

# Local Mom Offers Writing Course for Kids

By Jeanne Rawdin

Kara Camden is a college admissions advisor for high school students. She's also a mother of two preschool children.



Kara Camden, Founder of Itsy Bitsy Writers

So she combined her experience and came up with an idea that includes communication, expression, and creative skills for preschoolers. She calls it "Itsy Bitsy Writers" and it's all about parents and kids four to seven years old creating together. We caught up with Kara to learn more about her endeavors.

**So I understand you are a college admissions advisor for high-school students. Tell me about your career path.**

My career path has meandered a bit -- from actress to elementary-school teacher to director of admissions at a well-renowned university for psychology. I decided to stay home after my first child, Maia, was born. Even though being a stay-at-home mom is a round-the-clock job, I was also helping neighbors and friends with the perplexing maze that is college admissions. Over the past six years, I have helped many students with difficult situations in areas from admissions all the way through graduation.

**What sparked the idea for Itsy Bitsy Writers?**

I've worked with kids in many capacities over the years, ranging from being a public-school teacher, a life-skills facilitator, a nanny, and a mom. I've always been amazed at how young children express themselves. They are so creative and grateful for grown-ups who are active listeners.

I started experimenting by taking my listening to the next level and actually writing down or drawing what the kids were saying. They were thrilled, and as a bonus they became more interested in learning how to read their ideas that I had written down or the ideas of their friends. As I developed the process for Itsy Bitsy Writers, I drew on the well-received Writer's Workshop experience I had as a second-grade teacher.

**Wow, that's fascinating.**

**How long have you been doing this?**

Itsy Bitsy Writers was established in 2015. We started off by printing and binding stories kids had narrated to their parents. In 2017, we began offering parent participation workshops. We are not currently a nonprofit but we are considering that step in the future.

**How would you describe your overall mission?**

Our mission is to nurture and promote literacy, creativity, and confidence in young children through the process of developing, writing, and illustrating stories. My goal is to offer our program to as many kids as possible, and to create positive development in the lives of those we work with. I hope to continually improve our process and workshops so that we are an exemplary children's literacy and creativity program.

**Are the kids old enough to write stories at four to seven years old?**

Absolutely! In fact, my youngest daughter who is not yet two wrote her first story last week. We focus on writing as a verbal activity for the kids. They dictate their stories to a caring grown-up. For the free-form stories, there are no rules on how long they need to be or what they will involve. We also offer stories that are partially written and the kids get to complete the rest.

For both formats, we're simply listening to what the kids have to say and working with that. We encourage them to expand on their ideas. We start with their thoughts and then teach literary mechanisms from there. We can introduce words

like character, setting, and action based on what they're telling us. When the ideas are student generated, the lessons are more meaningful to them.

When it comes to writing, the creativity of young children far exceeds their mechanical skills. That's where Itsy Bitsy Writers comes in. We decouple storytelling from fine motor skills and bridge that gap. As the kids get older and their motor skills catch up, they naturally desire to write down their own stories. We believe fine motor skill development is essential of course. However, that is not the main focus of our program. We are all about the creative process, building literacy, and developing communication skills! The kids have a strong feeling of accomplishment from producing their very own books. They see themselves as good writers, and this confidence and experience provides a strong foundation for building literacy skills moving forward.

**How do you incorporate artwork?**

Everyone has different talents for expressing themselves. Some work better with visual expression and some excel with verbal expression. We like to offer both options to get the creative juices flowing. Some stories originate in the mind and some are sparked from a piece of art the child has made. We also use both fine art and art from children's book illustrations to demonstrate that everyone has a different idea of how to express what they see and observe in the world and that there are no such things as good or bad illustrations in our



Kara and 21monthold daughter, Gwen

workshops.

**How do you get parents involved?**

The parents are the ones taking the narrations and actually writing the stories down. We help guide the parents in how to prompt their children for stories and also how to keep the process open and fun. Providing a space and activity for kids and parents to be creative and connect together is a big part of what we do. We want to help strengthen families through our work!

**On a more personal note, tell me about your kids.**

Maia, age seven, is a scientist, writer, artist, scholar, pianist, and budding Kung-Fu master. Gwenny B, age twenty-

one months, likes to do everything her big sister does. She keeps us busy with her wild toddler antics.

**Where did you grow up and what was your childhood like?**

I was born in San Diego and moved to North Carolina when I was eight. There are six kids in my family, so things were pretty lively around the house. Growing up in North Carolina, I got to run around in the woods and we even had a creek in our backyard where I spent many a day catching salamanders, tossing rocks, and building forts. I was very involved in theater and part of a traveling youth tap dance ensemble. I loved making up skits, songs, and dances with my sisters and neighbors to perform for our families.

**What do you want to leave as your legacy in this world?**

The three C's: Connection, Creativity, and Communication. I hope that all the kids who come through our program will have improved skills in these areas that will in turn help them to live happier and more fulfilled lives, and thus be able to improve the world in their own ways! I'm working to make an excellent contribution to the educational field for early childhood literacy that will improve the lives of those involved and ripple out to those they interact with.

If you're interested in learning more about Itsy Bitsy Writers, go to <https://itsybitsywriters.com> or <https://www.facebook.com/itsybitsywriters>. Or, you can contact Kara directly at [kara@itsybitsywriters.com](mailto:kara@itsybitsywriters.com). The next class is in April with the theme of nature.



Seven year old daughter, Maia



Kara and Maia



Kara's husband, Joe, playing with Maia



Three girls from Kara's workshop last October