

# **BIG PENCILS FOR SMALL WRITERS: A MESSAGE FROM A MOTHER**

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This summer during the back-to-school specials, my four-year-old daughter Sarah and I went to eight different stores searching for the specified school supplies deemed appropriate for the four-year-old kindergarten class at her school. The school supply list for the four-year-old classes included a package of construction paper (no tablets, thank you), a pack of crayons (the eight basic colors only), two jars of white school paste (the all-in-one-piece-lid-and-paste-spreader model), and a 19" X 44" rest mat "divided into 4 sections that folds easily for storing (usually red on one side and blue on reverse side)." We also looked through the aisles for notebooks and erasers in the K-Mart and Eckerd's to find, alas, the "Two large (preschool size) Husky pencils" which had been designated for the young writers in Miss Clara's class.

I, too, can remember my large size pencil (as well as large size crayons that were flat on one side to keep from rolling off the desk). However, Sarah has not ever had a Large "Husky" Pencil and she has been making her mark on the world with some sort of writing implement since she could grasp (and be trusted not to swallow) a crayon. Since that time, she has had regular size crayons, large crayons, felt tip pens, standard pencils, large felt markers, ball-point pens, water color paints, colored pencils, chalk, golf pencils, and the novelty pencils that come in advertisements for insurance. She has a table that her grandfather made for her Christmas present when she was two years old: since that

time the table top has been cluttered with assorted pens and pencils that never quite get put away into her plastic Domino's pizza cup. She even has a file on one of my floppy disks with a letter that she typed herself on my computer, and she has realized at her young age that nearly the same letter will suffice for two grandmothers if you just change the name at the top.

So after having experienced all these tools of the writer's trade, why should Sarah now be required to use only the "Two Large (preschool size) Husky Pencils" in her kindergarten class? With great faith in the school that I had selected, I asked the school director about the large pencils during the open house held at the school before the start of the school year. She told me, predictably enough, that it was because of the state of muscle development and coordination; that children of this age can grasp the larger size pencils much better; that these young children actually write much better when they have the larger pencils, and so on.

But do they? Although Sarah may have used one at one time or another at Sunday school or at a friend's house, she had never had one to use for any appreciable amount of time. She never owned one as some pre-writing tool while her muscles or coordination matured sufficiently enough so that she could graduate to a standard size pencil. And would she actually write any differently if she were given one of the large pencils?

Wondering, after the school's open house, if Sarah's writing would look any different if given the larger pencil, I asked her to write a small sample with one of each type of writing implement that we had around the house. What follows are the writing samples taken with each of those implements. (I must tell you, and I suppose you have only my somewhat biased reports of the process data, that she wrote each of these samples quickly and effortlessly. That is, she did not seem to struggle with any one of the writing implements that I put before her. In fact, she thought it was all quite a bit of fun.) For the next moment, you decide which of the eight writing samples was written with which of the following implements:

- A.) Large Crayola coloring marker
- B.) Standard "Bic" pen
- C.) Tiny 2" X 1/4" pencil
- D.) Standard Number 2 pencil
- E.) Large preschool Husky pencil

- F.) Nylon tip pen/marker
- G.) Tiny 3" X 1/4" novelty pen
- H.) Felt tip marker

I Love You

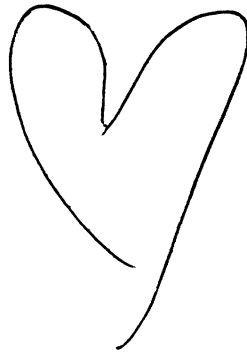


Figure 1  
Writing Sample Number One



Figure 2  
Writing Sample Number Two

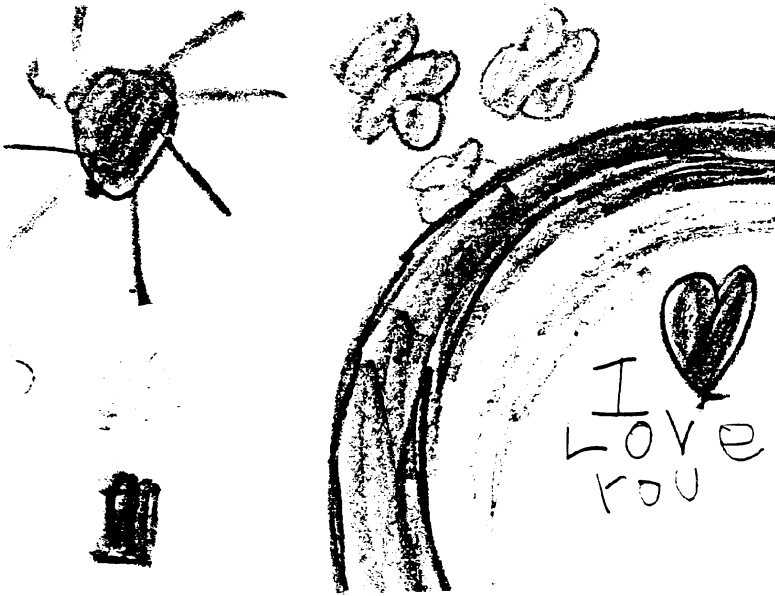


Figure 3  
Writing Sample Number Three



Figure 4  
Writing Sample Number Four

I Love You

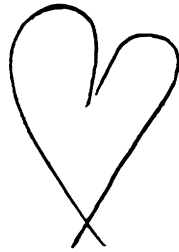


Figure 5  
Writing Sample Number Five

I Love You  
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Figure 6  
Writing Sample Number Six

I Love you

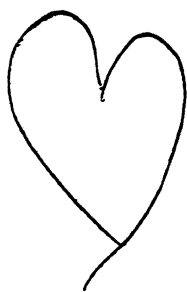


Figure 7  
Writing Sample Number Seven

I Love you

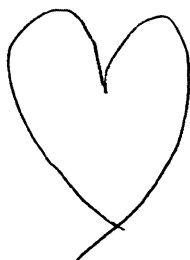


Figure 8  
Writing Sample Number Eight

While there does appear to be some difference in the size of her writing, there do not seem to be any differences in the conventionality (form) of the letters, in directionality, or in spelling. To Sarah, the Large (preschool size) Husky Pencil was just one more writing implement: no better and no worse than any of the other implements that she has been using for the past three or so years. And if it makes no difference to Sarah (or in Sarah's writing), why should it make a difference to her teacher, the director, or the school?

What if teachers had a greater awareness that the kids that enter school are capable of making their message with a multitude of different tools for writing? Wouldn't kids appreciate having the same variety of writing implements that they had in their homes before coming to school? And mothers wouldn't have to make so many stops in the department stores searching for those Husky pencils.

Kay Moss is mother of two girls, Sarah and Katie. She teaches reading and language arts to undergraduate and graduate students at Southeastern Louisiana University. She is also editor of *Reading: Exploration and Discovery*, The Louisiana Reading Association Journal.

(NOTE: In case you are still wondering about the writing samples, the answers are as follow: Figure 1 is F: Nylon tip pen/marker; Figure 2 is C: Tiny 2" X 1/4" pencil; Figure 3 is D: Standard Number 2 pencil; Figure 4 is A: Large Caryola coloring marker; Figure 5 is B: Standard "Bic" pen; Figure 6 is G: Tiny 3" X 1/4" novelty pen; Figure 7 is H: Felt tip marker; Figure 8 is E: Large preschool Husky pencil.)

