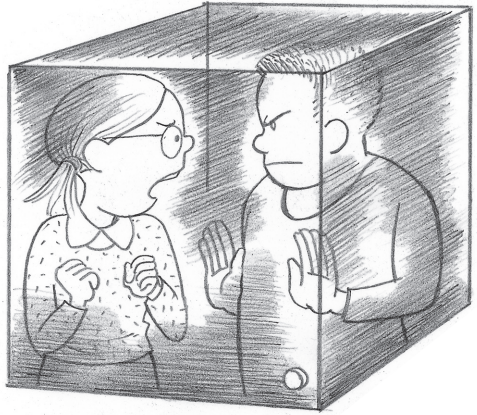
Like a party balloon, Spot floated upward. The black dot sailed over to the shelf where the rainy-day games and toys were stored. A moment later a wooden block

dropped off the shelf. Spot pushed the cube across the floor to Myra's desk.

"But that's just a plain old building block," Myra said, lifting the cube along with Spot onto her desktop.

"Not just a block, Myra, a left-handed *Writer's Unblock*," said Spot. "See the button. That's the hot spot. Go ahead. Press it."

With her pointer finger Myra pressed the black button in a corner of the cube. All at once the sides of the *Writer's Unblock* became transparent, as clear as plastic. In its center a small white tornado was swirling.



"Look closely, Myra," said Spot. "What do you spot?"

Resting her chin on her fist, Myra watched the tiny funnel cloud. At its bottom tip an image appeared.

"That's me," she said. "I see me as I was this morning standing by my bed in my pj's."

Spot paced the blue line again. "What else do you spot?"

Myra peered into the *Writer's Unblock* again.

"Oh, that was me when I was putting on my socks," she said. "I couldn't decide whether to wear red socks or blue socks, so I put on one of each."

As she spoke, a gurgling sound started churning inside her head. From deep within her brain came the glugging, slurping, and slish-sloshing sound of water going down a drain.

The scene inside the Writer's Unblock suddenly switched. At the base of the whirling cloud, Myra now saw herself eating breakfast, her favorite cereal concoction of Cheerios mixed with Lucky Charms mixed with Cap'n Crunch.

Switch!

She saw herself fighting with her brother.

Switch!

She was under her bed, searching for her homework.

Switch!

She was fighting with her brother again.

Switch!

She was studying her spelling list while brushing her teeth.

All the while the brain gurgling continued.

"You know, Spot," she said, "when I watch my morning like this, it doesn't seem so boring."

"Any day is the stuff for a good story," said Spot. "And here comes the high spot!"

Now Myra saw herself leaving her house. On the way out the door, *whack!*, her backpack banged on the door frame.

"There went my science fair experiment," she said. "A jar filled with an egg and vinegar. Phew!"

Glug, glug! went the sound in Myra's brain. *Gurgle, gurgle, glug!*

Before Myra knew it, she had a pencil in her hand. In her journal she wrote:

Myra

Oct. 15

Morning Disaster

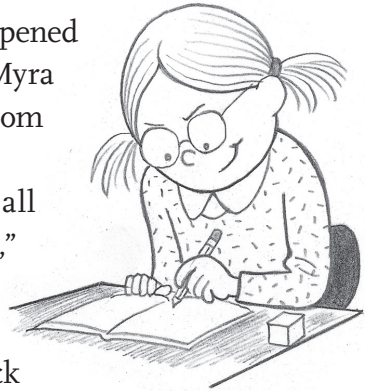
My backpack smells like a salad bar. Here's why.

"Wait until you read what happened on my way to school, Spot," Myra said. "I hardly have enough room to write it all down."

"Your ideas were there all along, Myra, right on the spot," said Spot.

As Myra wrote, Spot pushed the block, which had turned back into wood, onto the floor.

"And now that your brain drain is flowing again, I have work to do elsewhere," it said. "Zack needs me after *Mr.* in his first paragraph, and Kimberly forgot me above all four *i*'s in the word *Mississippi*. And I know I'll find many parking spots in Hannah's journal. She's always careless with spelling, capitals, and punctuation. See Spot! See Spot run!"



But Myra didn't hear any of that. She was too busy writing.